

THE ART OF **CONTEMPLATION**

By Courtney Lauck

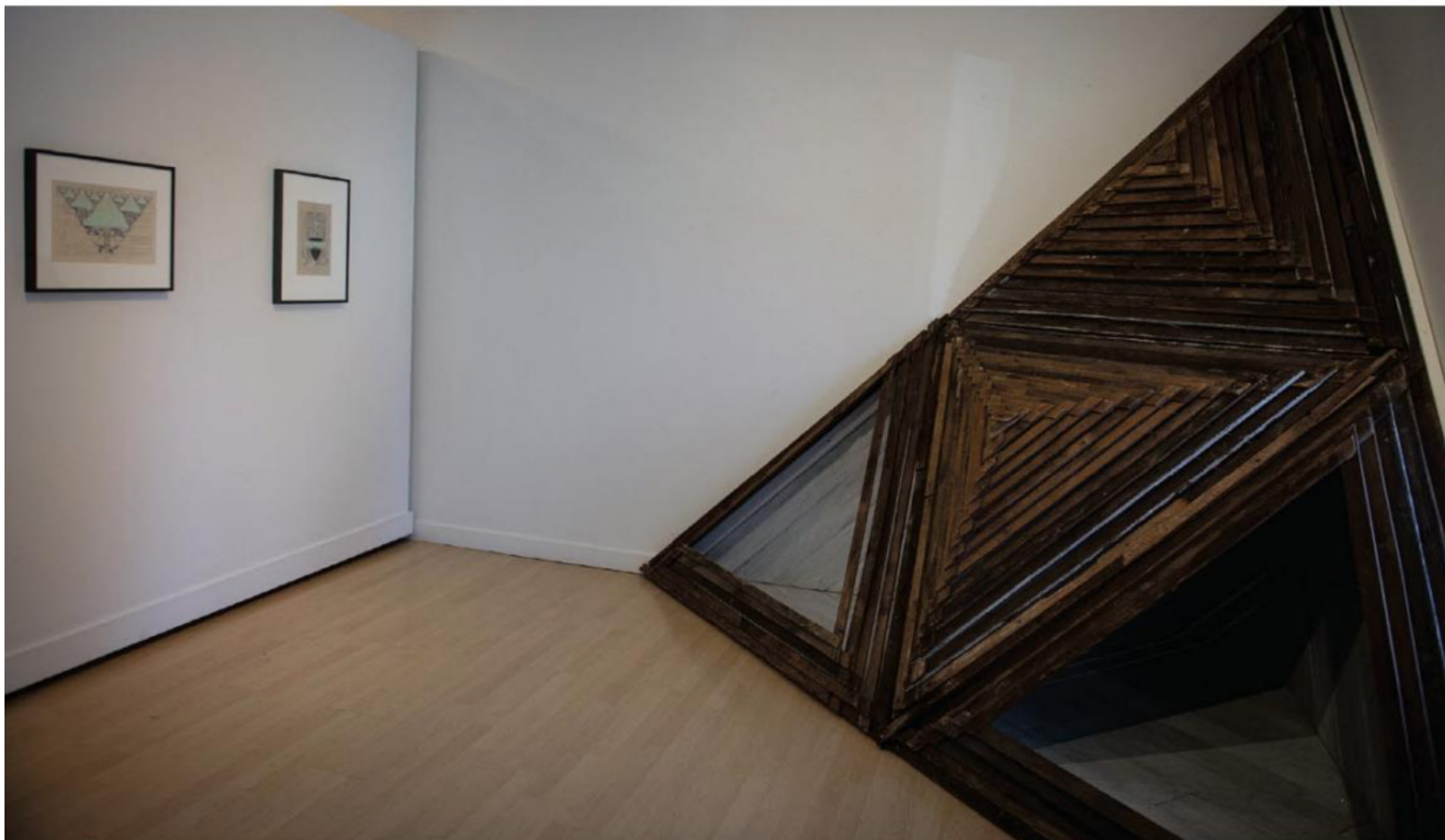
The Sun Valley Center for the Arts' BIG IDEA project began over 15 years ago, with a desire to expand thought and encourage conversation around one "big idea," utilizing multiple disciplines and culminating in an imaginatively produced vision. In March, The Center unveiled *Contemplative Practice*, and curator Courtney Gilbert explains the inspiration behind it: "The project grew out of a conversation we had at a staff meeting about the connection between art and healing, which led us to look at the relationship between contemplation and the arts. How does art inspire a contemplative experience?"

Through June 23, The Center highlights Pegan Brooke, Serra Victoria Bothwell Fels, Dana Lynn Louis, and Meg Hitchcock—four artists who each use meditation as part of their artistic process and as subject matter in their work. Gilbert says, "I like the way they work in a variety of media to address the idea of different types of contemplative practices."

