

May 4, 2012

North Adams Transcript

Artist makes works that end

By John Seven

North Adams Transcript

NORTH ADAMS — Some artists are accused of building walls between them and their audience, but walls are a part of Kim Faler's creative specialty, as well other everyday things you'll find around the house, in an attempt to reconfigure them for mischief.

Faler's latest sculpture is featured in the show, "Invisible Cities," at Mass MoCA.

Faler's wall is made of soap — or more precisely, two by fours fashioned out of soap have been used to build a wall. Faler has cast about 30 building pieces, each 10 feet long, all white, in front of exposed brick directly before the entrance to Building 5.

"It is white, so it has a foreignness to it just because of the color, and then there is the smell," she said.

Faler loves making work that address objects and structures people come into contact with everyday and pay little mind to, with the idea that if she changes an aspect of it, even in a subtle form, that will upset the experience between person and place to a degree that person will actually notice place more than usual, thanks to the disruption of it.

"We have such an overwhelming experience with architecture that we don't think about it, it's omnipresent," Faler said. "So here, I'm just trying to re-tilt the scales and bring the viewer back into the world that they already live in. I'm changing the material to give some sort of sensorial reaction to something you would never have a sensorial reaction to, like a piece of wood. I shift the material and hope that it triggers some sort of idea of memory and idea of your personal interaction with not only soap, but architecture."

Faler describes it as a recalibration of the senses.

"I try to make you see stuff that you couldn't otherwise," she said.

Architecture and design are central to Faler's work and fascination. This began full force in a design course that highlight the restraints dictated on the practitioners by the subjects of creation out of necessity for functionality. What if functionality were messed with a little?

"It has to be held this way, and it has to be made of this material, and sit in spite of this thing, in order for it to work," said Faler. "I really got motivated by all these constraints that design puts on itself, just because it's tied so much to functionality."

"When I started to make my own work, I began with traditional sculpture, but then the idea of design and the constraints they follow began to



Kim Faler's 2011 work 'Slack Tide.'

Photo courtesy of Kim Faler

sneak in my work, but in the end, I'm always trying to undermine functionality just to make it art."

Faler's work has become an exercise in "unfunctional" design. You can look at one of her works, you can see it is a wall or a sink or a shelf, but you can also see that there's no way, as realized by Faler, that it could possibly work for the purpose it was originally designed, and that's something that makes Faler laugh.

"I think the idea of taking something functional and taking the functionality out of it is, in itself, innately funny," she said. "If you take a coffee cup and you take the bottom out, it's not going to work, it's not going to do what it's supposed to do."

Faler's work becomes an examination of how people relate to their housewares and houses, and the ways in which their dependency is so reliant on the smallest portions of the object's design. One small change to the object and the relationship with the person shifts as well. This is nothing a person ever thinks about, and it's only in the disruption that it becomes crystal clear. It's like the old adage that you only appreciate what you have once it's gone.

"It's just like a habit. You do this over and over again, so you stop thinking about

it," Faler said. "But if you just shift it slightly, it has a cascade effect where you're allowed to see it again and actually think about what you're doing."

The Mass MoCA sculpture is not the first wall Faler has created. In graduate school, she fashioned a huge, cracked one, and shortly after, a subtle curved one that looked wrong without offering the viewer the chance to figure out exactly what was wrong until they walked around the corner and could see the latex skin behind it that caused the warp.

"It was pretty entertaining because most of the other work was either behind glass or a sculpture and most people didn't even see this work until they got in the room and turned around and saw it," said Faler.

Humor is key to Faler's work, as well as part of the natural reaction to it. Her piece "Slack Tide" features crumpled blue paper on a shelf — Faler's visual joke has the color blue leaking out of the paper and off the edge of the shelf down the wall. Some of it has dripped onto a pile of clothes, which is dumped next to a mysterious bunch of bananas — it elicits a quirky tranquility with a mess at the bottom.

"I wanted this casualness with the clothes and what was already there, and the banana is to

play on this idea of time and temporality and the life span of a piece," Faler said.

"A lot of my work, where it actually lives is hard to define, because it's so temporal and so site specific, a lot of it is — is the actual artwork the artwork or is it the photograph or is it the experience of it? With that piece, it's both. I think the documentation of it is satisfying, and the piece was, too."

Unexpectedly, the bananas played into the temporal nature of the work — although they look enticing in the documentation, they weren't freshened during the exhibit. The bananas became an organic indicator of the passage of time.

"When I showed it, I told them to update it, but they did not update it," Faler said. "For a couple weeks, it was rotting bananas."

Faler recently finished a chandelier for the DeCordova Museum that is made out of wax. Over time, the chandeliers deteriorate and Faler has to go and restock them for longevity.

"I was playing with that idea of temporality and the decorative and the fragility of what is around us — if you even notice it being fragile," she said.

Another piece had Faler creating a paper bicycle and placing that in the snow to photograph.

"I actually left that in the snow to disintegrate and dissolve," she said.

Faler did the same thing with "Barn," another outdoor work that featured an actual barn with the cloth tulle spilling out of it.

"I left the tulle there all winter and it blew all over the neighborhood," Faler said.

The very nature of temporal work requires letting go serve as one of the prime artistic qualities. This might be the case for any artist who sells their work, but in Faler's case, the work often goes away without a trace. Walls are torn down, paper bicycles are victims of the elements, experiencing the moment — and, sometimes, capturing it — is as important to Faler's work as the objects themselves.

Soap, tulle, drywall — it all goes away, and its passing is as important a part of the work as its arrival.

"When you're making temporal work, you have to just let it die," said Faler. "It's not always about the potential of dying. Being a sculptor, especially at a young age, you come to terms with putting a lot of your stuff in a dumpster. It is what it is. You have to balance it out with something that sustain time like photography and drawing and things of that nature, but it all balances out."

Kim Faler can be found online at kimfaler.com.