

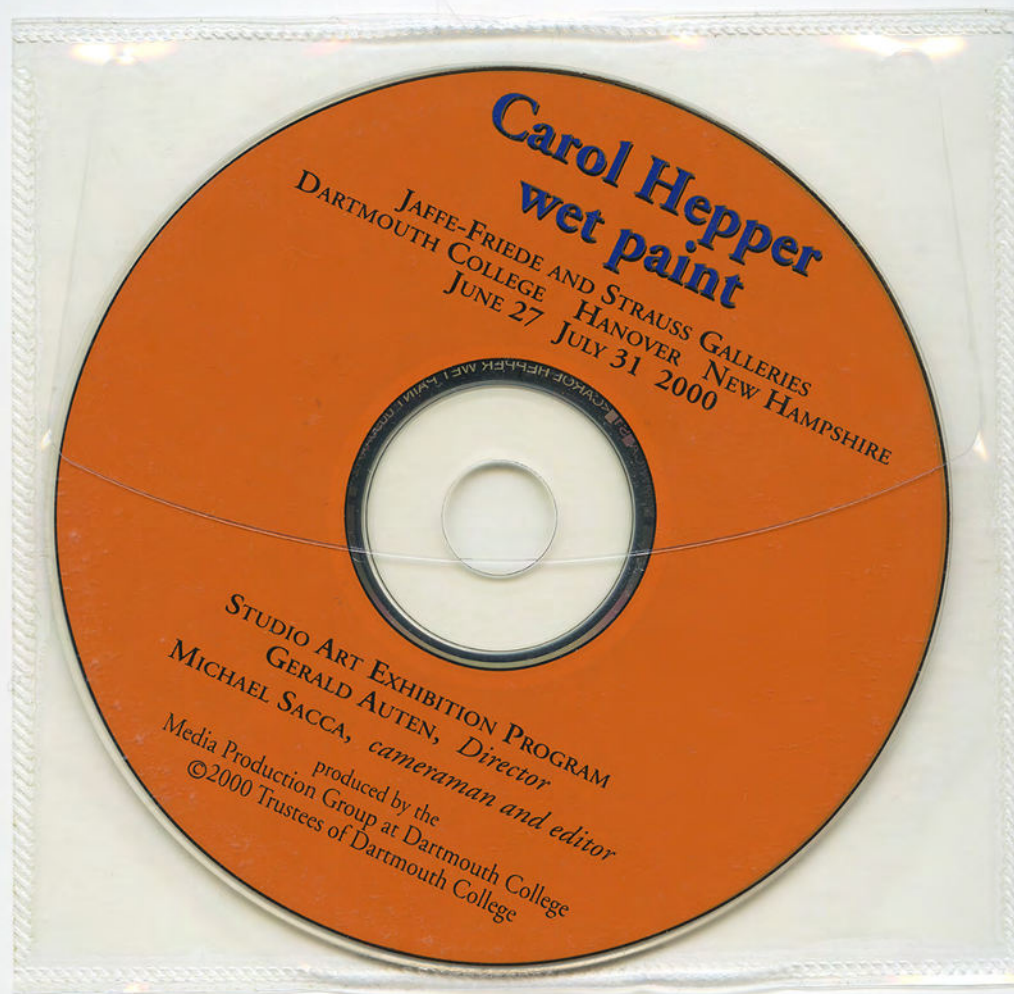
wet paint

Carol Hepper

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE
STUDIO ART EXHIBITION PROGRAM
Gerald Auten, Director
HB 6081 Dartmouth College
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755
603.646.3651

GALLERY HOURS
Tuesday–Saturday: 12:30–10:00 pm
Sunday: 12:30–5:30 pm
Closed Mondays and holidays

PHOTOGRAPHY: H-O Photographers, Hartford, Vermont
DESIGN: Glenn Suokko, Vermont
PRINTING: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, Belgium



wet paint
June 27–July 30, 2000
Hopkins Center, Dartmouth College, Jaffe-Friede & Strauss Galleries

Carol Hepper
Dartmouth College Artist-in-Residence
Summer 2000





A Local Abstraction: Recent Work by Carol Hepper

In a public dialogue on the occasion of her collaboration with Carol Hepper, the dancer Molissa Fenley described using Hepper's sculpture *Island* as a "spatial incentive" for movements that were "aqueous, tropical," that evoked "billowing breezes" and the grace of underwater life.¹ Hepper, whose great-grandparents were home-steaders in the Midwest, was born on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. It is a place often invoked in describing her work, a place brimming with evocative visual and historical incident—and a place where tropical breezes and the fluid ease of underwater life are the stuff of purest fantasy. Of course, dreams are good for art. While Hepper, a New York resident since 1985, has always relied on plain facts, intractable materials, and hard labor, she has equally depended on their opposite: the meandering traces left on mutable surfaces by imagination, belief, memory. She has also, from the start and increasingly, engaged in subtle disputation with several standing category definitions in art, including those that divide painting and sculpture, and also, more distinctively, naturalism of the most exacting kind and pure abstraction.

