

# Ruth Hardinger

## Statement 2014

*“Her recent exhibition, titled Normal Faults, clearly reflects a defective earthly condition, a surface both unstable and haphazard. In contrast to the formalist approach, Hardinger is searching for poetic metaphors, referencing the damage that persists in relation to the earth. Works, such as Double Envoy (2012) and To Be Changed 2, (2011) suggest inevitable ecological instability without losing their force as self-contained pieces of sculpture. ----*

To Be Changed 2



*Hardinger’s works are fresh and pulsate with vigor. They might also be read as entropic signs of dystopia, yet open to forging ahead as if to widen the spectrum of what sculpture can be, even on a modestly human scale – with the power to change the way we understand and feel the human condition in this highly conflicted age of globalization.”<sup>1</sup>*

My *Conundrums* and *Envoys* speak to totemic powers that are captured in secular formats and constructed with the reality of weight. Often, these concrete and cardboard constructs are installed as a sequence of presences – a storied journey with many participants. There’s a back-story of adjectives creating puns with their names: “concrete” is a solid fact, and “cardboard” is a material without substance.

The Messenger’s Layers, 2013



As an artist, working hands-on with these most common industrial materials, I am inspired by of their contradictory forces.

Cardboard, the most successfully recycled matter is paired with concrete, one of the largest contributors to greenhouse gases. Working inside and outside of abstraction, my work’s visual presence is of utmost importance, yet, simultaneously it reaches to associations that are obvious and/or obscure. Installations of these works invite spacing relationships - activity generated starting from below, rising up and above surfaces - along with predicaments of material matter.

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<sup>1</sup>World Sculpture News, Spring 2012, by Robert C. Morgan

## Envoys: Messengers' of Methane



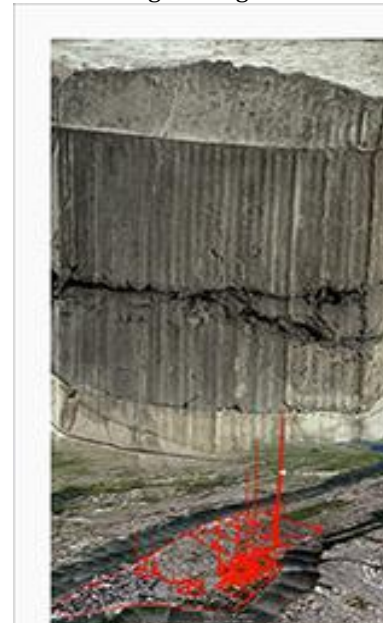
Envoys, 26, 8 and 2. Messengers of Methane, Cooper Union exhibition for Marfa Dialogues/NY

*“Ruth Hardinger’s Envoys seres translates this idea [regarding the GHG methane’s potency] into tangible form, the undeniable weight of her concrete sculpture pressing on our psyche as much as our physical constitution”*<sup>2</sup> See the Environmental Art category of this web site for further information.

Then, my Envoys appeared and the need to use obvious, even crude, material matter to shape these sculptural images developed. Even though each piece is a stand-alone sculpture, as groups they embrace the concept of an installation / gathering. In such groups, each work has their own message, and together, conjunctions. Envoys offer an engagement for communication, community and confrontation. The Messenger’s Legend includes the Gas Safety, Inc’s. chart of methane (mostly pipeline leaks) in Manhattan, with a cropped image of the weighty Envoy 8 hovering over the emissions.

Having spent much time around pre-Columbian and ancient Mediterranean art history and the contemporary cultures of those regions, my art conceptualizes a response to social justice, and cultural interactions, while drawing on abstraction and conceptual practices. From this foundation a door opened to the chaos of environment destruction caused by human society. What is tossed away today is not only the detritus of plastic, Styrofoam, cans and paper but an appreciation of cultural history and ethics that bring

### The Messenger’s Legend



<sup>2</sup> Emissions: Images from the Mixing Layer, essay by Kara Rooney see the Environmental Art column for the essay.

diversity, richness and stability to conditions of our ever-changing society now filled beyond the brim with risk.

Pathway 23, 2014



*Pathways*, works on paper, are created by folding and then opening the paper to place a linear Golden Mean; in the next step, the paper is distorted and disfigured. *Pathways* are an expressive harkening to geological forms and their These works imagine a complex expression of life's vitality underground; an area that when interrupted could open pathways or channels that instigate migrations.

