

**THESIS**

**PIECING TOGETHER**

**Submitted by**

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**Department of Art**

**In partial fulfillment of the requirements**

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER  
OUR SUPERVISION BY BECCA MENT ENTITLED "PIECING TOGETHER" BE  
ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### PIECING TOGETHER

“A quilt consists of two layers of cloth filled with an interlining of a soft, insulating material, such as cotton, down or wool.”<sup>1</sup>

This work is only a product; I see it almost as an afterthought - the sometimes exciting evidence of the artistic and technical processes which created it. I examine the work and I see its core self. I see this work presenting ideas of both *domesticity* and *process*.

I respond to its domestic voice in several ways: I relate the work to quilting and see quilting as “women’s work.” Making work that belongs to this historical context affects me strongly. I am also struck by the ideas of home, warmth and comfort that the forms suggest.

The processes that surround the making of this work create much of its meaning for me. Before these forms there were stages of exploration and experience. These stages are part of a cyclic process involving *learning* and *making*. In my art, that process of making plays a central role – much of the work’s value is in how I produce it and what I experience while producing it.

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<sup>1</sup> World Book, Volume 16, p.41

I was not aware that I wanted to quilt. That need grew inside me and surfaced, controlling the direction of my work. I came back from a break away from the studio with the understanding that I would quilt and that I was ready to carry the emotional weight that quilting would provide me. I feel close to women when I quilt – to the historical collection of so many women before me. I attach this feeling to my own family, though we've had no quilters. I can't help it. Women pour themselves into quilting – their quilts are a representation of their lives:

“Quilts are valuable artifacts because they elicit memories of their makers, family members, and special occasions; because they are symbols of family heritage and traditions; and because they are beautiful examples of women's art.”<sup>2</sup>

My quilts are visually somewhat different – there is a weirdness to them, something off. I think that speaks to my own specific outlook. I think that as a contemporary artist I don't want to respond to the world around me with soft fabric and cotton insulation – my life is less simple, more suited to rubber and vinyl.

This work is called “piecing together” in part because of the overwhelming feelings I've had in my life while crafting it. I have felt, for a while, that I have been piecing my life together – choosing elements and placing them in order. I believe those aspects of my life relating to home and hearth have only recently become central. I thought about this as I worked – the quilts strongly speak to those feelings of warmth and security.

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<sup>2</sup> Cox Crews, Patricia. Nebraska Quilts and Quiltmakers. P. 11

The work is also called “piecing together” because of the process involving laying out and piecing together the eight by ten inch squares. I came to this technique through sets of explorations and shifts in thinking.

I began working with rubber when I began sculpting after years of working in two dimensions. The process of pouring rubber excited me. The earliest works were small groups of colorful forms interacting playfully. Color was always a central element – it is a natural part of language for me. In shifting from two to three dimensions however, I felt best making subtle explorations. I became more interested in rubber’s surface quality. I poured large sheets of rubber, embedded with assorted objects. I was overwhelmed by the openness of these forms, and sought comfort in small rectangles. When I felt comfortable with those pieces of language I could visualize piecing them together to create a larger form.

Describing this evolution in the nature of my work doesn’t explain the value I place on the actual *making* of the work. The products here are evidence for me of what took place while making them. My studio was a swirling vortex of color and mass and smell. My pouring was magical – a different way to compose and create form. The sewing was painful and deliberate; addictive and rhythmic. During and between these acts I’d reflect. These processes were active, alive – I was continuously thinking and experiencing. This makes the art for me.

While I’m conscious of this central aspect of the work’s meaning, some viewers may not be. They will explore the work as it presents itself to them, without necessarily attaching meaning to its creation. My interest in the audience’s reception helps me to focus on formal presentation. It’s almost like the work skips a few steps in being here this

way – there is all this making, and then suddenly the work stands alone. This substantiates the idea that artwork serves many purposes, and that an artist’s intent may be personal and communicated only partially .

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Plate 1: Piecing Together (large quilt), sewn rubber, steel, wood, lighting.



Plate 2: Piecing Together (large quilt, detail), sewn rubber, steel, wood, lighting.



Plate 3: Piecing Together (large quilt, installation view), sewn rubber, steel, wood, lighting.

