





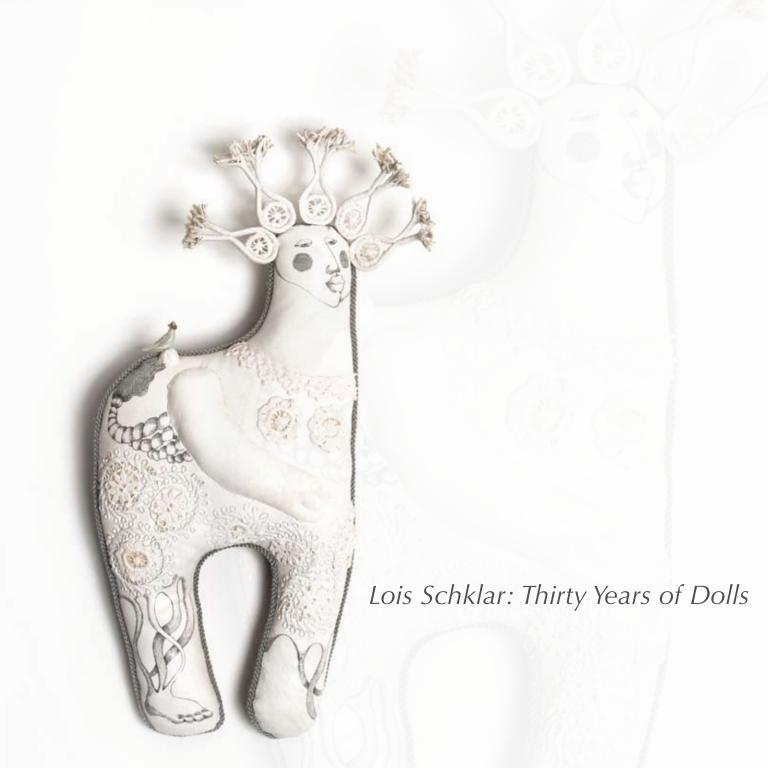






Lois Schklar: Thirty Years of Dolls





Essay by Janna Hiemstra

'Thirty Years of Dolls' may sound like a safe, nostalgic endeavor, but this is hardly the case when considering Lois Schklar's decades of exploration in form, material, and social relationships. Rather, complexity and the blurring of boundaries characterize an artistic practice that has involved printmaking, drawing, textiles, sculpture, installation, and of course, the creation of dolls. In fact, it is Schklar's movement through this latter form of expression that punctuates her history as a maker and gives rise to new directions, new material processes, and new spaces of inquiry.

Schklar traces her first experience with doll making to her childhood interest in puppetry. Years later in the mid-seventies, she decided to reconnect with those roots by developing a series of soft sculpture dolls. These forms were sewn and embellished with various textile surface techniques, handdrawn features, as well as any other materials that seemed appropriate. Let Feet Turn into Grass (1978), a whimsical half-human, half-animal form, is an early example of Schklar's use of different media to achieve a desired effect. Experimenting with different shapes, decorations and imagery, Schklar pushed the idea of what a doll could be. A teapot became a glamorous woman with feathered hat. The Princess is in her Secret Garden (1980) featured a doll inhabiting a stage-like environment. Stepping beyond the conventional understanding of dolls as children's playthings, Schklar made dolls that required time, attention to detail, and acknowledgement of their individual characters.

In many ways this early period was a playful testing ground for Schklar's future work. Her experiments with different imagery continued to culminate in ever more elaborately decorated dolls (*The Secret Garden*, 1983). She even developed overarching narratives for groups of dolls as in *A Fairy Tale* (1982). While the early eighties produced beautiful works, Schklar began to question the different elements and approaches she was using. *The Key* (1983) marked a crucial turning point in her processes of making as she started to look into the deeper emotional reasons that make a form compelling.







This search brought Schklar back to basics. She started using natural found objects to make work that was non-precious and ephemeral. Her *Twig Structures* (1983) incorporated sticks, string, lint, glue, and water and she referred to them as 'sculpture'. This focus on a three-dimensional shape was further supported by a course in experimental textile forms at the Banff Centre for the Arts in 1985. As a result her plush forms became more abstract, faces and detailed accourtements disappeared, and bodies began sporting spare twig limbs.