*“Ruth Hardinger, an established artist but also inveterate environmental activist, has a strong interest in the force of the underground, the ones always moving below us, even without our noticing. In Pathway 7, for example, she’s trying to reproduce how things underground move after having studied the New York State’s tectonics. The cracks of the paper, the forces interacting with each other still form unity, a stable whole—a metaphor for our society, in which the cracks are deep but the hope to heal and move forward still allows a certain balance, or more intimately of herself, Hardinger’s work demonstrates that what happens below is paradoxically similar to what’s happening above.”*<sup>3</sup>

Pathway, 22, 2014



<sup>3</sup> <http://brianmorrisingallery.tumblr.com/post/90680515169/what-you-missed-bmg-artist-talk-1>



In addition to casting concrete in cardboard boxes, which are underscored with constant but subtle change, I'm creating work with only boxes to instigate a process of immediacy that performs an adjustment or even a metamorphosis of its formations in a few weeks or month. *Boxing* is about large strands of cardboard boxes, woven together with rope, strung as a giant necklace or a chain, dangling or swaying in outdoors for a period of time enough to cause impacts.

Boxing 2, stage 2 detail



The collaborators are me, the environment and the weather.

These works do change: fragility with perseverance, a mark of beauty, time and the complexity of human participation.

Boxing 3, 2014, detail

The conditions of this group of pieces are presented with their stages. Their rapid modifications echo what is occurring in the present. Increasing impacts on the environment are being clearly identified as climate stresses.



*Conundrums* – are exhibited either as stand-alone pieces or are combined in clusters that often embrace joining works that span over the time of several years. These more *Conundrums* are more currently made with concrete and cardboard - those so commonly used industrial materials, handled with a deliberately rough and/or impulsive touch. The clusters, based on ideas of spacing, have a reference to the Giorgio Morandi paintings of bottles on a ledge or table. My structure of spacing is often a flexible and evolves.

Co nundrum 7, Conun drum 2, Co nund rum 3, 2008, concrete



These small structures, with one form embedded into the next, and then the next, resemble a russian doll approach to construction. These works do not have any interior brace, they are built with only the material at hand.

Consumer use of what is understood as discardable objects from plastic beverage glasses, water and soda bottles and more, rings a bell about fragility and temporality. Most of these plastic forms can truly not be permanently discarded.

*Conundrums* back-story is a blend of an aesthetic sculptural position, including being informed by archaeological history and contemporary environmental issues.

Conundrum increase, 4, 2013



Conundrum increase, 4, 2013





Merging between works on paper and cartons of boxes, these *Plural Pathways* are dense mixes of multiple mediums, laid out in levels of incongruous connections.



Plural Pathway 13, 2013 and detail

The word “pathways” has a intriguing variation of meanings, from an area marked for walking, or nerves in the brain. It can be metabolic processes. It can be the underground paths created by water or gas winding through rock formations.

Pathway 20, 2013





Ephemeral, outdoor works are constructed with tension and balance, engaging weight's strength to draw, and/or pull, from one place to the next. Some of these installations associate rope to web formations.

Continuous Draw 5, 2011



Continuous Draw 6, 2012, detail



The seven installations, created for the past seven years at Saunders Farm, Collaborative Concepts, have been anchored in the trees from trunk to trunk. Ropes become lines of definition, outlining spaces by suspending concrete sculptural elements, knotted to rope, binding to branches, delineating places to embrace and embody.

