

Rebecca Hutchinson: Growth and Place

My current work is inspired ecologically, looking at specifics in plant growth and how growth sustains in place. I look at formal and behavioral aspects of how plants respond to their surroundings: a) bloom bud structure at night, b) how growth continues to thrive next to different species or impediments, and c) what sustains propagation (tap roots, rhizome growth, leaders, etc.). These all interest me. This observation sets me in conceptual motion. I then draw what materializing these dynamics might look like and I bring this concept, research, and experience into the new context of the spatial realities of the installation site.

The ecological observation/research takes place in a variety of settings, not always near the installation site. Sometimes it is in my own garden, other times on research trips; to the Dominican Republic, the Okefenokee Swamp in southern Georgia, or the desert region around

1 Rebecca Hutchinson installing work in the "Field of Vision: Artists Explore Space" exhibition at the Racine Art Museum in Racine, Wisconsin.







2–3 “Bloom Dynamics” installation, University of Tulsa’s Alexandre Hogue Gallery, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2010. Overall image and detail of one piece in the exhibition.

Tucson, Arizona. The observations kick forward the concept and the concept resonates within me, making a connection. Here I see both the power of metaphor and concept as a guide and this connection and idea is brought to the installation spaces. Materially, I use some local organic or industrial cast-offs, as well as the potential of clay. Thousands of fictitious floral parts are made ahead of time, boxed, shipped, and then complex, large, nature-inspired forms are constructed within the space. I have done pieces in the past where I have worked on site and only used the material connections found in that place, but that is not what is happening currently in the work.

Space provides uniqueness, limitations, and its own set of predicaments (height of ceiling, floor color, space passage, perspective, etc). This installation work—interrelated material growth forms—intermingles with all the dynamics of the space. For me, the work is about potential and functional existence within the space, not dysfunction, and creating work hopefully that is visually compelling, and experiential (literally allowing your passage). Within nature we see the most powerful examples of interconnectedness and survival.

The experience of using cellulose and adhesive mixed with clay has encouraged construction to go in diverse directions. I have

managed to master which adhesive is the best and how much to use to offer the best sticky construction results that allow me to build large, thin, and complex components with a combination of cellulose and clay. Building non-fired and fired elements into specific, fictitious growth formations interacting with space relies on a system that literally sticks together with this individualized, signature sticky clay.

This installation work, of course, is only possible on such a large scale with the help of generous, willing assistants. It is their generosity and rhythm over the course of a four- or five-day install that I find deep and life giving; true connectedness of how we as humans are integrally involved within our ecosystems and that functionality is respecting and utilizing all the varied aspects.

Rebecca Hutchinson is a professor of ceramics at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth. She received a BA in ceramics from Berea College, in Berea, Kentucky, and an MFA in ceramics from the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. Hutchinson’s work is currently on view in a solo exhibition “Rebecca Hutchinson: Affinity,” at the San Francisco Museum of Craft and Design (www.sfmcd.org) in San Francisco, California and at the 2012 Taiwan Ceramics Biennial.