

Lauren Levin Bender Virtual Interview with Madeline Denaro, October 2008

Lauren Levin Bender is an art advisor and independent curator who lives and works in New York City. Prior to starting her own advisory business in 2006, she worked in the gallery world for nine years, dealing specifically in 20th century American art. She holds a master's degree in modern art and critical theory from Columbia University.

*On the occasion of her exhibition at HCG Gallery, Dallas
October 30 – November 22, 2008*

Lauren Levin Bender: Your work in several different media enables you to create paintings, drawings and sculptures that appear quite unique from one another. One formal quality that has struck me is the profusion of color in your paintings versus the tonal neutrality in your sculptures and the near absence of color altogether in your drawings on vellum. Can you elaborate on this?

Madeline Denaro: For years my paintings were very sculptural and also very neutral in tonality, almost somber. After I completed the series of suspended beeswax sculptures, somehow the paintings were released from their need for any textural or sculptural elements. It was as if they were “set loose”. This is when color pockets gradually started to peek in. First, in little perks, then in its entirety. It is as if color was now the form.

There is an instinctual force that one opens to in this making of art. The form that this takes may vary. So even though my media changes, the individual voice is still the same.

LLB: Is there a formal or conceptual relationship or link among your works in different media?

MD: I feel that all my work, in every media, from drawing, painting and sculpture to video and installation comes from the same search, the same investigation. Every mark is an active ingredient, an addition to this investigation into this object making, a very mysterious act that ultimately has an undeniable reality.

LLB: How did sculpture come into the work?

MD: I seem to have a certain affinity for spatial relationships and I believe that for years I fulfilled this to some extent through the three dimensionality of my drawings.

In the early 90's my paintings became very sculptural with the addition of construction materials (wood, tar, metals, steel shavings etc.). Simultaneously, I

was doing these tiny mixed media sculptures, using much of the same construction materials but on a much smaller scale. Physically they were minute but I saw them as huge - bigger than life. By the late '90's my paintings themselves became sculptures. They were so over-sized that they ultimately never made it onto any stretchers. They were called "tarp paintings" and they draped on the wall and overflowed onto the floor, making a kind of repository. I must admit that, from that time, the sculptor could no longer be denied.

LLB: There is a graphic quality in many of your paintings that creates an interesting contrast to the bold swaths of color which cover the canvas. How does your process evolve?

MD: The graphic quality comes primarily from my drawings. Ever since the paintings became paintings and no longer sculptures, they took on a new kind of life. They were able to be freer, able to be paintings, able to incorporate the sensitivity of drawing as part of their journey, because I feel it is a journey.

I don't begin with anything graphic nor do any ideas concern me. Actually I shun all visual concepts at this time. The palette is also secondary to the art making and during this stage it may change several times. The drawing, as an additional medium, is incorporated during the act of painting and is very much an active element in my repetitive process of adding and subtracting - as I build, destroy, erase, paint over. As the work evolves and the painting starts to take on a certain presence, the color is reconciled, form emerges and I feel that a communication starts to be buried within the surface of the piece.

LLB: How did you come upon your choice of materials, particularly in your sculpture and your drawings on vellum?

MD: I love the materiality of things. The first "tarp painting" came about because I bought the tarp that overhung a marketplace on a visit to Guatemala. It was a sculpture in itself, all weather-beaten and frayed, with hand-sewn repairs and homemade ties that dangled from the torn corners. I could feel that piece. I could feel it in the whole of myself.

That is how I pick my materials, they actually pick me.

I was purchasing canvas one day and I didn't feel canvas, I felt metal. I kept feeling metal. So I went to the steel fabricator and started adding sheet metals to my paintings.

As for the vellum,it was the week after 9/11. I wished to work *but I was different*. *We were all different*. I felt that, as a society, we were so open, so totally exposed.

As an artist, I felt the need of the sensitivity of drawing.

There was no question, vellum was the perfect medium..... *transparent*.

LLB: Do you see your work as pure abstraction or are there elements of representational association?

MD: Painting for me is a form of engagement, an engagement within the process of painting. There are no visual elements as I approach the work. My interest is in the essence of the piece.....in building, destroying, keeping some, shunning much, until the piece has its own kind of presence -- -- a presence that does not depend upon something representational.

LLB: How would you describe your subject matter?

MD: My work does not entail any social commentary nor is it a statement on the way we live. It does not concern the hollow aspects of our civilization but the mystery of its existence. To allow something that I do not control to have an action, to allow oneself to bring this action into a materiality.....this is my subject.

LLB: As a South Floridian who exhibits primarily in New York, Florida and Germany, how does it feel to be exhibiting for the first time in Dallas?

MD: Of course it is a great pleasure to be invited to show in the HCG Gallery in Dallas. To exhibit in a city that is known for such a strong commitment to the arts is quite an honor. I show my paintings, drawings and small sculptures in New York, Florida and in Germany. This is the first time though that my sculptural installation "New Forms" will be shown in a gallery setting. I would like to applaud Kirk Hopper for having the vision to open his space to this installation, and for giving me this opportunity to share my work with the Dallas community.