

# HANDS-ON NATURE

## LAURA MORRISON'S ORGANIC, PROCREATIVE, FIBER SCULPTURES

Alien and natural. Warm and weird. Feminine and feminist. Laura Morrison uses recycled fibers coupled with felting, knitting, crochet, embroidery and beading to create sculptures whose rich colors and textures twist, open, reach, wind and enclose, embodying a generative tactility, tempting viewers to touch them.

Touching is part of Morrison's process. All her work is made with her hands, eschewing machinery for sewing or felting. Morrison starts "with a kernel of an idea and the materials guide how it will come out," she said. "I don't start with a concrete sketch of how I want it to look." Her process-oriented approach allows each piece to develop organically, like the living things that inspire them.

"I pick natural shapes – flower petals, seeds – that I see in the garden. But nothing I make looks like something you'll see in nature," she said. "People say that something reminds them of something else: a penis or a vagina or a pod. That's to be expected. That's what all of nature springs from. All flowers are reproductive organs."

Others see something more unfamiliar. "People sometimes say my sculptures remind them of aliens," Morrison said. "They say they feel like 'It's alive! It might come out and get me!'" Her "Mutation Specimen E" uses wool and glistening beads to evoke something strangely aquatic, like a transfigured jellyfish or sea anemone (those who encounter it at the Mill Brook Gallery's "Got ART Talent" exhibition, on view through December 24 in Concord, New Hampshire, are protected by the glass cloche).

Morrison grew up outside of Chicago, and the art available to her all over that city was profoundly influential. But in the

suburbs, she said, "It was a wasteland." When she moved to Concord, N.H. in 1994 with her husband, son and soon-to-be-born daughter, she was surprised to find a very different culture. "In New Hampshire, every town had a little gallery or artsy shop, community theater, music, the whole gamut," she said. "New Hampshire seemed very supportive of the arts. Maybe not so much in terms of buying art, but in terms of supporting you emotionally as an artist."

Much of that support came from meeting other artists when she joined the New Hampshire chapter of the Women's Caucus for Art, a national feminist organization dedicated to recognizing and promoting women artists and providing professional development, exhibition opportunities and networking for its members. "I kind of found my tribe there!" Morrison said.

It was through WCA/NH that she met Gail Smuda, well known for her assemblage artist books and also based in Concord. "I think of Gail as my mentor," Morrison said. Trained as a graphic designer, Morrison was used to working as part of a team, something she missed as an individual artist. When Smuda approached her with an offer to collaborate, Morrison was eager to work with her.

Together, Morrison and Smuda have created two installations and a mixed media sculpture called "A Matter of Time" (on view through May 2014 at the National Watch and Clock Museum in Columbia, Pennsylvania). They are currently working on a series of small-edition artist's books, and are now working under the trade name Loosely Knit Alliance.

Morrison's work can be found throughout New England, often in conjunc-



Laura Morrison in her studio.

tion with other artists, such as the WCA/NH show "The Art of Words" at the Epsom Public Library (until November 16); the holiday small works show at the Emporium Gallery in South Berwick, Maine; and WCA/NH's 6 x 6 show at the new Studio 550 Art Center in Manchester, NH.

In 2014, Morrison will participate in "Amusements," a collaborative installation in which six artists reinterpret mini-golf holes, at Narrows Gallery in Fall River, Mass., and in "MOMMA," an exhibition by four New Hampshire artist-mothers (curated by this writer), at the Silver Center for the Arts in Plymouth, N.H. Morrison's work is also permanently installed at New Hampshire Technical Institute's Dental Lab and Building, and the Merrimack (N.H.) Courthouse.

Her artwork can also be seen online at her website, [LauraMorrisonArt.com](http://LauraMorrisonArt.com), and on Facebook at Laura Morrison Art.

| Marcia Santore