While the female form had always been a predominant theme in her earlier decorative work, Schklar's new use of materials helped refine an approach that addressed woman's power through the idea of vulnerability as strength. In *Obscured Thoughts* (1986), the pink raw silk bodies bear fabric marks suggestive of a womb, while the face is cleared of any expression and only becomes part of the body by virtue of the supporting twig frame of arms and legs. Schklar's interest in the magical power of dolls from other cultures gave her a wider context in which to approach her craft. 'Fetishes, Voodoos and Guardians' (1986-1994) further abstracted the form to achieve a raw, direct immediacy.

In the late eighties Schklar began to see the vessel as a symbol for the female. *Broken Promises* (1987) bridged the movement from the surface as signifier to the inner space of the vessel as a container for emotions. Doll forms morphed organically into tall standing architectural vessels, which eventually comprised Schklar's first travelling exhibition, *Collective Memories* (1990). Gloria Hickey observes "Schklar's work is sculpture, pure and simple, but it is also undoubtedly about form – pure and simple." Over the next ten years, she explored three dimensional burlap forms (1988-1998). This work seemed to cast away any idea of the contained being, and instead pursued a memory, where pieces such as *Pod Form* (1992) appeared simply as indentations of an absent body.



While these sculptural works still maintained a semblance of the human form, the clean lines and painted burlap surfaces began to feel formulaic to the artist, and lost the expressive intensity of the earlier doll work. Schklar was compelled once again to return to basics. In 1991 the first Gulf War broke out, and in response to feelings of grief and mourning, Schklar picked up her experiments with sticks and found materials. She wrapped sticks with torn strips of fabric and produced works such as *Gulf War Wrapped Doll* (1991). This act of wrapping became a consistent theme. While the process achieves a unified effect it also carries layers of symbolic weight.

In Schklar's own words:

I became increasingly interested in how seemingly disparate objects could be united and transformed both materially and metaphorically. Textural surfaces, inspired by both natural and urban sources, alluded to the continuity and affinity to marks made by man. I liked the intimacy of these objects and their potential to elicit an emotional and intellectual discourse on vulnerability and self-discovery.

These explorations resulted in a burst of creativity through the nineties, and produced dolls such as *Her Friend* (1991) and *Repressed Memories* (1992), a piece that is at once violent and mystifying - that draws the viewer in to question what is being represented. In 1994 Schklar began a series called 'Words Are Not Enough'. Incorporating photocopies of letters, newspaper text, and stream of consciousness writing into her doll forms, Schklar addressed interpersonal relationships as often confusing and marked by struggles for power. Driftwood, found objects, and old printing blocks eventually developed into dolls that could be used for printing, such as *Some Said the General Had a Nervous Stomach* (1994). Politically, "The General" also personified the mindlessness of the times and became a symbolic presence within many of her doll series (1991-2003).





In 1997 Schklar curated Dolls: Reclaimed, a group doll exhibition at the Ontario Crafts Council Gallery. She chose five artists who examined the doll according to themes of self-discovery, identity, and empowerment. In Schklar's words: "Laura Donefer, Catherine Heard, Mimi Holmes, Stefanie Marshall and Diana Thorneycroft challenge us with the power of their material creations. Their works provide an opportunity to reconsider 'the doll'."² Following Schklar's dedication to mixed media practices, the dolls were made out of materials that ranged from fabric to glass, and equally served to guestion the division between art and craft. But at the root of the exhibition, the dolls presented were both commentaries on and connections to how we live together in society. Contrary to G.I. Joe and Barbie dolls, the works in Dolls: Reclaimed rejected the slick veneer of consumerism and challenged the way the human form is used and represented. Bringing together this group of artists in a sense validated Schklar's years of working with themes of power and vulnerability through her own consideration of the doll form. She literally put her approach to dolls into words in her curatorial statement, writing a series of poems describing the work in the exhibition.

