

# Marjorie Schick

Body Works: Structure, Color, Space



June 10–July 8, 2001  
Arkansas Arts Center ■ Decorative Arts Museum





22. *For Finland #1*, 1993

## Body Works: Structure, Color, Space

Challenging the boundaries of wearability, the works in this exhibition were each created to be worn and to stand alone as sculpture. They are intended to make the wearer inwardly conscious of the body as well as outwardly conscious of the immediate environment. When the piece is removed, it exists as a finished sculpture on the wall or pedestal while the wearer is left with the memory of how the object felt, how it affected mobility, how it heightened awareness of the body and how it caused those who encountered it to react.

Covering a twenty-year period of time, these works are an exploration of form and color as well as non-traditional materials, including painted dowel sticks, plywood, papier-mâché and canvas. Each object is a personal statement about three-dimensional structure, color, pattern and rhythm. The ideas represented in these objects range from studies of directional forces to the relationship of the form to locations here and abroad, and exploring the possibilities of jewelry as part of a wall painting.

—MARJORIE SCHICK, 2001

Between 1960 and 2000 jewelry in Europe and America underwent an enormous innovative period. The Scandinavian influences of the preceding 1940s and 1950s—with their pure uncluttered organic forms—were replaced by a new aesthetic. This jewelry is characterized by a reaction against the status given to precious metals and gems and the desire by the artist to make affordable art. Jewelers explored the major art movements of abstraction, Bauhaus formalism, surrealism, Dada, figuration, narrative, and folk art with the unbridled freedom to experiment with new ideas, concepts, materials, and technology. There was a willingness to re-examine the relationship between jewelry and the body, gender roles were often forgotten, jewelry became problem solving as opposed to designing, scale was re-evaluated, and there was a conscious desire for individual expression.

Marjorie Schick has been described as a protagonist whose art has helped challenge and redefine generally held concepts regarding jewelry, wearable ornament, painting, and sculpture in an age where boundaries have become increasingly blurred. With her roots in jewelry and metalsmithing, this artist insists on making sculpture. Using metalsmithing techniques such as forging and riveting, Schick constructs with non-traditional materials—wooden dowels, plywood, rubber, papier-mâché, and sewn canvas. Her wearable forms exist as sculpture or painting independent of the body and yet are conceived, constructed, and exist for the human body. Her paintings and wall sculptures function as vehicles for the display of necklaces and bracelets, and vice versa. Necklaces and bracelets function as portable elements of her paintings and sculptures. According to one critic, Schick's unfettered experiments "hover on the brink of function." She has redefined the relationship between objects and the human body and has challenged the conventional ideas of scale.

Schick has been described as a radical American jeweler whose large-scale body sculptures influenced jewelry making in the United States and in Europe. She is an important figure among an international group of avant-garde artists who began creating a new language for jewelry from the 1960s. About this group, Michael Dunas writes, "Using the body as a springboard, these innovators challenged the formal restrictions of space, light, color, movement, decoration, social ritual, material, and method." Schick pushed her explorations to the point where the work nearly ceases to function as jewelry, but pulls up short of making performance art. Her work has been described as celebratory in mood, ceremonial, ritualistic, or theatrical body sculpture. According to Peter Dormer and Ralph Turner, "Schick has pushed the components of twentieth-century abstract art to its proper decorative conclusion...it has become an abstract art with its roots in jewelry."

For an artist who has had such a major impact on her field, chance and being open to suggestion have played a major role in Schick's career. She attended the University of Wisconsin, Madison and earned a B.S. in Art Education in 1963. It was there she met and married Dr. James B.M. Schick who is now University Professor of American History at Pittsburg State University—one of two important figures in her life. Not knowing quite what she wanted to pursue in graduate school, it was her husband who suggested that she liked jewelry the best. Because his father taught at Purdue, in-state tuition was available at Indiana University. This brought in the second most influential person in the artist's life, her mentor, jewelry and metalsmith artist and teacher, Professor Alma Eikerman.

