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Bill Burke: Recent Work

The Art Museum at Florida International University Frost Art Museum

The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum

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338

BILL BURKE

The Art Museum
AT FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
MIAMI, FLORIDA
Cover: *Refuge, 1991 - 1992*
Melaleuca Limbs, Lemon Branches, Beeswax, Oil Paint, Stool
110” x 84” x 84”
Photo: Dane Taylor
BILL BURKE

Recent Work
June 12 - July 15, 1992

_Birds Sing_, 1991 - 1992, Lemon Branches, Rope, Palm Tree Trunks, Roots, Gauze, Wax, Oil Paint, Melaleuca Bark, Leaves, Bones, Dust, 105" x 98" x 188", Photo: Dane Taylor

Essay by Manuel Torres
Organized by Dahlia Morgan, Director

The Art Museum
AT FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
University Park, PC 110 • SW 107 Ave. & 8th St., Miami, FL 33199 • (305)348-2890
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Art Museum at Florida International University is pleased to present the work of Bill Burke. Drawing both literally and figuratively from nature, he has created this powerful body of work illuminating not only the history of art but also the natural order of creation.

Mr. Burke has been a member of the Visual Arts Faculty since 1974. His previous FIU exhibition took place in the Art Museum in 1980. Since then his work has continued to evolve - acquiring a monumental presence, enlarging our vision as we move through the life cycle of death and rebirth.

I wish to thank Professor Manuel Torres, Visual Arts Department, for his insightful essay.

This exhibition is supported in part by the National Endowment of the Arts; the State of Florida Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs through the Florida Arts Council; the Metropolitan Dade County Cultural Affairs Council and the Metropolitan Dade County Board of County Commissioners; the Student Government Association of FIU; and the Friends of the Art Museum.

Dahlia Morgan
Director

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I would like to thank my family, my friends and loved ones of the past and present, for their encouragement and support; Museum Director, Dahlia Morgan, for her faith and trust in allowing me to freely express my evolving imagery; Dr. Manuel Torres, for his scholarly, intuitive essay, and the Museum staff, Regina Bailey, Eva Van Hees, Carlos Chiu, and Martin Amado.

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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ART MUSEUM STAFF

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Director

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Coordinator of Museum Programs

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Dust in the Wind, 1991 - 1992, Mahogany Trunk, Lemon Branches, Palm Trunk, Wax, Gauze, Paper, Leaves, Rope, 75" x 80" x 108", Photo: Dane Taylor
Some thoughts concerning Bill Burke

My work has become a simple metaphor of life. A figure walking down his road, making his mark. It is an affirmation of my human scale and senses: how far I walk, what stones I pick up, my particular experiences. Nature has more effect on me than I on it. I am content with the vocabulary of universal and common means; walking, placing, stones, sticks, water, circles, lines, days, nights, roads.¹ (Long)

I am a Pre-Columbian art historian. For the past fifteen years I have been concerned with the study of the art of others, far removed culturally. Case woke from a dream of airports...² (Gibson) spatially and temporally. I deal with closed units, closed categories, fixed in time although not clear as to beginning or end, or precise extent of its geographical and temporal distribution, or what exterior influences have contributed to its development. No individual artists are known from ancient America; these are culture-made objects. I strive to re-construct one aspect of a past culture to locate myself.

There is a Third World in every First World, and vice-versa.³ (Minh-ha)

To relate to the art of my own time and to obtain the necessary critical distance for its proper assimilation is a totally opposite process to the one briefly described above. This is our own time (a time of rupture, fragmentation, transition), our own rapidly and radically changing cultural context with no clear spatial or temporal coordinates. The work included in this exhibition is an investigation into our present state, an attempt at mapping these new cultural territories. How can anyone, then, speak critically, turn the present into history?

