



Brenda Garand



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NORTHERN ROUTES

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Jaffe-Friede and Strauss Galleries · Hopkins Center for the Arts · Dartmouth College

For Lawrence Fane, my mentor and friend. —BG

A World About: Brenda Garand's Recent Sculptures and Drawings

By Ronny Cohen

From the mid-1980s, when she began exhibiting in New York, Brenda Garand has continued investigating the language of abstraction and its potentials for meaning. Now spanning three decades, her art is distinguished by a decided emphasis on visual values that has grown even more intense and compelling in the wall sculptures and gouache and ink drawings produced since 2001. The strong visual aspects of her work are the product of a creative process at the crux of which is a passion for engagement with real-world subjects. The subjects that move her are invariably those carrying deep resonances. They come from the personal sphere encompassing autobiography, family traditions, and heritage. Key to her aesthetic and underscoring her approach is a need and desire to search out and express connections, dualities, and contrasts. Her awareness of these important factors in her work starts quite early.

It appears from the following incident that as a small child, she was already regarding the world in an aesthetic

manner. Next to the small family farm she was raised on in Hancock, New Hampshire, was a neighbor's field, with huge boulders. Garand was fascinated, and she never got enough of peering at the boulders and the field from different angles. She has strong memories of looking at the giant forms and the landscape surrounding them and of how conscious she was at the time of what she was doing—that she was seeing. Another feature she explored was a tiny triangular space between the boulders large enough only to fit a very small child. Garand has recalled that she would crawl into and stay in that space for long periods. In looking back at her actions, she has recently remarked that they revealed to her how innate her long-term interests in place and space and in the idea of containers are.

Other connections stem from her childhood. From the time she was old enough to contribute, the multiple farm chores she did, the family and New England traditions she participated in or witnessed, the tasks she



QUIETLY CONTAINED, 2005
Steel, fur
9 x 8 x 8 inches

FLUENT INTRUSION, 2003
Steel, fabric
16 x 6 x 2 inches



Fig. 1. Brenda Garand and White Faced Hereford, circa 1967

performed on building sites for her father, who was a shepherd and a contractor—these were the sorts of activities that can be seen as having put her on a close footing with *things* [fig. 1]. For her profession as a sculptor, the ramifications of her firsthand and hands-on encounters with a wide swath of natural and man-made things have been salient indeed.

It appears the distance between doing things for work and family and making things for one's pleasure was a short one. Some of her earliest sculptures were done using a ubiquitous material around the farm—wire. From the long list of things she could do—fixing fences, sewing sacks, building crates, mending roofs, pouring cement, to cite a sampling—she knew she could learn the techniques that would be required of her in art school, and so in 1977, at age seventeen, she enrolled in the BFA program at the University of New Hampshire, where she elected to specialize in sculpture.

The skills she brought over to the field of sculpture have given her wide latitude in the materials and techniques she can use. As for what she chooses to use, she follows her preferences for contrasts, another carryover from her childhood. Among the most intriguing have always been contrasts of hard and soft [fig. 2]. According to Garand, the subjects of her first wire sculptures were turtles—creatures with shells that are hard on the outside and bodies that are soft on the inside. Something soft within something hard, she has noted, can describe the little girl between the boulders and helps explain to her why that situation attracted her as young child. She began exploring contrasts of hard and soft in a group of large sculptures combining steel and fabric, done during graduate school. After she obtained her BFA in 1981,



Garand went to graduate school at Queens College of the City University of New York, where she received her MFA degree in 1983. In the early 1980s, she established her studio in New York and, starting in 1995, set up her studios in New Hampshire and Vermont when she began teaching at Dartmouth College.

Steel and fabric appear together in a number of sculptures done throughout the years. Garand's latest considerations of the formal and thematic implications this important juxtaposition of materials carries can be found among her recent wall sculptures. What led her to a combination like steel and fabric and, more importantly even, to remain with it, digging ever deeper into the combination and letting the significance she finds in it unfold during years of investigation, I believe has to do with the strong contrasts the pairing offers. They speak to a core sensibility of hers, one that is a fundamental part of her artistic temperament: her keen sensitivity to and appreciation for "thingness."

Perhaps it was innate, and the experiences of her childhood and teenage years touched on above brought it forward. Where exactly someone's creative inclinations come from can be argued endlessly. But I do believe her inner sense of "thingness" dovetailed with some of minimalism's basic tenets, which was propitious for someone studying during the late 1970s and early 1980s, as Garand was, given how minimalism and postminimalism took up a lot of the conversation in the art discourse—especially that on abstraction—being expounded then. Filled with dictums and rules, that discourse was extremely exciting and inspiring, but with its authoritative voice it could sound a bit intimidating and stifling at times. For young artists starting careers in New York in the early

