

THE WORK OF REBECCA HUTCHINSON

By
JODI STEVENS



"Night Bloom"
fired and unfired porcelain paper clay
handmade paper, organic material
3.7 x 5.6 x 4.7 metres

To fully appreciate Rebecca Hutchinson's creative process, it helps to have a peek into her everyday life. Hutchinson is a full Professor of Ceramics at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. She divides her "off" time from teaching between her Massachusetts and Montana home studios, where she is constantly working, dedicating all of her waking hours to some sort of labour, always setting aside ample time to work on her art practice. Whether she is harvesting willow branches from her Montana property, collecting used cooking oil from the local restaurants for the family "veggie car", rummaging through old linens at a thrift store to be made into paper, or canning and freezing her garden earnings for a long New England winter, she works toward a more inspired existence, connected to her surroundings and, as she calls it, utilizing her local "vernacular from place". Though sustainability is not the singular driving force of her art practice, her making process is a prime example of the "cradle-to-cradle" mentality. Much of her materials, such as the clay, or the willow branches she uses for her sculptural armatures, grew from the earth. Other items, such as cast-off cotton sheeting from the bedding industry or discarded and shredded bills from Crane Paper company where they print U.S. currency (at least one million dollars' worth, to be more specific), are broken down and reused, or "up-cycled" into raw pulp that is then transformed into handmade paper.

below -
"Orange Burst"
fired and unfired porcelain
paper clay, handmade paper
organic material
1.5 x 1.5 x 0.3 metres



Hutchinson creates beautiful, organic sculptures from these raw and natural materials. As some of her titles suggest, the works appear to bloom and flourish. They seem to be plucked from the forest of a strange world, yet one can see the purposeful placement of millions of small pieces, each one deliberately tucked in and attached by the artist's hand. Hutchinson acknowledges a correlation between the conceptual themes in her works of art and the organic growth patterns that can be found in the natural world. Drawing inspiration from her research of botanical motifs found in Persian rugs, handmade lace, and historical damask, she interprets this imagery in new form and pattern. These subtle references can be found printed on the surfaces of her handmade papers, or in the repeating porcelain shapes, carefully and densely piled. Dualities are discovered in the materials and forms themselves: they read as somehow both hard and soft in texture, surface, and line; they are individually delicate, yet as a whole the forms seem persistent in their growth and abundance. Thin porcelain pieces look like lace or delicate butterfly wings, while hundreds of folded and shaped papers are stiff, leafy protrusions that could have been picked, dried, and preserved, much like the small prizes from her home garden.

It is precisely this parallel of life to art that makes the work all the more intriguing. In a way, Hutchinson mirrors the much-loved labour of her private home life, to artworks meant for the public eye. She finds artistic flow in her home and studio alike, fostering a deep connection to the earth and its gifts, which she transforms to beautiful, raw materials for a sustainable art practice. Her sculptures are fitting for both public and private spaces, offering us a chance to contemplate a world of abundant floral growth. Hutchinson's persistent, blooming forms remind me of human resilience, and helping create the work invigorates me. It refreshes my passion for art and leaves me eager to work in my own studio. It's like spending a day visiting a large museum or a block's worth of fresh-faced galleries in New York City. One can see so much art that it becomes exhausting by the end of the day; it's been hard work, absorbing it all. Yet the impressions linger to be reflected upon for the coming days or weeks. Working as an assistant, I learn from our mistakes and relish in her success, which I admittedly measure by a long list of forthcoming exhibitions and travel dates. I am grateful to have someone who encourages emerging artists such as myself, who also teaches and mentors openly, whether she is aware of it or not.

JODI STEVENS

is an artist and independent curator. She resides in New Bedford, MA, USA and holds an ongoing position as adjunct faculty for the Continuing Education department at Rhode Island School of Design.



"Tranquil Bloom"

fired and unfired porcelain paper clay, handmade paper, organic material
shredded 100 dollar bills (1 million dollars), 6.3 x 5.3 x 4 metres

Rebecca Hutchinson is a ceramic installation artist and Professor of Ceramics at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Her site-specific works have been influenced by observation of place, specifically looking at environmental concerns. She has used and taught with paper clay for the past fifteen years, and has shown extensively throughout the U.S. and abroad. More of her work at www.rebeccahutchinson.com

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