



Provoking perceptions

Deborah Perlman discusses exploring artistic inspirations and viewer experiences



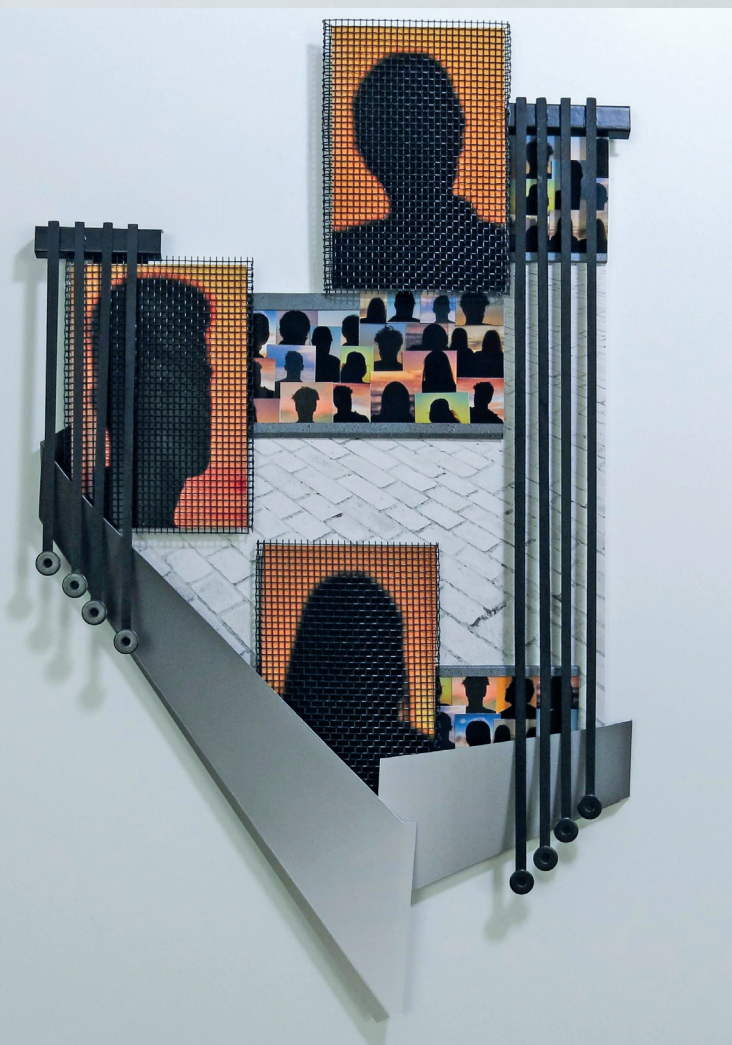
What ideas are you exploring in your work?

I live in a world that has changed in many ways over the past decade. This brings questions to mind as well as a range of emotions. Recent events like climate change, social justice and societal trends have influenced the direction of my latest work. I just completed a series entitled *Nature-Tecture*, exploring climate change and the respectful coexistence of the man-made and natural worlds.

Other new pieces focus on the themes of denial and restriction, using silhouettes to suggest migrants, people only seen as stereotypes and numbers whose basic human rights are being diminished. A new series explores how the world-wide pandemic impacted confidence, authenticity, and connection. I ask: when you see me “on the screen” what do you really see?

I am an optimist at heart. I know there is hope and I look for rays of light peeking through today’s clouds. ▶

Left: Deborah Perlman, *Nature-Tecture #4*, mixed media; paper, photographs, 20 x 25 cm



“The piece changes regularly until I know it’s complete. I let it lead me. I have learned to have no expectations from day to day.”

What are the materials used in your work?

