



The McIninch Art Gallery

DEBRA WEISBERG

Cannot be Determined in Advance

February 23 to April 2, 2017

Southern
New Hampshire
University



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The McIninch Art Gallery is pleased to include this site-specific installation by Debra Weisberg for our exhibition roster which is in keeping with our practice to create a platform for established artists to use the gallery's unique space for exciting creative experimentation.

Our invited artists are encouraged to think boldly and take risks with an intimate space that allows them to examine the roots of a percolating idea. The SNHU community and visitors benefit from these experiences because they are able to become involved with the work in progress and engage in meaningful discourse with artists as they install their work.

Debra Weisberg has created numerous installations for which she has combined her talent as a sculptor/draftsman with her skills as an educator. Her mark-making and sculptural forms are encouraged by the examination of place and the people that will populate that place. For the purposes of this installation at the McIninch Art Gallery, Weisberg's combination of sculpture and music creates an environment that envelops the visitor in the artist's thoughtful consideration of space, form and light.

Debra Weisberg's craftsmanship is flawless, allowing an uninterrupted experience of her practice as a highly established artist, as well as her vision for this unique installation. We are confident you will enjoy the experience.

— Debbie Disston, Director, The McIninch Art Gallery

(un)See(n)scape
2016; 96" x 204" w x 264" d; paper pulp, wire, foam,
powdered pigment, polymer resin, black sand

Cover | *(un)See(n)scape*
2016, 96" x 204" w x 264" d, paper pulp, wire, foam,
powdered pigment, polymer resin, black sand



(un)Sea(n)scape

2015; 9'h x 2 3'w x 9'd; paper pulp, wire, foam, powdered pigment, polymer resin

Duxbury Museum Installation

The dialogue between the artist and art writer, Judith Tolnick Champa, is encapsulated here as *Four Questions for Debra Weisberg*. It derives from discussions that took place in person, via telephone, and via Internet from September-November, 2016, and is presented here on the occasion of *Debra Weisberg: Cannot be Determined in Advance*.

You have produced a spirited installation for SNHU; a dense sculptural environment of multiple linear matrices. Like your overall creative project, it is rooted in the directness of drawing. How does drawing propel you into a mutable material direction, and how does each installation help refine that goal?

All of my work, even the three-dimensional, is rooted in drawing which I define—following anthropologist Tim Ingold—as “an indelible record of the pressure of the fingers on the pencil that makes it, driven by impatience, control, or anxiety of the maker... an archive of the maker’s muscle.”

For me, physical materials are the only “pencil” needed to make the glyph or line—tape, wire, fiber, torn, layered, or otherwise manipulated. The resistance of the material to the will of my hand and mind is essential to how I generate my art and how imagery may emerge. I find the act of drawing to be dynamic, improvisational, and mutable inside any installation.



What I love about the ability to reprise different iterations of an installation is digging deeper into a familiar visual experience. It's like learning to ride a bicycle, beginning with a tricycle, progressing to training wheels, and ultimately a two-wheeler. I gain the skills, stamina, and confidence to navigate unknown terrain.

Above | Swoop
 2013; 144" x 480" x 36"; Tape, paper, board, ink, stick back paper
 Collaborative Drawing Project @ Wheaton College





How does your sense of working space—balancing the known and the unknown, and cherishing the value of space shifting, including rupture, and weight-averse strategies—express itself in this installation?

In each exhibition venue, my body and brain retool, opening new pathways and leveraging prior experience to up the ante. For SNHU, I decided to integrate a sonic element to create a more meditative atmosphere and sense of fragility, leaving the viewer feeling enveloped; transported beyond the white gallery cube.

A related change was shifting the space away from the sharp angularities of the intersecting gallery wall and floor to minimize separations. So I made dozens of textile-like floor matrices, drawn using black hot glue dipped into pulp, and placed these over the floor, under the installation, and around the edges of the room. Lighting is dramatized to reveal and conceal selectively; again uniting plane, space and line.

Above and above left
Artist & Student working on Swoop at Wheaton College 2013

Glow 6 - Daytime View



Glow 6 - Nighttime View



Glow 6
2011; 9" x 5"; Photoluminescent Tapes/powders on museum board

In what ways is your studio practice a foundation for the completed installation? What are some surprises you faced using difficult materials and techniques, and how do these resolve with your painterly, even mischievous (recollecting Mermeros) impulses onsite?

I craft everything with my own hands. Originally trained as a painter, I still construct the many components of my installations as a painter would, mark by mark, building each visual element layer by layer. Final imagery emerges through the collaborative process I have with my materials (predominantly dyed paper, wire, wire mesh, and paper pulp) that at times resist manipulation or do not always yield to my will. Mine is a very slow process. I have come to accept that and I relish a pace that forces me to relinquish time; to see the timelessness in time.

I am attuned to every detail of surface, every nuance of what I am making, although some of my creations may end up submerged under other elements, or are only partially revealed. I trust that all the labor that goes into making my installation strengthens how it is received, from the fragility and temporal nature of the fictitious vistas I have created, to the questions I pose about tensions between collapse and renewal. I therefore find it ironic that I have gravitated more and more to temporary, site-specific work, where I am usually given less than a week to make a large-scale piece!



Above left | *(un)See(n)scape (Detail)*
2016; Paper pulp over wire



Above right | *Fuerza*
2000; 64" h x 36" w x 22" d; wire mesh,
cheesecloth, polymer, ink, wood



I start without preliminary sketches. This process is identical to my collaboration with students, where large-scale tape drawings begin with a PowerPoint introduction as the only blueprint. Increasingly, I find myself providing students freer reign in their visual decisions, even when contrary to my own. As a mature artist with a long history of studio experience, I welcome situations where I work at an atypical speed, in an unfamiliar space, oftentimes pushing against architectural challenges.