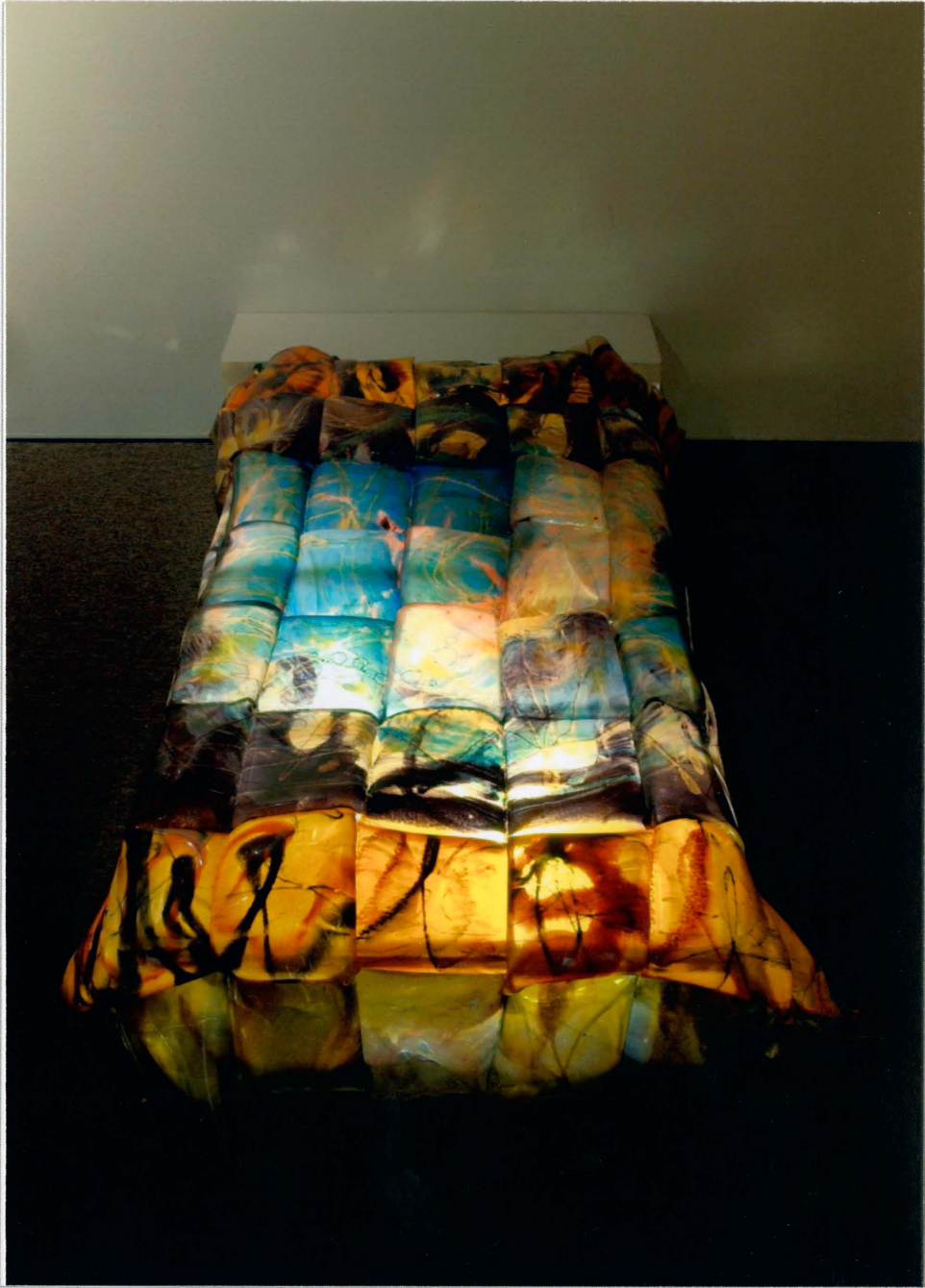


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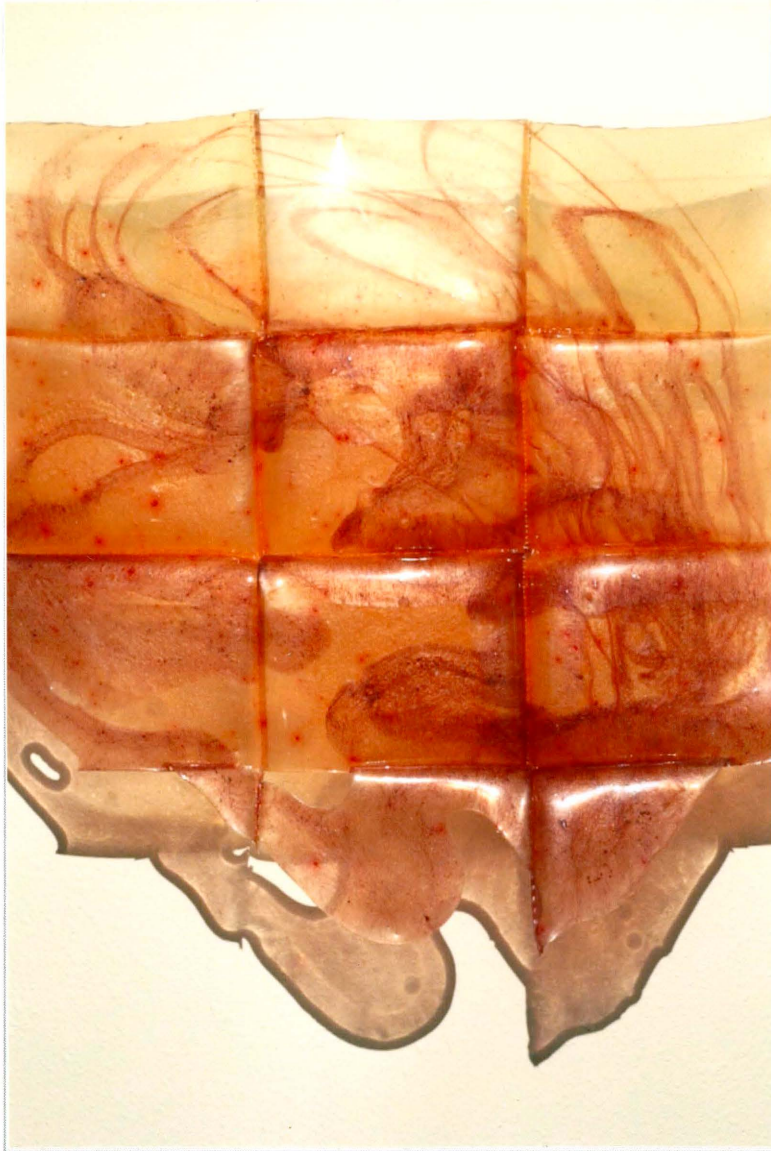


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Plate 7: Piecing Together (Wall Piece #3), sewn rubber, plexi-glass, lighting.



