



RUFFLE INSTALLATION BY GAIL GRINNELL

SUYAMA SPACE, SEATTLE



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GAIL GRINNELL RUFFLE

SUYAMA SPACE, SEATTLE | SEPTEMBER 10 – DECEMBER 7, 2012

PREFACE

Beth Sellars, Curator

The ephemeral material used by Grinnell in the creation of her work holds a deep-rooted significance for her. It takes its genesis from dressmaking patterns lovingly formed by her mother, a gifted, self-taught seamstress who made clothes for her growing daughter throughout the '50s – '60s with patience and love. Grinnell remembers surveying pattern books together and the touch of her mother's hands as she pinned the dress over her figure. At her mother's death Grinnell inherited the hundreds of patterns she had frugally saved. The desire to use these, to cut and pin as her mother and so many others had before her, became a strong motivation—not to make a dress *per se*, but to make art that was life-affirming and spoke to connections that bind through the generations. Grinnell initially used the actual tissue-paper patterns. Later she replaced them with a more durable polyester interfacing fabric, but her work remains a constant acknowledgment of her familial memory.

The physical construction of the drawn application on the stiffened fabric is based on old methods of patching holes in cloth. Grinnell's material responds to different fluctuations of movement and light, fluttering and casting shadows from the natural light. The body, the land, and the natural world are some of Grinnell's greatest interests; they are interlaced throughout the work with references to human skeleton fragments and spider webs. The artist wants her work to be a physical reminder of the body that creates it: fragile, transitory, and incrementally proportionate.

Gail Grinnell is a Seattle based visual artist; she graduated with a BFA in painting from the University of Washington in 1988 and has been represented by Francine Seders Gallery since 1993. She has participated in awarded residencies at Fundacion Valparaiso in Mojácar, Spain, 2007; the Ballinglen Arts Foundation in Ballycastle, Ireland, 2008, and again in 2010 with a two month fellowship; and the Jentel Foundation in Wyoming, 2010. In 2008, Grinnell was awarded an Artist Trust GAP Grant.

It has been a pleasure working with Gail Grinnell on her most labor intensive installation project to date. Thoroughly unflappable under any situation, she effectively produced a richly textured web of intrigue and beauty in the upper tiers of Suyama Space. We are constantly grateful to the artists who respond to Suyama Space, as well as the continued support from 4Culture/King County Lodging Tax Fund, Seattle Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs, and our lovely Suyama Space Friends.



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TIME LINES

Janet Koplos

An installation is a spatial experience, and it's also defined by time. Gail Grinnell's installation for Suyama Space—an assembly of lengths of Sharpie-marked papery fabric—is at least triply engaged with time. First there's the standard implication that an installation is temporary; after its exhibition dates it is disassembled and no longer exists as an entity. But this is also an installation that immediately makes you think of its sequential process of creation, so you get a sense of the artist's investment of time in the work, both in making the many elements and in arranging them. And in addition, Grinnell evokes an image, an aura, of time past or passing, which seems to be part of her subject.

Ruffle, as is typical of the installations that have occupied this distinctive and evocative exhibition venue, invites us to move within and around it. The first impressions it creates are masses and tatters. It also emphasizes elevation: our eyes are pulled upward to the building's rafters and wooden plank ceiling, just as in a cathedral. The floor space is nearly empty. Three cascades plunge downward but stop short of the floor, which is occupied only by viewers moving around the room and employees heading in or out of the architectural office at the back.



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The installation engages the space in another way: it is strikingly light-altered, and as daylight fades and the spotlights assume more importance, lacy shadows travel down the walls to catch the entire volume of the gallery in their web. Changes in light also alter the perception of color in the work. All the tonalities are gentle, the most intense being whispery peach or near-sepia but neutral ivories and grays more common. Directional illumination (from the gallery's two bands of skylights) both highlights and penetrates the material, so that the configuration seems to be constantly changing. A swath might look a bit dull or shadowy with bright light behind it, and then dazzle when the light falls upon it.

And that's hardly the only change. Our movement in the gallery space uncovers greater variation. Grinnell has massed her featherweight components in two-thirds of the space, allowing a view deep into the strands and streamers from one end of the gallery. Here the experience of the work shifts from physical to visual, and a succession of fleeting images may cross your mind, from cobwebs in an attic to swag decorations in a ballroom. The installation becomes a powerful image of festooned architectural space from this vantage point, with the wooden ceiling and floor framing the long view. (And, surprisingly, the shoji-like wall of the restrooms at the opposite end of the space blends in harmoniously.) There is one other association that arises from this long view: the open volume suggests breath, probably because the catenary swaths make an overall oval, like a barrel ribcage—through which the silvery tube of the air conditioning duct runs like a spine as it calls out the pearly tones in the paper. (Grinnell has also constructed several oval openings visible from other angles, which may subliminally contribute to this suggestion.)

The most emphatic variations are the dimensions and curvature of the outlined elements, which have been cut in various widths like edging and lacing. That the parts are held together with corsage pins suggests spontaneous assembly and easy reconsideration. The consequence of all this is that any "still" view of the installation seems to be in slow or sinuous motion, in a trajectory through space.



