

Curator Statement

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN ARTISTS 130th ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION: WALL SCULPTURE

Established on January 31, 1889, The National Association of Women Artists (NAWA) is the oldest continuously active American professional art organization for women. Created when there were few opportunities for women artists to participate in the professional art world, NAWA has striven to offer women venues to show their art and has provided artistic, intellectual and social support to women in the visual arts. Among NAWA's prominent early members were Mary Cassatt, Isabel Bishop, Louise Nevelson and Dorothy Dehner. With a national membership including artists from over 40 states, NAWA has its main office and gallery in New York City.

While the art of NAWA members ranges over virtually every art medium, this exhibition focuses on a particular form that is somewhat hybrid in practice and visual effect: sculptural works that are mounted on a wall. The four artists in the exhibition elaborate upon this physical concept with diverse approaches to material and meaning; they also represent several chronological generations, underscoring the long history of NAWA.

Natsuki Takauji's primary sculptural technique is welding, by which she creates complex constructions that are often open, linear, and sometimes web-like. Spindly formations are often contrasted with the inclusion of more solid objects, such as metal spheres, or additions of plastic. The results are an interplay between matter and space, heaviness and lightness, and rigidity and spontaneity.

Maureen Kelleher takes found wooden structures, such as industrial moving pallets or discarded panels, and transforms them into fields of narration by the application of objects and photos, as well as incised and painted written messages. The stories told may be either highly personal or historical, humorous or tragic. Much of her work thoughtfully yet powerfully documents aspects of African-American history, including slavery, lynching, and significant figures such as Harriet Tubman and James Baldwin.

Danielle Frankenthal works in a format that straddles painting and sculpture. She mounts layers of rigid, transparent acrylic plastic together with a space between each layer. The individual layers are painted with quick, gestural strokes of color, and the assembled object is displayed on a wall, creating complex effects of three-dimensionality and movement that can change as the viewer perceives the work from different angles.

Harriet FeBland's art has been recognized as pioneering work in the early use of artificial materials such as plastic and Formica. Whether in industrial materials or wood, FeBland's oeuvre reflects a dedication to geometric abstraction and the striking effects that can be derived from linear and geometric motifs. In configurations that are sometimes quite unusual and inventive, FeBland's art demonstrates the potential of geometry to produce imagery ranging from boldly striking to subtle.

Jeffrey Wechsler