

Out of Joint: Joan Tanner

McCormick, Von Romberg and Emmons Galleries
12 February – 14 May 2023

Checklist

Last Updated: 3-16-2023

Please check with Lauren for updates.

IMPORTANT: Unless otherwise indicated in the captions, all images are artworks by Joan Tanner. All photographs of artworks by Joan Tanner are © Joan Tanner. All artworks are “Courtesy of the artist,” unless otherwise stated.

OUT OF JOINT: JOAN TANNER

This exhibition focuses on Joan Tanner’s work of the past decade and a half and consists of installations, sculptures, and abstract drawings, many of which have never been exhibited. Its title, *Out of Joint*, points to Tanner’s penchant for contradictions, misalignments, and startling juxtapositions. At times, her drawings feel organic, like cells or tissues under magnification. At other times, they seem inorganic, like geological or topographic maps. Her sculptures and installations utilize common construction materials—rebar, zip ties, plastic safety netting, plywood, electrical conduit, and plastic sheeting—and transform them. They become bunched wads of netting, rolled tubes of plastic roofing, bent sheets of plywood, drips of shellac, bandaged rods, and stretched nets. These inventive gestures come together in complicated forms that deflect interpretation. Her art is not about symbols or stories. Instead, there is a sense of wonder about the qualities of materials: the flexibility of plastics, tautness of a stretched rope, delicacy of common hair netting, or heft of suspended plywood.

In recent years, Tanner has exhibited in Louisville, Seattle, Cincinnati, New York City, and Los Angeles, but she has not had a museum show in Santa Barbara since she began her large installations, such as *Mire* (2022–23) and *Shaped Plywood* (2022–23). She had her first solo exhibition at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in 1967.



Ear—Purple, 2022

Wood wrapped in painted canvas strips, electric cable, zip ties, steel bars, plastic mesh, zip ties, metal rods, 78 ½ x 89 x 84 in.

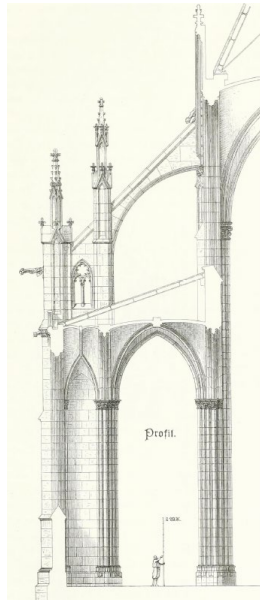
This sculpture seems to bring to life the curling lines of drawings from the series *End of Water* and *donottellmewhereibelong* (on view in this exhibition), as if they were yanked off the page and sprung into three dimensions. As with all Tanner’s works, the title is not a description but a suggestion of what the work might resemble. This sculpture’s tangle of curves might be an illegible signature, a cypher, or something akin to a graffiti artist’s tag. Alternatively, its armlike extensions and sense of twirling could evoke a human body in motion. There is also something emphatic about this sculpture, as if it were an underlined sentence or a triple exclamation point.



Flying Buttresses, 2013

Thin-set mortar on wood, all-thread rod, wooden frame, flat stock metal 120 x 14 ½ x 36¾ in.

Flying buttresses are arched piers that disperse the immense weight of a Gothic cathedral's roof (illustrated) by transferring the outward thrust to the piers. This multipart sculpture contains a set of forces and tensions held in equilibrium. The curved metal strips, kept in tension by metal rods, flex and struggle against the straight plywood support, while the threaded rods splay outward like lines of force or vector diagrams. These sculptures do feel architectural, as if they could be supports for or parts of a larger structure. Perhaps they are prototypes for a building yet to exist?

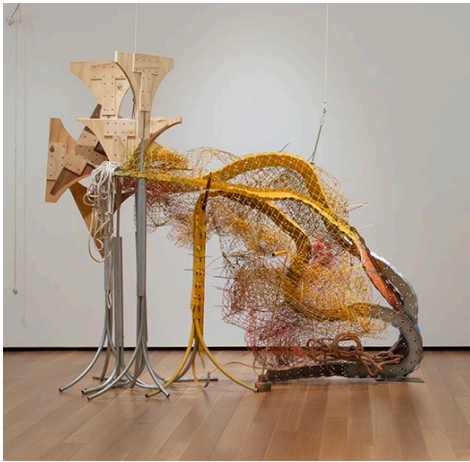




CONTINGENT, 2017, updated 2023

Flex-C Trac, plastic mesh, all-thread rods, eyebolts, rope, zip ties, metal sheeting, paint

Many of Tanner's sculptures are never finished but go through various states, as parts are reused and restructured. *CONTINGENT*, whose title signals its tentativeness, has existed in other versions for other exhibitions. The Flex-C Trac wends its way through the mesh, attached here and there with one of Tanner's favored mediums, zip ties. The intertwining materials confound the sense of inside and outside, interior and surface, as if the sculpture were being turned inside out.