Pegan Brooke has been living and painting in Ketchum for five and a half years. Though her paintings are abstract, one can certainly feel the influence of the Valley's seasons emanating through the canvas. For Brooke, the art found in nature is Sun Valley's main draw: "There are moments when the light shimmers on the snow, reflects on the rivers or flickers through the aspen leaves, which have become a part of my painterly interests." Though Brooke is prominently known for her paintings,



Above: Pegan Brooke, San Francisco studio. Photo by Eva Krucker.



"THE COLOR OF THERE SEEN FROM HERE" BY SERRA VICTORIA BOTHWELL FELS. 2013. LATH, CLAPBOARD, AND PLYWOOD. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND CATINCA TABACARU GALLERY, NEW YORK.



Above: Serra Victoria Bothwell Fels. Photo by Marc Azoulay and courtesy SVCA.

a medium she has worked in for 45 years, she also creates video poems and installations, which can be found alongside her paintings at The Center. Her video poems began with her contemplation of the Aven River years back in Pont Aven, France, a place especially important to her. Brooke describes herself as “internal and philosophical,” and credits years of reading literature by the sea as the grounds for her art. These inspirational experiences are especially striking in her video poem installation, “Acceptance/Resistance” (2016), in which light on moving water is projected onto the viewer’s hands, an idea that Brooke came up with 12 years ago and Gilbert helped to make a reality. “The current body of work studies light falling on water—the way that phenomenon can engage us in a simple, deep, and sustaining way. One overarching idea in all my work, paintings, and video poems is to create

a circumstance and space for the viewer to have her/his own experience, I just set it up.” Brooke will be speaking about her work on June 8 at The Center’s Evening Exhibition Tour.

The mesmerizing work of Serra Victoria Bothwell Fels features large wooden sculptures that can, in themselves, be used as meditative spaces; viewers are encouraged to climb inside for a full experience. Her piece, “You Are Here/Here You Are,” first grabs your attention with its impressive overlapping repetition of triangles and pyramids, and when one learns that the structure is crafted out of siding from post-Hurricane Isaac houses in New Orleans and crumbling houses in Detroit, the effect is even more arresting. In Fels’ *Meteorologie Series*, the intricate plans for her structures are detailed on French Meteorological Paper from the 1800s. She calls the plans “fantastical



"DONI DONI" BY DANA LYNN LOUIS. 2017. ACRYLIC ON WOOD PANEL, THREAD, GLASS BEADS, WIRE, AND METAL. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND FRIESEN GALLERY, KETCHUM.

Above: "Hope" (installation view) by Dana Lynn Louis. 2017. Blown glass, glass beads, and wire.
Opposite: Artist Dana Lynn Louis. Photo courtesy of SVCA.

