

KAREN MARGOLIS' SONOGRAM

A LIVING NARRATIVE

Installed in a shoebox-shaped gallery, "Sonograms" by Karen Margolis offers a dialogue about the hybridization of conceptual art, domestic craft, alternative abstract painting process, science, architecture and design. The installation is intellectually dense, yet appears physically delicate. In color and form it is joyful, elegant, light and airy, projecting the illusion of simplicity.

This "easy quality" is a smart conceptual trick, seducing the viewer into a complicated world that is psychologically probing and sly. For Margolis, the main concern is to achieve a type of evolving emotional minimalism and layered spatial fluidity. She remarked that one inspiration for the Sonogram space was Monet's impressionistic Water Lily environments. What is missing – transitional and hidden in depths – is as important as what's solid, permanent and visible. At her core, she is a conceptual artist who happens to make beautiful objects as transporters of questions and narrative.

As an exhibition, "Sonograms" is site-specific and features a select grouping of Margolis' ongoing oeuvre with more recent sculptural experiments. It is immersive and kinetic. Two groups of complementary forms are featured that reference each other: the leftover material created during the process of creating one group was reworked to achieve the other.

The gallery space itself is important because it functions, metaphorically, as a type of nursery. Although Margolis made it clear that she is not maternal, she did refer to her sculptures as "little children." Around the perimeter are six mixed-media basket-like forms from the Wire Series; of different sizes and heights, some rest the floor while others are attached to the walls. They look like biological formations, land or under-

water geological growths, or enormous microbes, bacterium and amoebas.

They are constructed of cotton-covered wire that has been hand-dyed and rolled into circular components that look like large rings or bracelets of various diameters. The circular components, or connectors, are built up as successive flat, irregular and curved areas into containers – or vessel sculptures – some empty, others containing bunches of raw wire. One sculpture, "Untitled," 2015-16, which looks like a mushroom or floral growth, has a bloom of shredded paper maps projecting from the top. Maps are "like people," Margolis said. "They contain information."

There are dozens upon dozens of circles, yet no two are the same; each is distinctive and unique. For Margolis, repetition of the same, yet individualized basic shape into an imperfect pattern is her signature. What is most interesting about these forms is the physicality of together/alone. While the rings touch each other to form the object, there is void space within the circle and sometimes inside the final construction itself, allowing the circulation of light and air. It's an "un-solid solid," much like crochet or lace. Because they look organic, yet are made of wire and appear in transformation, they allude to the possibility of having an "artificial intelligence."

The most dramatic of these is the aggressive looking "Omphaloskepsis,"

2014 (26" x 32" x 15"), an arched floor piece that has one end in a confused disarray of colored wires chaotically fuzzing out in construction/deconstruction transition. The other dominant piece is the repulsively seductive "Containments," 2014 (84" x 25"), which looks like two tall amoebas, or mold spores, in an intimate moment.

What makes "Containments" intriguing is the perception that it is living and emotional. The manner in which the colors are arranged in progression, with pops of bright, saturated yellows, creates a visual illusion of pulsating light and alternating heat. Making it even more anthropomorphic are prickly tiny black wires projecting out of the circles alluding to hair! This is where ugly meets beautiful.

Exploring the emotive possibilities of texture is another of Margolis' ongoing investigations. In the interior gallery space are 18 "In Situ" tube formations (45" x 6-8"). These forms are plastic polyester sheets that have been printed

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Sonogram Installation with *In Situ* sculptures and *Untitled*, and *Containments*.



with the imperfect circle shapes and colors, or fetal sonograms, of the woven circular wire objects before they were transformed into sculptural form. After dyeing the cotton wires, Margolis allows them to dry out on the plastic sheets, leaving circular markings when they've been removed. The plastic sheets are then rolled into tubes of various dimensions. This creates a transparent column sculpture holding a deep-layered space of circular forms that appear as bubbles in water. In the exhibition, they're suspended from the ceiling at alternating heights by thin monofilament, swaying gently. They mimic cocoons, or the nesting and breeding places of baby wire creatures.

By remaining soft in look and feel and avoiding the coldness of pure geometry, Margolis' pieces are friendly. Various states of organization and perfection, or as she described it "perfect imperfection," is the guiding principle. Messy is humanistic. Through her work she is investigating human perception and awareness. This need to address "what we think we see and know" arrives out of her observation that contemporary culture is being propelled by machines and is unable to keep up. We are confused.

"Technology is pushing us too fast, and I'm interested in finding the singularity that unites us all; to me it's space, time, repetition, the in-between areas, integration and dislocation," she explained. "There is so much that is undefined or impossible to describe; the empty areas are just as important."

In "Sonograms," a number of Margolis' signature themes interconnect: color theory, biology, architectural and technological engineering. Her sculptures engage traditional handcraft process – cutting, dyeing, weaving, folding, twisting, rolling, building and structural placement. "I'm an undomesticated woman who has harnessed the power of domestic craft in my work." But craft is the process, not the idea. Her foundational concepts are mathematical – pattern formations and fractal exploration. Her ideas arrive from scientific investigation of biological activity.

Within these broad topics, she layers other areas of study into an expanding story web that meanders back to one conceptual point: the circle, specifically the Ensō of Japanese Zen Buddhism. This one point, colored black in her personalized "flow color chart of emotions" which she designed for herself as a color guide

in pointing out that, while working, she is not thinking or trying to convey "object." Her pieces are, she hopes, narratives, vessels containing dialogue and emotion, and they are segments, or chapters, forming a larger body of work. "They are still evolving, almost living," she said, "into infinity."

THE ORIGINS OF MARGOLIS' FORMAL PROCESS CIRCLES BACK TO AND WITHIN THE DOMESTIC REALM WHERE HARD AND SOFT UNITE.

to document her process, rests at the center of a line-web. She uses the chart, which can be viewed on her webpage, to map out the colors within her sculptures. The color chart also translates her vision of what neurotransmitters look like when activated by various types of stimulation, whether chemical or via meditation or physical activity.

The origins of Margolis' formal process circles back to and within the domestic realm where hard and soft unite. The source of inspiration is found in her childhood spent with her father, a television repairman, and her grandmother, a master baker and chef. Margolis fell in love with the components inside television sets – the guts of the TV – wires, glass tubes and all those connectors; she was also fascinated by her grandmother's skill in combining different food materials into delicious edible sculptures. Those experiences imprinted on her, leaving sonograms of the past that she uses as instructional code when working.

Margolis is aware that her objects engage the craft conundrum and that at the end of the day they are objects with a decorative tone. She admits that her pieces are popular with viewers interested in design, but she is fast

Margolis was the recipient a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant in 1998. In June, she will also be exhibiting at the Museum Rijswijk, Netherlands, followed by exhibitions at Roger Williams University in Bristol, Rhode Island, and then New York City and Germany.

| J. Fatima Martins

Arnie Casavant

'New England: Seasonal Impressions'

**May 21st -
June 18th, 2016**

**Reception:
Saturday, May 21st, 6-9pm**



"Late Arrival" 18"x24" oil on canvas by Arnie Casavant



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