

Seattle artist Gail Grinnell has gained her share of attention over the past several years with thoughtful fabric-based installations and striking wall hangings at prominent venues throughout the Northwest. *angle of repose*, a site-specific project for the Boise Art Museum's high-ceilinged, expansive Sculpture Court, enabled her to create her largest work to date, spanning the entire 80-foot-long space. With assistance from her artist son, Sam Wildman, Grinnell fabricated an expansive, lightweight, yet imposing structure made from 600 yards of translucent seamstress interfacing held together by crochet pins.

Though the work appears fragile, these ribbons of treated, spun-bound fabric are, in fact, resilient. Dyes made from tea, coffee, and India ink produce an understated palette of browns, grays, and black, interwoven with accents of acrylic pastels and white. The climbing cornucopia-like form soaring from ground level to the high, far corner of the space accomplishes its state of repose through a combination of balance and gravity. The result is a poetic stillness that, when stirred by a light breeze, evokes a softly breathing cocoon poised for transformation.

It is readily apparent that drawing is at the core of Grinnell's aesthetic. A skilled, delicate draftsmanship informs *angle of repose*, with the black and white contour lines of the interfacing providing the technical underpinning of the three-dimensional composition.



Gail Grinnell (detail and right), *angle of repose* 2014.
Acrylic-treated spun polyester, ink, and natural dyes, 22 × 55 × 37 ft. Photo: Mark Woods.

Grinnell states that "it is the tension between the past and present that drives the final form of this installation." Metaphorically, her imagery is grounded in familial and personal experience, inspired by nature, a rural work ethic, and the craft of garment and pattern work instilled under the tutelage of her mother. A homespun aesthetic is reflected not only in Grinnell's materials and attention to detail, but also in her deferential deconstruction of the sewing process. And the entwined, botanically profuse composition harks back to an earlier era when textile art and floral design were in their heyday.

Yet present-day issues and methods also come into play. On close examination, this arboreal symbol of harvest and plenty is contradicted by other, less promising prospects. Scattered depictions of human bones, painted in sun-bleached white, imply disaster. And while the installation's inviting, ground-level front end beckons, up in the narrow interior reaches, the dramatically darker palette suggests a troubling turn.

In terms of technique, Grinnell reveals herself to be a soul mate of the late post-minimal artist Eva Hesse. Sharing a freeform visual vocabulary and an intuitive, introspective approach to process, the works of both artists rely on the fluid, asymmetrical, disparate shapes found in nature to suggest a transitory reality. More broadly, Grinnell's work conveys a different sort of feminism, injecting a refreshing tradition-based, non-ideological side of female identity into our cultural consciousness.

—Chris Schnoor