

## Veronica M. Fernandez

Southwest School of Art & Craft

Reviewed by John Ewing

What to put in? What to leave out? If artists were mathematicians, these questions would be the calculations that lead to a work of art. Finding balance might not require a formula per se, but getting the right answer is just as critical. Veronica Fernandez's painted wooden constructions make this affinity between art and mathematics apparent. Like theorems in a geometry proof, Fernandez lays down one set of claims, superimposes a contrary set, then manipulates the ungainly whole toward a visual resolution.

Consequently, her tense oppositions have taken numerous directions at once: pictorial realism vs. abstraction, symmetry vs. asymmetry, sculpture vs. painting, form vs. pattern. Some of the issues that occupied the short-lived *Supports/Surfaces* movement in French painting are also revived in Fernandez's constructions. However, the concerns of her art are not so much where paint meets edge but, rather, where the edges meet the eye—how the eye travels across the work of art, how it processes the information it gathers, and how it makes sense of the seemingly arbitrary obstacles encountered on the way.

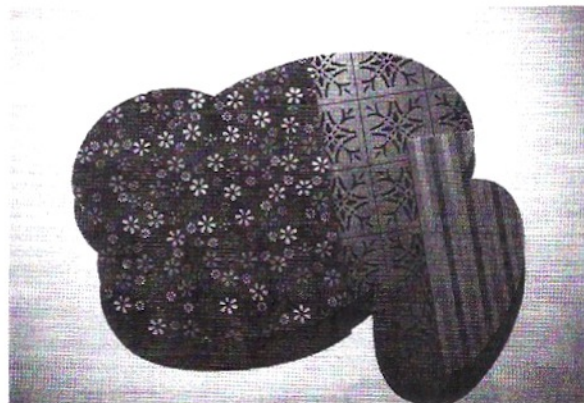
For Fernandez's recent exhibition of constructions and small works on paper at the Southwest School of Art & Craft in San Antonio, the Austin-based artist chose a pure shape, the ellipse, to carry the weight of her formal and conceptual investigations. Recalling Geometry 101, an ellipse is a flat, cross-section cut from a cone. The conic sliver may be a circle or an oval depending on the angle of the slice. In Fernandez's initial designs these flat, curvy shapes are stacked in irregular, overlapping clumps, obscuring part of each ellipse. The resulting knobby form is the foundation for an overlay of competing decorative patterns and surface treatments.

Each layer is placed in dynamic contrast to what is subsumed below. Much of the fun in viewing Fernandez's constructions comes in teasing apart their fundamental components, then putting the puzzle back together along the lines of the artist's guided patterns.

The exhibition's sixteen constructions are loosely grouped by their similar treatments. Some works are planed with grooves that lie counter to the elliptical tilt below. Each of these is painted an overall grayish blue, violet or brown, while the edges of the uneven surface are rubbed to reveal an orange, yellow or pink undercoat. These weathered surfaces are also pocked with a smattering of brightly painted holes, drilled through the constructions like gunshots in an old wooden fence.

In other works, the rounded form is broken up by rectangular passages that rise from or descend into the surface. These sections are stenciled with wallpaper-like patterns that compete with clashing colors and dissimilar decorative motifs (i.e. flowers vs. stripes). Historically, decorative patterns are useful not because they communicate meaningful content (though they clearly do, as in the case of Greek key and Celtic knot patterns) but because they order space in a regulated manner that is pleasing to the eye. Like a musical scale, the logic of decorative pattern is instantly understood.

Thus, Fernandez's patterns (which suggest Victorian wallpaper in several instances) have a familiar visual language that viewers are likely to "give their eye to" without critical pause. Pattern allows the viewer to take con-



Veronica Fernandez, *Elliptical # 12*, 2001  
Acrylic on Wood  
32 x 24 1/2"  
Courtesy of the artist

tent for granted as it forcefully directs the eye across the entire work. With enough core information, the viewer can even continue the design where it doesn't exist, as is the case where Fernandez's patterns fall off the edge of the work. To further complicate the equation, additional pieces separate areas of pattern with gently curving lines. These curves suggest still other ellipses, larger ones that neither correspond to the initial forms below nor entirely reveal themselves on the uppermost surface.

Fernandez's constructions demonstrate that the mere suggestion of a geometric form or pattern encourages the eye to complete the shape or design. This notion of a visual language derived from a set of unconscious "understoods" is the most intriguing aspect of Fernandez's work. Just as artists have an intuitive sense of what should go into a work of art, viewers may often know what they see before they see it.