

# Defying genre

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*Bulletin Staff*

Artist Meredith Cutler has always had an obsession with deconstruction and re-creation. As a child in Needham, she enjoyed taking things apart and improving upon them.

"I was kind of a horror at a young age because I'd wake up at five in the morning, go downstairs and color in all my books," she

said. "I've always been very tactile and I've always enjoyed drawing. I'd basically re-illustrate my books."

Cutler turned that creative energy into something that can't be easily manipulated to fit into any one artistic genre. In her artist's statement, she writes that in those times that classification of her work is necessary, she grudgingly says she works in mixed media or fibers. But she prefers not to pigeonhole what she does by labeling it as any one discipline.

She went to Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York and pursued an art major and an art history minor.

"In school, the program was loose enough to give me the freedom to experiment with materials," Cutler said. "Back then, I was interested in being a children's book illustrator and writer, but I got sidetracked given the interdisciplinary nature of that program."

In 1997, Cutler moved to Boston and felt like she was looking at the city for the very first time and simultaneously trying to find her footing as an

adult. As part of that process, she helped found an artists collective known as Nine Yards, which operated out of a house in Brighton.

The group created a number of collaborative works and shows and threw exhibit parties in which members would transform the house.

"It was a wild time and really

celebrated a lot of the things I'm interested in now," Cutler

said. "But eventually I kind of outgrew the cooperative and when they redeveloped the 65 Sprague Street building, I took the opportunity to get my own space."

Cutler enjoyed the opportunity to work in a light, open space and found the Hyde Park art community to be extremely welcoming. She particularly enjoyed participating in the Hyde Park Open Studios, which she said afforded her the opportunity to open her workspace to art lovers.

Cutler's studio is a place where the ordinary becomes the extraordinary. Kitchen and bathroom plastics, hair, studio debris, paper, fibers, acrylics, and paint are transformed into pieces of art that turn disparate elements into a focused whole.

Cutler finds that her work hits a nerve with children in particular even when she is exploring mature themes.

"They really respond to the imagery and colors that I use," she said. "I'm very attracted to repetitive patterns and have recently been using a lot of wall-paper and wrapping paper from



Photo credit: Michael Cutler

Meredith Cutler

the 1970s. That's how I approach my work. When I find something that strikes a chord in me, I have to explore it."

The root imagery of Cutler's work is familiar, but what it transforms into from its original context is almost tongue in cheek. Cutler likes to keep a sense of humor about her work, even when she is dealing with serious subjects and working with objects as mundane as saran wrap, window screens, and human hair.

In 1996, she discovered a love of fibers and weaving during an intensive summer course. She appreciates the dualities inherent in fibers: resiliency and fragility, the simplicity of a single piece of thread versus the complexity of cloth, and the unique qualities of man-made and natural threads. Now, Cutler weaves on a handloom.

"Once I discovered fibers as an artistic medium I found them to be very flexible," she said. "I

tend to use a lot of threads whether I'm sticking or binding. They can really capture the imagination even though they are very domestic and traditional materials. It also forces me to calm down my pace and work in a more meditative and contemplative way."

Over the past few years her output has ranged from soft sculpture to mixed media weaving to more traditional forms. She tries not to limit herself by thinking of the outcome. Rather, she prefers to move forward on the basis of what she is thinking about and interested in at that moment.

"I've always worked like this," she said. "I have early memories of drawing in school and then taking that drawing and running it under water or covering it with glue. I work with what I have and with what's around me. I take what's around me and adapt it."

Cutler finds that her methods

have led to her discovering new ways to explore history and materials, while still being able to create things for specific people or purposes.

That creation process, she said, thrives on her life experiences as both an artist and a professional. Since college, Cutler has worked full time and currently she works as a marketing and event specialist for First Act.

"I depend on life experiences to force my creativity," she said. "My personal studio practice tends to be very private so I find that human interaction, travel and my own wacky experiences dealing with the music industry through First Act is a really nice compliment to that. I don't think my art career would exist without that."

In the future, Cutler has plans to take her old concert t-shirts from her teenage years and create a quilt using the images. But, she said, that is a project she is saving for her retirement.

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