

Pam J. Brown

Art Statement:

Pam Brown is known for making sculpture that portrays her personal story as a naturalist, inspired by the beauties and tragedies of wildlife and American history. Her artwork focuses on anthropological and environmental concerns of extinction and the human condition. Brown's aesthetics of industrial imagery are integral to her artmaking processes, as is collecting and salvaging materials from abandoned rural and urban factory sites. Using these discarded remnants, such as wire, sheet metal, copper, wood, fabric and rubber, she builds architectural structures and sculptures that look like artifacts. Much of this work appears worn and weathered from use or exposure and has the familiar appearance of everyday forms with the strangeness of personified objects. Brown carefully fabricates sculptures that are composed of thin skeletal elements to enclose space in an open structure, thus creating a physical and psychological sense of inner and outer that permeates our deeper selves.

Most of Brown's sculptures are made from a combination of various sheet materials and linear elements. Cutting out her forms with scissors, she assembles these parts and darns them together using sewing techniques, in which sheet metal and wire replace fabric and thread. This needlework alludes to both "women's work" and early industrial manufacturing. The association of industry and domesticity engages a sensibility that is different from the "heavy metal" approach to sculpture that dominates much of American modernism. These artworks carry a strong element of bravado, and they recapture a sense of manual facility, textural subtlety, and subjective affect within a sculptural tradition shaped by monumentality and muscularity. Brown's artwork is defined by a deliberate, painstaking approach that is evocative of craft traditions and domestic labor, and she takes these gendered practices into new contexts and develops them as signifying corporal and emblematic elements.

Unlike the artworks themselves, Brown's themes are not always concrete, as she plays with the dualities of material and representation by addressing symbolic realities through physical forms. In this reciprocity between matter and meaning, the essence of her sculptures can literally give way to animal, figure, and plant forms. Often this imagery with irregular elements gives her artwork the spontaneity and idiosyncrasy of individual existence. Brown reinforces this individuality through the application of collage in order to communicate the subjectivity and personality of the objects themselves. The addition of these elements, in the form of eyes in particular, creates a sense of the thing staring back across the gap that separates subject from object and human from non-human. Brown's sculptures are given animistic power and autonomous existence, but these references frequently coincide with the physical presence of the sculptures in the way that figurative and literal meaning coincide in language. In this manner, they speak to the duality of human experience by presenting the world as a complex of objects and ideas that never quite converge, but in a peculiar kind of way make sense by suggesting the coexistence between conscious and the unconscious, surface and depth, reality and the unknown.