

Construction Crochet

TRACY KRUMM
by Aline Brandauer



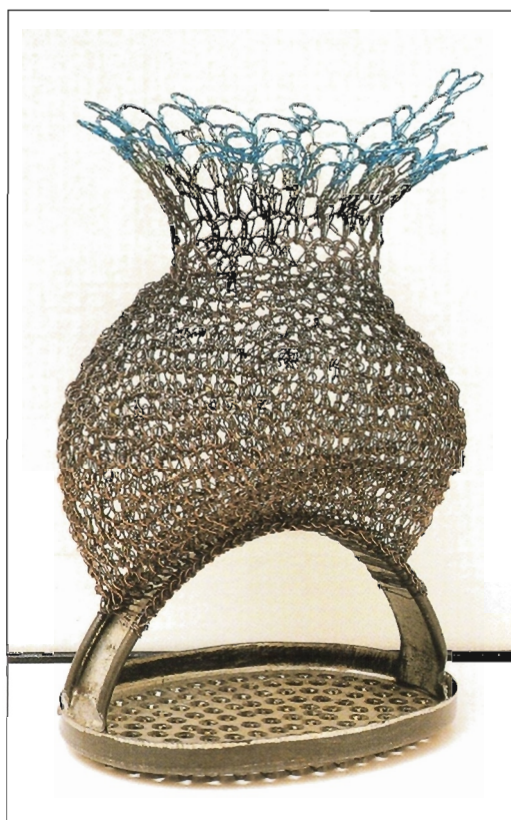
TRACY KRUMM 2: *Balanced*
Crocheted and fabricated
metal, found objects,
121" x 114" x 82", c2003.
Photo: James Hart.

Crocheting has been a part of Tracy Krumm's life since childhood. She learned to crochet from her grandmother when she was seven. After graduating from the textiles program at California College of Arts and Crafts (as it was then known) with high distinction, she attended Vermont College. There she returned to crochet. "I liked doing it because it calmed me down," she remembers. "But it also gave me somewhere to start. There were just so many ways to work, so many media and things to do, that I had to make a choice." The simplicity and practicality of that gesture allied her with both a generation of feminists interested in "women's work" as such, post-minimalist use of materials, and the reactivation of craft and meaning into sculpture.

In *2: Balanced* (c2003) two diaphanous nets of crocheted wire fall from found metal objects to and across the floor. The solid metal support seems as if it should hold much heavier material, and we see the artist's customary use of juxtaposition. Krumm contrasts textile arts and industrial materials, light open segments with solid used iron, frilly edges with sharp-toothed gears. In recent pieces, such as *2: Balanced* and *Yoke/Folded* (c2003) the artist has begun to move away from the explorations of volume bounded by the porous nets into considerations of weight and play between two- and three- dimensionality. In *Yoke/Folded*, the twisted wires hang like a blanket on a rack. This evoking of images and associations with traditional textiles pulls the viewer into undetermined narratives. The



TRACY KRUMM *Yoke/Folded* Crocheted and fabricated metal, found objects, 49" x 26" x 8", c2003. Photo: James Hart.



TRACY KRUMM *Blooming Grater* Crocheted and fabricated metal, found objects, 7" x 4" x 5", c2003. Photo: James Hart.

title also brings in the contrasting story of the found piece—the yoke with its past as a tool of the beast of burden suggests the outside, hard labor, and direct connections to different circumstances. Here, Krumm's ability to *imply* the dialectic appears full force. Shades of indoor, domestic handwork contrast with outdoor, agricultural physical labor in order to highlight the fluidity of Krumm's viewpoint while inviting the viewer to consider the real histories of each found object and the imagined stories of their combinations with constructed metal "fabric."

TRACY KRUMM

Construction Crochet



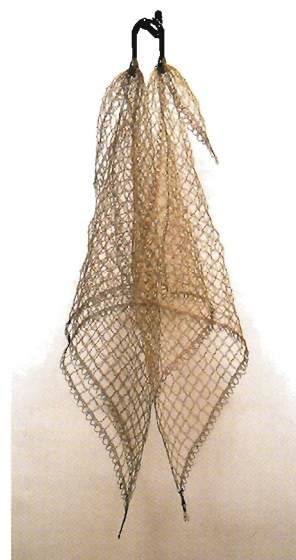
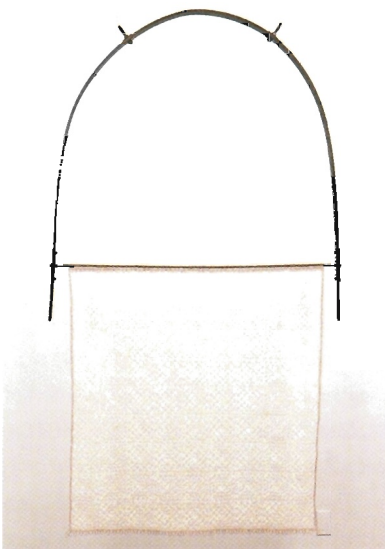
TRACY KRUMM *2 Dozen* Crocheted and fabricated metal, found objects, 42" x 68" x 8", c2003.

