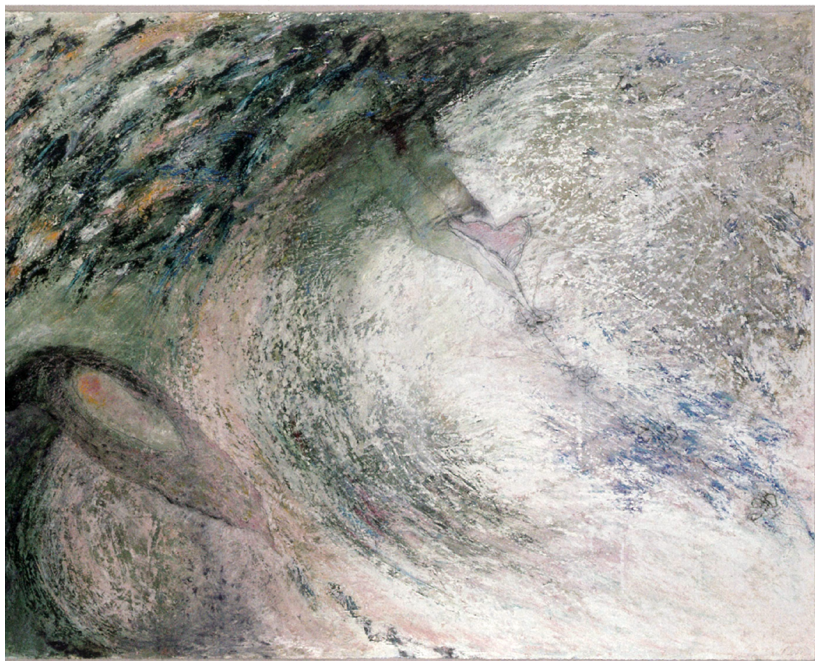


artscape

9 | 10 | 17

OLIVIA BERNARD



(Dis)Entanglement, 2001, oil stick and mixed media on paper, 44" x 56".

Olivia Bernard's sculpture has always spoken through the fingertips to the whole body. No matter how flat a piece becomes, there's always another side – and always a sense of inside and outside. It's tempting to read her small glass panels and attenuated sheets of handmade paper as following within the traditions of abstract or color field painting. But Bernard is neither a painter nor a follower and has no interest in carrying forward the ideological, political or art-historical agenda of abstract painting today. Her 3-D sculpture and installation is grounded in minimalism, feminism and process art. Drawing has always been an extension of her 3-D exploration; she approaches the surface not as a field of visual experimentation but as an exploration of her personal boundaries.

In October, at Smith College's Brown Fine Arts Center, Bernard will be showing two groups of smaller, relatively flat, wall-mounted work. These employ simple, low-tech materials, as usual, to explore the sensation of translucency. As in her larger sculptures and installations, which have shifted from poured Hydrocal carapaces to handmade paper over wire mesh, the materials in the current works are vitalized in an alchemical

transformation from liquid to solid. The "Glass/Wax" series involves a process of dipping glass panes in hot wax, while the "Embedded" series fixes linear structures into stable forms in wet paper pulp.

The materiality of Bernard's works forces us to reconsider our notions of both "flatness" and "drawing." Her avoidance of traditional frames forces us to see these forms, in spite of their thinness and rectilinearity, as objects. In the "Glass/Wax" series, the work is not hidden behind glass; the glass pane, which serves as both surface and structure, is itself the work. Leaning against the wall and supported only by a narrow steel flange, each naked pane is at risk from vibration and mishandling. Likewise, Bernard refuses to confine the handmade paper sheets of the "Embedded" series. She floats them over an invisible Plexiglas substrate projecting a few inches off the wall, where they are subject to air currents, gravity, and electrostatic attraction.

The sheets of abaca fiber in the "Embedded" series bear evocative images, but they must be understood, just as importantly, as minimal gestures physically captured in a process of becoming. Bernard begins by decanting a loose slurry of fibers onto a screen and then, between multiple passes, adds bits of pulp and snarled skeins of dark paper "strings." As the water is pressed out, the fibers contract, bonding interloper and matrix, figure and ground, together in one plane. A few liberated threads shoot right off the page and into the world beyond.

The clear glass panes of the "Glass/Wax" series have greater heft but feel equally insubstantial. Bernard dips each pane in hot wax, coating it sometimes in front, sometimes on the reverse, and sometimes on both, along with the edge between. The surface of the glass embraces the wax, endowing it with presence and form. Bernard uses the wax to adhere puckered scraps of handmade paper to the glass, or she encapsulates them in a puddle, along with dyed threads whose colors migrate into islands and continents. Sometimes the paper appears to dissolve in the wax, leaving only the trace of a wandering edge.

INTERVIEW

WHAT LIES BETWEEN, RECENT WORKS BY OLIVIA BERNARD

**ORESMA GALLERY
BROWN FINE ARTS
CENTER
SMITH COLLEGE
22 ELM STREET
NORTHAMPTON,
MASSACHUSETTS
OCTOBER 5
THROUGH 31**

**OLIVIA BERNARD,
(DIS)ENTANGLEMENT
UNIVERSITY MUSEUM
OF CONTEMPORARY
ART (UMCA)
SATELLITE SPACE
UMASS FIVE COLLEGE
FEDERAL CREDIT
UNION
200 WESTGATE
CENTER DRIVE
HADLEY,
MASSACHUSETTS
THROUGH
OCTOBER 28**