

Insider

GALLERIES | CATE MCQUAID

An artist's love letter to feminist forebears

When sculptor Tory Fair started researching "More than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the '70s," a 1996 exhibition organized by Susan L. Stoops at the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, it was like digging into her family tree.

Fair's work draws on abstraction and minimalism, throwing in a touch of representation, to evoke feminist themes: the blessings of the dark and unsung; the humble, often ignored ordinariness of inner life, domestic life, and the life of the earth. Like Mary Miss, Jackie Winsor, and Michelle Stuart, and other artists featured in "More than Minimal," Fair gently cracks open the human experience.

"Tory Fair: Portable Archive" at Drive-By Projects converses with Miss, best known as a public and environmental artist who crafts pieces that engage with society. Fair's titular piece takes off from Miss's "Portable Window" (1968), a plywood wheel with a rectangular hole in the middle. She could roll it around and use it to frame any landscape.

TORY FAIR: Portable Archive

At Drive-By Projects, 81 Spring St., Watertown, through Aug. 8. 617-835-8255, www.drivebyprojects.com

In Fair's version, the window inside the 7-foot wheel enables viewers to peer through time, not space. In the center, the artist has placed a photo of her own work, "Heap," a sarcophagal pile of cast objects from her life. Writing about that piece in 2015, Stoops drew on a Jackie Winsor quote: "... basically, you make things out of the structure of who you are."

Fair can swap out images. As with "Portable Window," there's a sense of a magic kaleidoscope on a human scale; spin it, and you don't know what you might see. Stones wrapped in rag paper demarcate the gallery's perimeter, suggesting a sacred site and nodding to both artists' concern with boundaries.

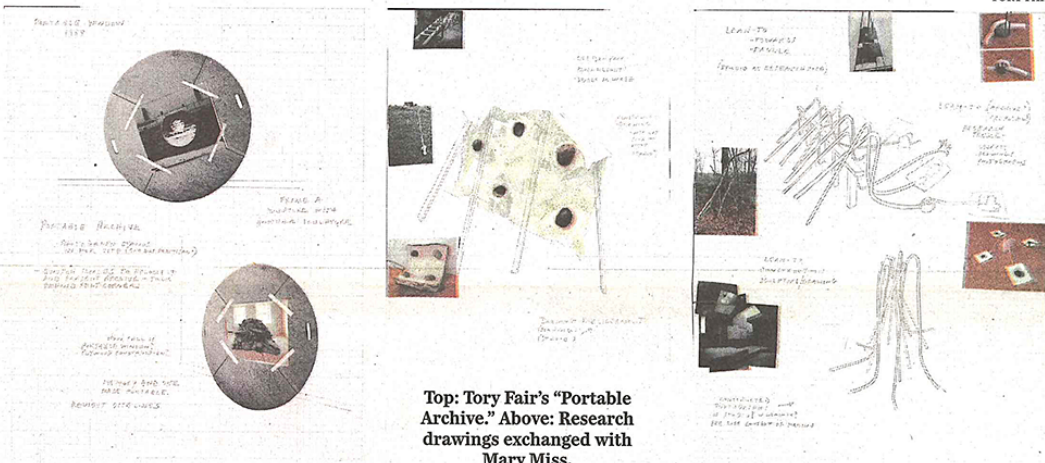
Drawings Fair sent to Miss also engage the older artist's work. She riffs on Miss's 1970 sculpture "Stake Fence." Miss's stakes splay open; Fair casts hers in rubber. They droop; the fence goes flaccid, as if its vigilance has been exhausting.

"More than Minimal" proposed that women artists infused minimalism's austerity with rich emotional content, making art that feels personal. Fair seizes on that. Her show is more than a tribute to conceptual forebears. It's a love letter to her grandmothers.

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TORY FAIR



Top: Tory Fair's "Portable Archive." Above: Research drawings exchanged with Mary Miss.