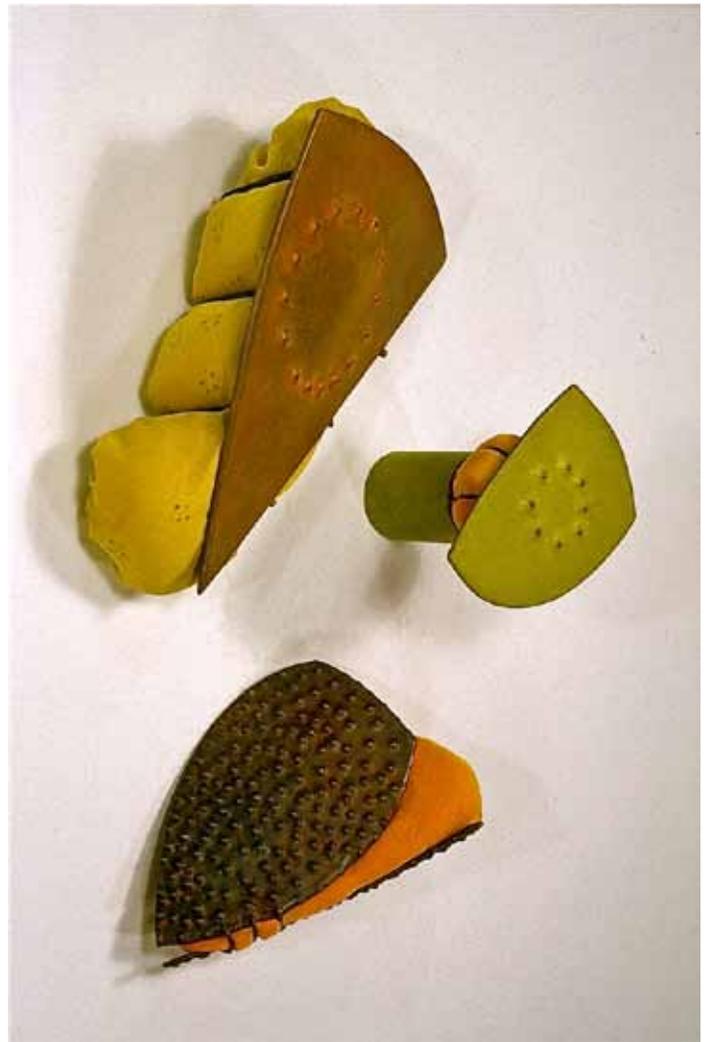


Fig. 2
FOR MEGURO: BOOTY
 2001
 Steel, lead, fabric, wire
 14 x 8 x 14 inches



AN EYE FOR AN EYE, 2002
 Steel, fabric
 13 x 7 x 3 feet

CRADLED INTENSION, 2003
 Steel, lead, fabric, wire
 14 x 9 x 3 inches

GROS MORNE, 2005
 Steel, fabric
 9 x 12 x 2 inches

SEQUESTERED INSOUCIANCE, 2006
 Steel, fur, fabric
 6 x 13 x 3 inches

BATTEN DOWN, 2003
 Steel, lead, wire, fabric
 30 x 12 x 4 inches

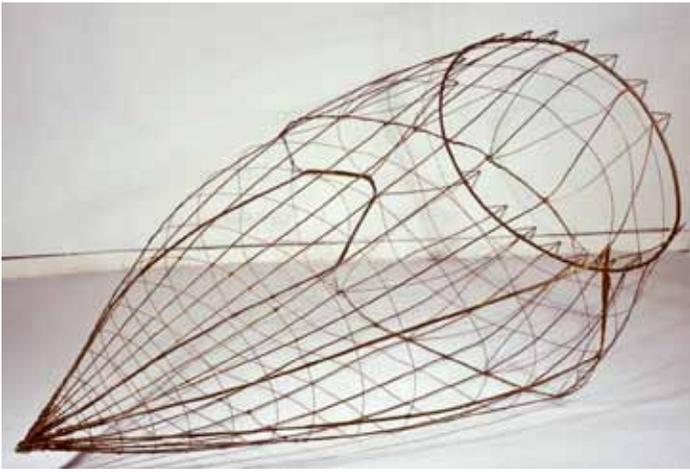


Fig. 3.
THE MARTYR CATCHER
 1991
 Copper wire
 29 x 69 x 43 inches



Fig. 4.
GRAMPA
 1986
 Handkerchief, patined plaster, wire
 8 x 11 x 12 inches

1980s, reevaluating what they had been taught to do and not to do in graduate school was instrumental in finding one's way. Garand's selection of the object as the form for her sculpture certainly fitted within the scope of both her own interests in "thingness" and minimalism's exaltation of "objecthood."

Where she departs from minimalism and takes abstraction over onto her own road is from minimalism's exhortation of sculpture's freedom from representation. Garand shows that far from being a burden, representation can be a plus. That is when and if the concept of representation is put through the special processing screen of Garand's sensibility, especially the portion governed by her keen sensitivity to dualities. Dualities of the real and abstract, and, concomitantly, of place and space, and, I might add, of prose and poetry strongly underscore her vision and her handling of notions of representation. Garand can see this in that and that in this, extracting from the details of appearances their abstract essences. Instead of the word representation, "interpretation" seems a more correct one to use in discussing her approach and resulting expression. Using form, color, shape, surface, space, and dimension, the statement Garand offers is abstract; it is reductive. However, there is a quality of specificity about her abstract sculptural objects that makes her style of referencing a subject so intriguing and so much her own. Her subjects are ones she has deep personal connections to, and she has things to say about them.

