



Tina Puckett: Woven Rhythm and Whimsy

LIKE THREE-DIMENSIONAL abstract paintings, Tina Puckett's woven wall sculptures trace the rolling rhythms of fields and hills. Hand dyed in the colors of autumn or spring, the natural materials she favors—sea grass, reed, hemp, and grapevine—convey the look of Impressionist paintings with layers of color.



Puckett often punctuates her pieces with her favorite bittersweet, a vine whose thick or thin stems are pliable when fresh. She harvests the material in late autumn and winter, when the leaves are gone, from fields near her Connecticut home. Selecting stems with shapes and breadths that appeal to her, she lets the vines inspire the design of future baskets. She bends the harvested vines right away, sometimes with the help of ropes, and stores them in her barn until she is ready to use them. "I'm already thinking of the next piece while I'm still working on the current one," she notes. "I'm always, always visualizing."

The curvilinear elements of Puckett's

works have a sense of motion and grace to them. Some freestanding sculptures are abstract expressions of familiar objects such as an hourglass or a pitcher. Some baskets tell a story by their shape, while others are more frankly functional, made to hold keys and other utilitarian items.

Puckett, a self-taught artist, became interested in basketmaking when her children, now grown, were young. As a gift,



ABOVE LEFT: Blue Bird Hibiscus, 2007; bittersweet-vine frame, woven flat oval reeds, woven-bead center; 52" x 48" x 8". From a series of flowers that involve layering of colors. ABOVE RIGHT: Landscape #8, 2006; bittersweet-vine frame, woven reeds; 40" x 50" x 8". BELOW: Country Blue Whimsical Wallhanger, 2006; intertwined bittersweet vine, woven reeds; 26" x 17" x 6". This sculpture can be hung horizontally or vertically. FAR LEFT: The artist (2003).

her mother gave her a series of lessons in a local studio. Puckett regularly made baskets as gifts, then eventually owned and ran her own art gallery. Today her studio is in a converted barn on her property.

Selling her gallery has freed Puckett to do more studio work and to exhibit at a dozen craft shows a year. She enjoys educating the public about basketmaking at shows, as well as through her website, on which she details the steps of weaving. She encourages young artists to consider basketweaving, observing that "it's a wonderful way to express yourself."

While in college, Puckett had studied to be a theatrical set designer. Although she never formally worked in that field, she feels it influences all her work, especially her landscapes. "Taking it from

my imagination and making it real” is the lesson she applies in basketmaking. “I really look at nature,” she says, aiming at weavings that are “more like paintings.”

As an artist, Puckett also looks toward the future. Someone once left a bundle of “walking stick” vines at her gallery door. Having used and liked them, she has purchased two plants and set them into the ground. In the years to come, she hopes they will give shape to new works of intricate woven art. 📸

The artist's website is www.tinasbaskets.com. She'll be selling her work January 19–22 at Beckman's Handcrafted Gift Show (wholesale) at the Merchandise Mart, Chicago (www.beckmans.com), and March 13–16 at the American Craft Show at Cobb Galleria Centre, Atlanta, Georgia (www.craftcouncil.org/atlanta), and she's exhibiting June 1–July 29 at Good News Cafe, Woodbury, Connecticut (www.good-newscafe.com).

BELOW: Dancing, 2004; bittersweet-vine structure, woven-reed costume; 68" x 38" x 36". Photos: Tom Wilson.