Continuous Draw #5, 2011



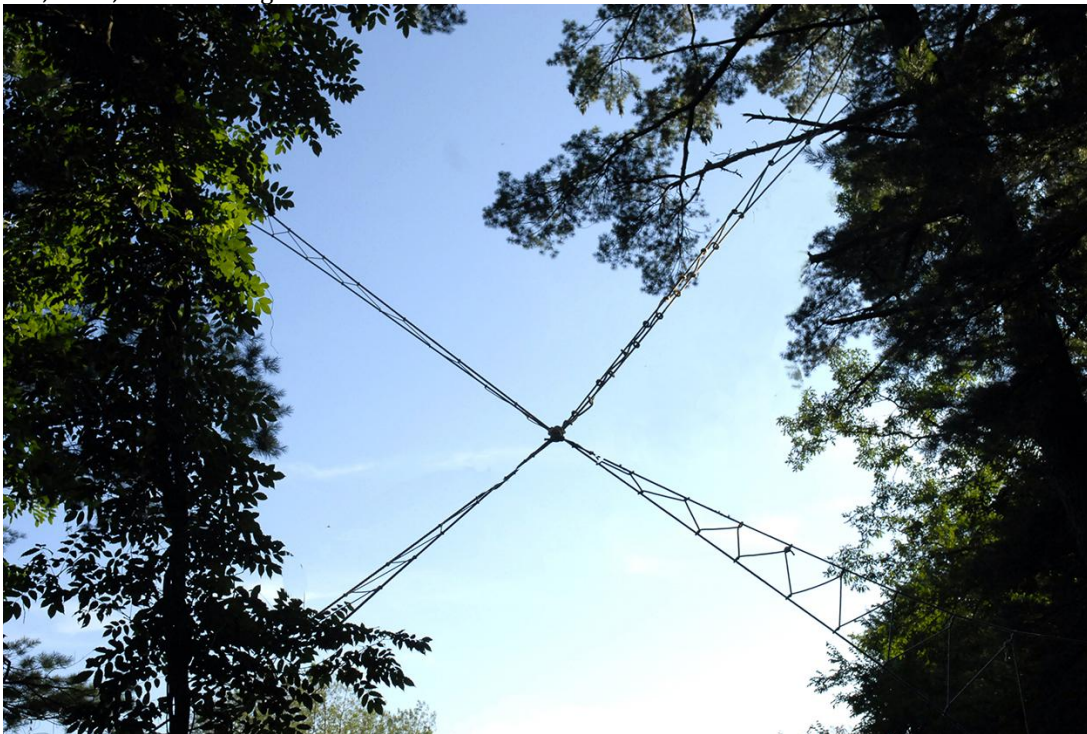
Honoring precious carbon sequestrers: wild flowers and plants, field grasses, soil, tree branches and sky are confluences of these installations between the landscape, the run of ropes and sculptural weight.



X, 2011, view 1 facing north, approx 50 ft high x 50 ft wide by 35 ft deep, rope.  
*Quick, Down & Dirty* , Byrdcliff Art Colony , White Pines, Woodstock, NY,



X, 2011, view 1 facing north



The image of X not only marks a spot, it conveys connectedness, focus and expansion. I start *Pathways* with an X of folding the paper establishing a ‘golden mean’ – a base-line for classic beauty. I’m including this ancient Greek concept in both the scale of paper’s intimacy and the outdoors broader arena. Using knots and branches as structural formats harkens to nomadic references, where movement is an imperative.



## RUTH HARDINGER

[www.ruthhardinger.com](http://www.ruthhardinger.com)

### Statement 2009

#### Sculpture

The material possibilities of powders of the earth and water: concrete and cement, echo nature's volatility in my current work, but they do so only in so far as they are the result of an alchemy.

My recent sculptures are conglomerates of primary forms made from concrete that is hand-built or molded or cast in disposable objects such as cardboard boxes and plastic cups. The individual components are joined together to make a larger whole. Intuitive choices, weighing, feeling and touching are essential in the process of making these pieces. Through tactile joining and fitting processes, these sculptures explore the rudiments of building; these efforts become my art.



*Ninth Envoy*, 2008, 33 x 15 x 17.5", concrete

My current works have an enmeshed relationship to my long-standing interest in myth, archaeology, early cultures and primary

structures. My forms negotiate a tension between their own literalness and abstraction, exploring their essential materiality rather than purely abstract. At times, there appear to be recognizable things in the pieces which are then rendered out-of-context or displaced and transformed to go to work in my visual language.

*"The sense of animation, of life present within the form, pervading Hardinger's newest sculptures is partly a natural outcome of the conditions of their making. The disposable food container, tube and carton moulds for*

*the cast concrete appear to have given out a little bit from the weight of the material, so the constituent parts of each sculpture swell like flesh. At the same time, their basic outline is geometric which imbues them with a tension between the earthly and the ideal, the tension that is never really resolved but instead remains buoyed on a sustaining spirit of play and contingency. ...*



*Ninth Envoy*, 2008. 33.5 x 15 x 17.5"

*Of the three groups of sculptures, the eponymous Envoys most directly address the human body in its own scale. While reaching only a little over half the average height of a human being, each Envoy commands the floor space of a standing figure. Like their smaller brethren they lean and list, but more as mighty fragments of a colossal figure, the golem of Prague, maybe. Unlike the other sculptures, the Envoys are made in a single cast. The mix of high and low is again operative, as the telling imprints of the ribs and folds of boxes lend their Pop, street signature to forms that, no matter how fragmented, might otherwise lean (as it were) towards the ethereal and ideal. The result is something like a Nauman wedge or a Whiteread interior volume dragged through Oldenburg's Ray Gun store."<sup>1</sup>*



*Extension 6*, 2008, 20.5, 14 x 14", concrete

Some of my sculptures go beyond the constraints of a fixed structure. For example, with *Reverse Count*, 2008, concrete components are bound together by a single, suspended rope. The installation of the flexible structures is specific to a particular site and to the making process and therefore one-of-a-kind.