Her interests in investigating her family tradition and heritage have comprised a main motivation driving the contents treated in her work. Garand is French Canadian, English, and Abenaki, an indigenous people



of Canada and of the northeastern states of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. In 1987 she visited a part of her heritage, France, on a Fulbright grant, and the research she did on medieval art found its way into her sculpture. *The Martyr Catcher* (1991) [fig. 3] is an example of how Garand will insinuate a historical reference into the reductive structure of her sculptural object. Here the linear patterns of the open-sided container-like wire structure are reminiscent of the elegant, arching, curving lines of Gothic decoration found in reliquaries and churches. An even earlier sculpture, *Grampa* (1986) [fig. 4] shows that her interest in abstracting subjects close to her was already present in the 1980s. The small plaster and wire sculpture is an abstracted portrayal of her grandfather, the handkerchief tucked into its surface a direct reference to how he wore one on his head while he worked.

In 1996, Garand returned to France on another grant, from the Marion and Jasper Whiting Foundation, to research the Bayeux Tapestry and Bayeux Cathedral. On that trip, she realized that there were connections between French medieval embroideries and the embroidered designs of mid-seventeenth-century Huron women in Québec. This was an exciting find, and it sparked her desire to seek out other cultural connections relating to her heritage. It set off a journey that is in progress still.

Beginning in 2003, Garand has been making trips to Québec, conducting what she terms “visual research” of the traditions and customs of the towns and villages along the St. Lawrence River [figs. 5a–b]. The big picture of the lives and history of the region is evoked in examples like *Saint-Laurent* (2009) [page 24], *Kamouraska* (2008) [page 30], and *Chicoutimi* (2007) [page 31]. The



Fig. 5a. Percé Rock



Fig. 5b. Eel Traps, Kamouraska



REGAINED COMPOSURE, 2004
Steel, lead, wire, faux fur
25 x 12 x 3 inches

VOYAGE, 2007
Steel, roofing paper, fur
11 x 5 x 3 inches

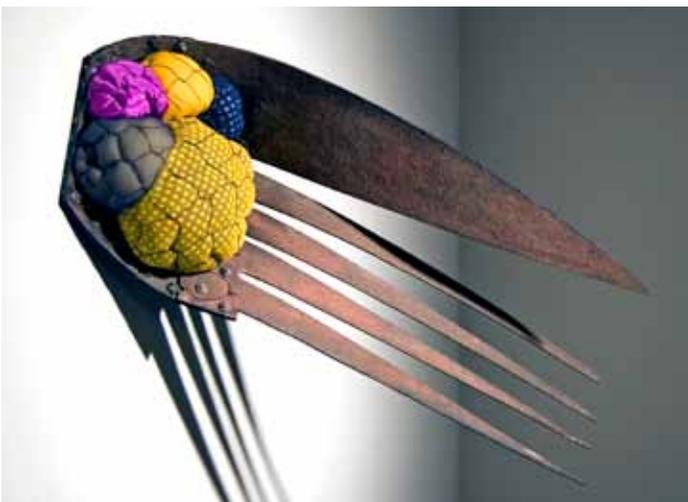
CRÉPUSCULE, 2003
Steel, lead, fabric, wire
7 x 13 x 4 inches

SHE ALWAYS RETAINED HER SENSE OF HUMOR, 2004
Steel, fabric, fur
3 x 6 x 3 feet

TROIS-RIVIÈRES, 2003
Steel, fur, fabric
9 x 6 x 3 feet

exciting sweep and movement we find in these large and dynamic three-dimensional open structures embody the flowing course of the river and activities important to the lives of the communities occurring there. In *Saint-Laurent*, the energies and tensions of the linear composition directed out, across, and down suggest the casting of fishing lines. Extending almost three feet off the wall, the buoyant *Kamouraska* gives the impression that the fish have just been biting and been landed—though in the case of the sinewy elongated throngs gathered at the front of the composition, the impression is of eels. The entrapping shapes within shapes in *Chicoutimi* suggest net fishing. Garand's new approach to steel and fabric is shown in all three. It was while doing a group of gouache and ink drawings, the *Pouch Cove Series* (2004) [page 12], during a residency in Newfoundland that the idea came to her that by combining steel and fabric, she could get a new range of effects similar to wet-on-wet on paper. Wrapping fabric—in the guise of threads—around steel, she has invented a new material, one that is hard on the inside and soft on the outside. Its warmth and color and lively surfaces add nuance to the sculptures. By varying the type, color, and thickness of the threads and the tightness or looseness of the wrapping, she can be very specific about the impression she wishes to convey with this material.

A number of the titles are specific in their references to places she has visited in Québec. Eel fishing is done in the village of Kamouraska. Basketmaking is one of the traditional activities in the Abenaki town referenced in *Odanak* (2007) [page 20]. Saguenay is the name of a river, a city, and a region. The bold structure of the open three-dimensional steel frame in *Saguenay* (2009) [page 13] is



a summary of the beauty and invention of traditional designs of baskets, drying walls, and holding bins used in fishing. *Tadoussac* (2005) [page 16], the name of one of the major seventeenth-century fur-trading posts on the St. Lawrence, examines the subject of trapping. With it, Garand offers an uncompromising statement equating the condition of being trapped with that of containment.