Constantly morphing in her approach to making, 1997 also marked Schklar's recommitment to the process of wrapping after a visit to the Royal Ontario Museum. The lost art of mummification compelled her to begin two series of dolls, 'Vestiges' and 'Falling Wounded', where wrapped surfaces hid what might be contained underneath. This in turn gave rise to the desire to reveal what had been concealed, and resulted in a series called 'From the Inside Out'. In two different bodies of work, 'Memory Tools' (1998-2007) and 'Rattles' (1999-2007), Schklar actually began constructing her dolls from the inside out, and in the latter series included objects that could make sound. According to Schklar, "Rattles, used as noisemakers in traditional native ceremonies, were references to rites of passage. They said: 'I am here', asserting a physical and psychological position within a certain space. It was this space, both literally and figuratively, that intrigued and challenged me."



In 2002 Schklar embarked on what would become her last three series of dolls. 'Horrid Little Dolls', eschewed exterior shells and inner spaces, and instead used found objects and papier-mâché. Based on Victorian half-dolls, the torso, head and arms were attached to objects such as pincushions, powder box tops, brushes and tea cozies that served to fill out the remainder of their bodies. Turning again to the relationship of inner emotional states and exterior bodily appearance, Schklar used materials to guide her exploration in form to represent the psyche. *Brush Doll* (2003) incorporated a broom and plastic figurine pieces to relate a sense of entrapment, or vulnerability, and also prompted the viewer's sense of irony, curiosity and even outrage. In this series Schklar reflected upon how and why society represents the female figure as idealized, and yet at the same time, as incomplete and objectified.

'Horrid Little Dolls' gave rise to further material mixing in the two series 'Dear Little Girls' and 'Bad Little Girls', where the half-doll theme was abandoned. Instead, Schklar combined plastic Barbie dolls with stereotypical little girl dresses that address society's patronizing views and perception of women. *Bad Little Girl Spitting Lies* (2003) is a perfect example of Schklar's ability to create dolls that at once attract and repel, that pull the viewer to question what is going on, and that always probe what is happening 'inside'.

Finally, Schklar moved into the series 'On Becoming' where she incorporated an interest in mythology to portray psychological transition and growth. Comprised of twenty-four figures, the grouping presents a complete life cycle, with life and possibility bracketing one end and death and extinction the other. Schklar maintained the rattle element in this series in order to again assert a physical and emotional presence. In some ways reminiscent of the multiple transitions in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, 'On Becoming' is a fitting representation of Schklar's doll work as a whole.





With a dedication to material processes that change and develop according to the needs of representation, the ebb and flow of abstract forms, and the desire to continually search, push, and assert themes of power and vulnerability, Schklar's doll work is truly suited to our contemporary time and place. Her work offers powerful forms that not only connect us to our own intricate emotional beings, but also stand as social and cultural symbols revealing how we are connected to each other.

Overall, Schklar's 'Thirty Years of Dolls' must be approached with the same spirit of enquiry and discovery that has marked her years of making. Her questions in the early nineties still resonate today and should stir our conscience when encountering her work:

"I have become aware of the need to reclaim and reconnect our past experiences.

What makes a form or image universally compelling?

What draws my attention, clutches my gut, and penetrates my soul?

What are the connections we make as individuals? As groups?

What are our shared memories?"3

Essay by Janna Hiemstra





Reclining Jester, 1984-1987. Upholstery fabrics, embroidery, stuffed fabric forms. $11 \times 23 \times 4''$. Collection of Cheryl Smith. Photo by Jenn Sciarrino.







 $\textbf{\textit{A Fairy Tale},} \ 1982. \ \ \text{Velvets, upholstery fabric, silks, paper, gesso with ink.} \ 28 \times 4 \times 1 \ \frac{1}{2} \text{\text{"}}. \ \ \text{Collectors unknown.} \ \ \text{Photos by Ron Cole.}$

A Fairy Tale

In a land of serene beauty there lived a princess who was a reflection of her surroundings, as soft as snow, a subtly shaded embodiment of nature.

All who were close to the princess knew her to be a true daughter of the land, one who respected her relation to those around as well as to the earth on which she stood.

Many suitors tried to win her hand, but the princess remained alone.

When her sisters were married to wealthy landowners and warriors, the princess wished them happiness without jealousy or ire.

As time passed some wondered why the princess chose to lead her life without a mate. No one spoke maliciously as all were concerned only for her happiness.

It was a custom of the princess to walk in her garden as the sun was rising in the east. On one such morning the gardener, who generally arrived much later in the day, came earlier to tend a flower whose health concerned him. By chance he happened upon the princess who was kneeling by the ailing flower. Being a very respectful man, the gardener quickly turned away, but not before he witnessed an amazing scene.

