

Pieced and Sewn Paintings

In 2010 I traveled in Turkey for several weeks. The richness of an unfamiliar culture, and particularly its colors and textures, left a vivid impression upon me. Following my trip to Turkey I began to work in an entirely new manner, which I have continued to the present. I arrange leftover, sometimes odd-shaped, pieces of canvas which I sew by hand into 3-dimensional constructions that hang on the wall. I stiffen each piece with gesso and acrylic paint, and then apply a richer surface of oil paint. These patterned works are loosely reminiscent of tapestries and weavings, but some also have come to resemble garments of various sorts, and thus may evoke a figurative presence.

I work with pieces of bare canvas left over from other artists-----namely, the selvages and odd scraps that remain when traditional canvas-on-wooden stretchers are made. I find it satisfying in an ecological sense to use this fabric that would otherwise be thrown out, but these scraps also work as a collaboration of sorts: the forms I build are determined by what is given to me.

These current works are connected to my deep commitment to feminism. I greatly admire the handwork traditionally done by women in the past-----the sewing of garments and quilts, lace-making, weaving, etc. The fact that this work was not considered to be 'art', and was usually created anonymously strikes a chord with me too. To borrow from Virginia Woolf, the phrase "anonymous is a woman" has until fairly recent times been an appropriate description of the visual arts community. In utilizing the classic art materials of oil paint on canvas in combination with some of the traditional techniques of women's creative handwork, I attempt to bridge this gap.

While recently reading the new biography of Leonardo da Vinci, I was struck by this declaration from his journals: "The first intention of the painter is to make a flat surface display a body as if modeled and separated from this plane." I find myself working in an opposite vein by making the actual painting become the modeled object that separates itself from the plane of the wall.

Carol Benson