

Nancy Winship Milliken Studio

Portfolio of Select Works





Defining her sculpture as “contemporary pastoralism,” Nancy Winship Milliken is inspired by our age-old relationship to nature as a way to consider ecological questions in the present. She creates environmental and site-specific sculptures in both urban and rural settings using natural materials like sheep’s wool or earth/clay from pasture fields surrounding the studio. Her design is based around the principle of keeping materials close to their original state with the goal of transforming the viewer, not the materials. The sculptures interact with the environment and are activated by ephemeral forces such as wind, rain, and sun, calling attention to the textures, odors, and movement of natural materials composed in formally simple structures. The work ultimately addresses complex issues involved in sustainable living. Much of the work is made in collaboration with farmers, artisans, poets and environmental studies interns from universities all over the nation. The studio culture creates the space and time for mentoring creative environmental leadership.

Winship Milliken earned an MFA from Massachusetts College of Art and Design in 2008. She has installed work in New England and New Zealand farmlands, and shown in solo and select group shows, including at Shelburne Museum, Vermont; deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Massachusetts; Boston Sculptors Gallery, Massachusetts; Minute Man National Historical Park, Massachusetts; Brattleboro Museum & Art Center, Vermont; Burlington City Arts, Vermont; Christian Science Plaza in Boston; Provincetown Art Association Museum, Massachusetts; Qorikancha Museum, Cusco, Peru.

Works



Varied and Alive



Wool, horsehair, driftwood, limestone, beewax, wood posts and steel cables, four 15x 17 ft structures, curated by Carolyn Bauer at Shelburne Museum, in collaboration with Eliot Hays Lothrop of Building Heritage, and Mike and Tawnya Kiernan of Bee The Change, 2021-22

Earth Glow

Winship Milliken's sculptures often derive from a series of thoughtful experiments with new materials and techniques, many times without a deliberate goal in mind.

Winship Milliken accumulated more than 600 pounds of beeswax to create *Earth Glow*. The beeswax glows and absorbs heat during warm, sun-soaked days and subtly undulates in the breeze on windy ones, reacting and adapting to its location. *Earth Glow* highlights the ecological and agricultural importance of bees and other pollinators and extends a visual reference to the sun's power and renewable energy.

Meadow Breath

Meadow Breath gives form to the invisible, as wind breathes new life into a woven net of local raw wool. Evocative of a flock of sheep grazing in a field, the wool in the sculpture moves by expanding and contracting with direction from the wind. Over time, *Meadow Breath* will change its form in response to the natural elements, from tonal shifts caused by the sunlight peeking through tufts of wool to textural evolutions from the felting action of rain and wind. Through its adaptation to place, *Meadow Breath* is a reminder of how humankind has influenced and forever altered our natural environment, from the changing climate to expanding urban development.



Lake Bones

The driftwood Winship Milliken gathered for *Lake Bones* was harvested along the shorelines of Lake Champlain and its tributary streams and rivers. After water, wind, and sun first shape and smooth the wood into abstracted forms, Winship Milliken returns the timber to the land and to its original, upright orientation. The artist honors this transformative process and the wood's new identity by applying a white limestone wash. Coated in this material commonly found in Shelburne VT, the irregularly shaped driftwood is unified through its new sheen and shared metamorphic journey.

Pasture Song

Pasture Song is a kinetic tapestry of horsehair, tied into thousands of cello bow hair bundles attached to netting. Energized by the sun and wind, the fibrous strands shimmer and stretch outward, extending their reach beyond the structural netting and wooden frame. Recalling a herd of horses or a flowing field of grass, *Pasture Song* celebrates nature's leading role and immense power as it influences the sculpture's varied tones, shapes, and movements.