Hepper's current work, *Island* included, is made of fish skins that she tans herself, stitches together with fishing line, and paints. The pigmentation she applies is, mostly, true to the color of the living fish (which fade as they dry) though it is sometimes heightened past realism; the patterns of the original markings are preserved. Splayed and joined side to side, the skins are generally grouped to suggest the aggregated bodies of fish in schools, social groupings of strikingly dance-like coordination in which the fish seem at moments to form a single organism. Hepper says that *Tsunami*, for instance, was inspired by "thinking of the formation fish make when they're beginning to form a school, as seen from below."

CRIMSON LAKE, 2000, 88" x 57" x 6"

And indeed shifting light, shot through moving water, seems to define the fish's contours, enhancing the impression of a limpid instability, of contours clear and bright as they are fugitive.

The tiger-striped skins of the narrow-bodied sturgeons used in *Tsunami*, held afloat from the wall by a metal armature, are vivid, electric. *Island*, the work conceived for the collaboration with Molissa Fenley, is painted with phosphorescent pigments and hung from a flexible wire structure so that it produces, in a darkened theater, a rippling, opalescent glow. As installed at Dartmouth, with lighting masterfully designed by David Moody, it casts shadows on the wall evocative of those that can be seen rippling on the sand near the shoreline of clear tropical seas. In other works, Hepper draws out the tender, dawn pinks and sunset blues of Chinook salmon, or the nocturnal markings of some sturgeon; *Crimson Lake*, made of sturgeon, is a surging arrangement of reds and greens. Sometimes, Hepper refers the skins to their functional origins as wrappers of solid flesh, as in *Red Snapper*, its skin stretched around a clay plumbing elbow to create a lively form flexed like a trained athlete but delicate as porcelain, or *Dutch Master*, an especially painterly work in which a single rainbow-colored salmon skin, tail and fins intact, is pulled across the big-bellied bottom of a metal saucepan (the Dutch Oven that is one of the title's references).

Effortlessly graceful as these sculptures seem, they reflect a great deal of arduous work. The skins, time consuming to amass (from commercial fisheries, retail outlets, and Hepper's own fishing trips) and the more so to dry and tan, are tough once treated, and hard to sew (shaping them, across metal armatures or around other objects, presents additional challenges). But wrestling fluidity from resistant material is established practice for Hepper, whose early



