

## Flesh and wood: Harmony Hammond and Francis Cape's "Angle of Repose"

Michael Abatemarco | Posted: Friday, July 17, 2015 5:00 am

In her painting *Flesh Fold #1*, pioneer feminist artist Harmony Hammond continues her minimalist exploration of surface material and conceptualism, which have been hallmarks of her recent work. But what lies below the surface of the painting becomes paramount, leading to all kinds of associations for the viewer. One consideration proposed by Hammond is that the painting, rendered thickly in near-monochrome color, is an extension of the body, if not the body itself. “For me, the material stuff, the paint, is like flesh,” Hammond told *Pasatiempo*. “The word in the title suggests the material body. That’s how the body is presented.” Hammond pairs *Flesh Fold #1* with a sculptural work by artist Francis Cape called *Foreclosure*, composed of remade Shaker furniture.

Together, the individual artworks form *Angle of Repose*, an installation in SITE Santa Fe’s exhibit *SITE 20 Years/20 Shows: Summer*.

Hammond met Cape in 2008, at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, a nine-week residency program in Maine. The two artists were on the faculty. “There wasn’t an obvious connection between my work and his work, but I kept coming back to it,” said Hammond, who was invited by SITE to work with another artist on an original piece for the show. “I’ve always been interested in his work. It functions as sculptures and furniture simultaneously. Like myself, he felt there was some connection, something that could be teased out, even if that wasn’t easy to identify. In this process of collaboration we’ve learned a little bit about shared concerns.”

Hammond was nearly finished making *Flesh Fold #1*

when she approached Cape to work with her, but distance was an issue; Cape lives in New York and Hammond lives in Galisteo. The decision was made to juxtapose individual works rather than creating a single piece together. “We weren’t so interested in having an exhibition; we were more interested in setting up a conversation,” she said. “When you have one piece and one piece, it becomes a conversation. Our collaboration was by email, phone, and we met once in New York. It was Francis who first used the term ‘angle of repose.’ It seemed like such a loaded, saturated term. I



### Foreclosure

Francis Cape: *Foreclosure*, 2015, handcrafted wood, courtesy the artist and Murray Guy, New York; photo Kate Russell, courtesy SITE Santa Fe

felt that it reflected the way I deal with content in my work.” The phrase “angle of repose” refers to the steepest angle relative to a horizontal surface upon which material can be piled before it begins to collapse or slump. In the works of Hammond and Cape, the term takes on other connotations.

“ ‘Angle of repose’ became a metaphor for the precariousness of our lives and all the stuff that piles up that we have to personally deal with, whether it’s financial, environmental, political, and so forth,” she said. “It brings up this question of How much can we take? What’s the straw that breaks the camel’s back in somebody’s life before they have a mental breakdown?”

“We both have very strong ideological positions,” Cape told *Pasatiempo*. “As you let the work sink in, you get the connections. For about 10 years now I’ve been making work that tries to address the society outside the art world, a society that seems, to me, very divided.”

The artists work abstractly and share a concern for the material substance of their art. For Hammond, it’s the rich possibilities of paint, built up in layers and affixed with grommets that act as portholes to the layers hidden below the surface. A part of *Flesh Fold #1* is peeled back, giving another glimpse to an interior realm, like skin revealing the raw flesh beneath. “I always work with material manipulation, and I feel like my job is to pull meaning out of that somehow,” said Hammond.

“Layering is important. I think you can see it in Francis’ work, too, because he has many pieces of furniture that are stacked or laying on each other. This idea of layering, of building up, is like the piling-on of the angle of repose.”

Cape’s frame of reference is no less conceptual but perhaps more explicit. Meaning is conveyed through the remanufacturing of everyday objects, particularly furniture. “I grew up in the late ’60s, early ’70s where we dreamed of making another world, and that is now seen as kind of fanatical,” he said. “My remaking of furniture is a level of uselessness, if you like, that points up the notion of value in hand craft.”

Cape apprenticed as a wood carver in the north of England before turning to sculpture, and he developed an abiding respect for handcrafted furniture. “I have craft in my blood. It’s a defunct way of living in the world now. If you contrast a handmade medieval oak bench with something from Ikea, you’d get the point. Furniture is now a consumable; it’s not a durable, whereas the medieval oak bench outlasted its maker by several generations. It’s a completely different notion of value. We are in a position now where we’re all consumables. Workers are consumables. Even CEOs are consumables. The only things that persist are the financial institutions.”

*Foreclosure* was partly inspired by a true story about a man whose home was foreclosed upon and who ended up surviving by selling off his furniture on the street. “The broader thought for me is the possibility of thinking about another social structure,” Cape said. “The use of Shaker idealist furniture represents that for me.” ◀



**Flesh Fold**

Harmony Hammond: Flesh Fold #1,  
2014; oil, Dorland's wax, and mixed  
media on canvas; courtesy the artist  
and Alexander Gray Associates, New  
York. Art © Harmony Hammond/  
Licensed by VAGA, New York.