Her long-term interests in nature are explored in examples like *Contoocook* (2009) [page 25] and *Mégantique* (2009) [page 19]. Mazes of twisting colorful shapes alternately bringing to mind leaves, birds, and fish, the tall vertical assemblages have a delicacy and a wonderful air of dreamy etherealness about them. It is almost hard to believe that these shapes were made by Garand from roofing papers.

Her ability to reinvent the things she knew and worked with on the farm is shown in how she uses pitchforks in the installation of the wall sculptures. As the artist herself has noted, “a drywall screw” would not work. The size and three-dimensionality of the sculptures required a special support in order to be installed on the wall. The slant of the prongs made the pitchfork ideal for the job. Garand forges her own steel pitchforks. Each is customized for the sculpture it supports. But no surprise here: taking things to new levels is Garand’s aesthetic stock in trade.

Ronny Cohen is an art critic, independent art curator, and art historian living in New York City. A widely published author who has written over 100 art catalogues, she has written on contemporary and 20th century art in numerous leading publications, including *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *Artnews*, and the *Print Collectors Newsletter*.



HAND TO MOUTH, 2005
Roofing paper, fabric, wire
16 x 9 x 16 inches

TUNNEL, 2007
Steel, fur
5 x 11 x 5 inches

TUNNELS, 2007
Steel, roofing paper, fur, fabric, wire



I TRAPPER

2007

Steel, rabbit fur from
Wendake, wool from the
Johnson Woolen Mills,
Johnson, VT

48 x 30 x 6 inches



2 **CACOUNA**
2009
Steel, wire, wool,
porcupine quills
98 x 9 x 10 inches





3 **POUCH COVE SERIES**
2004–08
Gouache and ink
17 x 16 inches each





4 **SAGUENAY**
2009
Steel, wire, roofing
paper