Windscape



Raw wool, netting, Norway Maple, twenty five 10-40 ft sails, curated by Burlington City Arts at Shelburne Farms, 2014

Photo by Ian Ray of Airshark

This land-specific installation was created in collaboration with Shelburne Farms for Burlington City Arts' exhibition Of Land and Local. These meadow sail forms are made of raw wool sheared from sheep that graze the pastures of Shelburne and local farms. Measuring anywhere from ten to forty feet, they are supported by invasive species of trees culled from managed woodland of the farm. Unlike true masts, the twists and turns of the trees shift the woven netted forms of wool at every angle.

The three flocks of sails are grouped as a response to landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted's expansive plans for the layout of Shelburne Farms. When viewed from the north side of the field, the meadow sails line up and become one big flock sailing the field towards Lake Champlain.



Cairn



Reclaimed charred barn timbers. 23 x 26 x 14 ft beams, installed on studio property, 2021

Cairn is a monumental sculpture comprised of reclaimed timber salvaged from a historic dairy barn which tragically burned down at Shelburne Farms, in Shelburne, VT. This project was prepared in partnership with Building Heritage.

In the fall of 2020, Winship Milliken offered online mentoring with two environmental studies students from two different institutions. The three formed an online journal, or a dairy of conversation, located in their own spaces, and incorporated the context of what was happening in the world during the exponential daily changes in government, pandemic, society and environment.

The symbol and action of building a cairn as travelers add bits of stone or materials from the area to mark their passage, became synonymous with the journal, entry after entry. By summer 2021, the three were able to meet in person and actualize the sculpture they had conceptualized during journaling.



Limestone Field Series



Limestone, field grass and plants, 4 x 4 ft, 2021



Limestone, field grass and plants, 5 x 2.5 ft, 2021

To create this work, Winship Milliken picked plants from the fields surrounding the studio and cast them into limestone and sand, materials from our Vermont soils. This act of memorializing the fields (or even a season, if one could do that), of trying to keep the plant's natural form, then set the field on a pedestal (much like the horses and war heroes in most town and city centers), transforms our concept of memorial as human centric and emphasizes nature centric memorials

Even the resulting sculpture becomes a carbon sequestering monument, as limestone is part of the carbon cycle-in contrast to the environmentally detrimental hardscape of an urban center (cement and asphalt have a negative impact for the earth). The installation of the indigenous plants of a region will be like having a year round textural stone field, or woodland, in all of its natural abstraction of form.