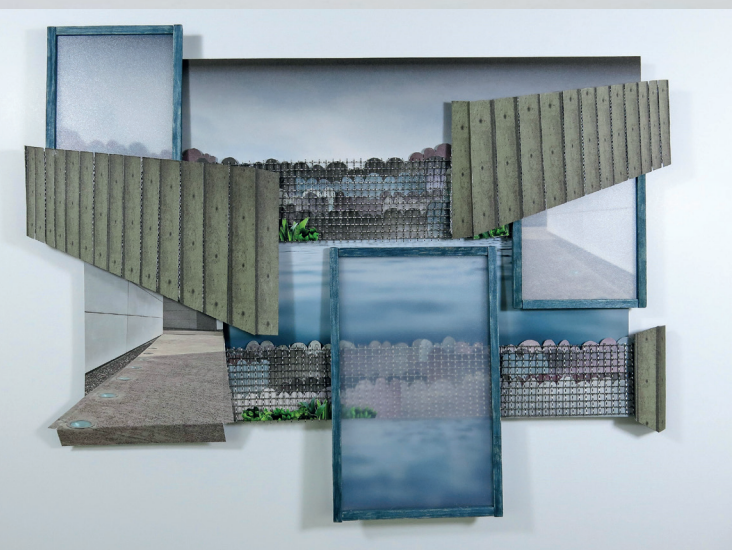
I use a variety of materials, including different types of paper, plastic, photographs, aluminium wire, tapes of all kinds, wire mesh, metal, paint, wood, and cords. I never leave the hardware, fabric, or craft store without something new to try.

My training in sculpture attracts me to three-dimensional, bas-relief artwork. The materials are placed into my work to emphasise its spatial dynamics. They also help me create patterns and tactile interest.

What are your main influences?

My historic influences include 19th- and 20th-century African sculpture; the constructivism, geometric abstraction, and cubism (Picasso, Braque, Lipschitz) art movements; Giorgio de Chirico and MC Escher’s “illogical perspective” works; Louise Nevelson’s bas-reliefs; Joseph

Top: Deborah Perlman, *Restricted*, mixed media; paper, wood, plastic, wire mesh, photographs, metal, 59 x 39 cm
 Bottom: Deborah Perlman, *Migrant*, mixed media; paper, wood, plastic, wire mesh, photographs, 46 x 58 cm



Right: Deborah Perlman, *Denied*, mixed media; paper, wood, plastic, wire mesh, photographs, metal, 59 x 39 cm

Cornell’s shadow boxes; and Frank Stella’s metal reliefs, among so many others.

And every day, I find myself looking at the work of my contemporaries. I inevitably find art that causes me to take a second look, do some research and take notes. It never ends.

Can you share some of your process?

Depending on the subject, I conduct research and learn as much as I can about the topic. I also search for photos to see how it’s portrayed visually. I put the photos around me in the studio, then start sketching – which includes time to think about the topic, to be sure I stay true to my original intention for the piece.

Sometimes I develop a very specific sketch and build a 3D mock-up, but lately I seem to jump in and place shapes, colours, objects, and forms together until I realise my vision. This more spontaneous method seems to create a more authentic work.

The piece changes regularly until I know it’s complete. I let it lead me. I have learned to have no expectations from day to day, and this instinctive process is truly the magic of being an artist.

What inspires your work?

Inspiration can come from anywhere or anything. Certainly nature, architecture, world events, and life experiences have played a significant role in my work.

The most important element for me is to keep my mind, eyes, and spirit open to whatever comes, and to honour my voice and my authentic self. I may have had one



idea about where a work is going, but honestly, the work tells me where it needs to go, and I follow.

What do you want the viewer to consider or experience through your work?

My art slides in and out of reality, landing somewhere between authentic and imagined. It challenges previous assumptions and established thoughts. I want it to stir the senses; spark feelings, memories, and images. 🗨️

Deborah Perlman exhibits throughout the US and has won awards and appeared in art publications. In 2023, her work was juried into a New York gallery exhibit by a curator from MoMA, and selected for a solo exhibit at the Morean Arts Center in St. Petersburg, Florida. artbydeperlman.com