In that Empire, the Art of Cartography reached such Perfection that the Map of only one Province occupied all of a City, and the Map of the Empire, all of a Province. With the passing of time, these Dismeasured Maps were not satisfactory and the Colleges of Cartography made a Map of the Empire that was the size of the Empire and coincided punctually with it. Being less Addicted to the Study of Cartography, the Following Generations understood that this extensive Map was Useless, and not without lack of piety gave it to the Inclemencies of the Sun and the Winters. In the Western Deserts remain the destroyed Ruins of the Map, inhabited by Animals and by Beggars; in the whole Country there is no other relic of the Geographic Disciplines. (Suarez Miranda: Voyages of the Prudent Gentlemen, fourth book, chapter XIV, Lerida, 1658).⁴ (Borges)
2 Mangos, 1991 - 1992, Earthenware Clay, Fired Remnants, 3” x 23” x 42”, Photo: Dane Taylor
Thinking about these works over the past few weeks, as the construction process was being described, the notion of speaking about this work with one voice was abandoned. The affinities with other contemporary texts and works of art became apparent and began to enter into the present text. I have decided, therefore, to adopt a multiplicity of points of view in the presentation of some of the issues addressed by the work included in this exhibition: 1. a sense of place (evident in the use of locally available materials - lemon wood, melaleuca bark) and time (the abandoned clay slabs, coral rock), 2. shelter, refuges and collapsing space, 3. collecting and assembling, 4. ruin, rebirth, decay, and a sense of the end of things.

we disappear
eagles tigers
nothing in the gold
nothing in the emeralds
nothing in the feathers
nothing in the word (Aztec Poet)

1. A sense of place, time, history

A good work is the right thing in the right place at the right time. A crossing place. (Long)

In recent art criticism a site-specific work is one that physically engages its environment. It is generally understood that such works have taken into consideration not only the cultural and geographic characteristics of the site, but also its psychological aspects. This idea could be extended to include the concept of time and, consequently, history and process-oriented activities.

... for the vision of a story that has no end - no end,
no middle, no beginning; no start, no stop, no progression;
neither backward nor forward, only a stream that flows
into another stream, an open sea. (Minh-ha)

The collecting of the melaleuca limbs, the lemon branches and the dead leaves, the assembling of the different parts, and their interaction through the gauze, the beeswax and the fire, make these pieces (Dead Birds, Love Letters, Life is But a Dream, 5 Mangos) blend with the surrounding space and suggest new formal possibilities through collapse, decay or reassembling.

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone...; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it... The poet... must be aware that the mind of... his own country... is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing en route... That... the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past’s awareness of itself cannot show. (Eliot/Sackheim)
A sense that time has passed is perhaps the most evident characteristic in the majority of these artifacts. To work with the notion of time... to resist that very notion of time that is synonymous with action. (Minh-ha)

an impossible past building an improbable present. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin)

They are semiotic phantoms, bits of deep cultural imagery that have split off and taken on a life of their own... (Gibson)

A quest for reflection and narrative structures seen in the tension inherent in any decision concerning issues of translation...

A summer morning there is a stone on the ground that owns its surroundings (Ippekiro)

what in the original thought, concept or idea should/could be carried into its formal recipient.

We’ve always had charms, everything that’s new is old with us. (Coe)

... one way in which what is named “postmodernism” distinguishes itself from (a certain concept of) modernism is with respect to the question of novelty. As some have said, we live in an era of the decline of the new. (Minh-ha)

The leaves are falling. Point things out. (Perelman)

2. Shelter, refuges, collapsing space
... we are here in the presence of something like a mutation in built space itself. My implication is that we ourselves, the human subjects who happen into this new space, have not kept pace with that evolution; there has been a mutation in the object, unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject; ... (it) stands as something like an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, as yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions. (Jameson)
My first exposure to this work was through several pieces *(Shelter, Refuge, Dust in the Wind)* that impressed me with notions concerning shelter. I thought of extreme desert conditions, of wide open landscapes where dust, wind and time make space collapse into itself.