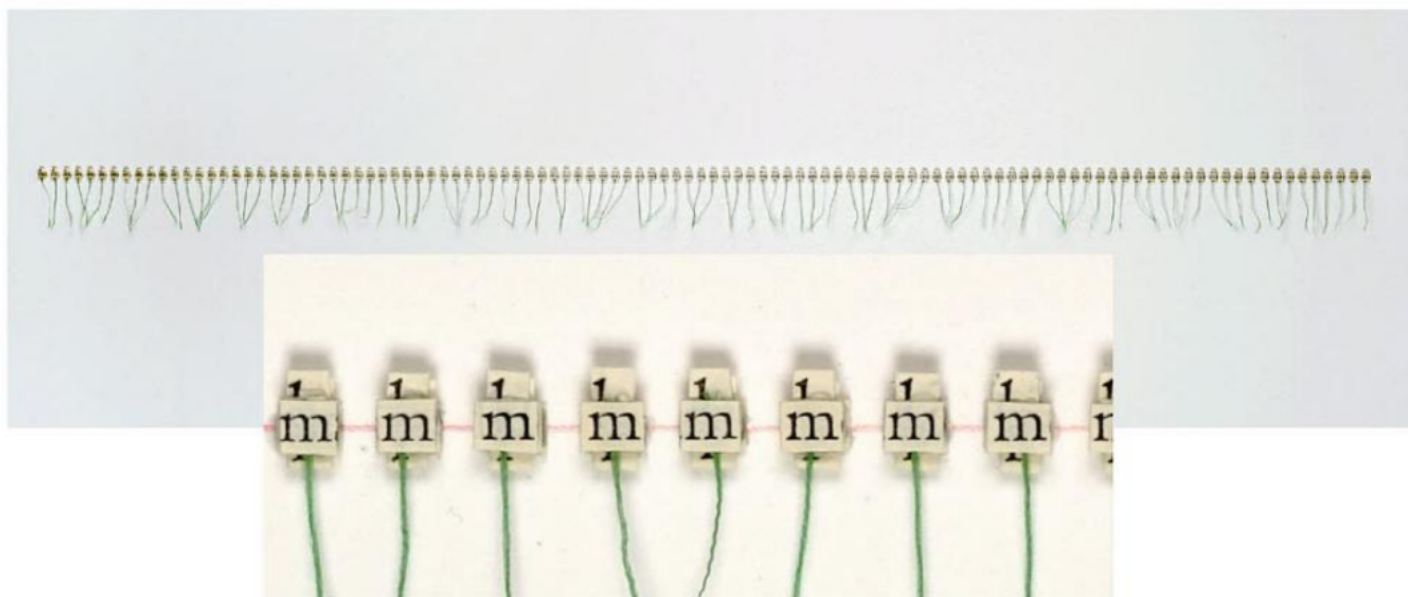


Above: Artist Dana Lynn Louis. Photo courtesy of SVCA.

blueprints,” and they are fascinating works made up of colorful interactions between repetitions of triangles and crystals, exemplifying her exploration of repetition as meditation.

For Dana Lynn Louis, the confluence of art and wellness represents a significant connection in her work. But, she says, the spiritual aspect of her art really only flourished after gaining her certification as a yoga teacher, and also working with hospitalized psychiatric patients. Before this, Louis described herself as a more “literal artist,” dealing in more traditional artistic avenues like that of figures and landscapes: “I think that in some respects with my work it’s been very connected to my spirituality for a long time but I was in the closet with it.”

Louis began facilitating Clearing Projects, in which things people would like cleared from their lives or the world are written down and ceremoniously burned. After witnessing the experience of her projects on psychiatric patients at the Oregon State Hospital, she considered bringing that art to a wider audience: “I realized if given the format to express yourself about hope, that it’s not just the people who are criminally or psychologically incarcerated who want to express themselves. That’s when I thought, there’s so much going on in the world and so many things are difficult and for a while my work has been about trying to create hope and levity in spaces and how...if I offered the



"108 MANTRAS" (DETAIL) BY MEG HITCHCOCK, 2016. LETTERS CUT FROM THE KORAN, THREADS CUT FROM TIBETAN PRAYER FLAGS. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND SVCA.

opportunity to people to express themselves in this way, what would happen?"

The clearing itself happens May 25th. "I just thought about it and the turbulent nature of our world is tenfold right now. That burning is going to happen the same night as the opening of the Festival," explains Louis. Aside from the Clearing Project, The Center commissioned her to transform their Project Room into an enveloping multi-media installation, which creates for its visitors an ultimate space for meditation and contemplation. Louis is running a concurrent show at the Friesen Gallery as well as being a featured speaker at the Wellness Festival. In addition, she will install light projections of her drawings at the Sun Valley Inn during the Festival.

Meg Hitchcock, a Brooklyn artist, cuts words and letters from two sacred texts and reconstructs them in patterns. The finished pieces are striking both in their design and their subject matter, sometimes ethereal and other times pointed, such as her piece creating a hijab. Hitchcock deliberately uses two texts, usually ones that can be seen as conflicting: "I started out with the Bible because I had a lot of them. I had a pretty strict

born-again Fundamentalist-Christian background, and that's what my work is about. I, eventually, in my thirties, broke away from that. When I was a Christian, I was always told that the Koran or Islam was evil...so that's why I started using the Bible and the Koran first."

Though the actual work of cutting up the text can be "excruciatingly boring and rote," Hitchcock also finds it to be at times transcendent. And if the process itself can be dull, it certainly all pays off when she has completed a piece. "Honestly, from the time I started doing these, people have just really loved them. I feel like it's because it touches a chord, especially with particular people who have grown up with this religious background and found that as adults you're sort of disappointed by it. I noticed that people who have backgrounds like mine, who are a little bit disillusioned, really respond to it positively." It's amazing how such disillusionment can go on to inspire works with such poetic power behind them.

Though sacred texts have been the lifeblood of Hitchcock's artistic meditations, there was one piece she created strictly out of a personal sacredness: "I did a piece on my

grandmother's diary [entitled *Diary 1971*]. To me it's kind of a sacred piece of writing but it wouldn't be sacred to someone else necessarily. I wanted to do something because they were just sitting on my shelf and they're kind of beautiful if you read them."

Hitchcock doesn't practice in any traditional faith, rather, she finds the act of creating her work to be spiritual, which is directly in line with The Center's BIG IDEA project. Hitchcock's views could well apply to all the artists' work in *Contemplative Practice*, and The Center's examination of the intersections between art and life: "It is a path toward a deeper understanding of myself, and I think in a lot of ways, knowing oneself and one's psychology is a form of spiritual practice."

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