

Tina Girouard

December 9, 2004 – January 29, 2005

Exhibition curator Susan Rothenberg has known Tina Girouard since 1969, during Girouard's early days in New York. Over the next four decades, the artist's work has evolved to include performance and installation art, video/film, sculpture, painting, and works made of non-traditional media such as wallpaper, linoleum, fabric, stamped steel, and sequins. Girouard's career has been forged largely outside the gallery system, and because of her dedication to working with non-profit, community-based organizations in the promotion of Louisiana and Haitian artists, Rothenberg wanted to re-acknowledge Girouard's own extensive and flourishing art forms, by organizing a survey of the artist's work in New York.

Iconography forms the foundation for Girouard's body of work, and through her study of its evolution, from ancient pictograms and hieroglyphs to international signage and computer icons, her personal visual vocabulary has emerged. She fills her compositions with juxtaposed narratives and, while retaining recognizable images, she further subverts meaning by including arcane symbols familiar to the artist but abstract to the viewer, in order to suggest that what is commonplace in one culture is exotic to another. Elements placed side-by-side, and images layered on top of one another are guiding forces which run throughout the course of Girouard's career and thus serve as underlying structural principles throughout the exhibition.

In the mid 1980's, Girouard moved her studio from New York to her native Louisiana. In 1986, the artist helped found an international Francophone festival which forged links between Louisiana Cajun/Creole and Haitian Kreyol culture, and exposed her to many diverse forms of Haitian art, dance, and music. A large commission inspired her to send drawings to Haiti in 1989 that would result in the making of large-scale sequined tapestries reflecting the unique beauty of Haitian Flags (Vodou Drapo), an indigenous art form originally created for use in religious ceremonies. Two years later, Girouard established a studio in Haiti to work alone and in collaboration with the artist Antoine Oleyant. Drawn to the intricate nature of Haitian sequin art, she spent ten years in Haiti building a repertoire of Vodou symbols (Veve) while incorporating her own personal imagery of herbs, bones, machetes, flowers, pistols, and termites into hundreds of intricate sequin art works. In *Flora*, 1993, Girouard unites the native flowers, plants, and crops of Louisiana and Haiti – iris, papaya, coffee, sugar cane, and mango – through use of vibrant color, shape, texture, and line. By juxtaposing form and media, Girouard provides the informed reader with a glimmer of mystery in order to “make the ordinary extraordinary, and the extraordinary ordinary.”



Flora, 1993
70" x 115"
Hand-sewn glass beads and sequins

After ten years immersed in a process-driven, meticulous art form, Girouard returned to her studio in Louisiana wanting to liberate her work from the small gesture by concentrating instead on large-scale panels in order to discover a new vocabulary of symbols, materials, and meaning. In recent works such as *Weather Fodor*, 2004, Girouard compiles everyday materials that most Americans live with – corrugated plastic, vinyl siding, linoleum, and garden lattice – in the form of an installation piece which includes both performance and object. According to Rothenberg, “the new works echo back to her early use of common household materials and combine her ongoing fascination with symbolism.”

(Over, please)

Vámanos!, 1983 (Not in exhibition)
Mixed media
60' x 30' x 15'



Weather Fodder, 2004
Mixed media
16' x 16'

By stacking and weaving together these plastic incarnations of wood, stone, and metal, Girouard broadcasts an experience of American “aesthetics.” The work, according to Girouard, “contains a budding worldview that acknowledges being at home in America, while cutting through the clutter to the culture.” Conceptually, *Weather Fodder* harkens back to earlier installations like *Vámanos*, 1983 – a poetic entanglement of disparate elements of Mexico City life composed of suspended machetes, gigantic snake piñatas, bird cages, and bus facades – as a metaphor for the innate contradictions defining the modern world in which nature and commerce buttress up against each other.

What surprises Girouard most about her current work is that it bears the conceptual seeds of her formative years while embracing more recent explorations into meaning. The artist sees her return to her Louisiana studio as a new participatory place of comfort. Focusing her energy on installation pieces again allows her the freedom to work through many permutations before reaching a conclusion. For Girouard, “working in an activated space brings along the great joy of getting spontaneity back in the process.”

ARTIST BIO:

Tina Girouard was born in 1946 in Louisiana and migrated to New York to join the contemporary art movements of the late 60's and the 70's. She shared her studio in Chinatown with musicians Richard Landry and the Philip Glass Ensemble for a decade. She was an early founding participant of 112 Greene St., FOOD, the Clocktower, PS1, Creative Time, Performance Art and the Fabric Workshop. In addition to her own projects she was involved in films, videos and performances by Keith Sonnier, Richard Serra, Lawrence Weiner, Laurie Anderson and the Natural History of the American Dancer, among others. She later moved her main studio to Louisiana in the mid-80s, and since 1990, has maintained a studio in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, has authored [Sequin Artists of Haiti](#), and has been instrumental in bringing increased recognition for Haitian artists within the United States.

Girouard has received numerous fellowships and grants for projects. Among the high points of Girouard's exhibition history were invitations to international events such as Documenta 6 in Germany, the Venice Biennial, Paris Biennial and in 1983, a mid-career retrospective mounted at the Rufino Tamayo Museum in Mexico City.

Michael Swindle, author

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