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This end view is memorable but not conclusive, since no one interpretation dominates. The title, *Ruffle*, favors the drawn curves and gathers on the three hanging masses. Looking at these details drives home that this is an installation of drawings: every part is by its essential nature flat. These are just as much representations of ruffles as they would be if framed and hung on the wall (but their up-to-12-foot lengths make that unlikely). Grinnell has combined the pictorial and the sculptural into a combination that plays with the senses, like decoration on pottery, which has an extra fascination because it bends into the third dimension. *Ruffle* has the impact of large scale as well.

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Drawings allude to paper, and in fact this work has grown from the artist's engagement with paper sewing patterns used and saved by her mother, which she inherited. That tissue could be collaged but was too fragile to build into an installation. So here, as in her previous tower/column titled *tinker, tailor, mender, maker*, shown at Anchor Art Space in Anacortes last year, she made these fragments of memory, these thoughtfully composed but fluent and seemingly casual linkages, in a more durable carrier: interfacing, a material used for structural reinforcement in garments, such as in collars. She further strengthens it with a coat of acrylic medium and can then conveniently mark, roll, fold, cut and hang it although it continues to appear fragile and translucent.

The drawings are not complete scenes but renderings of parts, given an abstracting isolation that reduces them to pure line that traverses three-dimensional space with the same sort of internal relationships found in any skillful two-dimensional composition. One might think, individually, of Ellsworth Kelly's line drawings of plants (except that Grinnell's don't depict a complete object). In addition to the hanging ruffles, other segments, layers of thick lines or thin ones, suggest medieval interlace motifs, Louis Sullivan's architectural details, rope knots, threads tangled in a sewing box, Islamic ornament and more. And considering it as a volume, the installation can bring to mind textile works such as Faith Wilding's web at Womanhouse in Los Angeles in 1972, Eva Hesse's draped entanglements, or the fluttery nests created by Colette beginning in the '70s. Grinnell's work has something in common with each of these, but specifically resembles none of them. The character of drawings prevails.

An artist who has shifted from painting to collage to drawing to installation, Grinnell follows her own path. And under her canopy of paper-cloth-memory-[time]line, she opens the way for each of us to find our own feelings and interpretations.

Janet Koplos is a New York based art critic with Seattle roots.



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ARTIST STATEMENT

Gail Grinnell

In the simplest terms everything I do is a drawing. For this installation I've isolated the forms of an elaborately constructed garment and drawn them different ways—changing the scale and the medium. These contour line drawings embody individual ruffles from a deconstructed garment as well as thread, bones and other natural forms. The lines are drawn in ink on translucent pattern making material (as a tailor would use) and then cut to shape.

I use working methods that I associate with the movements and materials that are used to do laundry or make garments—all of this grounded in familial memory. The touch of my mother's hand on my torso, as she measured fabric and the unique dimensions of my body, indelibly marked the way I think about the human form and intimacy. My current choice of fabric as a sculptural, referential material for my work harkens back to her consistent attention to the details of pattern making and sewing.



The construction of this drawing is based on methods used to patch holes in cloth similar to a mend applied to the most fragile of clothes. The drawing builds upon itself—one mark suggesting the next as it is pinned into a form that contacts the ceiling, walls and floor of the space opportunistically borrowing strength and form from the host architecture and changing the perceived volume of the room.

I want my work to be a physical reminder of the body that creates it—fragile, transitory, and incrementally proportionate to the maker—a remainder of the body's activity at a particular point in time.

I love beauty but not idealized beauty. My eyes slide off of classical, symmetrical proportions finding no point of purchase. It is the imperfections and the kind, gracious arrangement of them that excite my eye and interest my mind. Of late, the focus of my drawings and installations has become more and more directed towards finding the oddities and holes in my relationship to the world around me and measuring, fitting, dressing and mending them in anyway I can.

I think I am protecting and furthering my mother's work. She brought skill, imagination and beauty to the humble tasks of living. The tasks of maintaining life are grindingly real and solid while grace and beauty are fleeting—the essence of both is found in the making. Over the years my studio practice has produced wildly divergent results as I travel between these two poles in my search for an expression of the present moment.

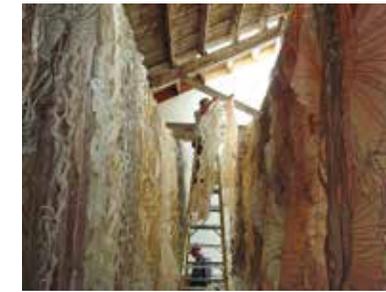
I am grateful that George Suyama and Beth Sellars have given me the opportunity to create a singular work that exists only in relation to the unique characteristics of the Suyama Space. I also want to thank my family and friends. Without their love, support and hard labor there would be no art made by me and no reason to make it! A very special thanks to Ben who makes everything seem possible, to Dan Sundberg and Hannah Wildman for getting the work there, to Dave Lipe for lighting up the place, to Sam Wildman for his expert installation work and to those generous friends and colleagues who labored long hours with me cutting out drawings.

This body of work was developed during several residencies that provided essential support, time and studio space in which to develop this work. Those included Fundación Valparaíso in Mojacar, Spain; the Ballinglen Foundation in the community of Ballycastle, County Mayo, Ireland; and the Jentel Foundation, Sheridan, Wyoming. Artist Trust provided funds towards some of my travel expenses.

www.gailgrinnell.com



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