

The Capital City Arts Initiative [CCAI] is honored to present Luminosity, an exhibition by Cathy Breslaw at the CCAI Courthouse Gallery, February 4 – May 2, 2013. In conjunction with the exhibition, curator Danielle Susalla Deery wrote the following essay. CCAI extends special thanks to Molly Bundy-Toral and the Carson Nugget for their lead donations supporting the project. CCAI was also delighted to receive a Challenge America Fast-Track Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to support the exhibition. Thank you to Cathy, Danielle, the Carson City Courthouse, and all those involved in the exhibition for your participation and support for the arts in Carson City.

Lightness of Being

Experimentation for artists, a key aspect of creativity that keeps them engaging with new materials and forms, enables them to continually push the limits of art. California based artist Cathy Breslaw, no stranger to experimentation, relishes trips to Home Depot where she may discover uncommon art materials in the building aisle. Committed to working with new industrial plastic mesh and netting from around the globe, Breslaw creates paintings without surface using surprising materials.

For her exhibition at the Capital City Arts Initiative (CCAI) Courthouse Gallery, *Luminosity*, a title that speaks to the importance of light, Breslaw has selected eight mixed media pieces. Engaging viewers not only with concepts surrounding illumination, the exhibition also invites contemplation about space and the possibilities associated with everyday plastic mesh materials typically seen wrapped around fruits and vegetables at the grocery store. According to Breslaw, "Concepts of virtual space, space around objects and outer space, all capture my thoughts as I attempt to visually create what we cannot see. Light, space and multiple dimensions form the undercurrent of my thought process as well as the transitory, fragile nature of life."

Light, as experienced in nature or in artificial indoor conditions, has a powerful effect on the human psyche, and as a subject and object in art over the past two centuries, has been a critical catalyst for artists. The Impressionists sought to capture the fleeting nature of light in the late 1880s, while artists such as James Turrell of the 1960s Light and Space art movement focused on the perceptual phenomenon of light. With a nod to the Light and Space artists, Breslaw's work seeks to capture the ephemeral lightness of her southern California environment through the use of transparent, translucent and reflective materials. Light also brings awareness to the rich textures and layers embedded within each piece, and encourages viewers to examine the volume, structure, shadow play and weightlessness of her work.

Born in Coral Gables, Florida in 1951, Cathy Breslaw was raised in Baltimore Maryland. Her childhood was spent immersed in her family's chain of fabric stores that introduced her to a kaleidoscope of color, texture, and pattern, ultimately having a significant effect on her artistic vision. Breslaw's distinct use of industrial mesh and netting

began in 2004 after a family business trip to Taiwan and China exposed her to this ubiquitous commercial material. While touring numerous factories with her husband, who manages a manufacturing business that incorporates various types of commercial plastics, Breslaw was immediately drawn to this material for its translucency, versatility and flexibility. Typically used for storing food and packaging fruits and vegetables, this plastic mesh and netting is seldom used in art making. Yet, with the eye of an artist, the variegated apertures (hole sizes), weight, color and thickness constitute an exciting medium not only to explore color and form, but also to communicate the globalization of manufacturing and its impact on the art world. Through a complex process involving slashing, twisting, weaving, painting, burning and sewing, Breslaw manipulates this atypical art medium, transforming it into ethereal abstract compositions.

The transparent quality of the plastic netting mimics Breslaw's interest in painting with watercolors, inks and acrylics. Using her materials in the same method a painter would use a brush, she blends colors together by layering pieces of vibrant hued plastic mesh to achieve a very painterly approach to her wall and floor sculptures. Color and texture play an important role in enhancing the atmospheric quality of the materials. *Lightness of Being #1* floats off the wall casting an intriguing shadow and a composition dense with various shades of red, purple, green and yellow. Each color subtly bleeds into one another without forming hard edges, recalling the meditative quality of color field images by many Abstract Expressionists. Sharing forms of painting, sculpture, fiber art and installation, the work leads the viewer to take an intimate look at the exciting tactile variations of seemingly ordinary materials. Distant cousins to the art quilt, these woven plastic works share a similar craft aesthetic often associated with fiber art, yet clearly function more like sculptural paintings. Each wall hanging and floor piece maintains the structure Breslaw was looking for in her painting but belies the heavy rigidity associated with a canvas or wood medium, allowing her to achieve paintings without solid surfaces.

Carousel presents unexpected combinations of plastic mesh, fabrics, beads, buttons and twine that activate the floor space provoking reflection from different vantage points. Breslaw's innovative combination of materials is reminiscent of the work of Judy Pfaff, an artist Breslaw cites as having an influence on her artwork. Recognized for her complex environments that involve a wide-range of eclectic materials, Pfaff's large-scale pieces have a dynamic sense of energy and lightness paralleled in Breslaw's installations. Like many of Breslaw's works, *Carousel* involves multiple layers of meaning, speaking both to concepts surrounding entropy and Robert Smithson's (1938-1973) iconic earthwork sculpture *Spiral Jetty* (1970) and to her interest in materiality and experimentation.

The drawings in this exhibition provide an important entry point to understanding Breslaw's creative process. While her industrial mesh sculptures are often intuitively designed in response to the materials, Breslaw's sprawling installations, primarily hung from the ceiling, are frequently derived from her abstract drawings. Taking inspiration from her imagination about space and time and an awareness of her surrounding environment, Breslaw's drawings are full of playfulness and rhythmic balance. The drawings, created on transparent paper, plastic or mesh, are sometimes embellished with other materials that create a world of movement in two-dimensional space. *Street Bubbles* presents a great example of how Breslaw paints on plastic, using the reflective quality of the material to express an experience she had in Spain watching a performance artist create massive bubbles simply from two sticks and a bucket of soap.

Weaving together her interest in light, space, materiality, and experimentation, Cathy Breslaw creates a meditative environment in *Luminosity* through a dynamic array of work that radiates energy and color. While the scientific understanding of luminosity implies the magnitude of brightness often associated with a celestial body, in reference to Breslaw's art, it reflects the light majestically emanating from her work.

Danielle Susalla Deery
Oceanside, California
January, 2013

Cathy Breslaw holds an MFA from Claremont Graduate University in Claremont, California, an MSW (Master of Social Work) from Howard University in Washington, D.C. and a BA degree in American Studies from George Washington University in Washington D.C. She currently lives and works in southern California as a visual artist, arts writer and public speaker. Breslaw's work has been the subject of over 30 solo exhibitions and has been featured in approximately 50 group exhibitions around the nation. Select exhibitions include Above, Below and Beyond (2012) Walkers Point Center for the Arts, Milwaukee, WI; A Matter of Space (2011), Oceanside Museum of Art, Oceanside, CA; Explorations: Space and Light (2011), Bakersfield Museum of Art, Bakersfield, CA; Light Moves (2009), West Valley Art Museum, Surprise, AZ; and Material Girls (2007) at the Riverside Art Museum, Riverside, CA.

Danielle Susalla Deery is Director of Exhibitions and Communications at Oceanside Museum of Art, Oceanside, California where she manages five exhibition galleries and oversees approximately 20 exhibitions a year. She has been curating in her native state of California for over 10 years and maintains a strong interest in modern and contemporary art history with special focus on southern California artists. Since 2008 Deery has also maintained an Adjunct Art History Instructor position at Fullerton College, CA and serves as the Vice President of the San Diego Museum Council. Deery holds an MFA from California State University, Fullerton, CA and a BA from Hobart and William Smith Colleges, NY.