

W O R K I N P R O G R E S S



N e n e H u m p h r e y

Work in Progress: Nene Humphrey

Nene Humphrey is the eighth artist to create a project for the Mississippi Museum of Art's *Work in Progress* series. Like the seven previous projects in the series, viewing this exhibition can be likened to a visit to the artist's studio, in that it includes a range of evolving, unfinished, and finished works. Initiated in 1995 as a unique forum for presenting contemporary art, the series is now an ongoing feature of the Museum's exhibition program.

Comprised of a number of diverse objects and materials, this exhibition explores Humphrey's creative process and finds unification in her use of the human hand in literal and metaphorical ways. The hand appears throughout the artist's two- and three-dimensional works—for example, as imagery in photographs and bronze castings, or "implied" in objects involving sewing and domestic handwork. Trained as a painter, Humphrey had to adapt and invent techniques when she began to make three-dimensional objects in 1978. As a result, she employs sewing and similar nontraditional methods for making art to fabricate her sculptural works. Handed down to Humphrey as a child by her grandmothers and mother, sewing and handwork techniques—especially those associated with traditional women's work—have played a significant role in the artist's personal artistic vocabulary.

A number of elements have had great influence on the work Humphrey includes here. She was born and raised in rural Wisconsin, where manual labor and working with one's hands is highly valued. Brought up as a Roman Catholic, Humphrey was greatly influenced by Catholicism's layered symbolism, repetitious rituals, and use of body imagery. Like the hand, images of the body appear regularly throughout Humphrey's art. Among her current interests is small-world phenomena that propose global interconnections of individuals and groups, such as the concept of there being only "six degrees of separation" between people worldwide.

In the spring of this year the artist spent five weeks in remote rural villages in the Chinese province of Guizhou. The Miao, a minority group known for its intricate, symbolic fabric work, populates this area. There, Humphrey encountered handcraft by Miao women, in particular embroidery, batik, and indigo dye work. Feeling immediately connected to these women, Humphrey said that in "witnessing similar handwork of women in a distant culture sent strands of thread, so to speak, back to its original source in my mother's work, her mother, and so on—and there is simultaneity *and* difference across cultures in the lives of these distinct groups of women."

In approaching this project, Nene Humphrey thought about how to bring together many of her interests and various facets of her work in a single presentation. Although it may not be readily apparent how the seemingly disparate elements mesh in Humphrey's art, it is important to understand that the artist draws on numerous sources to layer her art with personal meaning and symbolism. The various pieced elements—often with their "seams" exposed—reveal the artist's appreciation for traditions, materials, and techniques derived from both fine art and nonart sources. The hand image, found throughout, not only ties the parts together in a conceptual way, it reinforces the fact that art is the product of the human mind and body.

René Paul Barilleaux

The author wishes to acknowledge Nene Humphrey's assistance with this essay in the form of telephone conversations and written communications.

Nene Humphrey

Nene Humphrey was born in 1947 at Portage, Wisconsin. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana; a Master of Arts degree from Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont; and a Master of Fine Arts degree from York University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. For the past twenty-five years, Humphrey has exhibited her work in numerous solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States and Europe. Among her recent solo exhibitions are those presented at the Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, New York; Kiang Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia; and Art Resources Transfer, Inc., New York, New York. Her art has been discussed in *Art in America*, *ARTnews*, *Sculpture Magazine*, and the *New York Times*, among other publications. Humphrey has received awards for her work, including those from the National Endowment for the Arts, The Rockefeller Foundation, MacDowell Colony, and Anonymous Was a Woman. She has taught at Parsons School of Design, New York, New York; Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey; Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island; Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts; Hunter College, New York, New York; and most recently at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut. Her work is included in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia; The Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, Atlanta, Georgia; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art, New Orleans, Louisiana; and the Morris Museum, Morristown, New Jersey. Nene Humphrey divides her time between studios in Brooklyn, New York, and Litchfield, Connecticut.