Every gesture, every word involves our past, present, and future. The body never stops accumulating, and years and years have gone by mine without my being able to stop them, stop it.17 (Minh-ha)

I thought of equations between these objects and the body, the wax covered gauze outlining bones under parched skin.

Not only do we use and make objects; objects in turn have, in a sense, made us what we have become as a species. It seems evident that we have evolved ourselves in large part to interact with this artifactual world of sign-formations -in other words, that human evolution is in part the product of our long interaction with systems of built forms.18 (Preziosi)

A second reading provides an opposite result: abandoned shelters like those described by the arctic explorer Knud Rasmussen; arrested decay protected by the cold.

Along the path of the tracks of your hands, along the path of the tracks of your feet.19 (Sabina)

They could be understood as representations of a landscape, of mapped mountains like those in the story by Jorge Luis Borges. To finally propose the possibility of the body as landscape:

... mind must be like a mountain
and
like a river
... form
must be like
a blade of grass
or a tree20 (Ippekiro)

... we are in the process of assessing the catastrophe which Europe and the world experienced during the nineteenth century, at the end of the nineteenth, and at the beginning of the twentieth, and that there is an insistently present melancholic spirit that constantly wants to reexamine this catastrophe; it does not recognize that we are no longer there, that something else is happening now... As Hegel always said, history is like... the historian and the philosophers are like owls who awake at dawn after everything has happened; they come in the morning to say, there it is, it happened, but *it happened* 21 (Kristeva)
84" x 38" x 28", Photo: Dane Taylor
3. Collecting and assembling

... to pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal.22 (Benjamin)
Periodically tired of life in Miami, seeing travel to remote places as a way of collecting impressions and information, I have become a resident of displacement. Collecting, whatever it happens to be:
I think of past literature as material...23 (Cage)
daydreams, thoughts, memories, art, provide a sense of place and history. A shelter gradually built, assembled bits and pieces to construct a life like a refuge.
Collecting and assembling, and all they imply, are the traits that bind all these works together.
Any method which does not itself reach into the unknown is a bad method.24 (Grotowsky)
Artists like Marcel Duchamp and Kurt Schwitters, among others, have exhausted strategies of collecting in modern art. They generally concentrated on industrial and human refuse, on the found and manufactured object.
It informs of the explanations they invented for “the things (they) did not understand, ...”25 (Minh-ha)
The objects used by Duchamp, Schwitters and others, were taken out of context and the tension thus provoked gave rise to the “art object.”
It is no longer the myths which need to be unmasked..., it is the sign itself which must be shaken; the problem is not to reveal the (latent) meaning of an utterance, of a trait, of a narrative, but to fissure the very representation of meaning, is not to change or purify the symbols, but to challenge the symbolic itself.26 (Barthes)
In contrast, the work here under discussion does not concern itself primarily with manufactured human post-industrial debris, instead natural or organic materials are emphasized. Generally it consists of organic material obtained from refuse piles of removed-nature to make more space for human occupation: roads, factories, malls, housing developments, manicured gardens, etc. The act of collecting transformed into a statement about a society that sees life, to paraphrase Gottfried Benn, as economically usable life.
The art work is, to be sure, a thing that it made, but it says something other than the mere thing itself is... The work makes public something other than itself; it manifests something other; it is an allegory. In the work of art something other is brought together with the thing that is made. To bring together is, in Greek, *sumballein*. The work is a symbol.27 (Heidegger)

Pick up the right things.28 (Perelman)
4. Ruin, rebirth, decay, end

A screaming comes across the sky.29 (Pynchon)

Mysterious as the manner in which death came into life.30 (Aua)

The use of dead trees, dead birds, ripped bark, burnt objects, precarious constructions, mango imprints fired into a more or less permanent state, convey a sense of ruin and decay, a sense of the end.

... this fascination with death, this kind of hole in life (both lived and psychic life) which the thought of death introduces, is counter-balanced, actually thwarted by our powerful capacities to move against death and to create something new from that very place.31 (Kristeva)

But, then all these materials are used to build something new; symbolic constructs that comment on the very issues they are emerging from.