Yellow Mesh, 2020

Flex-C Trac, painted plastic mesh, painted plastic sheeting, wooden elements, metal rods, all-thread rods, rope, zip ties, hardware, painted sheet metal, 81½ x 92 x 52 in.

Tanner has a knack for taking unpromising materials and reworking them with simple gestures to create evocative artworks. Here, she has bound together metal tubes to form a bouquet whose flower petals are pieces of cut plywood. A length of Flex-C Trac snakes like a supporting spine. Zip ties hold the plastic mesh in place, as if it were fabric being draped on a dressmaker's dummy.



Mire, 2022-23

Painted plastic mesh, painted vinyl tubing, steel rebar, cast concrete, plastic sheeting, wood, plastic tubing, zip ties

This new installation was conceived especially for the exhibition, and it shows Tanner's ongoing experimentation with generic industrial materials as well as her desire to make installations that impose themselves on the bland, institutional space of the art museum—what is usually called “the white cube.” Mire might be a translation of her drawings, with their dense tangles, convoluted nets, and jutting projections. Rather than Conté crayon, or oil and pencil, she turns to spray paint, shellac, brightly colored plastic zip ties, and commercial mesh. Could this be an organism that has wandered into the museum and become stuck between columns, with its “tail” sticking into the gallery? Or is it an explosion of matter caught by a high-speed camera? Tanner does not prescribe what the audience should think, but instead allows the work to mature in the viewer's mind.



Shaped Plywood, 2022-23

Painted, stained plywood, C-clamps, pulleys, supports

Along with Mire, also in this gallery, *Shaped Plywood* was made specifically for the exhibition. Using thin plywood sheets that she has bent, stained, and painted, Tanner evokes a complicated theater stage with overlapping flats and pulleys. Perhaps the sheets will rotate or be raised, as if during a set change between scenes of a play. Tanner has often stressed the unfinished nature of her work—she adds, subtracts, pulls apart for use in other sculptures, and sometimes destroys—but this sculpture seems to anticipate or allude to a future change. It is as if we are waiting for the play to begin, for a character to walk in, for something to suddenly move.



Staunch Drawing #2, 2018

Oil stick, oil pastel, chalk, charcoal on Caslon paper, 58 x 48 in.

Staunch can mean to stop the flow of something, such as blood from a wound. Within these curves and smudges, Tanner has planted a few delicate, straight lines, as if to hint at a stable system or grid that might be hidden beneath the churning surface. Notice the remarkable range of marks that Tanner makes with the oil pastels, chalk, and charcoal: some feel quick, others slow; some bold, others precise. There are areas of smearing, rubbing, and layering to build up a variegated surface texture.



Staunch Drawing #5, 2018

Oil stick, Conte crayon, pastel on Strathmore paper, 70 x 51 in.



Staunch Drawing #6, 2017

Oil stick, charcoal, graphite, 48 x 65 in.

As with the nearby drawings, Tanner renders a phenomenal variety of markings from oil stick, charcoal, and graphite. She has pressed the pencil so hard on the page that its lines begin to shine as they reflect light. Some of her marks are precise and tight, others forceful, still others feathery. There is smudging, layering, and hatching. Tanner is not trying to picture or depict anything; rather, she employs drawing without a particular aim in mind—making a mark, then another, rubbing a bit out, then at a point calling it finished and leaving it alone.



End of Water #2, 2020

Oil stick, oil pastel, chalk, Conté crayon on folded Strathmore paper, 48 x 90 in.

While Tanner's drawings are not meant to be pictures of anything, they invite speculation and offer clues that the mind fills in. Their shapes might be thick, hanging vines suspended from the top of the drawing, or steel wool that has been pulled apart. Yet the mind continually drifts to the orange forms on the right, which read like islands on a map.



End of Water #3, 2020
Oil stick, oil pastel, chalk, Conté on Strathmore paper,
50 x 44 in.