Selected Solo Exhibitions:

1996 Sandler Hudson Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia. Essay by Nancy Princenthal.*
1993 Halsey Gallery, College of Charleston, Charleston, S.C., traveling to University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. Essay by Renè Barilleaux.*
1992 Winthrop Gallery, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, South Carolina.*
Sandler Hudson Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia.
1990 McIntosh Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia.
1988 Waterworks Art Center, Salisbury, North Carolina. Sculpture Center, New York, New York.
1986 Alternative Museum, Matrix Gallery, New York, New York. Curated by Jane Farver.
1985 Allen Priebe Gallery, University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, Wisconsin*.
1984 Hagger Center, St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana.
1983 Emily Lowe Gallery, Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York.
1981 55 Mercer Gallery, New York, New York.

Selected Group Exhibitions:

1995 "Essence and Persuasion, the Power of Black and White", Anderson Gallery, Buffalo, N.Y.*
"Object Lessons: Feminine Dialogues with the surreal", Mass. College of Art, Boston Mass. Curated by Jeffrey Keough and Ann Wilson Lloyd*
"In Three Dimensions: Women Sculptors of the 90's", Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, Staten Island, New York.*
1994 "Project Room Installation", Threadwaxing Space, with Ellen Driscoll, New York, New York.
"Fabricated Nature," Boise Art Museum, Boise Idaho and traveling to Univ. of Wyoming Museum of Art & Virginia Beach Center for the Arts*
"Sculpture Southeast", South Carolina Art Museum, Columbia, S.C.*
1993 "Idiocognito", OIA / Police Building, New York, New York and William Patterson College, Wayne, New Jersey.*
1992 "55 Ferris Street, Brooklyn, New York. Curated by Frederike Taylor.*
"Art on Paper," Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, N.C.
1991 "Art of Our Times", High Museum, Atlanta, Georgia, Curated by Susan Krane.
1990 "The Art of Drawing", Lehman College, Bronx, New York. Curated by Jane Farver*.
"Work on Paper: Contemporary American Drawings," High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia. Curated by Carrie Przybilla.*

"Collector's Exhibition", Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, Arkansas.
"Small Works, Cast Iron", Sculpture Center, New York, New York.
1989 "Lines of Vision, Drawings by Contemporary Women", Hillwood Art Gallery, Long Island Univ., traveling to Blum Helman Warehouse, and throughout South America. Curated by Dr. Judy Collishen.*
"Objects/Figures", East Hampton Center for Contemporary Art, East Hampton, New York.*
1988 "Scale(small)", Rosa Esman Gallery, New York, New York.
"Sculpture 88", White Columns, New York, New York.
1987 "The Blue Angel", Longwood Arts Center, Bronx, New York, traveling to Space 111, Birmingham, Ala. & AIR Gallery, New York, New York. Curated by Julie Carson and Howard McCaleb.*
1987 "Nature into Form", Oscarrsson Siegeltuch Gallery, New York, New York.
1985 "Earth, Water, Light", Interart de St. Amand Gallery, New York, New York.
1983 "Sculpture", Greene Space Gallery, New York, New York. Curated by Irving Sandler, Corrine Robbins and Kathleen Goncharov*.
1981 "Ambiance/Stimuli", Alternative Museum, New York, New York.*
"Ritual and Landscape", Touchstone Gallery, New York, New York.

Public Commissions:

1984 "Passages", Hagger Center, St. Mary College, Notre Dame, Indiana.
1983 "Roadrise / Resting Space", Art on the Beach, Battery Park, Creative Time, Inc., New York, New York.
"Unending Roads", Mitchel Field, Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York.
1981 "Meadow Passage / Forest House", Morris Museum, Morristown, New Jersey.*
1980 "Enclosed Garden / Landscape", Artpark, Lewiston, New York.*
"Four Mountains For a Grove Trees", Ward's Island, New York, New York. Sponsored by A.R.E.A.*
*Denotes Catalog

Selected Grants and Awards:

1986 Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship, Bellagio, Italy
1983 National Endowment for the Arts, Artist Grant
1982 Karolyi Foundation Fellowship, Vence, France
1978 Mac Dowell Colony Fellowship, Peterborough, New Hampshire

**SANDLER
HUDSON
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