

Lauren Clay

by Katherine Nonemaker



Lauren Clay's work sucks you into its hidden corners. It grabs you, pulls you, leads you slowly into darkened vortexes and spits you back out into hundreds of brightly colored directions. Clay, who received her BFA in Painting at the Savannah College of Art and Design and her MFA at the Virginia Commonwealth University, works primarily with cut paper, wire, wood and foam, constructing elaborate geometric forms that seem to be pulled directly out of the non-Euclidian nightmares of H.P. Lovecraft - but with a brilliance of color and complexity of form that makes that alternate horror seem oh-so-inviting. Her sculptures, simultaneously joyous in their colors and somewhat unsettling in their otherworldliness, are beautiful not only in their construction but in their potential for more. Each sculpture is comprised of seemingly endless architectures. Hundreds of strips of paper, grids creeping out from her sculptural forms lead out onto the wall or to the floor, and receding structures built on top of larger structures hint at the possibility that these forms could extend outwards ad infinitum- and maybe they do. Regarding Clay's subtle indications towards Taoist themes, I personally think Lao Tzu would be proud, and let's just hope Clay herself ends up being a catalyst that spawns Ten Thousand Things...they'd certainly all be beautiful.

Katherine Nonemaker: You received your BFA in Painting, and your MFA in Painting and Printmaking. What motivated you to turn to sculpture?

Lauren Clay: In many ways, my transition into sculpture was a natural progression of a body of work I began making in 2003. Also I began making sculpture because I found it important for the work to exist in the viewer's physical space, rather than for it to remain depicted in an imagined, pictorial space. There's something powerful about the work existing in the same space as the viewer. It is simultaneously impossible, but very present-- ushering the viewer into the potential for the unreal to exist. It's like a talisman that has the power to "turn on" the potential for another existence.

KN: When you begin work on a piece, what are you thinking about first? Is it color, form, texture, a certain phrase or idea you find inspiring, all of the above?

LC: I think my work develops out of my own necessity for it to exist. It becomes a sorting ground for all of these overlapping clues and themes-- ideas that are specific to my own personal interests, as well as ones that have a broader cultural, art historical, or timely significance. Usually I have a general impulse or feeling for a piece, but it evolves a lot as I'm working on it. The work itself is part of the search.

KN: Many of your works have vaguely metaphysical titles with allusions to Taoism and other Eastern philosophies, but not without a sense of play and irony. Is this something personal for you, or are viewing these themes from

a more critical and conceptual place?

LC: I think humor is an important part of the work because although most of my work is very sincere I think we would be lying to ourselves if we ignored the awkward fumbling feeling that comes along with any philosophical pursuit- whether it's art related or spiritual. Unless you are one of the lucky ones who are seized by a visionary impulse or internal calling, for the most part, I think it's healthier to admit how silly and awkward any attempt to address the infinite feels.

KN: There's a distinct, albeit sort of odd, geometry to all of your drawings and sculptures. What attracted you to these push and pulls of form and negative space?

LC: My work has always addressed the forms of geometric abstraction. As a way to poke fun at the masculine forms of modernist art, or the self inflicted stoicism of minimalism, my work has always been engaged with a play on seriality as a symbol of abundance and providence.

In my work these forms of modernism-- the monochrome painting, the grid, the plinth-- symbols of barren, stripped-down, esoteric, masculine abstraction, become simply what they are: geometric forms that by their own nature seem to reproduce themselves and exist in patterns of various scale and various permutations of infinity.

KN: I picked up on this phrase in another interview of yours that piqued my interest...could you describe what the term "inherited space" means to you?

LC: With the term "inherited space" I think I was literally re-



ferring to the places we are from, the places we grew up. I think that place is an important factor in determining how we understand who we are. I grew up in the suburbs— a place where there is no strong feeling of location or place-ness. The suburbs are a consumer landscape-- one that will only artificially evoke a sense of place-ness when it is profitable to do so. In some ways my work is probably an attempt to escape this. If I want to be really harsh I could say that growing up in this kind of place robbed me of having a true sense of social identity. Or if I want to be generous I could say that growing up in the suburbs gave me the opportunity and almost impulsive desire to construct my own sense of place-- a kind of "D-I-Y" regionalism.

KN: Looking at your sculpture over the years, it seems there's been a gradual shift from full installations to more individualized works that stand on their own. Could you tell us a little bit about this shift?

LC: For a while I was really interested in how all the components of the room worked together to create an entire environment in order to "transport" the viewer. But lately I've been more interested in the potential for a single work to evoke the intangible.

KN: Where is your work headed now and what is its motivation?

LC: For about a year now I've been working on a series of work largely drawing from wreath and garland forms. Lately I've been interested in European and Early American decorative arts. In some ways I think this allows me to position myself outside of the traditional art historical narrative.



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