

essay from *bird / cloud, a solo exhibition* at Dennis Museum in Traverse City, Michigan 2005 – 06

By Gerry Craig, Assistant Director for Academic Programs at Cranbrook Academy of Art

“I was something that lay under the sun and felt it, like the pumpkins and I did not want to be anything more. I was entirely happy. Perhaps we feel like that when we die and become a part of something entire, whether it is sun, and air or goodness and knowledge. At any rate, that is happiness, to be dissolved into something complete and great. When it comes to one, it comes as naturally as sleep.”

Willa Cather

Like Cather, the work of Anne Lindberg quietly insists on a capacious view of the world. Unlike much contemporary art, it is not essential that a viewer know her art history references to find the work meaningful although the references are there. By engaging our senses in acts of contemplation, she has found a balance for the work where an essentially private internal search is made meaningful to a larger public. At the most reductive level, we can understand her work through elements of line and time, and both of these elements in her work are deeply inspired by textile processes and nature’s phenomena.

Textiles all start with linear elements - yarns on a loom, stitches of thread through lengths of fabric. Lindberg was trained in these methods as a young artist, and began making wall pieces of hand-stitched fabric that were original drawings rooted in the humble origins of material domesticity. In the same way that drawing with pencil or ink is subject to uncontrolled internal twitches, stitching allows for a finely gauged improvisatory line, mixing self-conscious exactitude with minute alterations caused by spasms of the nervous system. In one of the most famous quotes by an artist of the twentieth-century, Paul Klee suggested “taking a line for a walk.” Klee advocated the dynamic and playful qualities of a line that might have its own life, separate from the will of the artist. In both her drawings and sculpture, Lindberg builds form from a massing of line that is both willful and indicative of the non-linear dynamics of time.

One of her most important raw materials is time. Although difficult to comprehend how an artist chooses to represent time, it was the stitches in her early drawings that revealed to Lindberg a measurable and countable duration embodied in material. These temporal conditions implied in her work are more in sync with cycles of the seasons than contemporary cyberculture, while the imagery in her work is a direct response to the surrounding prairie landscape where she has spent much of her life. Like the findings of a naturalist, her work bears witness to the phenomena of nature's time, the slow gathering and accretion of cells and matter and decay and rebirth. It is not the raging wind of a tornado but a rustle in the prairie grass. She illuminates rewards for the wanderer who, through positioning of attention, locates the ambient, contemplative rhythm of earth’s web of life. Her individual and collective lines become a visual model of how knowledge is generated and contained, then perceived and absorbed in the psyche, through the slowness of time.

In *bird / cloud*, wires with hand-carved wooden ends have singular characteristics, but the overall effect and motion has the subtlety of a field of prairie, with hundreds of native species in a square foot discernible

under close scrutiny. There is no hierarchy of composition, the viewer may approach the work from any perspective and it will still feel whole. The sweep of prairie has its own linguistic geography, its lingua franca or common language, with multiple vanishing points of perspective. Part of its syntax is that the matrix of thresholds and boundaries are too vast to consciously know, but experientially we can understand it as both ordinary and sublime.

The drawings are the same impulse, ethereal abstract clouds whose delicate and ephemeral materials suggest sheer vulnerability. In this her work is a descendant of Richard Tuttle or Robert Irwin, helping us see the fragile nature of existence and how needing protection extends to nature and us. Lindberg makes quiet accretions; like condensation - water changing state from gas to liquid - they are profound transitions in slow motion. In her work we feel again how complete and infinite nature is, how the solstice and equinox swirls around us and lingers in us, as naturally as sleep.

- Gerry Craig

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