

Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program
University of Minnesota Duluth
School of Fine Arts

THE NEST AS ART:

“The nest shape is often
a symbol of nature,
the wild, reproduction,
family, security, etc.”



Jennifer Bennett, Art and Design Department, Fall 2001
Robin Murphy, Faculty Sponsor

Jennifer Bennett, permission given to exhibit UROP, October 4, 2002

For a 3-D Design class project in which Robin Murphy was my professor, I constructed four generically shaped bird nests using non-traditional materials. Fellow students seemed fascinated with the outcome. The contrast between the expected function of an actual nest and these nests made of inhospitable materials made my classmates curious about the message and construction method.

After that project I began to think of the almost limitless materials that could be used to make nest shapes and how beautiful, arresting, humorous, or disturbing they might be to the viewer. (I have a listing of at least three dozen additional nests in mind). I then went on to make two more nests - one of feathers and one of un-spun sheep's wool (roving). At that point I was still also grouping the nests by source, i.e.: Wood and rubber = botanical Wool and feathers = animal Nails and wire cable = mineral



Exhibition in
Tweed Museum of Art



My original idea was an environmental commentary on loss of habitat and the imagined future need for birds to make nests of less and less “natural” materials, eventually resulting in nests of nails, etc. It also was a praise of the resourcefulness of birds and other creatures in using what is available to meet their needs... we have all either seen or heard of bird nests that included house insulation, dog fur, gift ribbon, etc.

As my ideas expanded, I began to think of display means and grouping concepts. It might be interesting to do groupings in a grid pattern. For example, all nests with black or gray color would go together, all the nests that were in the red family would be together, etc. To display them in a grid or large “block” of a dozen or so nests of any one color would give visual impact from a distance (the grid format has many associations - mathematics, maps, quilts, etc.), and upon closer viewing would reveal the incredible variety of materials used, playing on the concepts of sameness/individuality. The grouping of multiple nests in various ways would invite viewers to compare and contrast the materials used, as well as explore their emotional and intellectual reactions to nests made of improbable materials.

The nests would be physically constructed in an additive way (building up material, rather than removing material such as carving) of linear material (i.e. toothpicks or yarn) or distinct units (i.e. pebbles or beans). Each nest would be made of only one type of material, and there would be no duplication of materials. Glues of various types, intertwining, sewing, and other means would be used to connect the material to create the nest form. All nests would be of approximately the same size and shape. Some materials would be gathered from the wild (i.e. pine cones, birch bark), or otherwise collected, and many would be purchased.

The nests would adhere to a mounting system, yet to be determined, for wall display. Some nests would be displayed in a vitrine (display cube or case) on a pedestal due to the fragile nature of their material, and/or to isolate and group particular nests due to their material and subject matter/intent - for example: a grouping of nests made of:

1. Razor blades
2. Pins/needles
3. broken glass

In the latter my intent would be for people to consider nests from a human societal perspective and the dangerous conditions many children are raised in ...they do not have a safe "nest" or home environment. Those materials do not connote safety, comfort, haven, etc. in the usual manner

Relationship to Robin Murphy's work:

As an instructor, Robin Murphy stressed meaning, implication, detail, craft in assembly, presentation method, and exploration of materials and construction materials. My 3-D Design class with her was extremely thought provoking, as problem solving in a creative and artful way was often challenging.

Having seen Robin Murphy's recent ceramic works at a gallery, I found them to be full of color, detail, fanciful forms, having a poetic association (the actual object bringing about remembrances of or evoking images of other things and places). And a bowl shape is as rich in element meaning as is a nest...universally known, capable of infinite variety and inventiveness - meant to serve a purpose, yet beautiful as an object alone.

My Educational objectives:

I want to search my own imagination for the myriad possibilities of nest construction materials. I wish to make the viewer marvel at the inventiveness of birds/humans/all creatures who can take the materials they find and make what they require for survival. I hope the viewer will delight in the variety of objects used to make my nests, which pale in comparison to the structures made by real birds. I hope the grid display method will have visual appeal and invite close inspection and contemplation. And I hope viewers will consider the implication of these nests in our lives - what materials will be available to the birds if we do not preserve habitat? What do we build our own "nests" of? How do we structure our own environment to rear our children in? I have a background in biology and am now seeking my BFA in pre-graduate studio art. I find that my love of nature and experience in the sciences come through my art work time after time. This project will unite my interest in the natural world with my fascination with materials and their use to express ideas, relationships, and emotions. I hope these nests will be thought provoking for the viewer. I know this project will impact me as I explore my own reactions to working with materials that might be anywhere from lovely to disturbing. I hope the viewer will stop and wonder at life, nature, and the human imagination.

Thank you for your consideration.