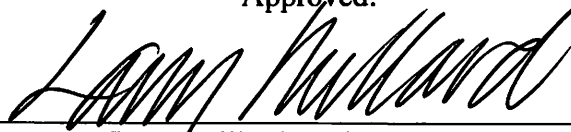


Shaping Identity

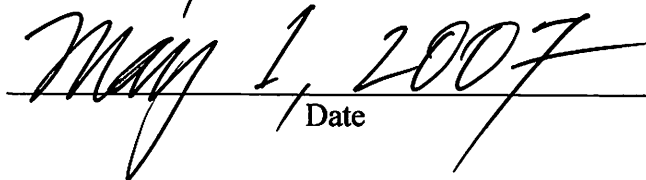
by

Erin Burke

Approved:



Larry Millard, Major Professor



Date

Shaping Identity

by

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**B.F.A., University of Nebraska at Kearney, 2003
M.F.A., University of Georgia, 2007**

**A Report Submitted to the Lamar Dodd School of Art
of the University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

Shaping Identity

My work is a direct response to contradictions inherent to the relationships and people within my own life. It is autobiographical. It transforms fragments of my life into invented narratives. My most recent sculpture, *When Will They Meet?*, (Figure 1) is created from the vantage point of the bridesmaid. I have been a bridesmaid six times in the last five years. The conflicting struggle between the desire to settle down and the desire to be nomadic and independent is apparent in this sculpture.

Several themes of contradiction are consistently layered within my sculptures. The contradictions that emerge in the piece, *When Will They Meet?*, are the appeal of fantasy versus reality, feeling embraced while simultaneously feeling trapped, sexual tension versus innocence, and strength opposed to vulnerability. The contradictions that are incorporated in the work can be observed through my careful choice of materials, form, and color.

The appeal of fantasy versus reality exists in almost all of my artwork. In *The Mighty Pink*, (Figure 2) the hot pink fabric combined with the glowing afternoon sunlight created an ethereal environment. I react to space to create imagined environments and narratives. The sculpture becomes a visual recognition of my experiences. Everyday objects and materials such as fabric are transformed into whimsical arrangements allowing the viewer to leave reality and escape into another fantasy world. The schoolhouse installation, *The Silver Lining*, (Figure 3) was based on the nostalgia associated with recreating the perfect prom experience, but in reality the viewer can't go back in time and change anything.

Francoise (Figure 4) consisted of an enclosed room embracing the viewer as a fantastical playground protected as if in a womb, but the space was also claustrophobic. Fabric and intense color encircled the viewer in *Many Blinds* (Figure 5), but was also confining. In these works, the viewer is left to decide if being completely surrounded by the artwork is embracing or confining. From the vantage point of the bridesmaid, the desire to settle down satisfies the need to be embraced, while the desire to be independent is trapped by the need to be embraced.

In *When Will They Meet?*, (Figure 6) the captivating white carousel horses represent a delusional fairy tale relationship. The scenario of living happily ever after is originated in fairytales like Cinderella that instill romantic illusions at an early age. The carousel horses were chosen because they relate specifically to childhood, a time when these illusions are created. The white horses reference the idea of the heroic knight on the white horse who rescues the damsel in distress. Western style saddles allude to the western twist of the cowboy riding into the sunset with his companion. The shimmering glittery surface represents the irresistible allure of the fantasy or illusion, but in the end, it is only surface. The horses are not accessible to the viewer because they are placed within the fabric structure and are an illusion literally out of the viewer's grasp. They remain a fantasy. They also are positioned in opposing directions symbolizing a relationship founded in idealism is heading in the wrong direction.

With *When Will They Meet?*, it is the carousel horses representing the idealistic relationship that are simultaneously embraced and protected by the soft fabric, but are also trapped within the ordered structure. The fairy tale relationship exists only within the parameters of the purple chandelier form. The purple chandelier structure consists of

three layers of reference, the chandelier, a petticoat, and an inverted three tiered wedding cake. The chandelier enables the work to be slightly above the viewer. The height of the piece is simultaneously inaccessible and accessible. It must be somewhat inaccessible to remain enticing. Purple is a color that is regal, unattainable, and desired. In order to view the carousel horses, the viewer must look up through the petticoat. The inverted tiers of the wedding cake allow a progression from reality to fantasy. The bottom smallest tier is just large enough for a person to stand inside. The scale directly relates to the viewer's own body. The viewer is grounded in reality while the horses exist in fantasy. Having the wedding cake inverted reinforces the idea of a perfect relationship being a delusion or trap while the petticoat reinforces the idea of embrace.

The innocence of a childhood fairy tale versus the sexual appeal of the petticoat form is a contradiction also present in *When Will They Meet?*. The sexual appeal and tactile nature of the fabric are combined in the hope of eliciting intuitive responses from the viewer. Seductive, luscious dark purple satin is deliberately used to bring the viewer closer to the sculpture to inspect the interior. The tactile nature of the satin is paired with the intense, passion associated with the color purple. This empowers the viewer to touch or to physically connect with the piece and environment. The sense of touch initiates a response and connects with the viewer in the same way that a smell or sound can transport you to another time and place. The compulsion to touch is further enhanced by the sexuality of the form itself, referencing a petticoat or undergarment of a dress. The form becomes an alluring temptation. This sexual appeal functions as a means to elicit the sense of touch from the viewer and connect with the viewer. It is used to reveal the interior of the piece. The interior of the sculpture contrasts with the exterior. The purple

satin is passionate and seductive whereas the white carousel horses are innocent and naïve.