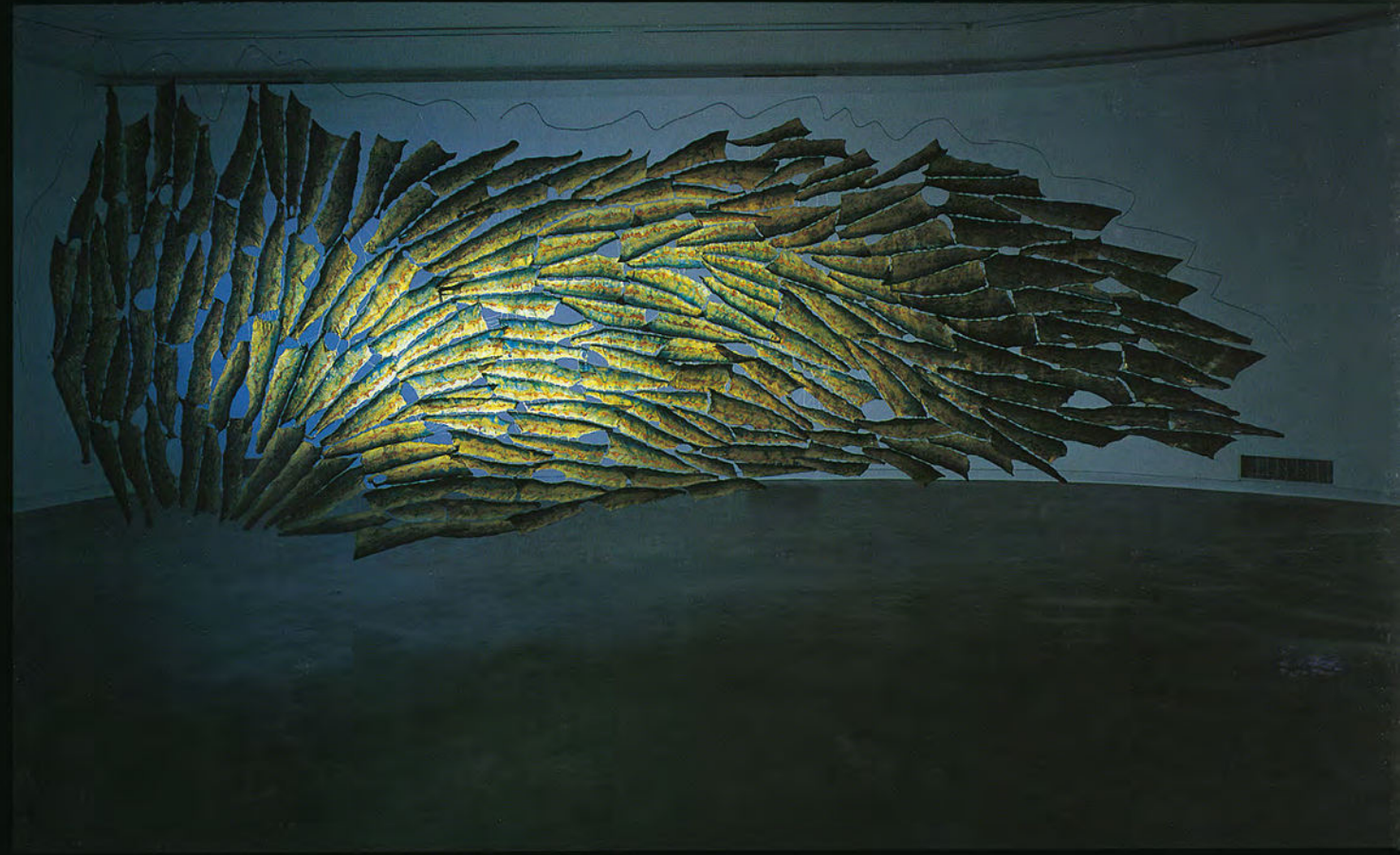
work included tent-like shelters made of animal skins, wood, and bone—forms that were stripped more or less literally to their skeletons in the bent willow sculptures that followed. In those sculptures, of the early 1990s, bundled willow branches were trained, under thousands of pounds of pressure over periods ranging to several months, into curving configurations of the utmost agility and poise. That body of work, which ultimately included related sculptures made of copper tubing, relies on a muscularity belied by its big, easy curves—just as the taut fish skins have a tensile strength that surges just beneath their glinting, color-soaked surfaces.

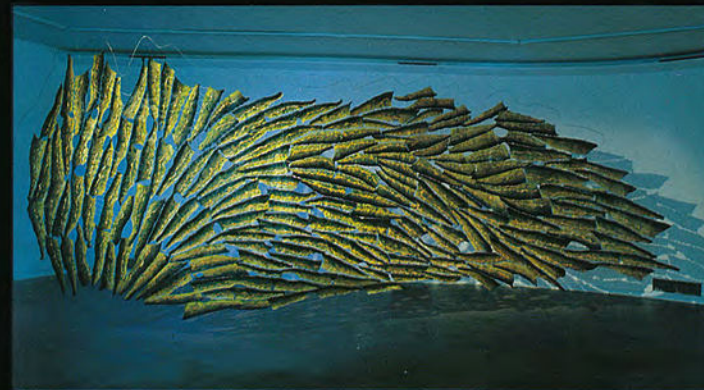
Though other materials have captured her attention at various times, Hepper has used animal hides more or less continuously. Almost as soon as she moved to New York, and took a studio near Manhattan's busy commercial fish market on Fulton Street, she began to use fish skins. Even during the period when she was concentrating on the bent willow and metal sculptures, she continued to make other, mostly smaller work in which hides stretched to translucency were wrapped around emotionally resonant found objects: boxing gloves, a doll, a plaster cast of her own teeth, the rim of a tractor tire.

