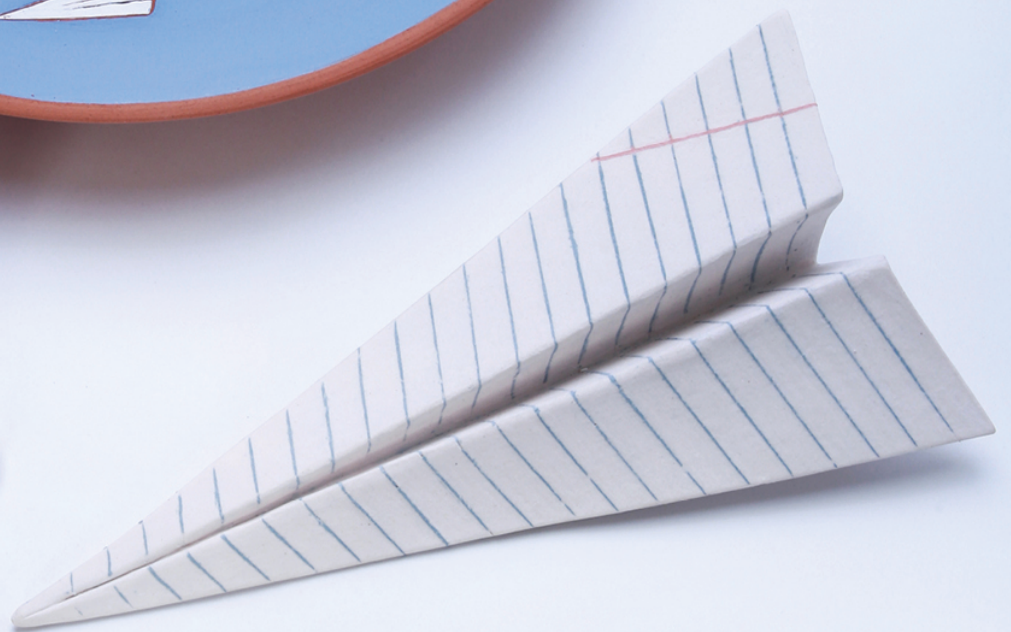


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# ARTICULATING NUANCES: THE WORK OF ARTIST REBECCA HUTCHINSON

## AVA ROBITAILLE AND MICHAEL ROSE

Rebecca Hutchinson is a lauded New England artist who explores a range of media in order to tell stories that focus on the natural world. Her work is often immersive and room-filling. Consequently, it changes the nature of the relationship between viewer and object and makes audiences rethink their connection to the subjects that Hutchinson cares about and to her artwork itself. A singular voice based in the northeast, Hutchinson is an artist to know. An experienced professor currently teaching at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, USA Hutchinson is also an award-winning artist. The National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, DC recognized her with a Women to Watch Award in 2015. She has been highlighted in over 80 publications worldwide, and has received many awards for her research and teaching including three consecutive nominations for Outstanding Educators Award at the International Sculpture Center. Her practice is recognized for innovation and expertise.

Hutchinson's work is centered in exploring the natural world and ecological relationships through large-scale sculptures. Using a mixture of clay, fiber, and natural materials she articulates relationships. Bringing details of nature into a larger context allows her to explore connections between human and botanical systems in a captivating way.

When asked about what draws her to sculpture and ceramics as a medium to explore nature and ecology, Hutchinson answers, "Within sculpture and ceramics I have the potential to articulate not only small details but work in a scale that is relatable to the human body. When I am working large the work is at its best. I'm articulating nuances of ecosystem behavior that may not be readily seen, but through scale, unavoidable at being noticed.

Artist and professor Rebecca Hutchinson installing one of her immersive sculptures.



My materials in themselves are earth materials. I use a blend of handmade paper made from harvested natural or domestic items (only natural fiber items) blended with clay to make a personalized adobe recipe."

Hutchinson's process has earned her the interest of curators and collectors around the world. Her work is held in numerous collections including those of the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the Maldives Waldorf Astoria, the Boston Children's Hospital, the Yingge Museum in Taiwan, the Georgia Museum of Art, and the Canton Museum of Art, among others. She has also been featured in exhibitions at dozens of important venues ranging from local spaces like the Danforth Museum of Art and the Fuller Craft Museum to Syracuse's Everson Museum of Art, the San Francisco Museum of Craft and Design, as well as Biennales in Spain and Taiwan. Hutchinson received her MFA from the University of Georgia at Athens and her BA from Berea College.

