

STICK IN A BOX

Karen Kunc's Bemis show gets down to basics

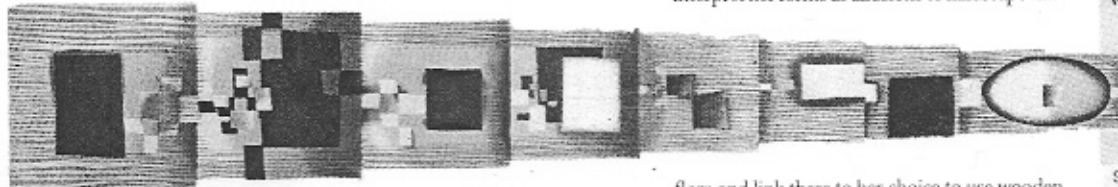
by Sarah Baker

Getting rid of the frills is a nearly sure-fire way to make things instantly interesting. It's definitely the case in the work Lincoln artist Karen Kunc is showing at downtown's Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts.

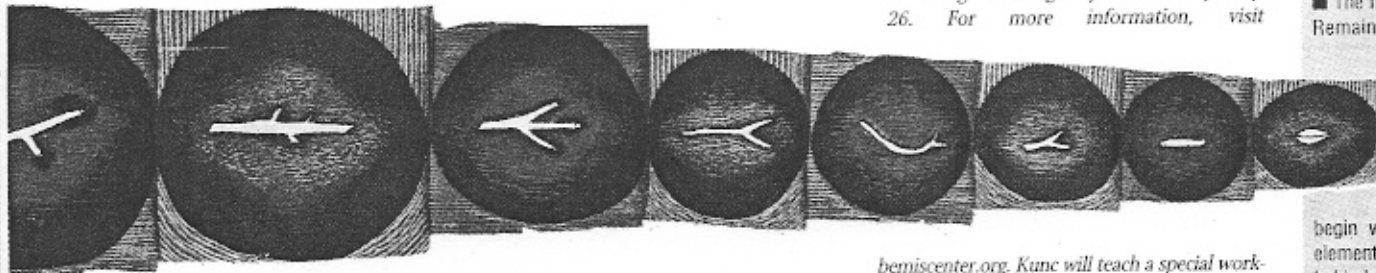
Kunc's solo show, which opened last week, features a small number of stark, pared-down prints that, while created in her usual style, heavily inspired by nature, are intriguing because of what they lack. Karen Kunc: *Sensory Source* is a show where the artist took ideas of chance, time and the idea of one moment and expressed them through simple, straightforward shapes. She aims to explore notions of

American Art and National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C.

She is the recipient of the Nebraska 2000 Governor's Art Award, Artist of the Year and a Fulbright Scholarship for research travel to Finland in 1996. She also won an Omaha Entertainment Award in 2006 in the Printmaking category. Kunc's work usually has a



focus on color and shape with a rhythmic quality. The work in this show adopts those same aspects but in a new way. Most of the works focus on one image from nature — a stick, for instance, and place it in a series of boxes that get continually smaller or larger, depending on how one looks at them. Sometimes the shape continues through the boxes as one image; other times, each box contains a separate image.



preservation, human myth and creation.

Kunc and her work have been recognized throughout the nation. She received a Master of Fine Arts from Ohio State University in 1977 and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1975, and has been a professor there since 1983. Her woodblock prints and other printwork have been featured in more than 100 shows throughout the U.S. and Europe, and she has work in the collections of New York's Museum of Modern Art, and The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of

The works are done in colors derived from nature — ochre, maize, sepia — and though the tones are muted, every once and a while Kunc throws in a bright orange or a deep burgundy to keep things interesting. The backgrounds of each box are covered with subtle patterns of cross hatch, stripe or a sort of wood-like grain, but these patterns are just subtle enough to not distract from the main image at hand.

In the catalog that accompanies the show, Andrew Stevens, curator of prints, Drawings

and Photographs at the Chazen Museum of Art in Madison, Wis., writes of Kunc's work: "We may see Kunc's predilection for images divided into portions as representing forces balanced against each other, achieving harmony through oppositions of compositional forms and contrasts between intense colors, all reflecting her personal search for a great balance. We may interpret her forms as allusions to landscape and

flora and link these to her choice to use wooden blocks to create her images and to her preference for country living." Kunc always has, and continues to draw from her travel experiences, rural Nebraska and nature in her woodcut work — all these are clear influences on the art she's showing at Bemis. **BT**

Karen Kunc: *Sensory Source* continues at the Bemis Center, 724 S. 12th St., through May 26. Kunc will give a free gallery talk Saturday, May 26. For more information, visit

bemiscenter.org. Kunc will teach a special workshop at Bemis during the run of the show wherein she will give 15 people the chance to learn about reductive printmaking. The workshops take place April 13-15 and cost \$120 for Bemis members and \$150 for non-members. Advanced registration is recommended, call 402.341.7130.

LOCAL ETCH: Omaha native Karen Kunc's work is intended as visual iconography suggestive of nature and is inspired by travel experiences through rural Nebraska.

SKET

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