

## Kansas City

**Kathryn Spence: Wild**  
**Kendall Buster: Sitelines and Suitors**

Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art

Kendall Buster and Kathryn Spence were artists in residence at The Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City this fall. Appearing side by side in the Kemper gallery, their two shows offered a powerful study in contrasting styles. But these artists also share a common bond: both look to nature as a source of inspiration, and reverence for its creations imbues their works.

The sculptures in Buster's installation, *Sitelines and Suitors*, inhabited the gallery space like creatures from a newly discovered phylum. At first glance her monumental sculptures looked mechanical: one pair resembled a turn-of-the-century flying machine, the other suggested a collapsing dirigible. But from a different angle, the sculptures became living beings. Like gigantic Venus flytraps, these fiercely beautiful forms seemed to invite the curious to view and then enter their interior spaces. The black sculptures, composed of two structures in the form of bell jars, were more menacing. Metal ribs curved over each intricate frame as an exoskeleton, and black netting covered the structures like a thin membrane. One of the jars reclined on its side, its underbelly contracting like a sea anemone to reveal an interior chamber. An exposed section in the other jar served as a window on the interior tracery.

The second sculpture spread sensuously across the floor like two enormous breasts in a steel-plated bustier. The sculpture's appealing paper surface—milky-white, waxy, subtly textured, and stretched as tightly over the metal ribs of the body as the cover of a drum—invited the viewer's touch (the museum signs warning against

touching only worked to enhance the viewer's feelings of repulsion and attraction toward the sculpture). The white form opened like the door of an igloo upon a compressed and enveloping interior space. Two chambers glowed softly on the inside, illuminated by

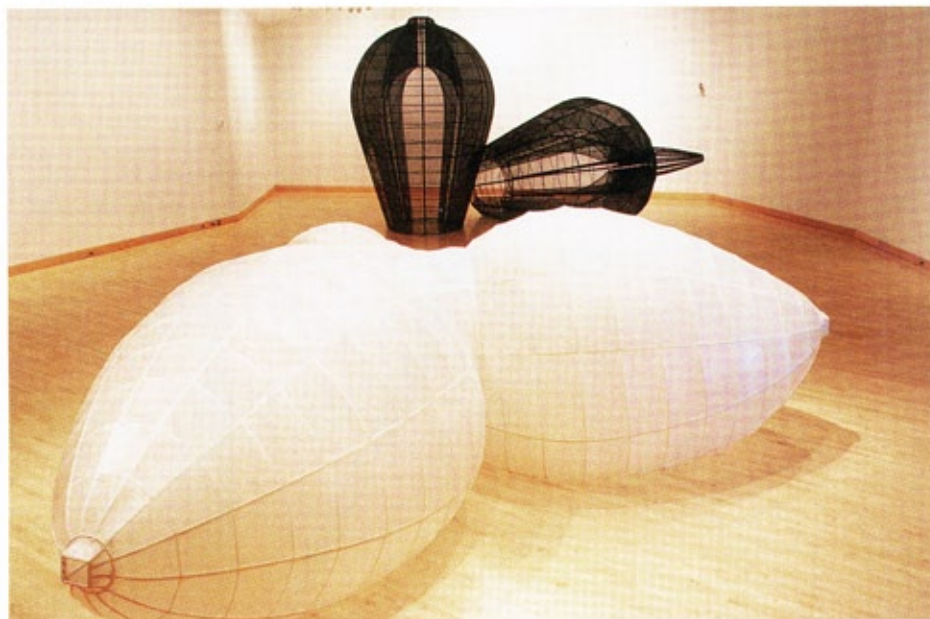
light filtering through the translucent skin.

The predatory nature of the "Suitors" of Buster's title came into focus as the viewer traipsed, insect-like, inside the structures. But more powerful still was the sexual dynamic playing out

between the sculptures in Buster's elaborate design. The dramatic contrast of colors, the dilating orifices, the white sculpture spreading open like gigantic thighs beneath the black rounded shaft, all seemed to be signs of an imminent act of intra-species



**Kendall Buster, *Sitelines and Suitors* (detail), 1999. Steel, paper, and Dacron, interior view.**



**Top:** Kendall Buster, *Sitelines and Sutors*, 1999. Steel, paper, and Dacron, 84 x 300 x 300 in.; two components: steel and netting, 108 x 180 x 108 in. **Bottom:** Kathryn Spence, *Untitled (Mud Animals)*, 1997–98. View of installation at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.



powerful than a gentle wave of nostalgia.

The highlight of the Spence exhibition was *Untitled (Pigeons)* (1996–97; 1999), an installation of 40 birds in a variety of sizes, made up of trash, rags, and newspaper bound together by wire and colored string. As individual works, the birds are grimy, misshapen, and bedraggled, but set in an installation, they come to life: a stunning composition of standing and feeding birds, some posing awkwardly with their heads cocked, others pecking at the ground, ruffled tail feathers in the air. Spence's trash assemblages capture the poetic essence of the discarded and the forgotten, transforming a ragtag scattering of scavengers into objects worthy of devotion.

—S. Amanda Davis

## Los Angeles Martin Kersels

Dan Bernier Gallery

An age of doubt is a period of time during which the majority of a population turns away from dogma to question universal truths. Postmodernism is just such a period of radical critique and, perhaps for that reason, an era more receptive to sculpture that displays an anti-romantic, nonrepresentational stance and forges ties with the real. It is a particularly good time for work that pulls the curtain on chicanery—a practice launched with fervor by the Pop artists of the 1960s and reinforced by the Minimalist school. And it is an excellent time for Doubting-Thomas artists like Martin Kersels, whose explorations are made vital via a sharp intellect and a generous, though sometimes dark, sense of humor.

coupling. Part machine, part animal, extraordinary and complex, Buster's forms inspired the same kind of wonder that one felt as a child when looking into a microscope and beholding the miraculous diversity of life.

In the second half of the gallery, Spence's creations occupied a smaller, more sentimental space. A menagerie of her animals lay

on the shiny museum floor: a circle of gray birds and five slumbering beasts molded from mud. Spence created the mud animals by covering stuffed animals in old bathrobes and layering the forms with mud. In spite of the mud's evocative and gritty texture, the creatures are endearing. They seem to be suspended in time and awaiting their first breath of animation—

strings hang from their bodies as if they were newly created from the primordial sludge. Their heads loll to the side, tiny ears tip forward, elephantine limbs gently cross, and rounded bottoms end in pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey strands of mud. Droll little creations, they are too much like characters from a children's storybook to elicit anything more