Describing the process behind her work, the artist says, "Each project whether it is a museum commission or a new body of work handled by a gallerist, is the result of thoughtful research. Most invitations are a chance to celebrate that specific place. I look for the untold story within the research of place or something that resonates metaphorically with the tension and realities within our cultural existence. Once research is complete and I have a conceptual focus, that supports image collection of specific growth patterns within the plant world or diverse historical imagery. The research and the image collection renders the development of new drawings on possible form directions. This research also encourages harvesting specific materials to use in the sculptural work (blue jeans and sugar beet pulp by-product), color and tone, and siting and display possibilities."



A dramatic view of Hutchinson's human-sized sculptural work.

The artist's thoughtful and place-specific research is an important element of what sets her process apart. Where some might impose their ideas on a site, Hutchinson responds to the places she encounters. Her unique way of making also enables Hutchinson to tell important stories, like that of resilience. In a practice that is intense and focused, her sculptures and installations become something like ecological case studies.

Hutchinson describes her ecological influences by saying, "My interest is in resilience and resourcefulness. Within the research I love learning about nature's ability to navigate despite a boundary or impediment or scarcity of resource. And... where their physical outcome has a positive story of the journey of their survival. For example, in the prairie where water may be scarce, prairie grass or specific prairie botanicals have disproportionate root length compared to their above ground bloom. Prairie grass could have roots 14 feet in length to sustain 14 inches of bloom activity above the ground. Learning these miraculous dynamics within ecosystems are relatable to the human condition and journey."

Beyond the research element of her making, the practical side of the way Hutchinson constructs work is also unique. Her process of mixing natural fibers and clay makes her artwork strong and stable, while also lightweight. This helps her build at an impressively large scale. She acknowledges though, that working with air-dried clay has its own set of rules.



A recent installation view of Rebecca Hutchinson's remarkable forms made of clay, fiber, and natural materials.

Considering the challenges her medium poses, Hutchinson states, "Adobe is incredibly versatile. It can be cast, carved and handbuilt. It is strong, air-dried and earthen in its quality. Because I am mixing natural fiber in my clay I am benefiting from increased strength, ease of building and decreasing weight while working large scale. Air-dried clay can be challenging for the collector, for the museum staff as they are considering their investment needing to maintain for years to come. I communicate my work is cared for by dusting with compressed air once a year and it is hard, stable and permanent. I have been a part of the education of what acceptable collecting and acceptable acquisitions can be. And I appreciate staff and collectors being open to this ongoing conversation of collecting non-fired adobe sculptural work."

Through her thoughtful practice, Rebecca Hutchinson blurs boundaries between media and explores new ways of researching and of making. In the process, she has deservedly received wide recognition and acclaim. An accomplished artist, Hutchinson contributes greatly to New England both as a visual art practitioner and a mentor.

September 4-7, Hutchinson featured at Art on Paper New York, a major art fair at Pier 36 in Downtown Manhattan. Looking forward, she is preparing for a 2026 solo exhibition at The Fine Art Program and Collection at Montefiore Einstein, The Gallery of ARTful Medicine in White Plains, New York. And in 2026-2027, she will be the subject of a solo exhibition at Yellowstone Art Museum in Billings, Montana. Learn more about Rebecca Hutchinson at [www.rebeccahutchinson.com](http://www.rebeccahutchinson.com) or follow her on Instagram at [@rebeccahutchinsonstudio](https://www.instagram.com/rebeccahutchinsonstudio).

This essay was co-authored by Providence College Art History senior Ava Robitaille in collaboration with New England Art News Editor Michael Rose. Thank you to Ava for her thoughtful research and writing contributions to this piece. Thank you also to Dawn Stetzel, Rebecca Hutchinson's studio assistant, for support with photography and other materials for this feature.

#### WORKSHOP OPPORTUNITY IN IRELAND

Rebecca will be giving a three day hands-on workshop 'Navigating Paperclay Within Your Ceramic Studio Practice' at Strata Ceramics in Bennettsbridge, Kilkenny 29th - 31st May 2026. *'In this 3-day workshop we will explore paperclay form development. Demonstrations will include mixed media material preparation, building techniques, surface and color, firing and non-firing options; all to achieve qualities of translucency, weightlessness and building ease. Participants will be encouraged to develop individual directions as it relates to their studio direction. The workshop will be balanced between material preparation, demo watching, discussion and studio construction time. All skill levels welcome.'* For further information and booking go to [strataceramics.ie](http://strataceramics.ie)

Opposite page: Organic forms are shown off in one of Hutchinson's impressive sculptural works.