With gentle hands the princess caressed the dying flower. With soft sensual breaths she blew lightly on its drooping petals. As she performed this subtle ritual, there appeared on her pink lip a tiny drop of blood, so red and pure that it dazzled the poor gardener and made him wince with pain. The princess looked up alarmed at first but with no anger, her eyes moist with tears. Before the startled gardener's eyes the princess became the essence of the tortured growth that only moments before lay dying at her feet. While the dazed gardener stared, the lovely princess, looking tired and worn, smiled tenderly upon him. Placing her fingertip to her lip, she slowly wiped away the dried spot of blood and walked quietly down the garden path to her room.

The flower, which only moments before had seemed wretchedly doomed to death, was now a vital organism bursting with life.

Not long after this incident an evil warrior ravaged by disease descended into the peaceful tranquility of the land with his foul band of followers. He was much feared and hated by all who encountered him, for his illness had made him an angry, embittered man. Many said he would bring darkness and death.

As the seasons changed a dark night prevailed. When the new spring finally arrived, the princess called her sisters to her chamber to make an announcement. Appearing demurely acquiescent the princess took the evil warrior for her husband while her sisters turned their heads in shock and disbelief.

When the news had spread throughout the land all were unanimous in their grief for the princess's fate.

Only the gardener did not weep.

The end. 1982



The Secret Garden, 1982. Upholstery fabrics, embroidery, jewelry findings, painted card. 26 % x 11 % x 3". Collection of Lesley North. Photo by Bruce Hogg.





Fetish #1, 1986. Cheesecloth, twigs, paper, pod. $43 \times 10 \times 1$ ". Collection of Melinda Mayhall. Photo by Bruce Hogg.





 $\emph{Birth Fetish},$ 1986. Cheesecloth, twigs, burlap, net, gesso. 47 x 9 ½ x 2 ½". Collection of Arlette Schulman. Photo by Bruce Hogg.





Horny Little Doll, 1991. Wrapped cheesecloth, paint, gesso. $25 \times 4 \% \times 2 \% \%$. Collection of Rachel Schklar. Photo by Jenn Sciarrino.

 $\label{eq:Her Friend #2, 1991. Wrapped cheesecloth, acrylic paint, twigs. 28 x 4 x 1 \frac{1}{2}". \\ Collection of Allen & Celia Hirsh. Photo by Jenn Sciarrino.$

Gulf War Doll, 1991. Wrapped cotton, acrylic paints. 21 x 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 2". Collection of Lisa Schklar. Photo by Jenn Sciarrino.





Wood Figure, 1992. Found wood from Prince Edward County and paint. 20 x 4 x1". Collection of the artist. Unknown photographer.





Even Grace Kelly Had a Lonely Heart #1, from the series 'Words Are Not Enough', 1993. Foam core, wrapped cotton with ink. $26 \times 6 \times 3$ ". Collection of Gloria Fallick. Photo by Lois Schklar.





Lies Are Only Words to Hide Our Discomfort #2, from the series 'Words Are Not Enough', 1994. Foam core, stencil, paper. 16 ½ x 5 ¼ x 1". Collection of Nancy Singer. Photo by Jenn Sciarrino.

Words Covered in Lint #1, from the series 'Words Are Not Enough', 1994. Paper, lint, metal, found wood. 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 4 x $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Collection of Allen & Celia Hirsh. Photo by Jenn Sciarrino.



Vestige: Silent Scream, 1998. Wrapped bias tape, gesso, acrylic paint, stitching. $20 \times 2 \times \frac{1}{2}$ ". Collection of Lynda Greenberg. Photo by Brian Piitz and Marilyn Nazar.







The Change, with detail at left, from the series 'From the Inside Out', 1999. Papier-mâché, net, gesso, twigs, cheesecloth, rhoplex. 18 x 2 ½ x 34". Collector unknown. Photo by Simon Glass.





Bad Little Girl Spitting Lies, 2003. Papier-mâché, plastic, Barbie doll forms, twig. $10 \times 2 \frac{1}{2} \times 3^n$. Collection of the artist. Photo by Jenn Sciarrino.