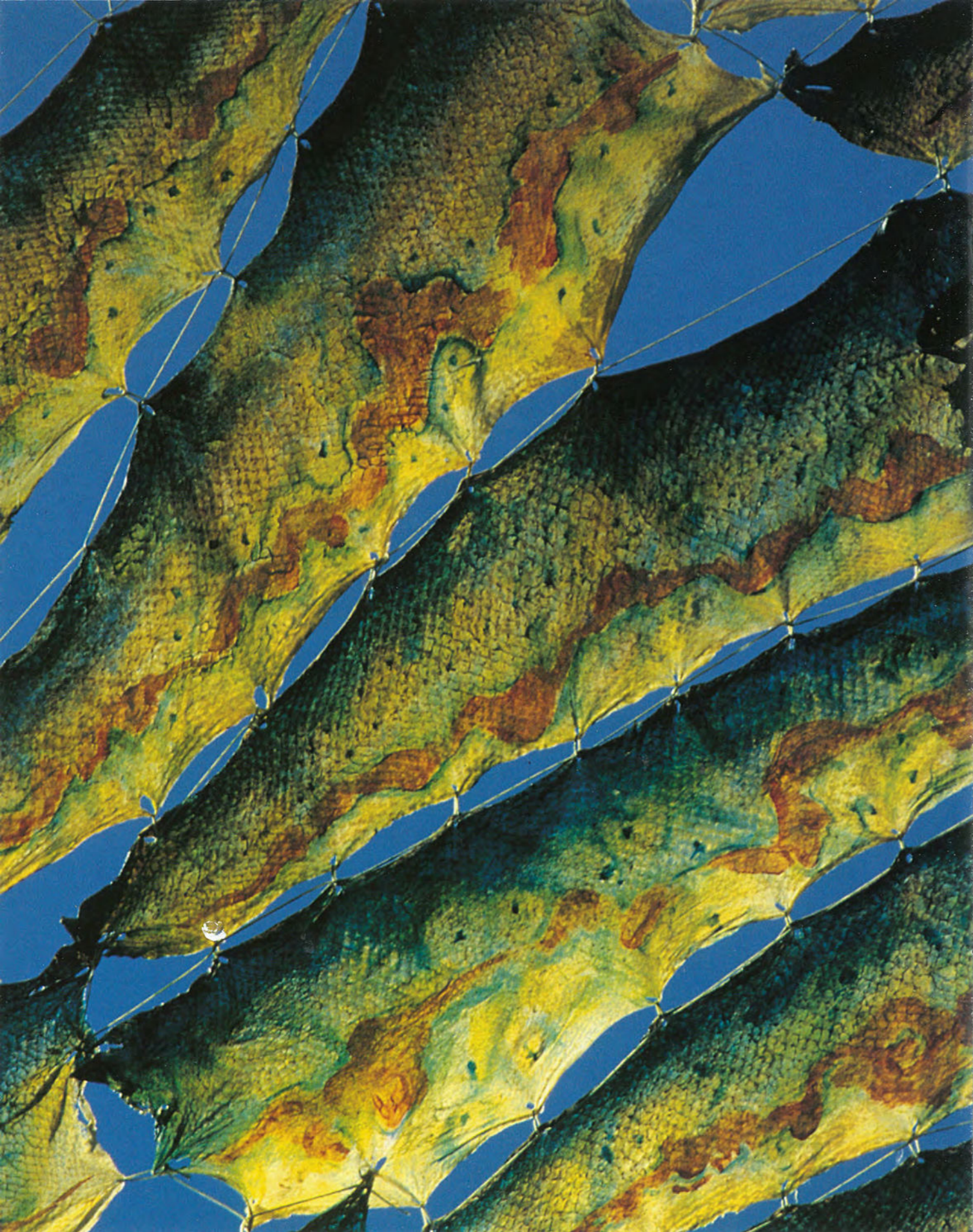
The relationship between skin and self-representation is an almost impossibly rich subject. It includes, to put it in the most general terms, the metonymy between skin and the surfaces of pictorial art; skin as metaphorical mediation between inside and out, the exposed and the concealed; and skin as the body's shield and its biggest sensory organ, tough, resilient, waterproof, stain resistant, and—shedding cells at the rate of a million an hour—dizzily unstable. In a catalogue essay for a 1996 Aldrich Museum exhibition called *In the Flesh*, in which Hepper's work was included, curator Jill

TORSO, 2000, 12" X 12" X 5"









Snyder referred to the skins Hepper was using as scarred by both physical and psychic memories, and then cited Freud on the reciprocity of the two: "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface."² As Hepper's work suggests, defining a body's physical exterior as distinct from its emotional animus means misreading the identity of each.