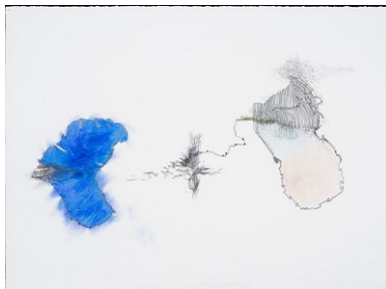
End of Water #4, 2020
Oil stick, oil pastel, chalk, Conté crayon on Strathmore paper, 50 x 44
in.



NoFeltWater #3, 1011
Oil pastel, oil stick, chalk

SMALL DRAWINGS

Throughout her career, Tanner has made drawings, using them to test designs that she might realize elsewhere. Drawing helps her to grasp and clarify her creative ideas and emotional experiences—in her words, to explore “thought forms.” Tanner allows drawing’s tools, methods, and restrictions to direct her initial concepts and impulses. The recent work shown here reveals her fascination with organic, scientific, geological, and architectural forms. Tanner admits that the ideas in her drawings evolve through chance and accident as she becomes absorbed in the work’s invention—the outcome is not necessarily the ending she first had in mind. This is also true of sculptures. However, this is not to say that she is doing something unintentionally. Rather, Tanner focuses on the give-and-take that occurs between forms and materials, and it is this interplay that develops, in her hands, into fresh and unexpected imagery.



donottellmewhereibelong #3, 2013
Graphite, oil stick, pastel
22 x 30 in.



donottellmewhereibelong #4, 2013
Graphite, oil stick, pastel
22 x 30 in.



donottellmewhereibelong #10, 2014
Graphite, colored pencil, pastel
22 ¼ x 30 in.



donottellmewhereibelong #11, 2014
Graphite, oil stick, pastel
22 ¼ x 30 in.

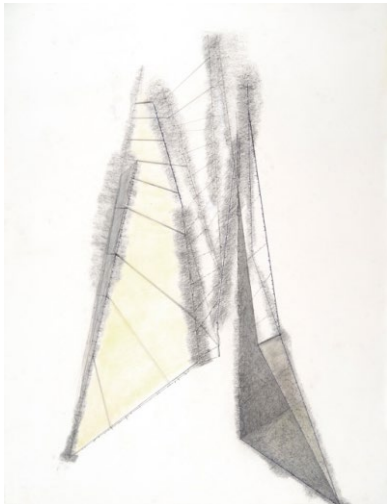
Out of Joint: Joan Tanner



donottellmewhereibelong #12, 2014
Graphite, colored pencil, oil stick, pastel
22 x 30 in.



donottellmewhereibelong #15, 2014
Graphite, colored pencil, oil stick, pastel
22 x 30 in.



donottellmewhereibelong #16, 2014
Graphite, colored pencil, oil stick, pastel
30 x 22 in.



donottellmewhereibelong #20, 2014
Graphite, colored pencil, oil stick, pastel
22 x 30 in.



donottellmewhereibelong #24, 2014
Oil stick, graphite, ink, chalk
22 x 30 in.



donottellmewhereibelong #33, 2015
Chalk, pastel, graphite, ink on Arches paper
22 x 30 in.



donottellmewhereibelong #34, 2015
Graphite, chalk, oil pastel and ballpoint on Strathmore
22 x 30 in.

SMALL SCULPTURES

Although Tanner began her career in the 1960s as a painter, over time, her interests have shifted, moving through collage and assemblage toward sculpture and large installations— for example, *Mire* and *Shaped Plywood* in this exhibition. These recent works emerge from her fascination with the manipulation of industrial and found materials. For Tanner, meaning is variable, dependent on both place and time, as well as the interpretive role of the viewer. This contingency is made all the more complex by the way in which she sometimes recycles and reshapes the elements that make up her sculptures. For instance, she has reworked *Screen Hat* for over twenty years. Such small sculptures show Tanner’s stated interest “in spatial discord and reconfiguration by way of stacking, bundling, sequence, and chanced movement.” Through these processes, she realizes an aesthetic of “unfinishedness,” a principle that acknowledges that our world is governed by impermanence and change.



Screen Hat, 1990-2010
Wood Xerox, cloth, metal screen, casters, acrylic, and Plexiglas, 12 x 17 x 17 in.



Trophy Pedestal Horse, 2008
Wood, metal rod, wire, glass, coated element, wire tie back, polyethylene foam, 17.5 x 11 x 11 in.



Trophy Arch, 2009
Glass globes, plasticine, rubber toys, Scotch tape, wood, magnets, Corian
27 x 26 x 14 in.