The Narrator, from the series 'Horrid Little Dolls', 2002. Glove fingers, packaging, papier-mâché, wool, netting. 10 ½ x 2 ½ x 1 ¾". Collection of Eleanor Misener. Photo by Jenn Sciarrino.



Four Hybrids from the series 'On Becoming', 2003. 8 \times 8 \times 3". Left to right: Collection of the artist, collector unknown, collection of the artist and collection of Eleanor Misener. Photo by Brian Pittz and Marilyn Nazar.





 $\label{lem:lemming to Fly, from the series 'On Becoming', 2003. 6 x 8 x 1 \nslant 2". Papier-maché, plastic, feathers, shell. Collection of the artist. Photo by Brian Piitz and Marilyn Nazar.$



SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

C I	FD FYHIRIII	ONS
	2010	The Department Gallery, "Familiar Territory: Pathways", Toronto, Ontario (Solo Exhibition)
		Ontario Crafts Council, "Body and Object", Toronto, Ontario
	2009	Artcite Inc. Gallery, "Familiar Territory: Excerpts", Windsor, Ontario (Solo Exhibition)
		The Drawing Center Online Registry http://www.drawingcenter.org/viewingprogram
		White Water Gallery, Drawing Exhibition, North Bay, Ontario (Juried Exhibition) CATALOGUE
		2002, 2001, 2000, John B. Aird Gallery, Drawings, Toronto, Ontario (Juried Exhibition)
	2008	Connexion Gallery, "Familiar Territory: Reminiscent", Fredericton, New Brunswick (Solo Exhibition)
	2007	Harcourt House Gallery, "Familiar Territory", Edmonton, Alberta (Solo Exhibition)
		White Water Gallery, "Familiar Territory: Redux", North Bay, Ontario (Solo Exhibition)
	2006	Gallery 96, "Familiar Territory", Stratford, Ontario (Solo Exhibition)
	2006, 1996,1	994,1992,1990,1988, Cambridge Gallery, "Fibreworks", Cambridge, Ontario (Juried Exhibition)
	2005	Gallery 1313, "Lakeside: Art Looks at Toronto Beaches", Toronto, Ontario (Juried Exhibition)
		John B. Aird Gallery, "Metamorphosis", Toronto, Ontario (Juried Exhibition)
		Latcham Gallery, "Silver Memories", 25th Anniversary Celebration, Stouffville, Ontario (Invitational)
	2003	Palace Contemporary Fine Art and Craft, "On Becoming", Toronto, Ontario (Solo Exhibition)
	2001	Lafrenière and Pai Gallery, "Elemental", Ottawa, Ontario
	2000	Lonsdale Gallery, "Lois Schklar: Mixed Media Work", Toronto, Ontario (Solo Exhibition)
		Gallery Stratford, "Arts2000", Stratford, Ontario (Juried Exhibition)
	1998	Santa Fe Weaving Gallery, "The Language of Dolls II", Santa Fe, New Mexico
		Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, "Poetry of the Vessel", Halifax, Nova Scotia (Invitational) CATALOGUE
	1997	Ontario Crafts Council, "Dolls: Reclaimed", Curator, Toronto, Ontario
	1996	Carnegie Gallery, "Lois Schklar and Peter Kirkland", Dundas, Ontario
	1996-1995	Traveling Show (USA), "In Celebration of the Doll" (Invitational)
	1995	Indigo Gallery, "New Tools: No Limits", Lake Oswego, Oregon (Invitational)
	1994	"Convergence 94: Northern Lights", Minneapolis, Minnesota (Juried Exhibition)
		Banaker Gallery, "American Baskets", San Francisco, California
	1993	Harbinger Gallery, "Lois Schklar: Light Within Form", Waterloo, Ontario (Solo Exhibition)
		"In Our Hands", Kyoto, Japan, (Invitational) CATALOGUE
	1992	Canadian Craft Museum, "A Treasury Of Canadian Craft", Vancouver, British Columbia CATALOGUE
		Wellington County Museum, "Illuminations", Elora, Ontario (Invitational) CATALOGUE
		Museum For Textiles, "Selected Works from the Cambridge Collection", Toronto, Ontario
	1991	Ontario Crafts Council Traveling Exhibition, "Collective Memories" (Solo Exhibition)
	1990	Ontario Crafts Council, "Lois Schklar: Collective Memories", Toronto, Ontario (Solo Exhibition)
	1989	Gallery Lynda Greenberg, "Fetishes", Ottawa, Ontario (Solo Exhibition) The Koffler Gallery, "Agnes Olive/Lois Schklar: The Inner Quest", Toronto, Ontario
	1988	Harbinger Gallery, "Fibre", Waterloo, Ontario
	1982	The Apple Doll, "A Fairy Tale", Toronto, Ontario (Solo Exhibition)
	1981	The Apple Doll, "Cloth Jumping Jacks", Toronto, Ontario (Solo Exhibition)
	1979	The Apple Doll, "Soft Sculpture Dolls", Toronto, Ontario (Solo Exhibition)
	13/3	The Apple Don, Soit Sculpture Dons, Toronto, Ontario (Soio Exhibition)







