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National Basketry Organization

President's Letter	2
New Faces	3-6
Book Review	7
Along The Basket Trail	8
Brian Jewett	9-12
Exhibition	13
Elizabeth Whyte Schulze	14-18
Exhibitions/Workshops	19-21
Calendar of Events	22-23
Cerf+	24-25
Exhibition	26

INSIDE

quarterly review | Summer 2011



Waltz 4 Debby
Elizabeth Whyte Schulze

Promoting the art, skill, heritage, and education of traditional and contemporary basketry.

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ELIZABETH
WHYTE
SCHULZE

Featured Artist



photography by: Stephen Schulze





LOOKOUT, LISTEN TO ME and SIT DOWN NOW! - These are three titles in my recently completed Anna series. The words on the basket confront the viewer as they interact with paper figures painted with marks, dots, lines and graffiti-like imagery. Each coiled basket is informed and inspired by my travels in addition to the experiences of everyday life.

My earliest artistic attempts were at the Saturday programs for young children at the Charles A. Wustum Museum now known as RAM, the Racine Art Museum in Racine Wisconsin. What I remember most was the freedom with paint and paper encouraged in the programs. RAM now has one of the most extensive collections of fine craft in the country and I am proud to have my work in their permanent collection.

The encouragement to acquire an education and travel were two important goals my parents impressed upon me. While attending Ohio Wesleyan University during the late 60's I was part of the action committee pushing for campus-wide changes resulting from the student protests to end the war in Vietnam. By the time I arrived in Boston in 1970, I discovered the beginnings of the fiber revolution taking place in university art departments throughout the city. This development in the east and a similar one on the west coast changed the role

middle: Tokyo Dolls, 2010

19.5" h x 19.5" w x 1.5" d

pine needles, raffia, round reed, acrylic paint and paper
photography by: John Polak

top photo: Listen To Me, 2011

25" h x 20" w x 12" d

pine needles, raffia, round reed, acrylic paint and paper
photography by: John Polak

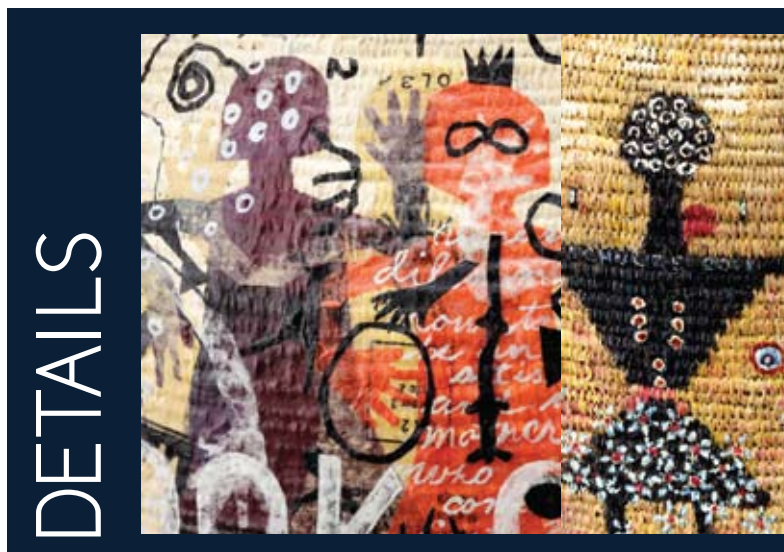
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below: Noway, 2011

11.5”h x 10”w x 8.5”d
pine needles, raffia, round reed, acrylic paint and paper
photography by: John Polak

right: Monkey Business, 2011

9.5”h x 8”w x 4”d
pine needles, raffia, round reed, acrylic paint and paper
photography by: John Polak



of textiles as art. It was a stimulating time, as a new respect for the medium appeared, and in it I found my true interest in basketry.

My desire and love for travel began back in 1969 when I traveled out to Borneo to visit my brother who had joined the Peace Corps. The experience of visiting Southeast Asia was a huge awakening for me. The art, culture and people of this area triggered a sense of adventure and discovery that would stay with me as I pursued my artistic career.

In 1980, I traveled to Nepal and India for my honeymoon. The imagery of beautifully carved Nepalese window frames and festival scenes of flower draped Katmandu doorways inspired my first coiled baskets. Coiling, a process of stitching and binding a core to create a basket became my chosen technique. The coiled form has provided me with an inexhaustible variety of shapes and sizes while it retains the solid basket structure important for my sculptures. In the Nepalese Window basket series I wove and stitched the designs into the basket with hand dyed raffia and other colorful threads.