62 x 64 x 14 inches

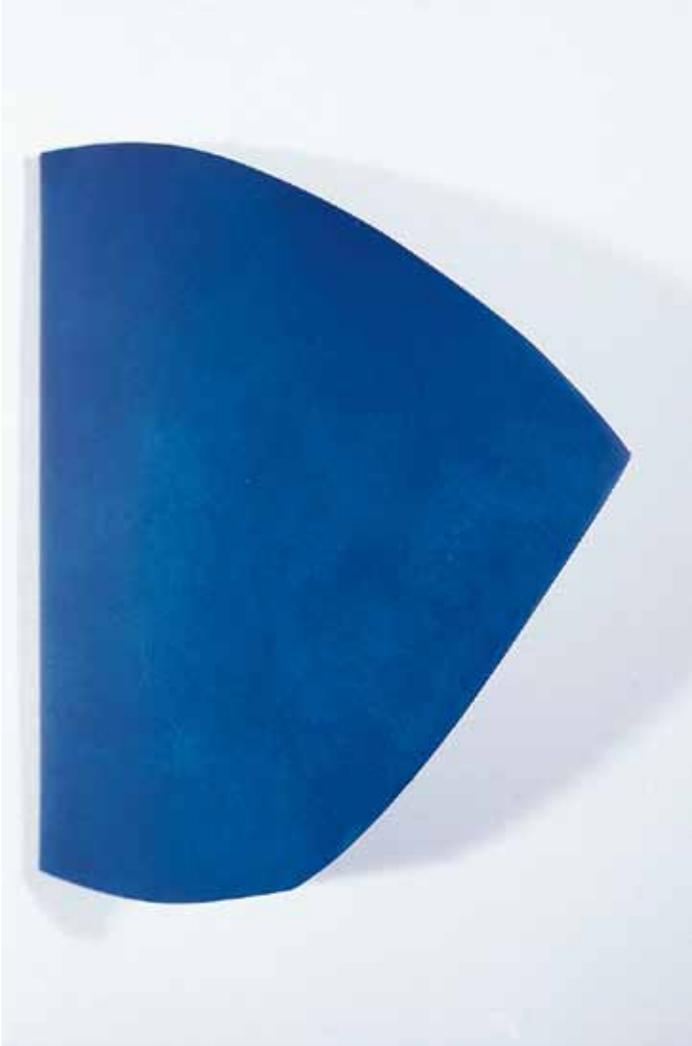




5 **PIQUANT**
2006
Steel, fabric
5 x 13 x 3 inches



6 **SHEPHERD'S GOLD**
2003
Wire, wool
11 x 8 x 15 inches



7 **TADOUSSAC**
2005
Steel, fur
15 x 6 x 13 inches



8 **WHAT REMAINS**
2002
Roofing paper, wire, faux
fur
10 x 7 x 20 inches





9 **SPRITES**
2005–08
Steel wire, fabric, fur



10 MÉGANTIC
2009
Steel, wire, roofing paper,
lead
102 x 16 x 24 inches





II ODANAK
2007
Steel, wire, fabric
60 x 45 x 22 inches





12 SKATUTAKEE

2009

Steel, wire, catkins, fabric,
lead

88 x 19 x 24 inches



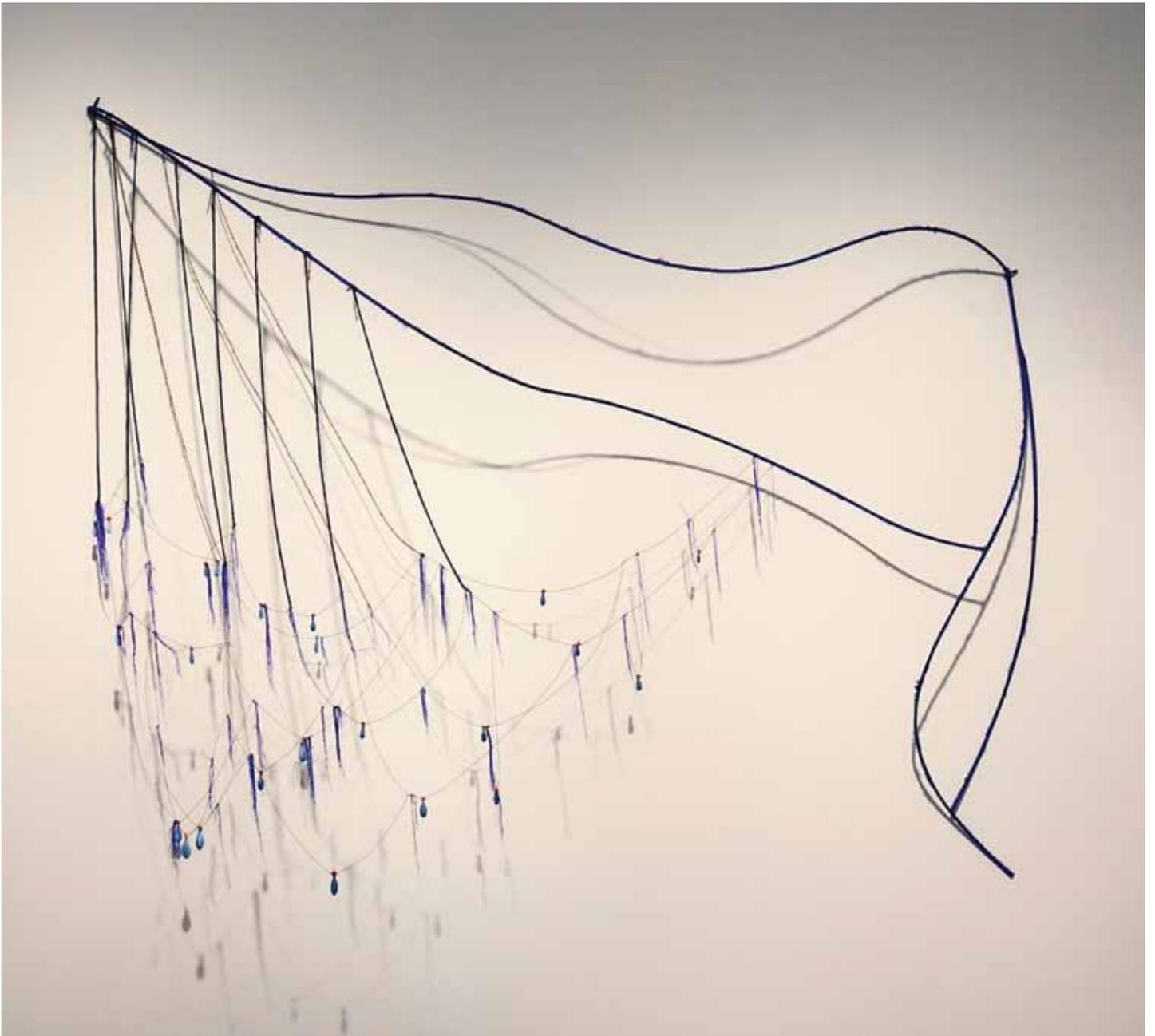


13 **OGUNQUIT**
2009
Steel, wire, roofing paper
27 x 16 x 19 inches





I4 JE ME SOUVIENS
2008
Steel, wire, fabric, leather
7 x 9 x 8 feet

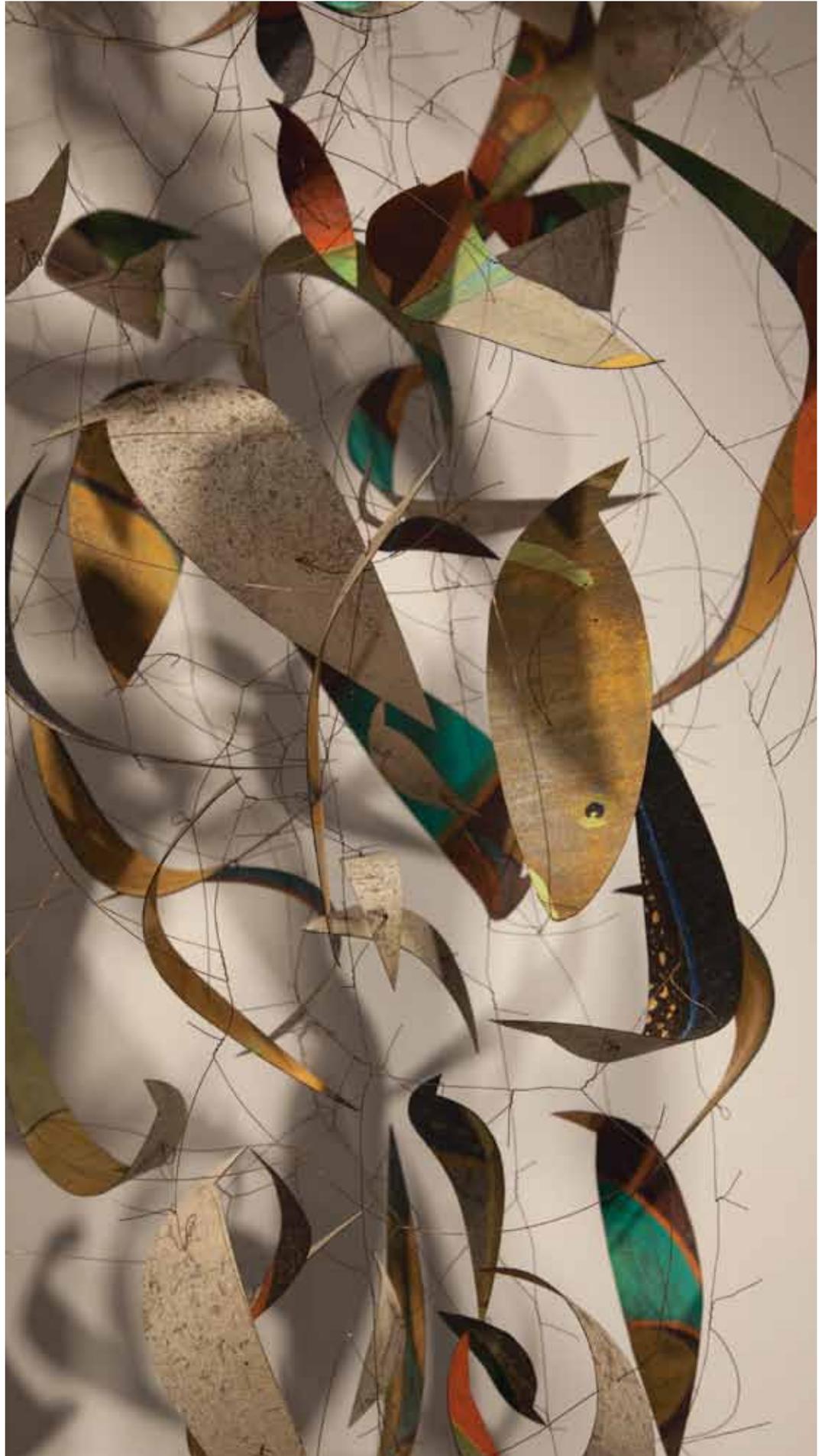


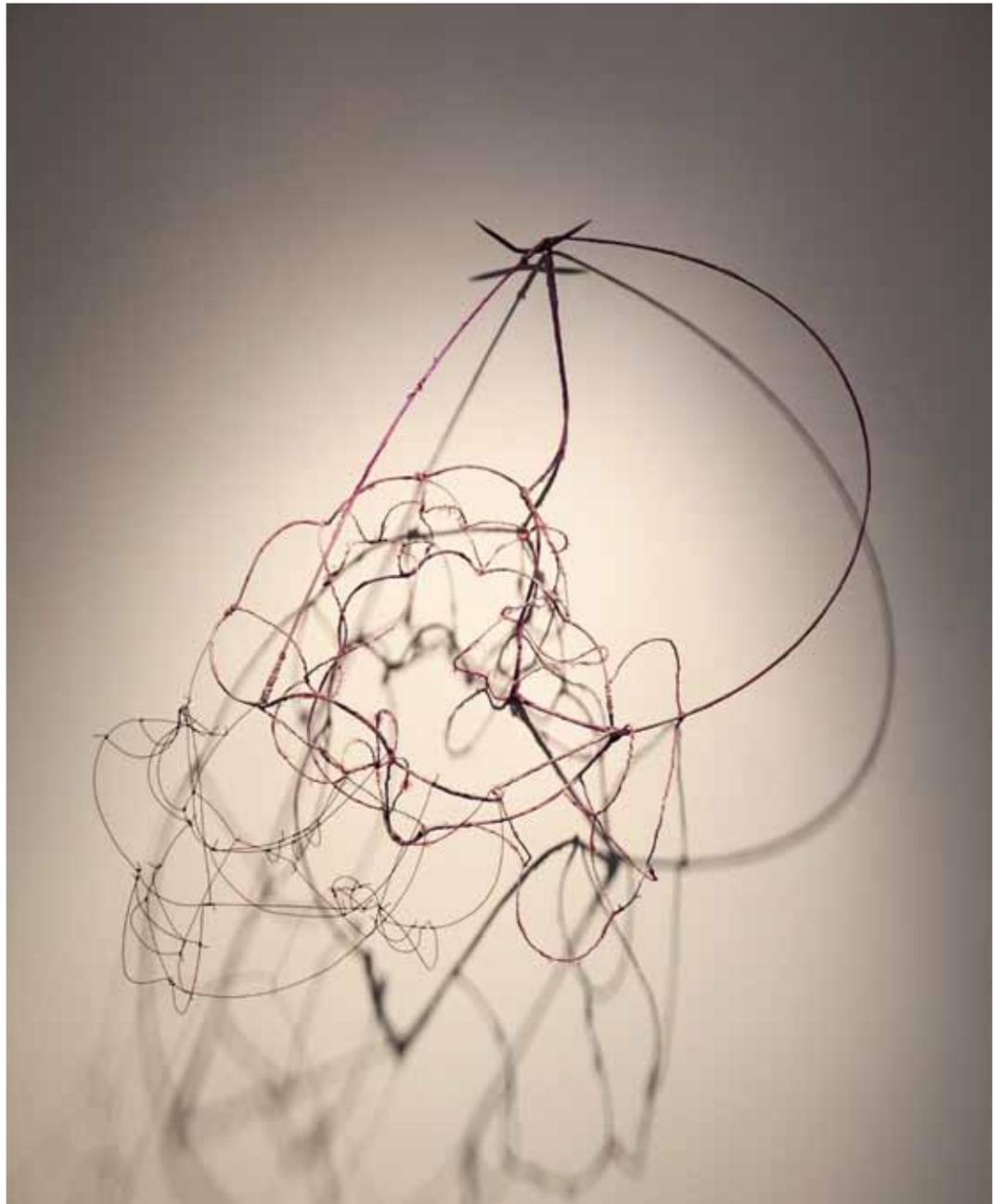
15 **SAINT-LAURENT**
2009
Steel, wool, silk, lead
79 x 92 x 24 inches