In *reverse count #2*, concrete blocks, cast in tubes or boxes, have interior perforations cast with disposable cups and tubes. Rope is wrapped and knotted around each block so that the blocks are held in place *only* by suspension. In other block-and-rope works, the blocks, laced and knotted together, spill off the wall and fall into place.



*Reverse Count #2*, 2005. 16' x 15" x 16", nylon rope w/ concrete components

The use of concrete is important for its physicality. Concrete allows for a kind of tension between warm, flesh-like textures, and the somber permanence of totemic objects while being simultaneously a common building material.

In my preceding works, I used plaster as a way of capturing an immediacy and urgency, rendering the fragility of my structures. "Plasters" (2001-2003) explored primary forms, balance and structures in plaster of Paris, structolite, hydrocal and hydrostone.

Plaster responds to being handled and molded in a completely engaging way. Edges remain raw, freshly extracted from the mold, other surfaces are burnishing by hand, finger marks show, and hand-troweled passages exist along side molded areas as a record of the formation process. These

<sup>1</sup> Ruth Hardinger, *Envoys*, Essay by Stephen Westfall, 2008.



organic building methods allow the work to retain a humanity. Plaster's uncanny fluidity coupled with its fragility are essential elements in this group of works. These elements are echoed by the gestures of the works: *Against the Wall* leans against a wall, *Passage* balances on one limb, and *Teeter for Two* stands on a base that tips. The pieces are precarious — I stop stacking at the last point where stability is still maintained.

*“The element of craft in Hardinger’s work has similarities to that of Eva Hesse, whose brilliantly creative organicism Hardinger shares. There is also a nod to the brooding presence of Louise Bourgeois; Hardinger keeps up a dialogue with the tradition of Surrealism, its penchant for the mysteriously erotic. But the influences are only influences—Hardinger has transmuted the art of her predecessors into a language very much her own. Sculpture, for so long second-best after painting, has a need to be understood on its own terms, as a three-dimensional guarantee of the efficacy of the object and its nearly unparalleled ability to reify our sense of perspective, that bugbear of Western art for many years. In continuing to probe the language of sculpture, Hardinger comes to an agreement with its forms. Her assemblages bring together an idiom of disparate, albeit everyday materials in the hopes of rendering the physical metaphysical – not so much in its expression as in its wordless intent. As a result, Hardinger’s work tends to exact its own standards, its particular language, in favor of a personally realized idiom.”*<sup>2</sup>



*Passage*, 2002. 11.75 x 38 x 14.5”, plaster



*Against the Wall*, 2002.  
49 x 25.5 x 5.5”, plaster

## Graphite on Paper



*Interaction 2*, 2008, 22.5 x 19.5”, graphite on paper.

Furthering the language of forms and materials, I’ve recently begun a series of drawings called *Interactions*. These works utilize the physical characteristics of paper and graphite. Their intent is to capture pulsating moments that are parallel to my physical interaction with these materials.

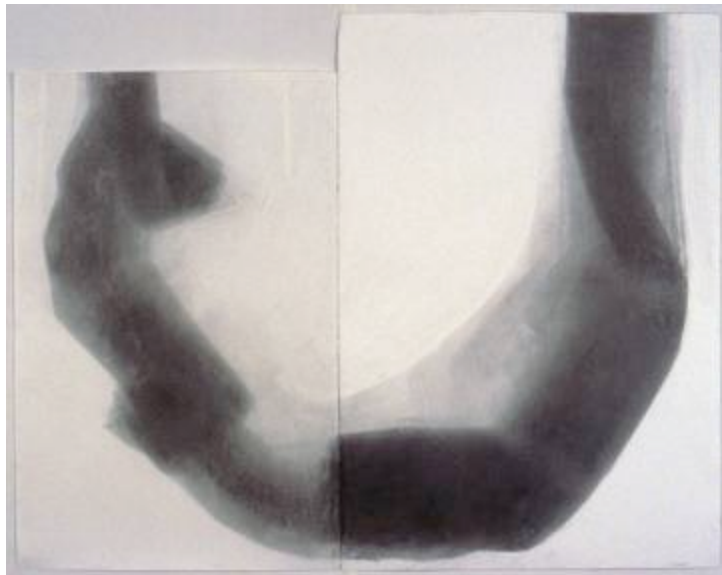
<sup>2</sup> Sculpture Magazine, review by Jonathan Goodman, April 2004, pg 74-75.

