

Interview with Suzan Friedland

by Jane Reichhold

JR: You are having an exhibit, "Uplift and Erosion: A Collection of Like Things", in April with Kim Shuck and Joost Romeu in the Coleman Auditorium. Can you tell us how this came about and what your purpose is for this show?

SF: Ever since Kim and I were grad students we'd planned on doing a show together at some point, but we'd lost contact with each other. When I saw that she was invited to read her poetry at CityArts in Point Arena I took the opportunity to reconnect with her. In a discussion of the processes that led to the incredible terrain of this area a great opportunity presented itself to finally collaborate. Joost was there that night as well and liked the premise. After the three of us brainstormed for a week or two we came up with what we considered a good foundation for a show. Based on the fact that all of our work is heavily influenced by the observation of natural processes and that impermanence plays a large role as well, using evolution as manifested in the geology of the coast seemed to provide a nice springboard. As clichéd as it may sound, the geological instability of the area is mirrored in the art, and we wanted to emphasize that. Uplift as the act of creation (creating mountains) is balanced by erosion as the agent of impermanence, and our work attempts to reflect that balance. We decided that the common thread would be the materials we used (i.e. the "like things") and that we would go off and work on our own and then create the mélange that constitutes the show later.

JR: How did you get interested in art?

SF: In the early 60's my mom took me to the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco for children's art classes and I was taken with finger painting. I remember walking around the museum after class and being mesmerized by the energy of the large canvases. She noticed my inclinations and really supported me and let them flourish. That may have been the most important contribution to my development as an artist. My career was set by the age of seven. But I took a rather tortured path to get to my current situation of spending a majority of time doing art, though whatever I did always involved manipulation of light and texture.

JR: Here is your chance to share your philosophy of art and its meaning in and on your life.

SF: I don't mean to be trite, but my philosophy of art is pretty simple and personal. Respond to the impulse as attentively as possible or suffer the consequences. I'm pretty eclectic and like many artists it's pretty edgy trying to figure out the direction of my next work, but if I'm paying attention something usually presents itself. It's taken me a while but I've come to accept that state as critical to my functioning as an artist. Studying Buddhism really helped provide a context for an explanation of my focus. Also, as mentioned above, reacting to natural phenomena plays a large role in my work. I mean natural

phenomena both as experienced and as conceptualized by artists and scientists. The tension between those provides a lot of inspiration for me.

JR: Your work is using the materials, and many of the methods of quilting yet, you are on a very different path. Would you care to give a definition of art or describe the line, if there is one, between craft and art?

SF: I wouldn't say that craft and art are completely independent but are definitely different sides of a coin and either can serve

the other. It's hard in our culture because people seem to feel the need to value one over the other and hence there's a lot of confusion about the distinction. For me the textural quality of quilts (in whatever combination of art and craft) is irresistible and I was naturally drawn to quilting. But it didn't take long for me to realize that I needed other materials to express what was coming up for me. The fabric became less the ground, as in quilting, than another

piece of the textured realities I was drawn to create. Seen in context the path that I've taken was a pretty natural progression from quilting to a more expressive textural palate that allowed me to explore the issues that become important. There is continuity through quilting, as a craft, to my use of adobe and other materials, which is very important. But when that craft results in my being to able to respond well to an impulse it feels like something I'd call art.

JR: You are relatively new to this area, so do you have any thoughts you would like to share about your perception of the local art scene and the ones you are used to? Any advice or observations?

SF: Being a relatively small community with such a large proportion of artists, on balance seems like a great thing. Though there's always petty politics in any community, the artists in this area seem more able to interact on many different levels than in other places I've been. While obviously not a major urban art center, the level of artistic expression constantly amazes me. Combined with the pace, light and incredible geology, fauna, and flora this is a great place to do art and interact with other artists. Advice, observations - breathe.

JR: How do you perceive living in this area will change your art?

SF: Directions are difficult to determine, but not knowing can be a blessing for an artist. I always liked the way Zen master Seung Sahn put it "Only don't know".