16 **CONTOOCOOK**
2009
Steel, wire, roofing paper,
lead
101 x 20 x 25 inches



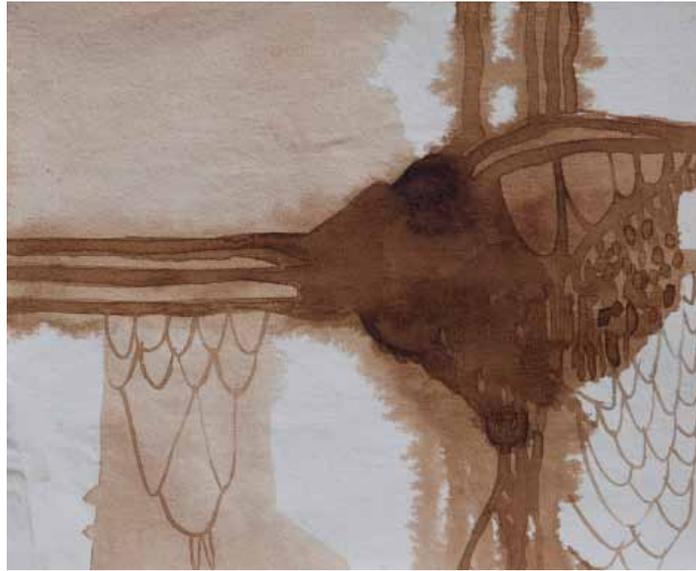


17 **PASPÉBIAC**
2007
Steel, wire, fabric
40 x 36 x 17 inches





18 CAUGHT BETWEEN THE
TRACKS AND THE ROAD
2005
Steel, fabric, fur, wool, wire
9 x 5 x 4 feet



19 WALNUT INK AND
CHARCOAL DRAWINGS
2008
20 x 20 inches each



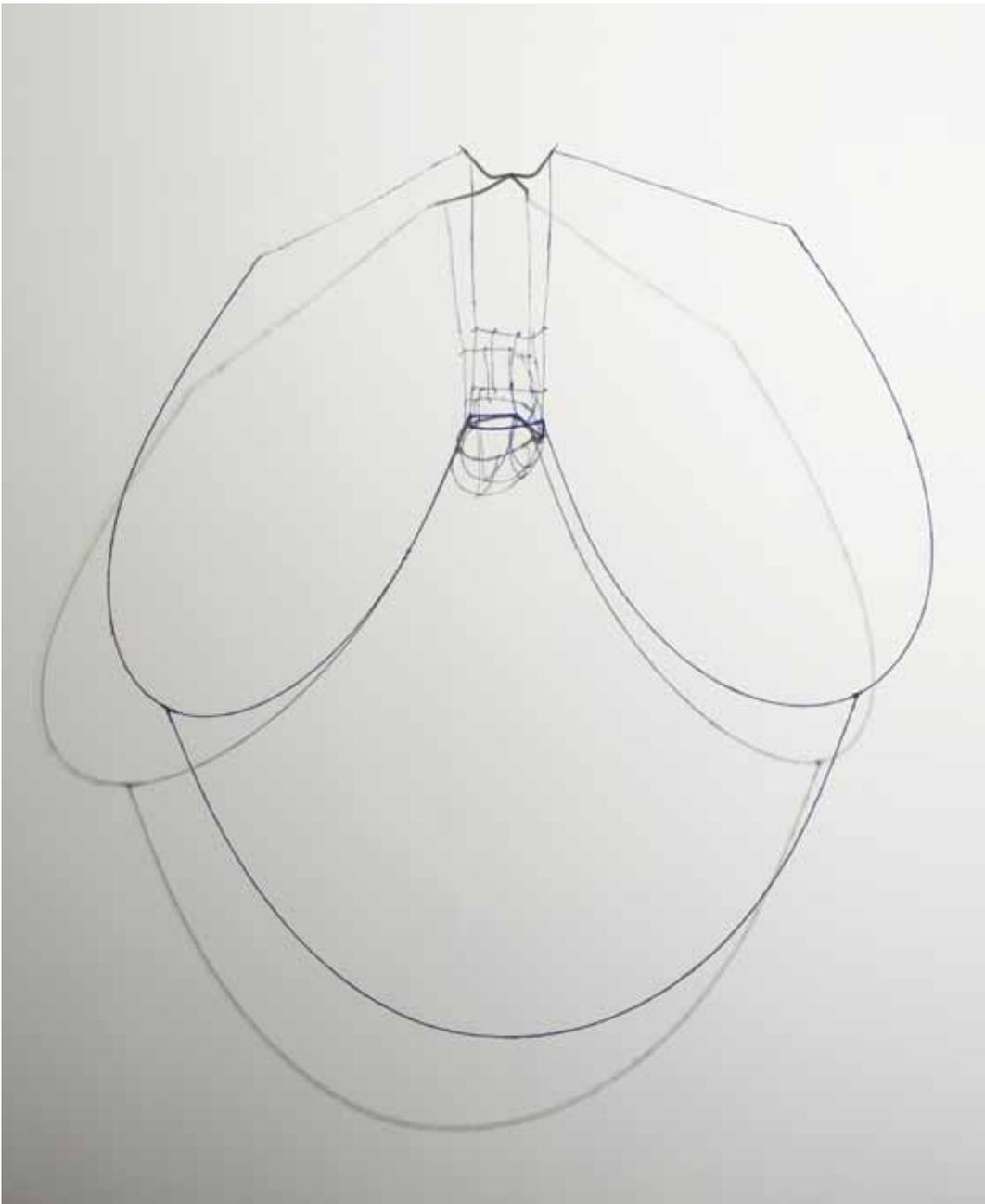
**20 DIGGING CLAMS TO
FEED CRABS IS LIKE
SERVING CAKE TO RATS
IN A PANTRY**
2007
Steel, rabbit fur from
Wendake, Québec
28 x 46 x 14 inches



21 KAMOURASKA
2008
Steel, roofing paper, wire,
wool
72 x 60 x 34 inches



22 MOOSE BROOK
2009
Steel, wire, roofing paper
98 x 9 x 11 inches



23 **CHICOUTIMI**
2007
Steel, wire, fabric
51 x 59 x 20 inches





Brenda Garand is a sculptor born in Peterborough, New Hampshire. She grew up in Hancock, NH, and has also lived in Paris and New York City. Garand received her MFA in Sculpture from Queens College, City University of New York and her BFA in Sculpture from the University of New Hampshire. Selected exhibitions include: National Academy Museum *183rd Annual: An Invitational Exhibition of Contemporary American Art* NYC; Reeves-Contemporary, NYC; Johnson State College, VT; BigTown Gallery, Rochester, VT; Wright State University Art Galleries *Brenda Garand "Northern Fiction" Sculpture*, Dayton, Ohio; Spheris Gallery, Hanover, NH; American Academy of Arts and Letters *Invitational Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture*, NYC; im n iL, Brooklyn, NY; Hampshire College, Amherst, MA; A.V.C. Contemporary Arts Gallery, The Fuller Building, 57th St. NYC; Atelier Silex, 3/4 Galerie, Trois-Rivières, Québec; 55 Mercer Gallery, NYC; The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA; Usine