What little Schick knew about Eikerman before starting her M.F.A. program at Indiana University came from her roommate at the University of Wisconsin who had taken a summer class with her. What made an impression on Schick was the story of how Eikerman left the studio windows open so students could sneak into the room to work extra hours. Schick studied with Professor Eikerman for three formative years (1963-1966). What she learned was to construct three-dimensionally, to draw for the development of form and ideas, and to work with self-discipline. Eikerman became a role model as an artist and as a teacher, as a producing and innovative jeweler, in the way she dressed, in the beauty of the food she served at parties, in what she read and in the art she collected. To Schick she was a totally involved artist, a powerful influence and inspiration with her challenging teaching.



34. *Double Dutch Artists Necklaces and Painting, 1998*  
Van Gogh: *The Starry Night*; Mondrian: *De Stijl*



39. *Dunloe, 2000*

Eikerman placed importance on the work of the sculptor Julio Gonzales because of his creative and sensitive manner of making joints or connections in his metal sculptures and because of the way he used space as a material. During this time, Schick created pieces that were signs of work to come. For example, she used iron wire and brass screen in pieces when these were considered non-traditional materials. One silver necklace from 1966 consisted of forged lines, each of a different shape that were constructed three-dimensionally and encircled the neck. She continues to explore forms that are built in the round for this part of the body. Another necklace was inspired by one of Van Gogh's wheat field paintings. For this she massed multiple silver wires together to form a solid shape around one side of the neck. Her experimentation with line, whether of dowel sticks, papier-mâché, wrapped metal rods, or stitched canvas, continues to this day.

After Indiana University, Schick taught one year at the University of Kansas and then, in 1967, she and her husband obtained positions at Pittsburg State University where they have remained since.

Pittsburg is a small out-of-the-way community in southeast Kansas. Here the artist found colleagues whom she respected and admired and, while they held different aesthetic points of view, were supportive. Their input was not so much about jewelry—she would tell them, “I know about jewelry”—but rather for input on whether her piece worked as a painting or as a sculpture. For faculty shows in the late 1960s and early 1970s she would wear her “outrageous papier-mâché sculptures” to openings. She chuckles and says, “I believe everyone in Pittsburg thought that what I made was the look of all contemporary jewelry.”

At the end of graduate school, Professor Budd Stalnaker at Indiana University was having his students make papier-mâché bracelets. Schick became interested and began to make some—creating paper collages to aid her in the design of the patterns painted on the surfaces. They became larger and larger and after

the first four or six she took them with her on a trip to Indiana and New York. Eikerman loved them and told her she must make appointments and show her work to curators at the American Craft Museum and the Museum of Modern Art. “Whatever Eikerman said, I tried to do,” Schick says. The visit led to an invitation to participate in the *Made with Paper* exhibition at the Museum of American Craft in 1969. At the Museum of Modern Art, a jewelry exhibition by sculptors including David Smith had just ended, but her visit there resulted in a referral to the art dealer Leo Castelli. While his gallery was not interested in her work, he did take the time to critique it. The *Made with Paper* exhibition led to an invitation to the *Fascinating Paper* exhibition in the same year at the Museum of Applied Arts in Zurich, Switzerland. Her career was launched.

The sculptural papier-mâché forms and papier-mâché wrapped linear “drawings to wear” of the late 1960s and early 1970s were inspired by David Smith's sculptures. It was not so much the form as it was the idea of wearing a sculpture that inspired the artist. In 1966 she made the decision to make body sculptures after wondering what it would be like to be inside a David Smith sculpture, to extend an arm through a hole, or to wrap oneself around a metal form. The experience of wearing sculpture is vastly different from viewing one in a museum and she knew at this point that was her goal for the future.

Throughout the 1970s Schick thought of her silver and brass metalwork and jewelry as her “serious” work and the papier-mâché pieces as something she did because she was compelled to do them. Her attraction to papier-mâché was its light weight, her ability to create planes and three-dimensional forms, its potential for greater scale, and above all the possibility of adding color.