LEFT BELOW: TRACY KRUMM *Double Chain with Sleeve* Crocheted and fabricated metal, found objects, 63" x 12" x 12", c2003.

CENTER BELOW: TRACY KRUMM *9 Squared* Crocheted and fabricated metal, found objects, 92" x 52" x 2", c2003.

RIGHT BELOW: TRACY KRUMM *Double Squares* Crocheted and fabricated metal, found objects, 43" x 14" x 10", c2003.

Photos: James Hart.





TRACY KRUMM *Forty* Crocheted and fabricated metal, found objects, c2004. Photo: James Hart.

And the public has responded. Since 1986, Krumm has been in sixty group exhibitions and has had sixteen solo shows. Her work is included in museum collections such as the American Craft Museum, the Denver Art Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe. Private and corporate collectors have also been taken with the user-friendly but beautifully made work. Arthur Young and Company, Marin General Hospital, and Tobu Sapporo Hotel own pieces along with Lark Books/ *Fiberarts* and The Broida Collection. In 2000, Krumm was selected by the *Pasatiempo Magazine* of *The Santa Fe New Mexican* as one of the top eleven emerging artists of the new millennium.²

Tracy Krumm *works*. Her sculptures of crocheted wire and found industrial materials rely on the felt sense of labor. She confounds the now tired notions of women's work versus men's work by juxtaposing it—or, after more than a decade

TRACY KRUMM *Gathered, with Collar*
Crocheted and fabricated metal, found objects,
24" x 12" x 8", c2004. Photo: James Hart.

of this practice, simply ignoring it. At the same time, she taps into one of the major streams of American art: that art is work.

Both the visible and palpable concerns with labor as well as the restriction of the formal vocabulary support the idea of repetition. Sculptor Jackie Winsor said, "When you repeat an action again and again, you produce an effect of certainty or security in the viewer's mind. You're not trying to discover something, or to convince yourself of something. You're dealing with certainty, then, as a formal concern. And that soothes the viewer."³ Winsor's preoccupations were different than Krumm's. The early 1970s were the crucible of nascent feminism with minimalism and Winsor was a critical player in that moment. Her tightly wrapped rope forms and wooden cubes are about silence and hidden spaces as much as they are about

industry. The repetition, or in her words, certainty, emphasizes the minimalist concern with the phenomenological translation of visual experience into felt, kinesthetic apprehension.

Krumm builds on the tradition of using industrial materials and conflating them with feminist issues from the vantage point of thirty years of work done by other artists.

If we examine the two artists' use of repetition the comparison deepens. Krumm uses the repetitive actions of crocheting in ways that lead the viewer into the notion of women's work but not as an explicitly intellectual venture. It is instead an affective hook for the viewer to sense weight and texture—and to imagine the objects' stories. She has written:

"My work is grounded in the histories of sculpture and women's work. It involves the investigation and juxtaposition of the historically gender-specific techniques of handiwork, such as crochet, with metal fabrication and blacksmithing to question and comment



on identity, duality, relationships, and beauty. These labor-intensive processes involve me in the transcendental nature of repetition which has long been an elemental aspect of my studio practice... “4

Winsor, in contrast, was working at a moment when “meaning” was just beginning not to be a dirty word. That there was mention of hidden spaces was certainly a product of early feminist art’s flirtation with essentialism. The older artist’s frame of reference was the formal/anti-formal, visual/haptic distinction that was the hallmark of the minimalist debate. Winsor’s careful insistence on repetition as a purely formal concern that produces comfort without semantic baggage places her squarely in this historical discourse.

Repetition, then, need not eviscerate meaning as it supposedly does for Winsor. Krumm’s ability to use objects and combine them with crochet preserves the sense of handwork and of labor. Her work does not demand analysis but it can embrace it.

Blooming Grater (c2003) embodies the other trend in Krumm’s work; whimsical small objects and non-functional vessels. Playing with the forms of containment with materials that can’t possibly hold anything is another twist to the artist’s theme of perpetual juxtaposition. She investigates “how things are put together and coexist”⁵ in these small pieces by again using the viewer’s expectations about material and function to assail assumptions about what these objects may be or do.

Krumm is able to make a lot with very little. She has reduced her working vocabulary to very few terms that she makes bear a lot of weight and a large number of meanings.

—Aline Brandauer is an independent art historian living in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She has lectured and written extensively on contemporary art in the US, Europe and Latin America.



TRACY KRUMM *Gathered, with Chain* Crocheted and fabricated metal, found objects, 24" x 16" x 7"; c2004. Photo: James Hart

1. Interview with the artist. May 14, 1999.

2. “Pasatiempo,” *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, December 28, 1999, n.p. .

3. Jackie Winsor quoted in Munro, Eleanor, *Originals: American Women Artists*. Simon and Schuster (New York), 1979. p. 432.

4. Tracy Krumm, Artist’s Statement, 2004-2005 <http://users.lmi.net/tkrumm/statement.html>.

5. Tracy Krumm, Artist’s Statement, 2004-2005 <http://users.lmi.net/tkrumm/statement.html>.