C, Montréal, Québec; and the Meguro Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan. Garand is the recipient of a Fulbright Grant to France; a Fulbright Berlin Seminar; The Marion and Jasper Whiting Foundation Grant to Bayeux, France; The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Research Grant; New Hampshire State Council on the Arts Individual Fellowship; Dartmouth College Senior Faculty Grant; Vermont Artist in Residence at The Carving Studio and Sculpture Center; and a Vermont Arts Council Individual Artist Grant. Residencies include Yaddo, Ragdale, Dorland Mountain Arts Colony, Atelier Silex in Québec, and the Pouch Cove Foundation in Newfoundland, Canada. Brenda Garand is a Professor of Studio Art at Dartmouth College. She has also taught at Queens College; City University of New York; the Chautauqua Art Institute; Parsons School of Design; and The New York Studio School. She has been a visiting artist at Princeton University; Colby College; the Vermont Studio Center; University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth; University of New Hampshire; University of North Alabama, Florence; Western Connecticut State University; and Roger Williams University. Brenda Garand lives and works in Vermont.

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—BG

Opposite (detail):
CHICOUTIMI, 2007
 Steel, wire, fabric
 51 x 59 x 20 inches

Front cover (detail):
ODANAK, 2007
 Steel, wire, fabric
 60 x 45 x 22 inches

Back cover (detail):
KAMOURASKA, 2008
 Steel, roofing paper, wire, wool
 72 x 60 x 34 inches

Studio Art Exhibition Program

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Gallery Hours

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

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