

# STARS

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## Anne Cofer

Syracuse sculptor's  
Everson exhibit unites  
homey fabric with brute force



Gina Wright / The Post-Standard

Artist Anne Cofer (left) and Syracuse University students Jaimie Merrell (top) and Vanna Valdez work installing Cofer's exhibit, "Concealed Objects," at the Everson Museum. The exhibit continues through April 26.

# Sala show

spotlights  
winner of 2008  
Everson Biennial

By Melinda Johnson

Arts editor

Two young women bend over panels of floral fabric that match the marked pattern pieces. When they brandish large wood-block mallets and deliver a few resounding taps to the moist clay lining of the skirt panels, you adjust your thinking.

This activity culminates the final stages of the installation of "Anne Cofer: Concealed Objects" at the Everson Museum of Art. Cofer joins her work force as the skirts, layers of fabric and clay, are assembled and hung from a ceiling grid. Once in place, she kneads, presses and pushes the thick skirts into draping shapes. She acknowledges, in a British accent, that this requires "brute force."

Cofer's solo installation — her first — is the prize promised to the artist taking Best of Show honors at the 2008 Everson Biennial. She had entered "Nine Forms," sculptures of clay-soaked, then dried, cloth, suspended from the second-floor ceiling above the Sculpture Court.

The show's juror, Edward Winkelman, director of Winkelman Gallery in New York City, called her work "simply gorgeous."

"Anne is very careful and very precise about the surface of her

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sculptures," he said at the time. "It's important in the work that the surface look fragile even though the object is fairly solid. That paradox is what I would call sort of the poetry of her sculpture."

Days after completing her installation and on the eve of the opening of "Concealed Objects," Cofer seats herself at the back of the gallery to discuss her art. One moment she contentedly takes in the exhibit while raking her hands through her blonde locks. Before long she pops up, circumnavigates the space and meanders among the suspended skirts re-appraising the installation. A whisper of an answer, somewhat distractedly, trails behind her.

This observation begs the question, which is answered: "Yes, I'm a perfectionist."

**• Is she a sculptor or a ceramicist?**  
A sculptor, because she uses clay from outside of the discipline of ceramics, her work comes out of sculpture and it's not fired in a kiln.

**• The fabric:**

Originally sheets, blankets, tablecloths and curtains. Most she purchased at the second-hand stores of the Rescue Mission and Salvation Army and a few at Bed Bath & Beyond and Target to vary the color of skirts. Her preference was for "garish," larger floral prints.

Each skirt requires six yards of fabric, which proved to be a challenge.

"I've always worked to add an emotional component to the fabric by adding it to other material (glue, plaster)."

**• The skirts:**

Cofer wanted to represent full, fluid skirts so common in the late 19th century. She successfully launched an Internet search to find skirt patterns from that era.

Each skirt is constructed from seven to eight panels.

**• A feminist or female message?**

"No agenda, just part of who I am and what I do."

**• Why the skirts?**

There is a domestic thread running through the exhibition. Cofer was looking for a new form that related to her previous sheet forms. The skirt and dress forms are fitting for "women and their role in society and how we feel about that, good or bad." She also liked using domestic furnishings — once curtains, tablecloths and sheets — as skirts, another connection to the domestic environment. And the forms had another dimension. The clay gives a physical and emotional weight to the sculpture.

**• Another viewpoint:**

Cofer sees the irony of her work: so much labor invested in art that's "so ultimately ephemeral" and "site specific."

**• The process:**

Once the fabric was cut, moistened clay was pounded flat and trimmed to

The complete installation of "Concealed Objects" suspends sculptures of fabric and clay above the floor of the Everson's Robineau Gallery.

fit the pattern shape. The clay was placed atop the fabric, followed by a layer of garden netting and a backing of muslin. These damp pieces were rolled up and placed in garbage bags for moisture control.

This involved 12 to 16 hours of labor per skirt.

"So it becomes like a piece of architecture."

For installation, the pieces were unfurled and fashioned by hand into the skirt form, with wire joining the panels.

• **Weighty matter:**

Cofer used 1,500 pounds of new clay.

Each skirt weighs 120 to 150 pounds. "It's more than I weigh on a

good day."

"You're really limited by how much you can lift."

• **On art:**

As an artist Cofer's intent is to push the limits. She confesses to this "sadomasochistic activity."

Her clay-fabric art has "something very appealing about it, maybe because it's so difficult to use."

• **On her art installations:**

"All the projects are big ... big and heavy, never practical or small," says Cofer, who stands 5 feet 5 inches tall.

### THE DETAILS

What: "Anne Cofer: Concealed Objects."

When: Through April 26: Noon to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Friday and Sunday; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday.

Where: Everson Museum of Art, 401 Harrison St., Syracuse, 474-6064.

Admission: Free, with suggested donation of \$5.

Also: The artist will talk about her exhibit at 6 p.m., Thursday.

### THE ARTIST

• Anne Cofer, 36 years old.

• Native of Gloucester, England. Syracuse resident since 2000.

• Master's of fine arts from Syracuse University in 2005.

• Adjunct faculty member in fiber arts/materials studies at SU.

• Married to Chris Cofer and mother to Hannah, 10, and Jack, 3 1/2.



Gianna Wright / The Post-Standard



Courtesy of The Everson Museum

"Nine Forms," the work by Anne Cofer that was chosen as Best in Show of the 2008 Everson Biennial.

Syracuse University ceramics student Jaimie Merrell (on ladder) suspends a skirt form in the exhibit "Anne Cofer: Concealed Objects," at the Everson Museum last month. Assisting Merrell are from left, SU ceramic student Vanna Valdez and Justin Rabideau, a collections assistant at the museum.