

# REBECCA HUTCHINSON



PHOTOGRAPHY BY KURT KELLER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LORI PEDRICK



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**REBECCA HUTCHINSON** is an award-winning sculptor from Rochester, Massachusetts, whose work appears in prominent national and international venues. She was one of 12 recipients of the 2015 “Women to Watch” award from the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. A dedicated educator of over 20 years, Rebecca gives workshops internationally, both online and in person. She currently serves as full professor at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, teaching undergraduate and graduate ceramics.

**I’VE BEEN A SCULPTOR FOR 30 YEARS.** As an undergraduate student at Berea College, I found my voice in throwing at the potter’s wheel, one piece after the next, and setting them carefully on the ware board in front of me. The space between the bowls or cups or other specific forms began to speak to me about relationships — human relationships within space and particularly within society.

I went on to graduate school for an MFA in ceramics at the University of Georgia and found ceramic scale and working site-specifically. There, I also apprenticed for two years with a papermaker, and those skills and concepts have found a way into my current practice.

Two years later, I launched a professional career, first in North Carolina working for the North Carolina Arts Council and then two years at the Archie Bray Foundation, a world-renowned ceramics residency program in Montana.







PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEAN DAVIS

**WHILE A RESIDENT ARTIST** at the Archie Bray Foundation, I found that my materials began to expand. I saw how my background in ceramics and in papermaking could conceptually and materially blend. This new work in paperclay was reinforced by working on multiple solo shows while in Montana, at the Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art and

at the Missoula Art Museum, and several pieces for exhibitions at the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) conference.

My professional life since then has been a blend of installations and exhibitions at museums, and site-specific projects, including significant international biennials.

“The really modern artist, i.e. the conscious artist, has a two-fold purpose: in the first place, [one] must create the purely visual work of art; in the second place, [one] should make the public susceptible to the beauty of such purely visual art. As soon as artists in the various branches of plastic art will have realized that they must speak a universal language, they will no longer cling to their individuality with such anxiety.”

— THEO VAN DOESBURG (NEOPLASTICISM)





### A LIFELONG STUDY OF NATURE

influences what I do. As a maker, I have a particular affinity for the builders in nature: nesting birds, insects and animals that use the materials around them in their sustainable constructions. I think about how their efforts are interdependent with the environment, not just in terms of their available materials but also in terms of how they are working with space and how their engineering strategies determine their survival. I feel an affinity with these dynamics of making — with an equilibrium of potential and limitation.

As a mixed-media sculptor, I select materials that are informed by my research and engineering needs. I collect domestic cast-offs at thrift stores — tablecloths, linens, 100% natural fiber used garments. The research prior to museum projects also includes upcycling manufactured industrial cast-offs, the “found” remnants of human history and activity.

The use of multiples is present in every installation I build, a nod to my conceptual awakening as a production potter at Berea College as well as a maturing researcher of growth systems. In nature, there is often the accumulation of repeated parts — pine needles in a nest, segmented leaves on a plant, cells of a beehive. The expression of growth is well articulated in repeated elements such as grids, layers or intuitive patterns.

Currently, I’m working on a solo show at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York. The show is an installation of 10 to 12 inverted vessel forms built very much like a wasp builds its paper nest. They will be site-installed.



## CREATIVE PROCESS

FOR ME, IT ALWAYS STARTS WITH AN OBSERVATION OF THE NATURAL WORLD that illuminates metaphorically a connection to social systems. While my work at first glance may seem to be about the natural world, it is ultimately about us as human beings. How relationships navigate with each other and navigate within place. While there are so many examples within the natural world and the social human world of ability, I am ultimately interested as a sculptor in articulating function conceptually.

I then draw. That can be small-scale drawing in a journal or putting large 8-foot sheets of paper on the wall and drawing very openly with oriental brushes dipped into ink. I draw without expectation. Then I go back and revisit the drawings and hold myself accountable to something that I notice that has a connection to the research. I take notes right on the drawing about the specificity that I see. While preparing to build sculpturally, I choose a drawing that has strength.





**THE CONSTRUCTION PROCESS** is about having the appropriate materials on hand. I collect what I need using clay as a foundational material. My knowledge in papermaking guides me in selecting the appropriate cast-offs to pulp in my Hollander beater anywhere from two to seven hours.

It's the combination of these materials that affords me an earthen-like quality while achieving strength and monumentality and avoiding weight. I engineer pieces uniquely from one museum project to the next. I may weave a structure; I may use simple woodworking skills in constructing structure from willow harvested near my property; I may use traditional hand-building techniques or a combination of traditional and unconventional methods of making.

Engineering is solved first, and then I follow through with a constructed invention or a borrowed traditional construction method by using the combination of these two materials.

Adobe is both a concept and a material (air-dried, non-fired fibrous clay). It is used by the animal kingdom but has also been an architectural material since the beginning of time. Adobe, used by the swallow, takes a combination of earthen materials and fibrous materials from the region along with saliva from the bird and packs those materials together in constructing the form.

A 2:3 fiber-to-clay ratio offers the highest engineering strength.

Whether it's invention or borrowed tradition, repetitive motion and repetitive use of parts are used to build large-scale forms. Multiple large-scale forms are brought to the museum to set up within the architectural reality of the space, paying very close attention to special dynamics between the parts and the viewer as they pass through the spatial installation experience.

## MORE ON THE CURRENT EVERSON MUSEUM OF ART PROCESS



**IN THIS CURRENT BODY OF WORK**, the walls of the inverted vessels are made by taking paper pages from landfill-bound books, dipping them into a slurry of paperclay, folding it so it has more thickness, and basically building it like a coil pot, moving upward from the base and providing shape by sloping outward or inward, letting it grow in volume and sensually in relationship to the human body. An 8-foot piece weighs approximately 18 to 20 pounds, so very lightweight and very thin.








**CREATIVELY,** I will choose to keep the rough surface texture of the folded pages — or I can stucco to make a smooth surface by brushing on layers of paperclay.





WHILE WORKING ON THE LARGE-SCALE FORMS, I have a continual relationship with my own body. I am mindful of this relationship when pieces are dry, complete and installed within the museum setting. Ultimately, I am interested in a harmonious experience between the multiple pieces and the visiting viewer as they navigate through the installation.

■ Rebecca

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**LORI PEDRICK** is an award-winning art director, photographer and designer with over 25 years of experience in publishing. She has managed the visuals of magazines with a wide variety of topics, including home, food/entertaining, contemporary art + design, travel, weddings and both long- and short-form narrative. She is the former art director for *Yankee* magazine as well as *Philadelphia* and *Boston* magazine's ancillary publication division. She is the current art director for *Art New England* magazine as well as the Edible Manhattan Group.

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