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## DECODING IMAGES

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### **Jennifer Nocon, Untitled Shelf #4 (Air over Earth over Fire over Water means Good Fortune), 2009**

Hand-dyed wool, pine #1, teak,  
101 x 72 x 14 inches.

Los Angeles-based artist Jennifer Nocon uses the tension created by arranging natural materials and organic forms in the gallery context to test human behaviors. Here she explains the fundamentals of a work, *Untitled Shelf #4*, on view at Tracy Williams in New York through October 31.

## FOUR CORNERS

I understand how the forms within the shelves would be read as symbols, though I think of them more as stand-ins. I'm uncomfortable with the word "symbol" because when I begin construction on a shape I have only a vague feeling of what the final outcome will be. I build on the principle of "the path of least resistance," so the process of object making is largely meditative and the relationship between the form and its corresponding elemental reference is an after thought. I think this enables the forms to be loose enough for the viewer to weave their own narrative into them. I titled them Air, Earth, Fire and Water but I think these elemental terms are big enough to transcend their literal translations.

## SHELF LIFE

I started the shelf series in 2007, and there are four to date. Each one is very different in terms of content, but they all function based on the same principles of grouping. Formally they reference the tri-gram configurations of the I-Ching. Conceptually, as a series, I was thinking about the way Rauschenberg carefully juxtaposed objects and painting to achieve an almost meditative or spiritual quality in his Combines.

## HIGH-TECH FIBER

There are only three places in the continental United States that will distribute the quantities I work in. Most of this material is designated for friction application in the aerospace industry.

## LIVING COLOR

I use color to suggest an emotional, elemental or organic situation; like fear or fire, or joy and surrender or melting... I watercolor at home while I build forms in the studio. Working simultaneously in both mediums helps me to workout palettes. If I want something to read as gold, like the top piece in *Untitled Shelf IV*, I'll cut all the pieces first then dye them several different tones of ochre, burnt sienna and cadmium to arrive at the feeling I am trying to express in that color. The tonality prohibits one color or shape from dominating. The gold form in the highest position is titled air, but i am more interested in it as the idea of ascension. The greens are referencing the natural world and/or growth. The reds and oranges fear and/or fire or transformation while he blues attempt to evoke water, ice, melting and/or tranquility.

## MATERIAL BODY

The pieces are made out of quarter-inch pressed wool felt. It is very dense but extremely generous in terms of pattern making, cutting, construction and receiving dyes. I chose to work in wool for this piece because the material has a corporeality that enables me to build a seemingly organic form that could also reference an aspect of the human condition. In general I observe re-occurring patterns in the natural world and am intrigued with how we mimic these patterns in human nature. The work continually attempts to reveal the way in which people, through the repetition of certain behaviors, slowly evolve a character—much the same way a plant develops thorns. I especially like the idea of

replicating something thorny, untouchable or parasitic with soft wool. It creates a dichotomy where tenderness is juxtaposed with cruelty. The dichotomy creates a tension hopefully in the form of desire. I have observed that the viewer often wants to touch the wool sculptures but they can't because its in a gallery or a scripted space that reads "no touching"—thus creating desire.

### STATE OF GRACE

The title is a reference to the I-Ching. An ancient Chinese text rooted in the diverting philosophies of Confucianism and Taoism often citing the teachings of Lao Tzu. It is actually a very simple and practical oracle whose guiding principle seems to point in the direction of mindfulness. The readings use very basic metaphors from the natural world to suggest how we might conduct ourselves in a continually changing universe. Each of the 64 outcomes is determined by a varying configuration of elements arranged in trigrams - or lines of three. The I-Ching subscribes to the idea that while the universe is in constant flux, there are certain principles that do not vary with space and time. The traditional elements from the text; wind, water, fire, mountain, earth, thunder and heaven, refer to these constants. I used this system as a point of departure to create my own arrangement; Air over Earth over Fire over Water. Consequently determining my own good fortune. So yes, I believe the elements in *Untitled Shelf IV* reference topography, but in this case it is the mapping of a desired state of grace, or meditation.

### STORAGE SPACE

The shelves are spaced evenly, about 20 inches apart: just enough to give the housed forms space to exist autonomously while coexisting. It is important that the shelves appear to be floating and seamlessly attached to the wall. I am interested in the floating strait line of the shelf acting as a plane, or a dimension that exist in an ascending order.

<http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/decoding-images/jennifer-nocon-untitled-shelf-4-air-over-earth-over-fire-over-water-means-good-fortune-2009/>