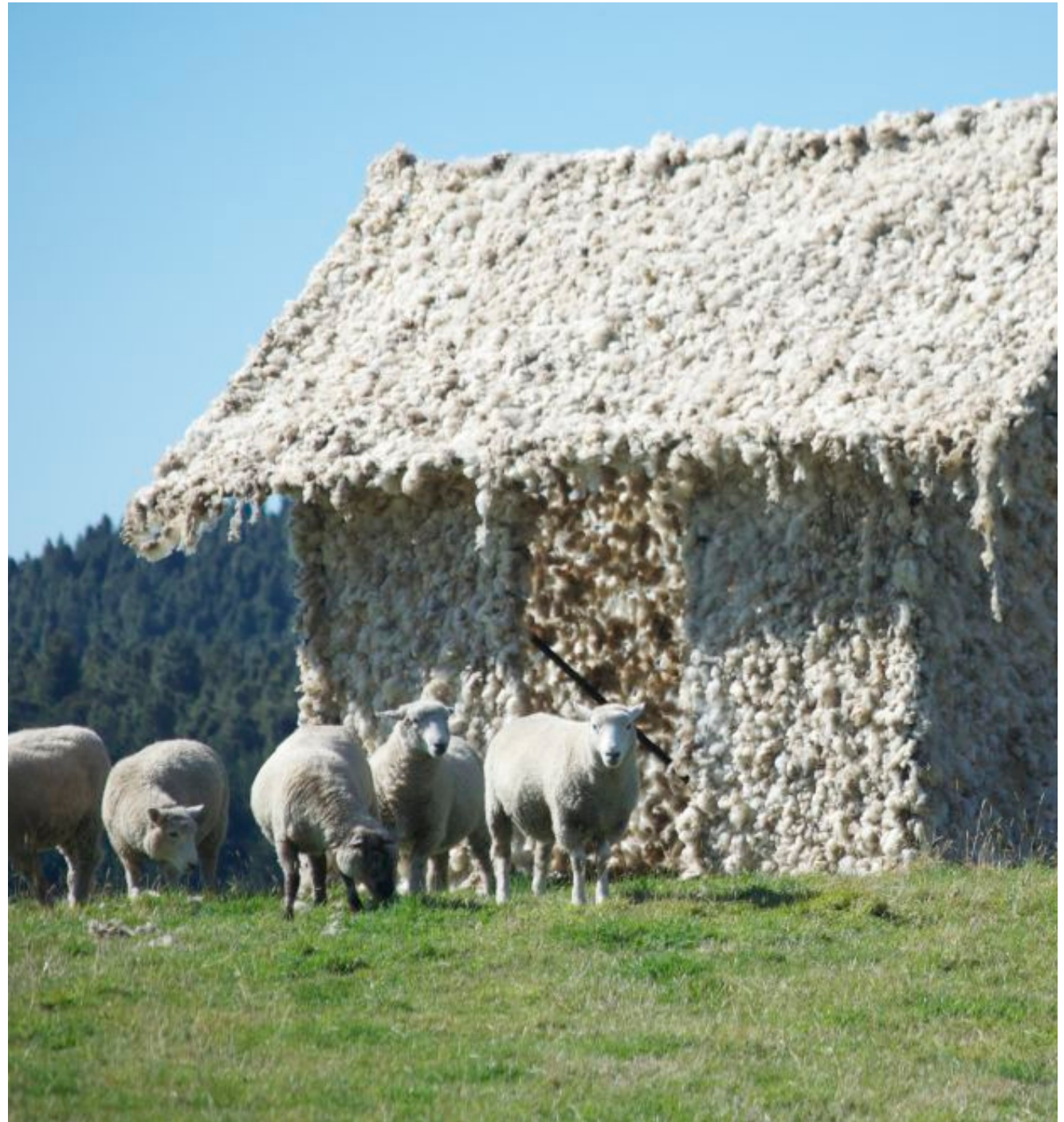
Limestone, field grass and plants, 1 x 2 ft, 2021

Tika Ware



Raw rams wool, netting, bamboo, created in Turangi, New Zealand with collaboration from the Truebridge Family, 14 x 9 x 8.5 ft, 2013

Tika Whare is a site specific installation in Turangi, New Zealand on the Te Hapua farm owned by the Truebridge family. In Maori, *Tika Whare* (pronounced Teaka Phorae) means true home. This 14x9x8.5 foot structure is made of materials all found on the farm: bamboo, silage netting, and the wool from the thousands of sheep that surrounded me while I worked out in the paddocks. The flexible structure "breathed" and shifted in the wind as if it was alive, but was stationary among the flock. The sun traveling through the day provided unique lighting through the wool, reminding one of light filtering through the lacy leaves of the forest nearby and the delicate design of Polynesian and Maori art.



Earth Press Project: Witness



Earth, wood, 5 x 10 x 14 ft, installed at Minuteman National Park, 2019

The Earth Press Project: Witness is a publicly engaged environmental project using an earth-based printing technique to inscribe words collected from communities across America in response to the question, "What change would you like to witness on this earth?" Word submissions are imprinted in adobe block and presented spilling out of a wooden structure referencing the historic witness houses located at the Minute Man National Historical Park. The word 'witness' can hold many meanings today as it did during the time of the Revolutionary War.

Earth and words—two disparate and common elements. One is heavy, dense, fluid and solid. The other ethereal, weightless and yet weighted in its gravitas. Combine them and the earth is branded, printed with a human thought. Originally an environmental project, *Earth Press Project: Witness* quickly became socially engaged art. We witnessed the events in the news each day, mirrored in the incoming words for change.