Schick worked with papier-mâché for a decade and then stopped in the late 1970s to explore ceramic, plastic, paper, and thread as materials. She continued to make jewelry until the 1980s. The papier-mâché

wrapped linear forms of the 1960s and '70s were a direct influence on the dowel stick jewelry she created throughout the 1980s. In the late 1980s, her need to create planes in addition to lines led to experimentation with plywood as a material. In 1991, when in London on sabbatical leave, she returned to her exploration of papier-mâché and was excited to re-introduce organic forms into her work. More recently, she has added sewn and painted canvas to her list of materials. As her work has become painterly, it seemed appropriate to her to use canvas, the material of painters. Currently, she works in a combination of papier-mâché, wood, and painted canvas, and chooses the materials as they seem most suited for the forms she is creating. Speaking about her work Schick says, "I am making sculpture first—sculpture that is wearable. I want my work to exist as finished sculptures when they are not worn." This is why she chooses lightweight materials. Papier-mâché is light; canvas is even lighter. In addition, canvas is flexible, non-breakable, can be stacked, picked up and shaken, and will fall into shape. "I want my body sculptures to affect the wearer and the viewer in ways ordinary jewelry will not..." "I like it to be dramatic, to take up a large area. There is theater to it—it takes nerve to wear objects of such large scale and it is something for the wearer to experience—moving through space in a different way. It is one thing to look at sculpture on a pedestal and another thing to become a physical part of the piece. You can't forget you have one of my pieces on. If you wear one on your arm you are very aware of it and must move more carefully, becoming more conscious both of your body and the immediate space around you."

Schick's work never was intended for the theater. But in the late 1960s and early 1970s, she participated in a collaborative series of modern dance programs around Kansas, Missouri, and once in New York City. To her surprise her works were used in ways she had never imagined. While she might walk stiffly in a work, the dancer might spin and swoosh to the floor and while she would wear bracelets on her wrists, the dancers might wear them on their ankles.

Regarding her working habits, Schick says that, "I begin with an idea for both the purpose and form of the piece. I don't draw first but rather work and play with the materials, making it necessary to constantly design and problem solve through the making of each piece." Various themes have been suggested to her recently and she likes the challenge. *Variations on a Theme* folding book sash/necklace was created for a book show. For her most recent sabbatical leave, Schick's husband suggested she do a body of work based on color as it related to places visited in their travels. From this she decided to use places she has traveled to and also places she had lived as the sources of her inspiration.

Pieces from this project include *Quetzalcoatl* for a trip to visit the ruins of Mexico, *Pittsburg Brick* for the brick streets in the town where she lives, and *Double Dutch Artists* for their travels to Amsterdam where she exhibits frequently.

Schick's work is formalistic and abstract. She does not attempt to work toward a narrative art. Schick says, "I have a general idea when I begin a piece, but do not have a pre-conceived idea of what the piece will look like after it is finished." Aesthetics are of paramount importance to her with other concerns being whether the work will stand independently as sculpture, how the work will be wearable, and her involvement in the materials and processes. Often she sets herself limitations, "I have been trying to avoid painting stripes for the last ten years," or if a style has run its course, to let it rest for a while. Applying color is the last task on any piece, but it is the most challenging part. She often repaints and over-paints until there is rightness between the color and the three-dimensional structure. "And always, edges are important." She says a throwback to Alma Eikerman's influence.

In the 1980s Schick began to consider the presentation of her art forms when they were not worn. For this she constructed a wood wall relief to hold a bracelet in 1988. The same year she made three flat necklaces that she felt needed more in the way of presentation and so did *Painting for Three Necklaces*. Because the necklaces are reversible (all of her pieces are finished on both sides), she designed the painting in a way that the necklaces can be viewed from either side and can relate to the shapes and colors in the painting. Remove the three necklaces and the painting exists again as a finished work. This idea of making paintings as wall supports for the jewelry brings the work to further completion. She returned to the idea in 1998 when she did a series of such forms including *Bound Colors*, *Quetzalcoatl*, *Pittsburg Brick*, and *Double Dutch Artists*. Most recently, *Golden Web* is a continuation of this idea, but without a rectangular format.

Color has been a major concern of Schick's since her first papier-mâché bracelets in 1996. On the dowel stick pieces of the 1980s, her colors were flat and about color relationships and the rhythms of repeated bands or stripes of colors. When she introduced plywood into her work in the late 1980s, her painted surfaces became more complex and dealt more with patterns, gradations of color, and even creating the illusion of depth on flat surfaces. This is seen in the *Purple Rays* necklace in the exhibition. *Golden Web* from 2001, has many layers of colors, both on the painting and the necklace. Textures are built up with acrylic paint and gel mediums. Most often the color in her works is meant to emphasize the three-dimensional structure, but in some cases the painting camouflages the structure. The visual relationships between the *Golden Web* painting and necklace

are so close that the necklace nearly disappears into the painting beneath.

Since 1966, Schick has remained focused on constructing forms for the body and more recently, on the wall presentation of these works when they are not worn. Her large scale, three-dimensional works challenge the wearer and the viewer and create the possibility of new experiences wearing sculptures. These forms are not only about size in relationship to the human body, but also about three-dimensional structure, color in relationship to the shapes and rhythms of the form, and space as it relates both to the object and to the immediate space around the wearer. *Body Works: Structure, Color, Space* is an appropriate description of the work of Marjorie Schick.

—Alan DuBois, Curator  
Arkansas Arts Center Decorative Arts Museum



13. *Back Sculpture with Reeds*, 1988

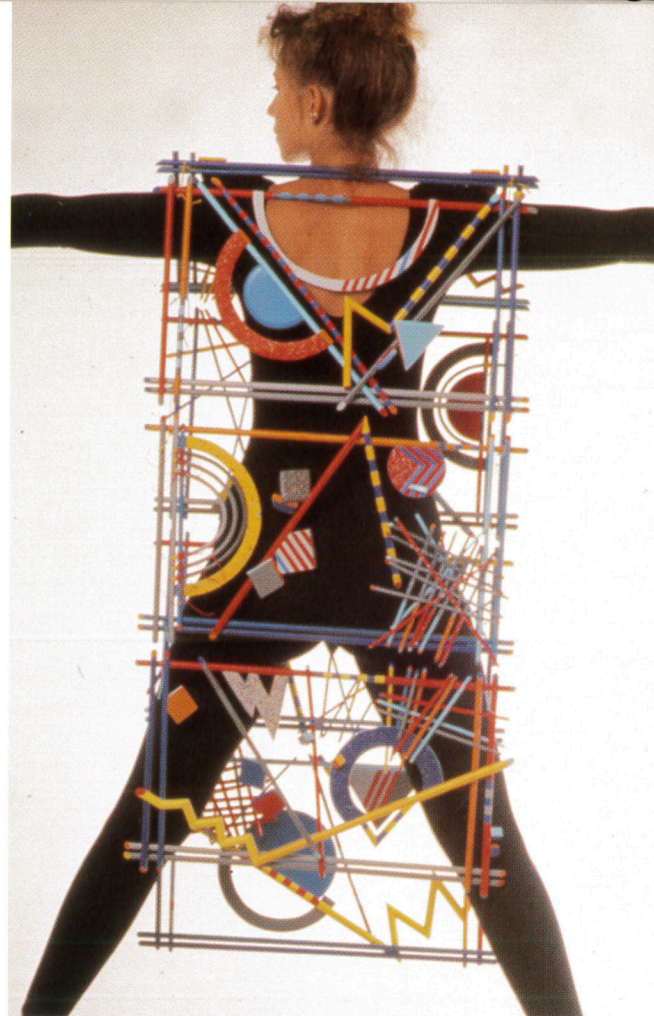
This essay was dependent on the writings of Barbara Mayer, Peter Dormer and Ralph Turner, Helen Drutt English, and Michael

Duna and an interview with the artist in February.

Please refer to the artist's resumé for bibliographic references.