Defined primarily by the use of folding and thereby creating lines that extend the action of the piece beyond the edge of the paper, these works evoke a spatial territory that extends beyond the boundaries of the page. But the work exists in the page and the viewer turns to the pulsing graphite form that is simultaneously present and absent, a shadow and a sound.

Historically, they belong to the tradition of truth to materials. In 2000 I produced a series of drawings where I allowed the tooth of the paper and graphite to interact and respond to each other. These and the subsequent works have a certain uncontrollable, unpredictable quality. In this way my working process is related to my process-specific sculpture.



*Interaction 19*, 2008. 39.5 x 25.5"  
graphite on paper



*123002RHI*, 2002. 42.375 x 55.75"  
graphite on paper



*122902RHI*, 2002. 55.75 x 42.375"  
graphite on paper



## Work in Mexico



*Long Red Count*, 1992, 100 x 38 x 30 inches, mixed media

Mesoamerican art and cultural history have long influenced my aesthetic interest. I received a grant from IIE (Fulbright) to work in Mexico to develop those involvements from 1991-1992. During that year, I proceeded to construct all my work of materials indigenous to Mexico such as cochineal, fresco, adobe, bones, concrete, copal, beeswax and traditional Chontal huipil textiles. I slaked my own hot lime, ground my own dried gnats (cochineal), searched on hillsides for animal bones, developed on-going working relationships with Indian (Chontal and Zapotec) weavers, and sought out anthropological information about religion and customs. Striving to incorporate what I learned and experienced in my work while living there I produced *Long Red Count*, *Divided Count* and *Suerte de Animales*.

*Long Red Count* is a tall, thick cylinder of concrete covered with an egg and cochineal tempera over a rabbit skin glue membrane. There are three fat rings of hand-troweled fresco rising on the pillar, one of



*Divided Count*, 1992, 54 x 42 x 21", mixed media.

which has an rock mounted in its side. These rocks, "Aztec" rocks, are nine unworked rocks from the excavations of Tenochitlañ (ancient Aztec capitol in Mexico City). They were used as fill or construction rubble by the Aztecs, Archaeologically, they have no value yet aesthetically, they have great value in my work. I have incorporated one rock into each of the nine works of my "Ballgame."

Aztec belief held that the souls of deceased warriors migrated to the nopal cactus; my use of this traditional material constitutes, in a sense, an act of drawing with the blood of ancient

protectors.

The title of *Long Red Count* refers to the Mayan calendar, the red is blood (cochineal is actual insect blood) and rings ascend like the constant clouds over the Sierra Nevada mountains.

*Divided Count* rests on the ground and is divided both horizontally and vertically in the cardinal directions by sections of copal resin and beeswax burned together, fresco, and cochineal.

For *Suerte de Animales*, I commissioned a back-strap loom weaver, Eufrocina Vásquez, to create the belt which wraps the work and is, in some sense, an appropriation — and also my way of re-defining the so called “folk arts” as fine arts.

## Tapestries and Prints

During my year in Mexico, I also worked with a treadle loom weaver, Alberto Vásquez, to interpret my drawings for textiles into weavings, work which now continues with his son, Gérman. These works mixed imagery from a Mixtec codice of trees or offering bundles along with my sculptural shapes and placed them in fields of color which abstractly referred to serape designs. I made painterly textile “cartoons,” designed to challenge, and under Sr. Vásquez’s agile hand and swift eye, they transformed into delicious, colorful woven ideas as in *Woven Codex* (1995). Conceptually, these works mix histories, aesthetic traditions and technologies and yet they become their own narratives of primary imagery.

The great importance of these collaborative tapestries, expanding both Alberto’s and my knowledge is that they while preserve and maintain each of our knowledges. The works are co-signed.



*Suerte de Animales*, 1992, 63 x 32 x 42 inches



*Woven Codex*, 1995, 48 x 56 inches, tapestry



I have taken these tapestry works into the world of high-tech, digital printing. Re-weaving imagery from the original drawing and the original weaving into Iris inkjet prints, these works explore further the concept of creating a narrative of primary forms and specific cultural and personal symbols, such as in *Woven Codex: Base* (2002). These works were made at Pampelmousse Press, NYC, working with master printer Andre Ribuoli.



*Woven Codex: Base*, 2002, 24.25 x 32.25 inches