

ZIPORA FRIED

The conceptual art of Zipora Fried traces the arc of the creative process, almost literally. The resulting works are a meditation on artistic creation and production. They're also cool to look at

Text by Aimee Walleston

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Genius, for better or for worse, is not an opt-in plan. There are people born into the world who are simply different. Joseph Beuys was not your average Joe—that's why we're still talking about him. The work created by New York-based artist Zipora Fried has a quality that makes the air around each piece feel a little icy, heightened, and somewhat unreal. Like a sorceress, her sculptures, photographs, and drawings (she is a creator who is wholly unconstrained by specific media) take known entities and metamorphose them into images and objects imbued with that most elusive of qualities: aura.

Aimee Walleston How did you start making art? Were you a child who drew a lot, were you interested in literature?

Zipora Fried As soon as I could hold a pencil I started to draw, and I was known as "the girl who doesn't talk and doesn't smile." I would ignore people's questions and not answer. I could hear them perfectly, but did not see the significance of answering. Every school that I went to had tested my hearing because the teachers were convinced that I had a hearing problem. My schoolbooks were full of drawings and I drew on the walls of my room. I was a mute and observant child, hungry for visual stimulation, not interested in words. Drawing was my world, and became a way for me to avoid communication. When my mother read stories to me from children's books, I couldn't remember the stories but in my mind I would often go back to the illustrations in the books, remembering every detail, lines and colors.

My first experience with sculpture was at twelve years old. One day I had to go on a school trip to a forest near Vienna, causing high anxiety for me because there was no way to escape talking to my classmates. But even there I was able to fall back into my usual mannerisms. Someone had a Swiss Army knife. I borrowed it, collected tree branches and pieces of wood, and spent the whole trip carving. This started an obsession with woodcarving. For a long time many wooden objects at my parents' house were transformed into elaborately carved art pieces. My mother was not really sure what to think of her "ornamental" broomsticks and brush handles. I studied at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. The first two years I learned the craft of painting by



copying Old Masters paintings. I was able to make a flawless copy of an Old Master but I was not interested in being a painter and I switched to a master class for Conceptual art. My most important friend during these years was Martin Hodel, a Swiss artist. We spent every hour of the day talking about the meaning of art, pseudo-conceptual movements, questioning everything anyone had to say about art. This friendship was a very important part of my development as an artist. Martin has taught me the difference between philosophical knowledge and poetic thinking.

AW Many of your pieces involve a transformation of ordinary objects. An armoire is stabbed in the back with many knives, a table is knitted with a "sweater," a baseball bat is multiplied. What is your interest in transformation?

ZF The predisposition of objects and their manipulation fascinates me. In my world objects have patterns of behavior—they are created with certain characteristics, and depending on where they are placed or how they are treated, they change. I like to deprive objects of their functionality and by doing so, I give them a new, beautifully dysfunctional existence. The process of making these objects is complicated. I don't sit at my worktable and decide to do something with baseball bats or tables. It is a process that takes weeks. There is a search engine constantly running in my mind, searching for a match. And then there is the fantastic moment of the machine coming to a halt, all the details of the piece come together and from there the process is unstoppable.

AW Your drawings seem, in part, to be a meditation on the act of drawing itself. By creating a textured surface, you are making an abstraction that brings the viewer into the act of drawing. The final result is a surface that seems almost anti-emotional—the texture becomes so perfectly repetitive, it's almost as though a machine could've made it. How do you see this work in relation to your practice, and in relation to the act of drawing?

ZF These are compositions made by hand. The drawings are dense with strong and powerful markings repeated over the entire surface. There are no emphasized areas—all areas are treated equally. There are minimal value contrasts. I have a clear image of the composition before I start; then I concentrate on the scale and proportions. The image I create seems to be woven. There is an organic sense of shifting and growth in the work, of changing rhythms. I am leaving a trace that appears to be heavy and strong, but it is extremely vulnerable. Over the years the forms became less important, the rhythm in each drawing and the stroke much more so. The beauty of the line, the eloquence of the mark, was my dominating motivation.

Imagine a city with workers drawing kilometers of these drawings on indestructible paper. Other workers refill the graphite pencils; others clean the piles of dust. When they retire, the drawings are hung up from the sky. They would be monuments, curtains of time. You could look back at the work you produced and have a visible result, through drawing, of your effort through time.



Installation view, "Zipora Fried," On Stellar Rays, September 2009



T.H., 2009. All artwork courtesy On Stellar Rays, NYC



Armoire, 2008



Chère Maman, 2007