

AN INNER SENSE OF WHOLENESS

Thursday, November 3rd, 2022 // [Artscope Issues, Features, November/December 2022](#)



Olivia Bernard, Partial gallery overview with Untitled (Large Ovoid), 1996, Untethered (Drawing), 2004, and other works.

by Elizabeth Michelman

Olivia Bernard's exhibition of sculpture and two-dimensional work spreads out under the sloping roof of The Stoneleigh- Burnham School's Geissler Gallery. Hanging sheets of white scrim bound the space on one side, separating her work from that of another well-known installation artist, Karen Dolmanisth.

Bernard's self-curated selections, which span her output of the last 26 years, combine earlier with later works to propose more of a gist than a direct path connecting the lot. Each sculpture demands enough space that, when one is in its presence, the next one hovering nearby does not impinge on one's sense of being alone with another being. Each piece holds its own, capturing the viewer's attention and indeed anxiety. As with Giacometti's figures, one finds that on more intimate approach the works feel larger and more charged.

The abstract work is grounded in cumulative experiences of aging and loss, tempered by an awareness of the sufferings of our times. While Bernard's immediate audience is adolescent schoolgirls, she addresses all ages in her emphasis on the grounding of awareness and imagination in bodily-based experience.

Despite their sometimes-ungainly Bernard's forms are deeply human constructions that lead one to engage with internal signals, dialogue and a sense of one's own existential condition. Many works are built around stiff armatures, using some combination of muslin, cheesecloth, wood, wire, glass and paper that Bernard dips or embeds in Hydrocal, a modifiable type of plaster. Rather than painting her surfaces, she integrates pigments and dyes into her materials' natural textures, running a gamut from velvet black to gleaming white, with dirty smears of rust or grey and the occasional splash of forgotten blue.