SELECTED MEDIA COVERAGE

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2007	The Edmonton Journal, April 13. "Artist uses Lines and Objects to Map Personal Space".
	Gilbert A. Bouchard
2006	Beacon Herald, May 6. "Gallery 96 exhibit includes collection of discarded items", by Donald
	O'Connor, Stratford, Ontario
	Rogers Cable, May16-31. "One Person's Junk", Stratford, Ontario
2005	The Globe and Mail, "Life's a Beach and Then You Exhibit", G.M. Dault
2004	Preston Catalogue, Fall 2004, pg.20. "Art and Soul" by Caitlin Crockard
1994	Ontario Craft, Winter 1994. pg. 16-19. "Poppet Power: Dolls For Grownups" by Margaret Canon
	Surface Design Journal, Fall 1994, Vol. 19, No. 1, pg. 19-21. "Form Pure and Simple" by Gloria Hickey
1992	The Toronto Star, August 1992. "Thornhill's suburban sorceress" by Don Sutton
1990	The Globe and Mail, 1990. "Standing Stones Hold Secrets", Review by Anne McPherson
	Ontario Craft, Spring 1990, pg 16-19.
	Artpost 38, Fall 1990, pg. 12-13. "Agnes Olive and Lois Schklar at the Koffler Centre.
1989	Ontario Craft, Spring 1989. pg 22. "Constructions: Kaye, Quinton, Schklar." Review by Sandy Harris
1979	The Toronto Star, January 6, 1979, pg G9. "Decorated dolls cheer your day" by Susan Himel and
	Elaine Lambert
1978	Theatre and Events Guide, August 1978, p 44-46. "Doll-Making"
ARTIST IN RESIDE	NCE .
2008	Connexion Gallery, Fredericton, New Brunswick

COLLECTIONS

1993

Claridge Investments, Montreal, CATALOGUE. Bronfman Collection, Montreal, Quebec. The Library and Gallery, Cambridge, Ontario.

The Key Corporation, Portland, Oregon, Private

McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinberg, Ontario

GRANTS

2011, 2010	, 2007, 2006 (x2), 1990,1989,1988 Ontario Arts Council Exhibition Assistance Grant		
2007	Ontario Arts Council Mid Career Visual Arts Award; Toronto Arts Council Grant		
1998	Canada Council Travel Grant		
1997	Canada Council "B" Grant		
1997-1991,1983,1981 OAC Artists in Education Grant			
1999,1994,1992,1991,1989,1987 OAC Individual Crafts Grant			

SELECTED AWARDS

2010	*new* gallery Award, juried by the Ontario Crafts Council, Toronto, Ontario
2006	Cambridge Galleries, "Fibreworks", Honourable Mention, Cambridge, Ontario.
1999	Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition: Murray Koffler Purchase Award, Toronto, Ontario
1998	Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition: Honourable Mention, Mixed Media, Toronto, Ontario
1991	Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition: Best in Fibre, Toronto, Ontario
1007	Harden of cont. Conft Class. OCC A. and Tananta. Outside

1987 Harbourfront Craft Show: OCC Award, Toronto, Ontario







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Learning to Breathe from 'On Becoming' series. Plastic, paper, paint, found or natural objects. 8 x 8 x 3". Collector unknown. Photo by Brian Piitz and Marilyn Nazar

