Creativity can be spurred by an idea, an impression, a word, vision, or sound. Artists often speak of the “aha!” moment, in which an idea for a work crystallizes from an initial spark. Beyond that, visual artists pursue their creative practice with many varied processes. Some artists create works by first responding to an idea or theme, and then begin works to address their own reflection and research on that theme. Some artists set up a disciplined structure within which to explore variations on an initial idea that intrigues them. Yet, other artists are most interested in process, and make works that mostly closely respond to the process of painting, sculpting, printmaking or any other media. This exhibition of five artists falls in with the last group; these artists are interested in the process suggested to them by the particular materials they use in the creative act.

Artists Laura Ann Cloud, Iris Goldstein, Donna Hapac, Laurie LeBreton, and Gina Lee Robbins each create works in which the materials that they use suggest, persuade and finally dictate the form of the works. Each of these artists reacts in a primal fashion to their various materials, with passionate response to what their various materials have to offer. Clay suggests solid weighty and earthy forms, while abaca paper, with its fragility, suggests a more ethereal interpretation. Natural reeds create a more linear response that refers to nature, while plaster and paint create forms that resonate with texture from manipulation of the surface. Photographs on artists’ paper are atmospheric with the softness of the paper dictating the mood of the image.

Laura Ann Cloud is known for her mixed media installations that use voice, sound and scent as part of the sensuous expression of her ideas. She perceives of a work as something sensory which we inhabit. We are asked to be “there”, as if we as audience are part of the installation. In this work, Sky Impressions, we are asked to be present to notice something from our universal everyday lives; here, we see the variations of mood from a small patch of sky, which changes with the humidity, time of day, location, and light. We experience the many subtle shifts of color, light and impressions. Because the works are printed on artists’ paper, the works appear to be subtle paintings, with the image softly embedded in its material support. Here, photography seems not mechanical, but something hand-made, as if light and color has been infused into the paper surface. The work is rich with atmosphere, and engages our universal love of nature.
Iris Goldstein creates her sculptures with plaster relief and paint. Her forms are both geometric and sensual simultaneously, using the structure of her aluminum wire frames to give life in space to her forms. She is interested in creating relief, the sense that a work attaches itself to its support and yet juts out into the viewer’s space. Through sensual and rich color, and very evident texture, her forms invite us into their emotive space. The forms at times seem anthropomorphic and humorous, and at other times, are seductive. Her works can be read abstractly, or can be perceived as narrative. They invite our response to come closer and engage.

Donna Hapac creates her more linear forms referencing nature with either natural materials, like reeds, or with man-made plastics that have thread-like flexibility to allow for curves and bends. Hapac’s forms, too, like Goldstein’s, come out into our space, but these actually divide the space around them in a forceful way. They “intrude” on our space as viewers, and yet engage us in the beauty of their softened geometry. The lacy quality of the works integrates light into her forms, so that they manifest strength in their structure, yet fragility in their expressiveness. Their sense of translucency and structure is evocative and yet intellectual, referring to mathematically induced frameworks. These works appeal to both our intuitive and intelligent selves.

The work of Laurie LeBreton invites us to drift upward into an imaginative realm of whimsicality and beauty. She creates what might be creatures, plants or other forms from nature, and yet they are physical manifestations imagined by their creator. They challenge us to explore our memory of what we may have experienced in nature, and yet elude us because they are original. Her soft and ephemeral forms are repeated as if they are germinating, and they float above us in a way that engages our sense of wonder. LeBreton also relies on the tactile quality as well as the richly saturated colors of her abaca paper to seduce us. The sense of these forms enveloping us in space also adds to our affective and sensory response.

The clay works of Gina Lee Robbins delight us with their weightiness. We experience her use of clay as a heavy material, one that bends, sags, folds and flops. Her forms seem humorous, and sometimes anthropomorphic, like Goldstein’s, as if we can read relationships in their gestures and positions, bending toward one another or leaning away. The use of clay suggests a history, since it is an ancient material, and her works carry that history as we can imagine her manipulation of the material itself. These works are not functional, like many clay objects, but suggest functional forms like jars, urns, and vases. Instead, they suggest “selves”, beings that exist in space and engage one another. The works create a delightful cast of characters that reach out to us to explore their forms and movement.

-Beth Shadur, Curator