The Lighthouse



Raw wool from New England farms, scaffolding, debris netting, steel, fishing net, rope, and an existing light box, shown at Christian Science Plaza, 72 x 6 x 8 ft, 2013 • Temporary



Concepts for *The Lighthouse* began by thinking about Boston as the home of the first lighthouse in North America. About how the materials represent the industries of New England. How the wool contrasts with the solid massive materials of the plaza. How the wool moves in the wind and twists around the grid of the graceful scaffolding. But then the work comes out of the studio, interacts with its surroundings, and continues the process Winship Milliken began. It becomes much more than its materials. In this case, perhaps, *The Lighthouse* is about opening up the impenetrable forms of buildings or of ourselves. The thick walls of a lighthouse are gone, and we witness the internal structure allowing the light to shine, not just at the apex, but throughout its length.

Intensive Rotational Grazing



Earth and canvas, 28 x 8 ft, 2017

To The Barn And Back



Earth and canvas, 4 x 16 ft, 2015

Earth Print (Galaxy)



Earth and canvas, 13.5 x 8 ft, 2017

Field



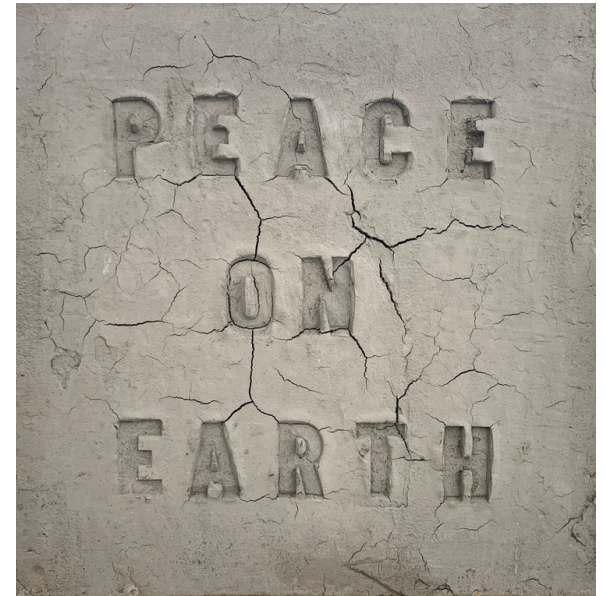
Field grass, netting, rope, 20 x 8 x 1 ft, shown at Boston Sculptres Gallery, 2015



Wool Moon, wool, chicken wire 4 x 4 ft, 2020



Mountain Moon, beeswax, earth pigment, gessoed canvas, 72x36" 2023



Peace on Earth, earth, steel, panel, 2 x 2 ft, 2019



Goose Flower, goose feathers, wire, 1 x 2 ft, 2015



Sunshine, beeswax, panel, 4 x 4 ft, 2020



Rope Cubed, rope, steel, 4 x 4 x 1 ft, 2015

Process



As an environmental artist working in all different mediums with the common theme of a reverence for this earth, Winship Milliken explores methods and techniques to try to find a language of love that might strengthen our relationship or connection to the land. The practice of the studio is as much about process as it is about object. From finding and harvesting materials, to molding, weaving, burning into form, our hands and senses “know” the material intimately. The different smells, textures, and raw sensation of making the form is all a part of informing the outcome of the work. She trusts that the inherent beauty of the materials in their natural state will come through no matter what form they are put them in.

Here is an excerpt from the process of creating *Intensive Rotational Grazing*.

Intensive Rotational Grazing was made while on residency at Bread and Butter Farm in Shelburne, Vermont. For this piece, Winship Milliken created a “printing press” that could handle the weight of a herd of cattle as they walk over. Through a collaboration between bovine, farmer and artist at Bread and Butter Farm, she captured the movement of livestock from one pasture to the other. *Intensive Rotational Grazing* transcends a foraging technique to become a metaphor for the delicate balance we often maintain between economic prosperity and environmental conservation.





Eliot Hays Lothrop, of Building Heritage, constructing beams for *Varied and Alive* and interns creating *Earth Press Project*



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