2. *A Plane of Sticks*, 1986



10. *Folding Body Sculpture*, 1987

## Marjorie Schick

1941 Born, Taylorville, Illinois

1963 B.S., University of Wisconsin, Madison

1966 M.F.A., Jewelry-Metalsmithing, Indiana University, Bloomington

1983 Extended Study, Sir John Cass School of Art, City of London Polytechnic

1967 - Professor of Art, Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, Kansas

### **Selected Collections**

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Royal Museum, The National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh

Renwick Gallery of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

The American Craft Museum, New York City, New York

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan

Applied Art Museum, Oslo, Norway

Municipal van Reekummuseum of Modern Art, Apeldoorn, the Netherlands

# Checklist of the exhibition

All works have been lent by the artist. Height precedes width precedes depth. All paint is acrylic. An asterisk \* denotes illustration. Photography by Gary Pollmiller. Beth Neubert, model, cat. nos. 2, 10.

1. *Stick Pins*, 1985  
(series of six stick pins on bases)  
painted wood, nickel wire, and rubber  
7-3/4 x 7-3/4 x 3-3/8 inches  
7-3/4 x 7 x 3 inches  
7-3/4 x 8 x 3-3/8 inches  
7-1/2 x 8-3/8 x 3 inches  
7-7/8 x 10-1/8 x 3-1/2 inches  
7-3/4 x 7-5/8 x 3-1/8 inches
- \* 2. *A Plane of Sticks*, 1986  
(necklace)  
painted wood  
27 x 36 x 6 inches
3. *Directional Forces*, 1986  
(necklace)  
painted wood  
41 x 18-1/2 x 7-1/2 inches
4. *Necklace*, 1986  
reed, wood, and thread  
26 x 28-1/2 x 5-1/2 inches
5. *Necklace for the Back*, 1986  
rubber and wood  
15-1/2 x 22 x 9 inches
6. *Snakes and Ladders*, 1986  
(sculptures and pins for two people)  
painted wood, reed, and leather  
48-1/2 x 3-1/2 x 20-1/2 inches  
41-3/4 x 3-1/2 x 26-1/4 inches  
pins, average 13 x 1-7/8 x 1/4 inches
7. *Pair of Armlets*, 1986  
painted wood, reed, and thread  
4 x 10 x 7-5/8 inches  
5 x 10-3/4 x 4-1/4 inches
8. *Pair of Armlets*, 1986 and 1987  
painted wood, and rubber  
6-1/2 x 9-1/2 x 3-1/4 inches  
6-1/2 x 10-1/8 x 3 inches
9. *Within a Frame*, 1986  
(necklace)  
painted wood, and rubber  
36 x 22 x 2 inches
- \* 10. *Folding Body Sculpture*, 1987  
painted wood, reed, and cord  
96 x 22 x 1-1/2 inches
11. *Back Sculpture #1*, 1987  
painted wood and nylon straps  
23 x 19-1/2 x 26 inches
12. *Back Sculpture with Grid*, 1988  
painted wood, nylon straps, and thread  
27-1/4 x 27 x 6-3/4 inches
- \* 13. *Back Sculpture with Reeds*, 1988  
painted wood, reeds, and nylon straps  
48 x 26 x 8 inches
14. *Painting with Three Necklaces*, 1988  
painted wood  
painting: 33-2/4 x 22 x 2-3/4 inches  
each necklace: 20 x 10 x 12 inches
15. *Purple Rays*, 1988  
(necklace)  
painted wood  
21-1/2 x 23 x 5 inches
16. *Wall Sculpture to Hold a Bracelet*, 1988  
painted wood  
wall sculpture: 19 x 20-1/2 x 6 inches  
bracelet: 7 x 11-3/4 x 1-3/4 inches
17. *For Pforzheim, Folding Necklaces*, 1989  
(series of five necklaces)  
painted wood  