Plate 8: Piecing Together (cushions, installation view), sewn rubber, lighting.

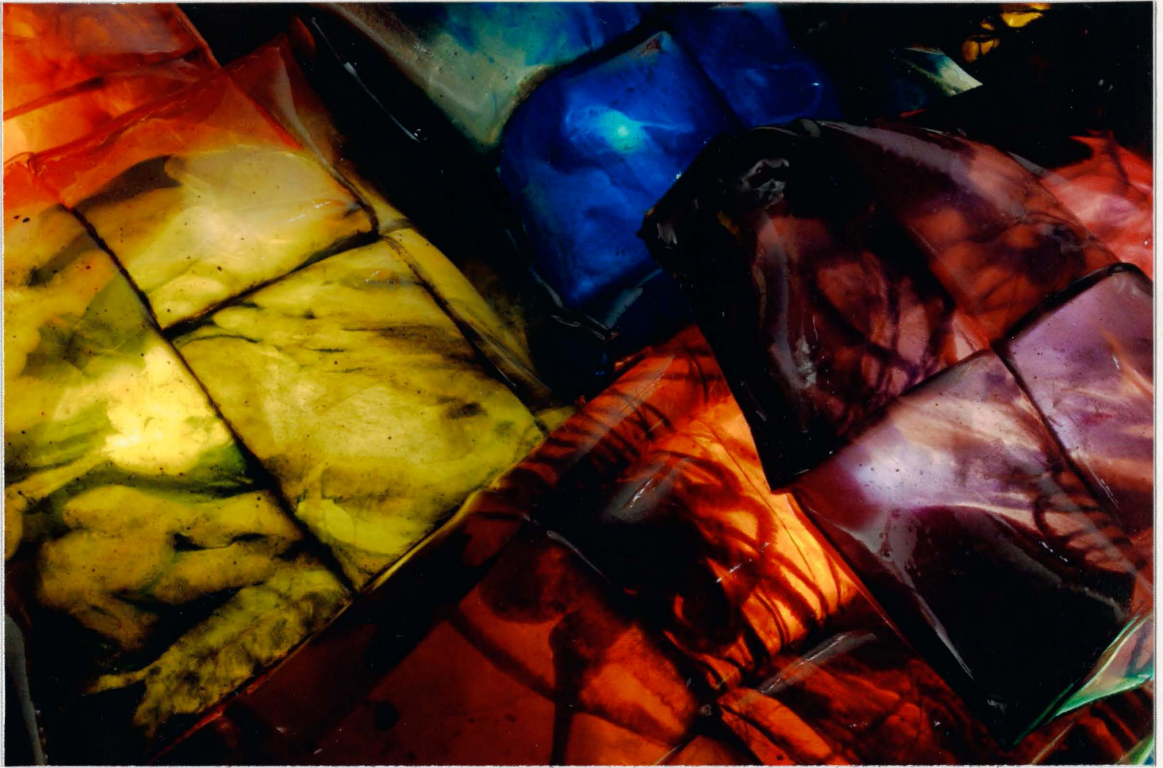


Plate 9: Piecing Together (cushions), sewn rubber, lighting.

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