The embroidering of the basket, drawing, and marking the surface with thread soon became too tedious and restrictive. As an alternative, I began to experiment with acrylic paint and soon found a new freedom of expression. The use of paint allowed me to draw, design and cover areas with layers of color. In 1996, I was given the rare opportunity to visit the original Lascaux Cave in France. The experience was a seminal moment for me as I was transitioning from all fiber work to combining woven basketry and the painted surface. In the cave I saw the charging bulls and galloping horses come to life on the walls and ceilings in this Paleolithic art gallery. The experience inspired me to find a way to bring my imagery to life on the textured surface of my basket sculptures.

Recent travels have taken me to Australia and Japan, continuing my education in other cultures and their art. Visiting Australia in 2008 gave me the opportunity to see the vibrant and dynamic paintings of world-famous aboriginal artists such as Rover Thomas, Clifford Possum

Tjapaltjarri and Emily Kngwarreye. Japan is a country that I have visited several times and each time it continues to inspire. The variety of finely made rice papers is providing me with a new source of material to add to the complex surface design important in my current work. From the solitude of an ancient temple to the bustling noisy crowds in Shibuya Station, Japan's culture is one of extremes. I find both ends of the spectrum stimulating.

Travel destinations inform my work but I find that everyday experiences provide inspiration as well. I can best describe my recent series by beginning with the story of Anna's Dilemma. The tale is written on a dress in each of the baskets in this series and refers to an

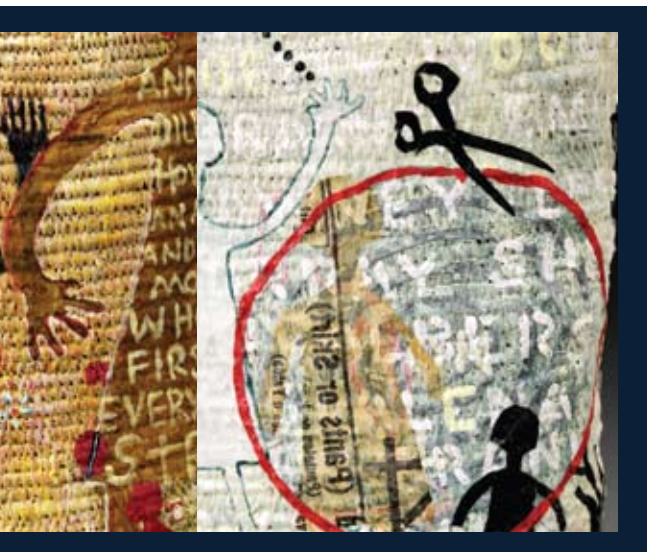
experience I had in the fall of 2010. I attended visiting artist, Anna Schuleit's open studio at the University of Massachusetts where the topic of discussion initiated by Anna turned to how to combine one's artistic pursuits and motherhood. Many attending women artists spoke about the difficulty in their own lives juggling studio time and children. Later, in reflection I posed the question to myself about who comes first? This experience was the catalyst for the words and imagery I use in this series.

Continued on next page

below middle: Sit Down Now, 2011
12" h x 8.5" w x 5" d
pine needles, raffia, round reed, acrylic paint and paper
photography by: John Polak

bottom photo: Lookout, 2011
16" h x 18.5" w x 8" d
pine needles, raffia, round reed, acrylic paint and paper
photography by: John Polak

middle details:
first: Lookout
second: Sit Down Now
third: Monkey Business




“ Travel destinations
inform my work ...
but, I find that
everyday experiences
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Each basket in the Anna series is defined by the bubble bottom; an oval coiled base ballooning out before it turns in and up. Repeated around the bottom is what appears to be a classic Persian design, but is actually the tracing of a discarded piece of intricately cut veneer. Embedded into the coiling is a female figure visible inside the basket as well as out. The many layers of paint, rice paper cutouts and gel medium envelop the basket's raffia and pine needle construction. Stenciled artists names follow the coiled rows up the side. Women in contemporary dress and hair-style, dance, walk, and stand their ground on the undulating surface. The female cutouts are created using fine paper, which is then adhered to the basket surface. Some are cut from old Vogue dress patterns with printed directions while others are from handmade

papers from India, Japan and Thailand. Layers of paint and paper create a complex interaction between figure and ground.

For many years I have been interested in petroglyphs of the American Southwest. Considered one of the earliest forms of graffiti are the drawings on stone that survive today on canyon walls. I find myself also being intrigued by contemporary graffiti where artists leave their mark on buildings, bridges, and walls throughout the urban landscape. When I use graffiti, I want the words and images to confront the narrative on the basket surface. LOOKOUT, LISTEN TO ME and SIT DOWN NOW! Are the words and declarations calling out to the viewer to react, and perhaps respond? 



top: Waltz 4 Debby, 2010

7.5" h x 16" w x 16" d

pine needles, raffia, round reed, acrylic paint and paper
photography by: John Polak

**bottom: Waltz 4 Debby
(also picture on cover)**

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