Salivate, secrete the words. No water, no birth, no death, no life. No speech, no song, no story, no force, no power.32 (Minh-ha)

He lived, became old and saw a bird flying away in a winter day33 (Ippekiro)

Works that seem like catastrophic premonitions alternatively replaced by indecisive beginnings and ends.

I do not call this the period of modern art...since the so-called modern art is only a synonym for the attempt of the western world's soul to get free and independent of every predetermination by the political pressure. but for me this is not enough...this modern art- it has to come to a wider understanding of art, which could be related to every person's doing. So, the formula is: "Everybody is an artist."

Every human work has to be seen as a kind of art. For me only this idea could overcome this fragmentation that we have now. There is the world of art, there are the economics, there are the law problems or, the so-called democratic problems, there are the cultural problems, with the school systems, the university systems, the education. To see the world principally as a unity with the idea of creativity and ability of the people, it means their spiritual constellation with all their real creative powers, thought powers, soul powers, will-powers, ethereal powers, and all the further and higher developed bodies. This is a necessity - to overcome this completely distorted and only additional nothingness. Nobody knows anymore what one is working for... where the goal is... how to develop and unfold the powers of the world.34 (Beuys)
It’s always time to leave.35 (Perelman)

Manuel Torres,
Associate Professor, Art History,
Visual Arts Department, FIU

Works Cited

1. Richard Long, Words After the Fact
2. William Gibson, Neuromancer
3. Trinh T. Minh-ha, Differences
4. Jorge Luis Borges, Of The Rigors of Science
5. Nothing in the Word. Versions of Aztec Poetry
6. Richard Long, Five Six Pickup Sticks, Seven Eight Lay Them Straight
7. Trinh T. Minh-ha, Grandma’s Story
8. T. S. Eliot /Eric Sackheim . . . the silent Zero, in search of Sound
9. Trinh T. Minh-ha, If upon leaving what we have to say we speak: a conversation piece, Discourses
10. Walter Benjamin, Illuminations
11. William Gibson, Burning Chrome
12. Ippekiro, Cape Jasmine and Pomegranates
13. Ralph Coe, Lost and Found Traditions
14. Trinh T. Minh-ha, If upon leaving what we have to say we speak: a conversation piece, from Discourses
15. Bob Perelman, Primer
16. Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism
17. Trinh T. Minh-ha, Grandma’s Story
18. Donald Preziosi, The Semiotics of the Built Environment
19. Maria Sabina, Life and Chants
20. Ippekiro, Cape Jasmine and Pomegranates
21. Julia Kristeva, Discourses
22. Walter Benjamin, German Tragic Drama
23. John Cage
24. Jerzy Grotowski
25. Trinh T. Minh-ha, Grandma’s Story
26. Roland Barthes, Change the Object Itself
27. Martin Heidegger, The Origin of the Work of Art
28. Bob Perelman, Primer
29. Thomas Pynchon, Gravity’s Rainbow
30. Aua, Shamanic Voices
31. Julia Kristeva, Discourses
32. Trinh T. Minh-ha, Grandma’s Story
33. Ippekiro, Cape Jasmine and Pomegranates
34. Joseph Beuys, Energy Plan for the West
35. Bob Perelman, Primer
WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION:

Castor-Oil Plants, Gauze, Oil Paint, Beeswax, Rope, Twine, Tree Branch
106" x 24" x 18"

*Birds Sing*, 1991 - 1992
Lemon Branches, Rope, Palm Tree Trunks, Roots, Gauze, Wax, Oil Paint, Melaleuca Bark, Leaves, Bones, Dust
105" x 98" x 188"

*Dead Birds*, 1991 - 1992
Glass, Bones, Leaves, Lemon Branches, Wax, Rope, Twine, Carbon
84" x 38" x 28"

*Disk*, 1991 - 1992
Earthenware Clay, Fired Remnants
3" x 53" x 54"

*Dust in the Wind*, 1991 - 1992
Mahogany Trunk, Lemon Branches, Palm Trunk, Wax, Gauze, Paper, Leaves, Rope
75" x 80" x 108"

*Fallen Leaves*, 1991 - 1992
Lemon Branches, Oil Paint, Wax, Gauze, Metal, Rope, Leaves
118" x 23" x 57"

*Fir Trees*, 1991 - 1992
Earthenware Clay, Fired Remnants
3" x 10" x 193"

*5 Mangos*, 1991 - 1992
Earthenware Clay, Fired Remnants
4" x 22" x 134"

*Life is But a Dream*, 1991 - 1992
Melaleuca Limbs, Branches, Wax, Oil Paint, Rope, Carbon Residue, Dust
75" x 80" x 108"

Castor-Oil Plants, Gauze, Oil Paint, Beeswax, Rope, Twine, Letters
90" x 35" x 25"

39" x 67" x 104"

Melaleuca Limbs, Lemon Branches, Beeswax, Oil Paint, Stool
110" x 84" x 84"

*Shelter*, 1991 - 1992
Melaleuca Limbs, Melaleuca Bark, Beeswax, Oil Paint
97" x 84" x 98"

*2 Mangos*, 1991 - 1992
Earthenware Clay, Fired Remnants
3" x 23" x 42"
BIOGRAPHY

BIRTHPLACE AND DATE:
Flushing, NY, March 26, 1948

LIVES: Miami, Florida

EDUCATION:
1972-1974 M.F.A. State University College of New York, New Paltz, New York
1968-1972 B.S. Ceramics, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:
1974 -present Associate Professor, Florida International University, Miami, FL
1974 Instructor of Design, State University College of New York, New Paltz, NY
1974 Graduate Teaching Assistant, State University of New York, New Paltz, NY
1973 Graduate Assistant, State University College of New York, New Paltz, NY

WORKSHOPS AND LECTURES:
1987 Chairperson of Panel Discussion, "Fine Art/Fine Craft," North Miami Museum and Art Center, North Miami, FL
1983 Workshop and Lecture, Daytona Beach Community College, Daytona Beach, FL
1982 Visiting Artist - Workshop, Penland School of Crafts, Penland, NC
1981 Workshop, Haystack School, Deer Isle, ME
1980 Lecture, Pratt Institute of Art, Pratt University, Brooklyn, NY
1979 Workshop and lecture, American Crafts Council, Greenwood Gallery, Renwick Gallery, Washington, DC
1977 Workshop, Brookfield School of Crafts, Brookfield, CT
1976 Visiting Artist Workshop, Georgia Designer Craftsman, Callan Wolde Fine Arts Center, Atlanta, GA
1973 Lecture, Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia, PA
1972 Lecture, "Lustres and Low Temperature Glazes," Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY and State University College at Albany, Albany, NY

REVIEWS:
1988 Ceramics Monthly, Review

The Miami News, Group Exhibition at the New Gallery, University of Miami, Miami, FL
American Craft, North Miami Museum and Art Center
American Craft, Barry University Exhibit
The Miami Herald, Life Styles, Review
The Miami Herald, At the Galleries "Selected Gallery 24 Artists"
Ceramics Monthly, Barry University Exhibition

RECENT EXHIBITIONS:
1989 Then and Now," Barbara Gillman Gallery, International Group Show, Miami, FL
Surreal Ceramics," National Invitational, John Michael Kohler Center for the Arts, Sheboygan, WI
"Expressions 89," Hollywood Art and Cultural Center, Hollywood, FL
"Pillars and People, Bill Burke and Grace Hendricks," Barbara Gillman Gallery, Miami, FL
"Spotlight 89," American Crafts Council South East Regional University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

