

Contact: Betsy Siersma or Regina Coppola

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NEWS RELEASE

The University Gallery is pleased to present JUDITH SHEA: SCULPTURE from October 29 through December 14. Featured in the exhibition are 21 works relating to the human form, including fabric constructions mounted on the wall and free-standing cast sculptures.

Judith Shea's early work is informed by an interest in clothing design and the significance of garments as sculptural objects and cultural signs. Tacked to a wall or hung on wooden dowels suspended close to a wall, Shea's stylized articles of clothing--pants, vest, dresses, etc.--hover between painting and sculpture. I Like Ike, 1980, is a canvas work whose flattened shape defines the right half of a man's overcoat. The garment's crisp contour and simple lines demonstrate Shea's investigation of design construction and evoke a cultural association with the 1950s. By using the material and fundamental shapes of fashion design, the artist alters the craft's significance and broadens the conventions of fine art. From these silhouette-like abstractions, Shea continued her exploration of clothing as a surrogate for human form by employing more rigid materials such as wire mesh or industrial felt and by using the sculptural tradition of casting in bronze or iron. The generic clothing previously outlined against walls was inflated to enclose the volume and weight of invisible human figures. Shea best explains her intentions: "The basis of the work I'm doing is the difficult task of establishing a negative, establishing the presence of a figure in the actual absence of it." The Balance, a cast bronze piece from 1986, resonates with this incongruous quality. Inspired by the abundant drapery folds of ancient Greek statuary, a seated figure holds in its lap a wooden cube, the symbol of logic and order. The sculpture's surface has been treated to effect a patina, giving this contemporary work a timeless air. Though the figure is headless and handleless, the presence of a body in absentia is sensed strongly through the material representation of the garment's curves and lines. Shea keeps the proportions of her "bodiless" figures to human scale which intensifies their palpability. Like her fabric constructions, Shea's figural works are archetypal in meaning, embodying profoundly psychological states of mind and life.

Judith Shea was born in 1948 and currently lives and works in New York City. Since 1981 her artwork has been exhibited at numerous galleries and museums including the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Shea has served as an Adjunct Faculty member in the Studio Art Department of New York University from 1980 to 1987 and as an Instructor at the Parsons School of Design from 1978 to 1988. The artist will present a slide lecture about her work at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in early November.

JUDITH SHEA: SCULPTURE was organized by the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, California. The exhibition was funded in part by the New England Foundation for the Arts through the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C., and the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, Cambridge, and by the Alumni Association and Arts Council of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

The University Gallery, located in the Fine Arts Center, is open to the public Tuesday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday, 2 to 5 p.m.