

## Barbara Knight, Some Thoughts on Cardboard.1

Cardboard has myriad associations for me starting with early childhood during the Second World War in Great Britain, where I was raised with the mindset of collecting, reusing and recycling, habits I still maintain. I am completely committed to sustainability and the environment. When our family moved to the United States, every Christmas we received a box of presents from each uncle and aunt, and a sensual memory of unwrapping boxes with their unique postwar English paper smell imprinted itself on my mind. Our family led a fairly nomadic life, where the packing and unpacking of cardboard boxes of belongings was connected to feelings of both familiarity and displacement.

I collect material from walks around the city wherever I am, mainly NYC or Chania, Crete, my summer studio from 2011 on. The urban environment is ideal for collecting. If a piece attracts me, I pick it up, no matter where it's from or where I find it. It's the energy, the charge that draws me. How I juxtapose various fragments with each other is the mystery of the work -- they assume a transformed energy together, whether applied to large collages, small squares, fragments or shaped works.

I recycle found cardboard boxes and corrugated packing material, cheap and abundant. Starting in about 2015, I explored new possibilities of wetting the material, pushing it around on the floor and exploring its very physical combination of layers, how it stuck together and came apart. I let it dry and made some large spare pieces where I let the material be the focus and attached metal, string, mesh and bubble wrap.

During Pandemic walks to get out of the house, I tore off sections of billboard paper and collaged them into "fragments" of various sizes, playing with chance, accident, surface, color or subtle monochromes, gluing it all to a corrugated cardboard background and cutting out the contour, then reinforcing and shellacking the back to preserve and mount on the wall.

In the last two years, I have returned to 3-dimensional sculpture by molding wet corrugated cardboard into forms influenced by the natural environment, particularly the stone formations of Crete, tying with string, drying, painting or fixing them and attaching to the wall. I don't know what this paper-based material will turn into. I trust chance and my intuition to guide transforming it into art.

Cardboard as a material has become primary -- humble, honest, subtly variegated in its browns and grays, smooth or corrugated, fragile yet strong, printed, painted or unpainted. A material that is seen as mundane, something to cover something, something used to transport then discard, I see as ripe with possibility, even transcendent. In my transformation of the material I come to various solutions, whether 2 or 3-dimensional. At the same time, I'm aware that using corrugated for art-making is a kind of reverse recycling, a political statement of defiance in the globalized commercial culture we find ourselves in now.

I am aware that my historical antecedents and their influences upon me give me context. I am an artist finding value in something devalued, using an unexpected material with the possibility of making magic.

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Barbara Knight, October/2023