NEW YORK TIMES, "North Miami Beach Community College"
NEW YORK TIMES, "Aesthetic Triumph for Langman Gallery First Crafts Exhibition The Miami Herald, Exhibition review Crafts Horizons, Bicentennial Bagatelle - "One Hundred Artists Commemorate Two Hundred Years for Xerox and the USA"
From, Swedish Art Publication, "Avant Garde Form Over Function"
Handmade Toys, Doubleday & Company

GRANTS AND AWARDS:
1982 Florida Fine Arts Council State Grant
1981 Tile Wall Commission - 9 Belle Isle Tower, Miami, FL
1980 Florida Craftsman Representative, Miami, Florida area "30th Annual M. Allen Hortt Exhibition" Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, FL, Merit Award Board of Directors-Grove House Gallery, Coconut Grove, FL
1978 Florida Fine Arts Council State Grant Art in Public Places, Public Works Commission - Design and execution of Ceramics Frieze, Naranja Park School Recreation Center, Naranja, FL
RECENT EXHIBITIONS CONT':

1988

- "1989 Annual Juried Exhibition," Orlando Museum of Art, Orlando, FL
- "Originals By Florida Originals," Barbara Gillman Gallery, Group Show, Miami, FL
- "South Florida Crafts Annual 88," Florida Craftsman Regional Exhibition, Miami, FL
- "Miami/Hands On," North Miami Museum and Art Center, Chairperson for Panel Discussion, Fine Art/Fine Craft, North Miami, FL, Invitational Group Show
- "Allure of Lures: An Exhibition Dedicated to the Mystery of Attraction," Appalachian Center for Crafts, Smithville, TN, Invitational Exhibition, Permanent Collection
- "Small Ceramics National," University of Arkansas, Fine Arts Gallery, Fayetteville, AK National Juried Exhibition
- "Gallery Artists," Hodgell/Gillman Gallery, Tampa, FL
- "Crafts National 87," September/October National Juried Show Rochester Institute of Art. State University College at Buffalo, NY
- "South East Crafts 87," Regional Juried Exhibition
- "7 Artists - Works in Clay," Invitational, University of Alabama, Moody Gallery of Art, Tuscaloosa, AL
- "Regional Ceramics Invitational," University of Miami, New Gallery, Coral Gables, FL
- "3 Person Exhibition: Invitational," Suffolk County Community College, Selden, NY
- "Faculty Exhibition," The Art Museum at Florida International Miami, FL
- "36th Annual Ceramic League of Miami Exhibition," Metropolitan Museum and Art Center, Coral Gables, FL
- "Florida Show," Gallery 24 - Annual Group Exhibition, Kane Concourse, Bay Harbor, FL
- "Gallery Artist's Group Show," Invitational, Works Gallery, Southhampton, NY
- "28th Annual Hortt Memorial Competition and Exhibition," Museum of Art, Ft. Lauderdale, FL
- "Southern Fried Presents?" Performing Arts Center Gallery,

1985

- "35th Annual Craftsman Exhibition," Hollywood Art & Culture Center, Hollywood, FL
- "One Person Exhibition," Barry Art Gallery, Miami, FL
- "Hands On," Invitational, Discovery Center Museum of Ft. Lauderdale, Ft. Lauderdale, FL
- "In Their Cups," Invitational National Exhibition, Valencia Community College, Orlando, FL

COLLECTIONS:

- Appalachian Center for Crafts, Hollywood, FL
- Art in Public Places, Miami, FL
- Xerox Corporation, Rochester, NY
- Art in State Buildings, Florida
- International University, Miami, FL
- Daytona Beach Visual Arts Gallery, Daytona Beach Community College, Daytona Beach, FL
- Lockhaven State College, Art Gallery, Lockhaven, PA
- 9 Belle Isle Towers, Belle Isle, FL
- Perdue University, Art Gallery, Perdue, IN
- Richard and Ruth Shack Art Collection, Miami, FL
- State University of New York, New Paltz Art Gallery, NY
- University of North Dakota, University Art Galleries, Fargo, ND
- Valencia Community College, Visual Arts Galleries, Valencia FL