Some of Hepper's earliest sculptures made of skin stressed its identity with a living body, and also the history of animal hides' uses, as drumhead and painting surface, shelter and clothing, resonant, protective, and durable. But her recent return to aquatic life reflects interest in a different set of associations: flexibility, porosity, change. Water, too has a skin, a surface tension that can be measured though its molecular structure is consistent from top to bottom. It's an edge susceptible to blurring beyond visibility through evaporation, and to solidification and expansion by frost. The way Hepper uses fish skin is tied to these conditions of water, and to the adaptability of the organisms it shapes. "The third commonness with light and air," Wallace Stevens called the tumbling waters of a New England river, and described the steady energy with which it consolidated the town's landscape as "A curriculum, a vigor, a local abstraction."³ In so doing he named the daily flux of the natural world, overwhelmingly energetic and so ordinary it's nearly invisible, that is a critical impulse for Hepper's work.

Another, by her own account, is painting that reflects it, as does Jackson Pollock's. Remarking, during her discussion with Molissa Fenley, on Pollock's "depth and strength," Hepper hinted at connections between her work and his: a critical if implicit third dimension their work shares, a tensile linear strength. Just as impor-

ISLAND, 2000, 24' x 7½" (overleaf and left, detail)



INSIDE OUT, 2000, 8½" x 9" x 9"
right: TOPOGRAPHIC SOLUTION, 1999, 80" x 54"





Carol Hepper

Lives and works in New York City and upstate New York.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1953 Born, McLaughlin, South Dakota
1972 Receives a BS. Degree, South Dakota State University, Brookings.
1980-82 Teaches drawing at the Standing Rock Sioux Indian Community College, Fort Yates, North Dakota.
1982 Receives the Betty Brazin Memorial Grant, Tarrytown, NY and an Individual Artists Grant, from the South Dakota Arts Council.
1984 Receives a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant, New York, NY, and spends a semester in New York teaching drawing at the School of Visual Arts.
1985 Awarded a second Individual Artists Grant, from the South Dakota Arts Council. Received the South Dakota Governors Award for Creative Achievement in the Arts. Moves to New York City. While living in New York, her South Dakota studio is destroyed by fire.
1986 Awarded a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, New York, a Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation Grant, New York, and an Edward F. Albee Foundation, Residency Fellowship, Montauk, NY (receives a second Albee fellowship in 1990).
1987 Awarded a Macdowell Colony Residency Fellowship, Peterborough, NH. (also 1989 & 1990).
1988 Receives a Djerassi Foundation Residency Fellowship, Woodside, CA. Appointed Visiting Faculty in sculpture, spring term, at Maryland Art Institute, Baltimore.
1989 Appointed visiting faculty, sculpture at Princeton University, NJ, fall term, and visiting faculty, sculpture at State University New York, Purchase, spring term. Receives Foundation for the Arts Grant in Sculpture, New York, NY.
1990 Awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Grant in Sculpture.
1992 Yaddo Residency Fellowship, Saratoga Springs, NY.
1993 Lives in Europe for two months as artist-in-residence, Atelier 11, Triesen, Liechtenstein.
1996 Invited to be the first artist-in-residence at the newly formed Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, Portland, Oregon.

- 1998 Is the Van Zante visiting professor in Visual Arts at South Dakota State University, Brookings. Establishes home and studio in upstate New York.
1999 Appointed visiting lecturer in visual and environmental studies, Harvard University, fall term.
2000 Spends the summer as Artist-in-Residence, Dartmouth College Studio Art Exhibition Program, Hanover, NH.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2000 Frederieke Taylor/TZ'Art, Strange Island, New York City
1999 Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, Oregon
1998 Soma Gallery, LaJolla, California
1995 Orlando Museum of Art, Skin/Deep, Orlando, Florida (brochure with essay by Sue Scott)
Mississippi Museum of Art, Works in Progress, Jackson, Mississippi
1994 Michael Lord Gallery, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1993 Galerie Waltraud Matt, Eschen, Liechtenstein
Hill Gallery, Birmingham, Michigan
1992 Worcester Art Museum, Insights:
Carol Hepper, Worcester, Massachusetts (brochure with essay by Donna Harkavy)
1991 Rosa Esman Gallery, New York (catalogue with essay by John Howell)
1989 Rosa Esman Gallery, New York
Vaughan + Vaughan Gallery, Minneapolis, Minnesota
1988 Rosa Esman Gallery, New York
Hill Gallery, Birmingham, Michigan
1982 P.S.1, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, New York City (catalogue)

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

American Telephone & Telegraph, New York; Aterrana Foundation, Vaduz, Liechtenstein; Champion Paper, Stamford, Connecticut; Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis, Missouri; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; New School for Social Research, New York; New York Public Library; Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey; Orlando Museum of Art, Florida; Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona; Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon; Ringling School of Art & Design, Sarasota, Florida; South Dakota Art Museum, Brookings, South Dakota; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota