

for "School Partners" - Park Show 1992  
paired with A.A.G.

## STATEMENT CONCERNING MY SCULPTURE AND PROCESS

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Plywood is a structural material consisting of sheets or layers arranged at right angles or at least a wide angle for a "woven strength of opposition." In the 70's while exploring appropriate materials to build a large ship's hull to hold young art students art projects, I became aware of the functional toughness and aesthetics of plywood. To paraphrase I.M. Pei: What plywood wants to do is to be glued into even greater "piles" of sheeted wood, increasing its endurance and emphasizing the visual appeal of the repeated layers' edges which are all end grain.

To translate these piles into forms that communicate a human thought and that resolve emotion into pure imagery, I graduate from a sketchbook drawing or doodle of the thought to graph paper where  $3/16$ ths of an inch stand for one layer of  $3/4$ " plywood. It is on graph paper that I become aware of structural and engineering problems. For an example: How to keep large and small works divisible into separate sections to facilitate final tool- and sealing as well as transportation? I solve this by a layer that is sabre-sawed into two "rings", one glued to the top section, and the other to the bottom section resulting in a simple box with lid.

It is also on graph paper where the added problems of enlarging a small model four or more times are solved: How to support greater weight? How to vent the hollow form to prevent build-up of condensation? Where to place drainage holes? How thick should walls be? How to allow access for larger power tools? How should the work be supported for safe but attractive display? No matter how earnestly I try to anticipate, problems develop as construction advances. I am not an engineer so these impasses are solved intuitively or the structure changed completely. It is both in the working drawing on graph paper and during actual construction that changes in proportion and expression often occur, either deliberately or serendipitously. As in the untitled (photos enclosed) sculpture the eyes have become more skeletal in the model than in the drawing, the hands reworked in the drawing to be less massive in the full scale version, and unintentionally the large work is taller for its height than the model simply because the model is made of "quarter-inch" stock which is actually a little less than  $1/4$ " thick. Also, the water-proof glue used in the exterior version is viscous, adding more to the height than "Elmers".

There are things that plywood "does not want to do": While its crudeness is compatible with honest or disagreeable subject matter, it will not easily be sawed into intricate contours, because it is full of holes, rock-hard knots, and even foreign debris! I respect this characteristic by limiting most structures to simple geometric forms. Variations on the cone or cylinder are amenable, because a pattern of the layer of greatest diameter can be reduced as the diameters of the layers decrease and provide a control for piecing out most layers from scraps. (An economic necessity!)

The nature of the trees from which plywood is made, mostly firs and Southern Yellow Pine (except for exotic veneers, which are expensive!), is extremely fibrous. This means that, like the sabre saw that is used to cut out the layers in the first place, and refinement of the stepped surface that results from construction must be done with tools that "chew". In small models I do this by hand with rasps, files, and increasingly finer grits of sandpaper. In very large structures I must resort to machines: an auto-body grinder with #16 closed grit disks and orbital sanders. These machines dig in and leave their marks in concave areas where it is almost impossible to remove. It becomes a characteristic "print" of the process.

Plywood is very "thirsty" and absorbs vast quantities of lacquers and polymer sealers as well as the lactic glues used for interior works and the rubber and polymer-based adhesives used for exterior works. The untitled piece in attached photo has six coats of Polyurethane inside and out, using over 13gals. Polyurethane leaves a reflective surface which detracts from the form, so a seventh coat of a flattening agent is added to the natural wood areas. Under the pressure of weights, clamps, or nails used to insure close contact between layers the glue drips or oozes. This effluent is a visual metaphor for much of the content expressed in my sculptures. I eliminated them as excessive in the full scale version.

This sculptural process is labor-intensive. For the technical aspect of building sculpture with the medium of plywood is as important as what I say with it. After years of dabbling with and enjoying literally dozens of two and three-dimensional materials, I am addicted to this process of accretion. It requires relatively simple tools, and the "at-home" work spaces of basement and barn are adequate. In a sense I have turned the years of obligatory domestic piling of linen, dishes, groceries, ad infinitum into a meaningful and rewarding opposite.

That complement approaches the universal order and process of growth and enlargement found in the layers of the smallest living cell as well as the sedimentary and eruptive layers of planets and space. The process of layering is important to me as a woman. It connects me with other women and all industrious life since the beginning of time. In the gradual procedure of stacking and adding units of material there is the solace of being in tune with the infinite.

In learning what plywood "wants to do", respecting its limitations, and cooperating with its potential for unyielding grit, the medium has indeed become my message and purpose: to occupy the spaces of fellow human beings, confronting them with the emotional quandaries of our times, sharing in their solutions, or finding comfort in mutual frustration and understanding.