I'm like the introverted comic who prefers performing stand-up to its video documentation. Maybe it's the exhilaration of a live performance that one has spent many months alone preparing for, knowing full well that as much as one prepares there remains a myriad of uncontrollable unknowns. Somehow, when it all comes together, with missteps and accidents incorporated into the final piece, it is so much richer for both me and the viewer.



You invited jazz musician and composer, Ken Field, to create a complementary sonic environment for this installation, in part to tease out, or even amplify, its non-linguistic reading and its abstraction. You emphasize the gallery as the realm of the maker. Yet like your exhibition title, *Cannot be Determined in Advance*, there is an intentional, inherent openness. Can you talk about engaging an improvisatory musical element within in the university sphere?



Left | *Salt 1*
2015; h 17" x w 11" x d 11"; Paper, paper tape, salt, clear nail polish, ink, museum board

Above | *Salt 1 (detail)*
2015; Paper, paper tape, salt, clear nail polish, ink, museum board



I specifically wanted to work with a jazz musician who embodies my love of the unexpected. Ken created a short live sonic piece for a previous exhibition of mine and it really changed the mood. It turned the gallery into a space of contemplation; opening room for emotional qualities that seem to be absent in contemporary art but continue to be central in music.

I show a fair amount in university galleries and the audience, mostly groups of students, often arrives noisily and is somewhat raucous. I noticed that by incorporating sound, the visitor is forced to slow down and become a viewer who listens and looks with a focus that can be absent when there is a lot of chatting between visitors.



Top | *Infinitesimal (right rear)*
2011; 118"x 133"x 1"; Black and white paper tape on paper

Bottom | *Infinitesimal (Detail)*
2011; Black and white paper tape on paper



The music complements my faded memory bank of images that I wrestle into an abstracted, affective experiential state. My hope is that sound will interact with sight to deepen the audience's immersion in the work and allow for a quiet intimacy between place and self.

Top | *Dystopian Dreaming Day View*

Bottom | *Dystopian Dreaming Night View*

2011, 11' x 22' x 1"; Photoluminescent tapes and powders on museum board mounted on wood

DEBRA WEISBERG is active nationally and internationally. She has exhibited at the Paper Biennial in the Netherlands; Art in General and East Hampton Center for Contemporary Art, New York; and in the Boston area, the Art Complex Museum, Duxbury; Danforth Art Museum; DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum; Gallery Kayafas; Mills Gallery, Boston Center for the Arts; Dedee Shattuck Gallery; Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University and VanDernoot Gallery, Lesley University.

In 2017 Weisberg, as artist-in-residence at the Facebook Corporate Office in Cambridge, produced an eighteen-foot long wall installation. She twice attended the MacDowell Colony and was awarded an art residency in CanSerrat, outside of Barcelona, for June 2009. In 2008 Weisberg was a Massachusetts Cultural Council fellowship winner in drawing. Her forty-foot high installation at the DeCordova entitled (*Sub*) Surface won an award for best museum installation (2003) from the Boston Art Critics Association.

Weisberg was Somerville Arts Lottery winner in 2001, 2004, 2008, and 2015. Her individual works have entered numerous collections, from the Sonesta Hotel to General Hardware Manufacturing Company in New York. As part of her studio practice Weisberg collaborates regularly with students on large-scale dimensional drawing installations, the most recent, *Somatic (e) SCAPES* at Milton Academy.

In addition to teaching at Boston College and New England School of Art and Design at Suffolk University, Weisberg is an energetic invited lecturer. She recently spoke on “Material Drawing: Exploration and Connectivity” for MIT’s Graduate School of Architecture and Planning. This paper, which examined the material of making, intuition and accidents in the digital age, was presented in 2014 at University College, London.

KEN FIELD is a composer and saxophonist (Birdsongs of the Mesozoic, Revolutionary Snake Ensemble, Sesame St) and has created a multi-channel soundscape to accompany the artwork. Simultaneous, asynchronously looping material result in a constantly evolving sonic environment that mirrors the textural and meditative aspects of Weisberg’s work.

JUDITH TOLNICK CHAMPA is an independent contemporary art curator launched by Brown University’s History of Art graduate program, where teaching with objects became her passion and the impetus for a curatorial career. An experienced art writer, she recently was editor-in-chief of Art New England, a longstanding regional art magazine in Boston. Tolnick Champa served as curatorial affairs director for Brown University’s David Winton Bell Gallery as well as director/curator for the former University of Rhode Island, Kingston Fine Arts Center Galleries. A 2011 Leadership RI graduate, she is on the board of the New England Museum Association (NEMA). Cultivating the complementary practices of curating and writing, she is founding director of the Providence Biennial (in development), to be inaugurated by an ambitious program of art installations across the region.

The McIninch Art Gallery

MISSION STATEMENT

The McIninch Art Gallery, administered by the School of Arts and Sciences at Southern New Hampshire University, provides first-hand experiences in the arts through collections, exhibitions, and diverse programs designed to support the university curriculum and enhance public engagement with fine art.

This publication is in conjunction with the exhibition Debra Weisberg, *Cannot be Determined in Advance on view from February 23 – April 2*, McIninch Art Gallery, Southern New Hampshire University.

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Gallery Hours | Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. • Thursdays, 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. • Closed Sundays and university holidays

Location | 2500 North River Road, Robert Frost Hall • Manchester NH • 603-629-4622 • www.snhu.edu/art