

BIMA - Bainbridge Island Art Museum: Fiber 2020

Gail Grinnell

Cyclone Fence: 13'Hx14'Wx6'D. nonwoven polyester, acrylic, ink, natural dye, pins, feathers. My chosen materials hold associative content. Part of these materials come from the tools of the home seamstress. I am also reacting to the homeless encampments that I see every day in my travels as I walk, bus or drive to and from my home and studio. The official chain-link fencing and cobbled together dwellings also resonate with my childhood experience of living in a temporary military encampment (turned permanent town) where the civilian residents were managed with various physical barriers both protective and constrictive. This early experience during the years of this country's Cold War has made me alert to the ways people nurture and comfort themselves in their surroundings no matter the circumstances.

A strong part of my working process is an interested and opportunistic reuse of available materials taken from my local environment. While working on this piece I recognized the connection between hand crafted knitting and patching techniques and the invention of machine-made fencing. The similarities between the machine knitted industrial metal fencing of forbidden lands and my mother's handmade fabric creations, meant to provide comfort, filled me with a feeling of dissonance and became the starting point for this work.

BIMA: Fiber 2020

Blue Shawl (Tarp): 12'Hx3'Wx2'D. woven plastic, ink, pin, nail.

Ubiquitous as chain-link fencing in the Western landscape this blue tarp is machine woven from plastic strands and is one of my growing collection of heavily used tarps that are beyond further use because the polymers holding the weave together are largely exhausted. For this piece I cleaned, mended and altered the basic fabric to hang on the wall like a garment or cloak that could be worn or used to construct or enhance the walls of an imagined makeshift home.

This tarp was found hanging on a chain link fence by the door of a former studio that was situated above recycling bays in a large metal processing yard. This studio had a picture window view of an industrial yard ringed in chain-link fencing with acres of asphalt, cars, trucks and fast food places filling the view beyond. I remember feeling that this was a familiar American place to me personally and I settled in making studies of variously aged and worn fencing as I watched and heard dumpsters of used metal being loaded in the bays directly below my work space and witnessed the growing homeless encampments ringing the recycling yard. When I left that studio, I took the tattered tarp with me thinking I might make something tender from its nothing.