A WALL IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

by

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"Either that wallpaper goes or I do." Oscar Wilde on his deathbed
Wallpaper is a decorative medium that communicates both visual and psychological messages. My work is inspired by research of traditional and contemporary wallpaper. I create sculptural wall assemblages using shredded paper and raw wool, which are taken out of their ordinary contexts and introduced into new environments. In my attempt to understand the functions of wallcoverings, my site-specific art explores the dichotomy between spontaneity and structure, as well as permanence and impermanence. I aspire to create a visual experience that forms a dialogue between the object and the viewer. Irregular patterns of light, shadow, and texture produce very natural yet unexpected qualities to the work. I make art that creates feelings of comfort and familiarity yet also challenges traditional ideas of what decorative wall surfaces should resemble. The end result is an embellished surface that questions the language of wallcoverings.

Growing up in a military family, moving to a new home every two years, and observing my parents remodel and redecorate helped me to become very much aware of my surroundings—especially the wallpaper that adorned the spaces that we lived in. This concept of creating a familiar, comforting, and personal environment using decorative surfaces has helped me to define my work as an artist and designer. The idea that wallpaper is temporary and site-specific is an important issue in my work in that it parallels change as well as moving and adapting to new location.

Throughout graduate school, my continued fascination with two-dimensional pattern and surface design eventually began to transform into a strong interest in three-dimensional objects, sculpture, and installation art. Fabric design has always been divided between fine art and industry, and my intentions thus far have been to merge
these ideas about textiles. As a result, I began to create works that combined a fine art aesthetic with contemporary ideas of decoration.

My first exploration of three-dimensional wall surfaces began with the utilization of paper, _Peanut Butter Crackers in My Pocket_ (Figures 1-2). I created an installation of four panels constructed of shredded papers that were mounted onto the wall. The repetitive action of shredding the paper was an important aspect of my work. The materials used were architectural drafting paper, craft paper, wax paper, and colored printing paper. Light, shadow, and texture played major roles in my selection of these materials, all of which exhibited very natural and organic qualities. Additionally, I was interested in transforming everyday objects by placing them in a unique environment while emphasizing their unusual yet beautiful characteristics.

For this first installation, I rented an old warehouse space and transformed it into a gallery filled with the shredded paper panels. Each of the four walls had a large panel installed, similar to a painting. I shredded a large quantity of papers before the installation. The repetitive nature of shredding the paper was very tedious, yet the work was predictable and comforting. Working quickly and spontaneously, I took handfuls of the shredded paper and stapled them to each panel, with not much concern as to the placement, but mainly working in an intuitive manner. Individual pieces of paper were free to fall to the floor, giving a very natural and organic quality to the work.
(Figure 1) **Peanut Butter Crackers in My Pocket**
Installation of Shredded and Manipulated Paper
Craft paper, staples, and insulation board
48” x 96” 3” 2005

(Figure 2) **Detail- Peanut Butter Crackers in My Pocket**
Installation of Shredded and Manipulated Paper
Craft paper, staples, and insulation board
48” x 96” 3” 2005
I created my next shredded paper installation, *A Merry Blithesome Nature* (Figure 3), in the hallway of the Lamar Dodd School of Art building. During this time, I began to think more about location and placement of my work. I selected an expansive wall so that my focus would be on perspective. In order to get away from the look of a panel, I created a running stripe with shredded masking paper. I intentionally placed the work lower on the wall, away from the predictable eye-level perspective. A pleasant addition to the work was the movement of the individual strips of paper that was caused by the air vents on the ceiling. This movement of the paper, along with the rustling sounds, created a very playful and whimsical environment for students and faculty in the art school.

(Figure 3) *A Merry Blithesome Nature*
Installation of Shredded and Manipulated Paper
Masking paper and staples
34” x 276” x 3” 2006
I created my third shredded paper installation, *Redecorating* (Figure 4), in my studio using shredded newspapers. I chose newspapers because I could obtain an unlimited supply of this very colorful material. My objective was to cover the entire wall, while at the same time integrating the sink, paper towel holder, and garbage can—all existing objects of the space.

(Figure 4) *Redecorating*
*Installation of Shredded and Manipulated Paper*  
*Staples and newspapers*  
*99" x 142" x 3" 2006*

For my thesis exhibition, *A Wall in Sheep's Clothing* (Figures 5-6), I selected raw wool for a wall installation in the Samuel H. Kress Gallery at the Georgia Museum of Art. The fleece is a Leicester Longwool from Cranberry Moon Farm, a small family sustainable farm located in the Berkshires of Massachusetts. Leicester Longwool is known for its length, luster, and durability. This work was similar to the shredded wall pieces in that the main focus was on light, shadow, and texture. Dutch textile designer,
Claudy Jongstra, who creates handcrafted materials using raw and unfinished materials, states that “tactility, color, and ornament are no luxuries; they are essential ingredients of an impressive and imaginative interior” (Jongstra 39). Because of the material and overall shape of this work, it became more organic and less rigid than the shredded wall pieces. Rather than covering the entire wall space, I chose to create an organic shape that complemented the material itself. My objective was to create a warm, comforting, and familiar environment. Texture and scent were most significant in this piece, while incorporating the natural elements found in raw wool, straw and lanolin.

(Figure 6) A Wall in Sheep’s Clothing
Installation of manipulated raw wool
Raw wool and staples
105” x 180” x 3” 2007
In *The Yellow Wall-Paper*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman describes the scent of the wallpaper:

It is the strangest yellow, that wall-paper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw—not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things. But there is something else about that paper—the smell! I noticed it the moment we came into the room, but with so much air and sun it was not bad. Now we have had a week of fog and rain, and whether the windows are open or not, the smell is here. It creeps all over the house. I find it hovering in the dining-room, skulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall, lying in wait for me on the stairs. It gets into my hair. Even when I go to ride, if I turn my head suddenly and surprise it—there is that smell! Such a peculiar odor, too! I have spent hours in trying to analyze it, to find what it smelled like. It is not bad—at first, and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor I ever met. In this damp weather it is awful, I wake up in the night and find it hanging over me. It used to disturb me at first. I thought seriously of burning the house—to reach the smell. (Gilman 15)
My objective in making these wallcovering installations is to create a total sensory experience, with the end result being an environment that physically places the viewer into the work while integrating the senses—sight, sound, touch, and smell. In his book on contemporary wallcoverings, Lachlan Blackley states, “Wallpaper is back. No longer bland peripheral decoration, wallpaper today shouts out individuality. It is customized to enhance our homes, commercial spaces—bars, restaurants and hotel interiors, and installed as art in museums and galleries” (Blackley 7).
Works Cited

