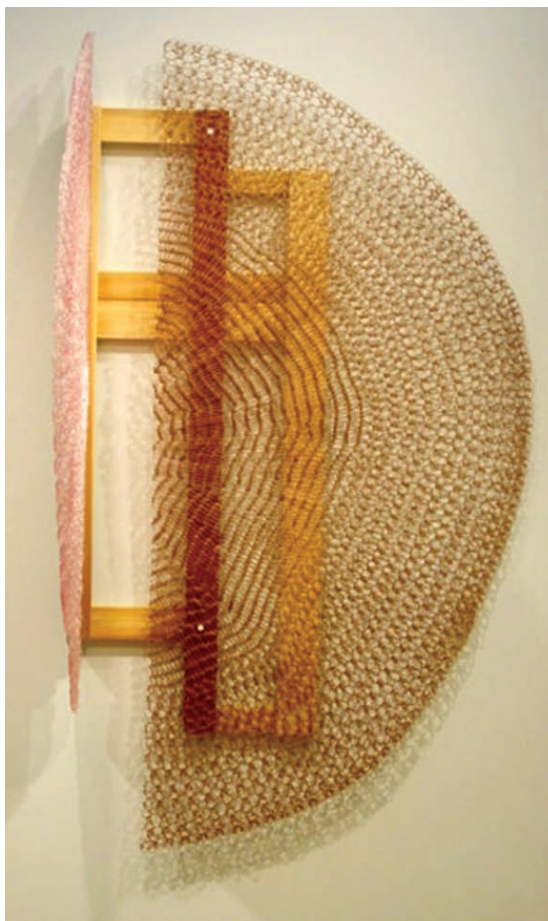


YVETTE KAISER SMITH



“What I love is the chase!” says Yvette Kaiser Smith. When she begins a new sculpture, she has a “clear conceptual destination” in mind and has selected medium, process, color, and scale. Her material is such a challenge to work with that she never quite knows where a sculpture is going—or exactly what it will look like when she’s done. That’s where the fun comes in.

Kaiser Smith makes abstract constructions that she mounts on the wall, sometimes using a light wooden framework. A typical piece, which may measure nine by twelve feet or even more, consists of a few large, flat, pale-colored circles, semicircles, or rectangles mounted either flush or perpendicular to the wall. The artist crochets these shapes from yarn-like lengths of fiberglass and stiffens them with color-infused polyester resin to create a translucent form that casts patterned shadows.

The artist writes that her conceptual goal is “to articulate narratives of identity in the language of crocheted fiberglass—and to disintegrate and redefine expectations of a sculptural object by unraveling pre-conceptions of materials, forms, and categories in art.” Her work is neither sculpture nor painting, but a hybrid, she states. Influenced by Eva Hesse and her “spirit of experimentation,” Kaiser Smith says that her artistic roots are in Post-Minimalism, Arte Povera, and process art.

“Narratives of identity” spring from the artist’s personal history and observations of life. She translates verbal ideas into the language of crochet, which comprises traditional stitches that are used to make circular and rectangular forms. Kaiser Smith’s work

has grown in boldness and clarity as she came to terms with her family heritage and explored her material and process.

Born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, the artist came to the U.S. as a child and completed her MFA at the University of Chicago during 1994. She discovered fiberglass as she was doing “all-out materials exploration” in the studio. She made structures of metal and wire, combining them with sheet fiberglass. She also began to crochet fiberglass into doily and runner forms, feeling a bit defensive about her craft technique. In those days, her art was “stories from the body,” as she puts it—suggestions of ovaries and the spine.

In 1998, Kaiser Smith visited Prague for the first time in 30 years. “My childhood came rushing back to me,” she says. “I was like a sponge filling

EXHIBITION: *A Sum of its Parts: Identity 2*, 2005. Crocheted fiberglass, polyester resin, lacewood, poplar, 71 x 41 x 27 in.

**Sculpture Invasion, Koehnline Museum of Art, Oakton Community College
Essay by Victor M. Cassidy, July, 2007**



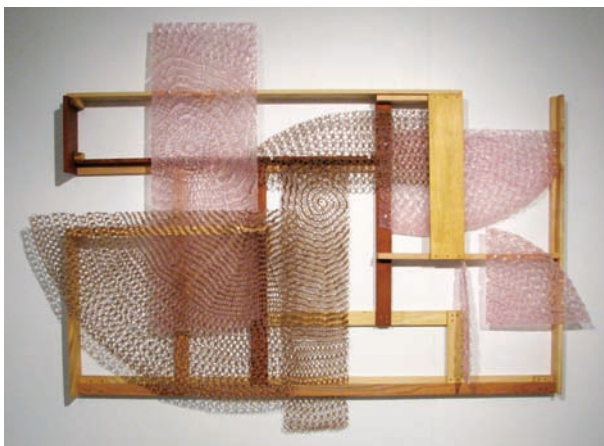
with water.” She saw lace everywhere—in curtains, runners, and shawls—and overlaid patterns in traditional costume. “I had not considered my heritage before,” she says, “and I returned to Chicago with patterns in my brain. I began to see people as patterns, which brought me out of the body in my work.” Kaiser Smith’s sculptures grew in scale as she gained confidence in her technique.

Fiberglass is perfectly miserable to work with, the artist says. Her skin itches during long hours of crocheting. When she applies resin to a crocheted form, it “clings to itself, stretches endlessly if pulled, puddles, loses all form, and just wants to

become a wet lump of stuff.” The form starts to set after about 25 minutes, but she must support it for 24 hours until it is completely stiff. Despite all this, the “run-away behavior” of wet fiberglass keeps her from becoming predictable, she says. “The material is inherently much more creative and clever than I am. It is the equal partnership of our two voices, mine and the materials’, that produces successful, interesting, readable new forms. It is in this resin stage that the form is found.”

A Sum of its Parts: Identity 2 (2005) suggests that personal identity is a “hybrid” of our genetics, body, behavior, choices, and how we interact with our environment, the artist says. *Identity 2* consists of two semicircular crocheted fiberglass forms at right angles to each other, which cast complex shadows beneath and to the left. Both forms are derived from doily patterns, but the scale of this piece—it’s 71 inches high—lifts them beyond any suggestion of craft. Both flat and dimensional, *Identity 2* hovers between painting and sculpture.

A Sum of its Parts: Identity 11 (2005) recalls Constructivist painting. The artist made it by mounting studio scraps onto a wooden framework of open and closed rectangles. With its linearity, patterns, overlays, and subdued but vibrant colors, *Identity 11* suggests possibilities that Kaiser Smith has just begun to exploit. She will be enjoying “the chase” for many years to come.



From top: *A Sum of its Parts: Identity 2* (right side view);

A Sum of its Parts: Identity 11, 2005. Crocheted fiberglass, polyester resin, lacewood, yellow heart, oak, maple, poplar, 70 x 37 x 7 in.

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