The final contradiction is strength versus vulnerability. The combination of the petticoat form and purple color is sexually aggressive, luring the viewer towards the piece. However, the purple fabric on the structure also possesses a feminine sense of appearing soft and delicate. The viewer is permitted to look through the petticoat, given access to the undergarments alluding to vulnerability. The viewer can look at the carousel horses, but not touch them. The glittering horses are seductive and sweet like sugar intended to entice. It is representative of a strength in vulnerability contrasted with the strength of feminine sexual appeal. It is the contrast of internal strength versus literal strength.

Exploring contradictions that exist in myself and within the relationships in my life, allows for the exploration of identity as well as existing cyclical patterns in relationships with people. Identity is constantly redefined and reshaped through self discovery. I am defined by my own expectations and my relationships with family, friends, and society. I am interested in examining those expectations, who I am expected to be, who I expect myself to be, who I am, and who I want to be. The process of examining identity leads to self-awareness, which ultimately helps one understand and define their place in the world.

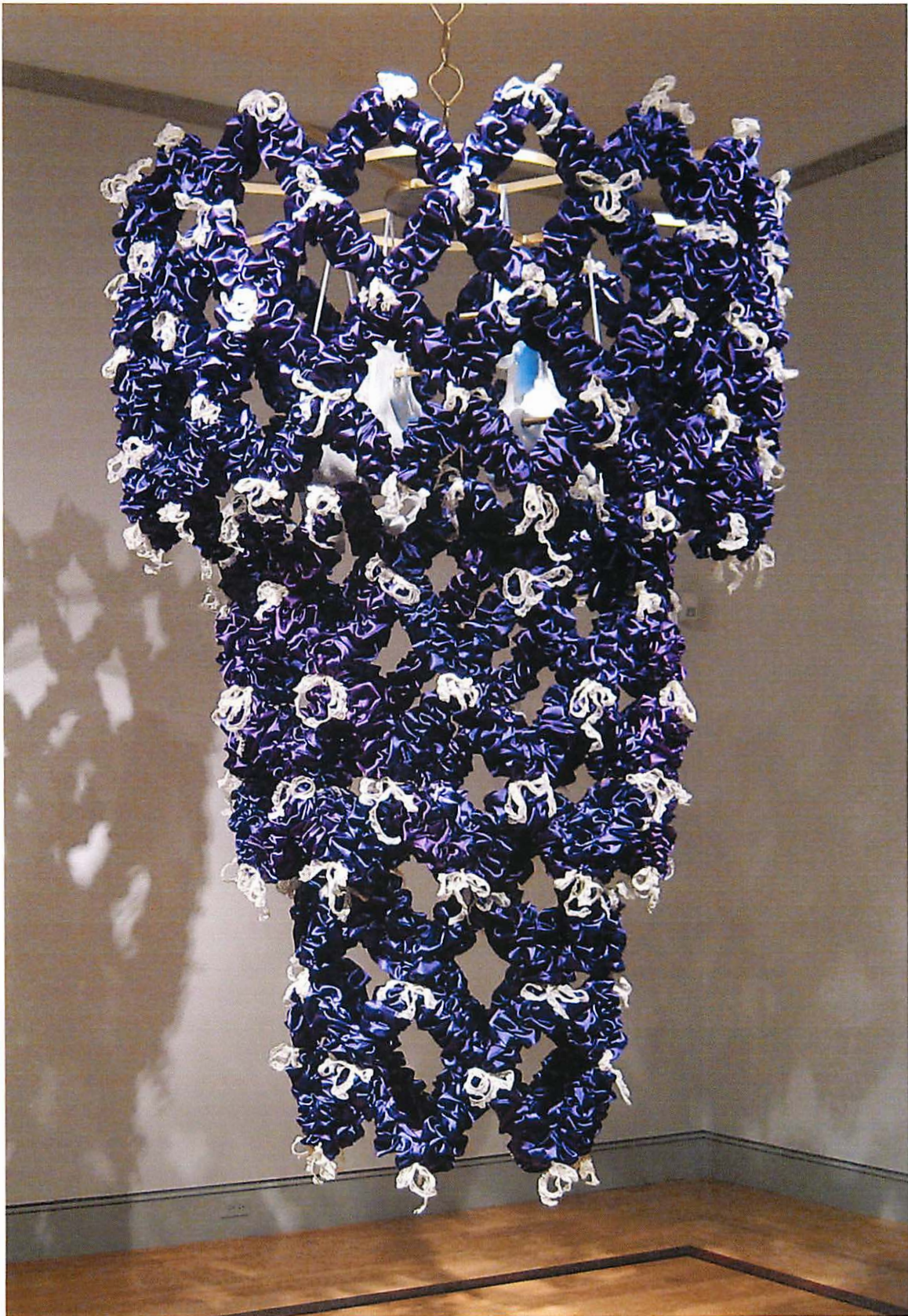


Figure 1. *When Will They Meet?* Mixed Media, 9'x5'x5', 2007



Figure 2. *The Mighty Pink*, Mixed Media, 11'x20'x13', 2006



Figure 3. *The Silver Lining*, Mixed Media, 15'x7'x50', 2005



Figure 4. *Francoise*. Mixed Media, 13'x17'x20', 2005



Figure 5. *Many Blinds*, Mixed Media, 20'x13'x15', 2006



Figure 6. When Will They Meet? Mixed Media, 9'x5'x5', 2007