24-1/2 x 22 x 2 inches  
24 x 24 x 1-1/2 inches  
23 x 20-1/2 x 1-3/4 inches  
25-1/2 x 23 x 3 inches  
painted wood and rubber  
24 x 21-1/2 x 1-3/4 inches
18. *Head Sculpture*, 1989  
painted wood and rubber  
9 x 20-1/2 x 14-1/2 inches
19. *Checkered Diamond*, 1991  
(necklace)  
repainted papier-mâché  
18-1/2 x 22-1/2 x 2-3/4 inches
20. *Memories of New York*, 1992  
(armlet)  
painted papier-mâché  
10 x 10 x 4-3/4 inches
21. *Mulvane*, 1992  
(necklace)  
painted wood and papier-mâché  
19 x 22-1/2 x 6 inches
- \* 22. *For Finland #1*, 1993  
(necklace)  
painted papier-mâché  
15 x 19-3/4 x 3-3/4 inches
23. *For Finland #F2*, 1993  
(necklace)  
painted papier-mâché  
15 x 19-3/4 x 3-3/4 inches
24. *For Norway*, 1993  
(collar)  
painted papier-mâché  
19 x 18-1/2 x 12 inches
25. *Spring Green*, 1993  
(collar)  
painted papier-mâché  
23-3/4 x 23 x 6 inches
26. *Bodega Bay*, 1995  
(armlet)  
painted papier-mâché  
7-3/4 x 8-3/4 x 4-3/4 inches
27. *Golden Frost*, 1995  
(necklace)  
painted papier-mâché  
18 x 18-1/2 x 7 inches
28. *Summertime*, 1995  
(armlet)  
painted papier-mâché  
8-1/2 x 8-1/2 x 4-1/2 inches
29. *Transition*, 1992  
(wall sculpture with bracelet)  
painted papier-mâché and wood  
wall sculpture: 17 x 25 1/4 x 4-1/2 inches  
bracelet: 5-1/2 x 8 x 8-1/2 inches
30. *Tribute to Alma Eikerman*, 1995  
(collar)  
painted papier-mâché  
18-1/4 x 19-3/4 x 4-1/4
31. *Illusions*, 1996  
(necklace)  
painted papier-mâché  
16-7/8 x 17 x 3-3/4 inches
32. *De La Luna/Del Sol*, 1998  
(necklace)  
painted canvas and cord  
34 x 27-1/4 x 3-1/8 inches
33. *Bound Colors*, 1998  
(necklace on painting)  
painting on wood panel  
36-1/4 x 27-3/8 x 1-3/8 inches
- \* 34. *Double Dutch Artists*, 1998  
(two necklaces on painting)  
painting on wood panel  
33-1/2 x 22-1/8 x 1-5/8 inches  
*Van Gogh: The Starry Night*  
(necklace)  
painted wood and cord  
15-1/4 x 15-1/4 x 3/4 inches  
*Mondrian: De Stijl*  
(necklace)  
painted wood and cord  
14 x 14 x 3/8 inches
35. *Pittsburg Brick*, 1998  
(body sculpture on painting)  
painting on wood  
19 x 51-7/8 x 3-3/8 inches  
body sculpture: painted canvas  
13-3/4 x 46-3/4 x 1 inches
36. *Quetzalcoatl*, 1998  
(necklace on painting)  
painted wood  
24 x 24-1/8 x 1-5/8 inches  
necklace: painted canvas  
16 x 16-3/4 x 1-3/4 inches
37. *Squares with Squares*, 1998  
(five necklaces)  
painted wood  
12-3/4 x 12-3/4 x 5/16 inches  
11-1/2 x 11-1/2 x 5/16 inches  
10-1/4 x 10-1/4 x 5/16 inches  
9 x 9 x 5/16 inches  
7-3/5 x 7-3/4 x 5/16 inches
38. *Variations on a Theme*, 1999  
(accordion-folded necklace/sash)  
painted canvas and cord  
36 x 7 x 4 inches
- \* 39. *Dunloe*, 2000  
(armlet and sculpture)  
painted papier-mâché  
sculpture: 9 x 10-3/4 x 9 inches  
armlet: 4-1/2 x 8-1/4 x 8 inches
- \* 40. *Golden Web*, 2001  
(neckpiece on painting)  
32-1/8 x 23-5/8 x 1-1/8 inches  
necklace: metal, fabric, thread, and wood  
13-3/8 x 15-3/4 x 4-5/8 inches

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ON THE FRONT:  
40. *Golden Web*, 2001