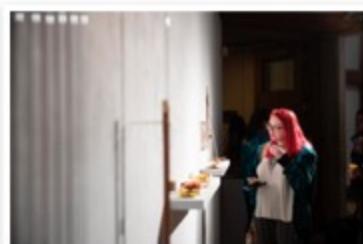


## Art to Change Perspective: Artist Martha Whittington Uses Sculpture to Shift Focus

Published: November 09, 2018



CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas – To some, an art gallery is a place to go to immerse themselves in art. To others, they are rooms filled with knowledge of history, both current and past. To Atlanta-based artist Martha Whittington, a gallery is a canvas waiting to be filled with sculpted pieces of intrigue and beauty.

In her exhibition, featured in the Weil Gallery located in the Center for the Arts until Dec. 7, Whittington, a nationally and internationally known artist and professor

of foundations studies at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia, showcases sculptures inspired by surveying. Some works may remind viewers of a circle graph or bar graphs or even compasses and surveying markers. Each work is connected through red lines, with varying line weight, that race along the walls and work as a map to lead the eye through the journey the room provides.

"I think students will enjoy seeing this use of materials and craftsmanship," said Whittington. "I want them to have the experience of the gallery, not just as something to place art in, but that it can be a part of the work, and the viewer, too."

While Whittington took inspiration from the gallery itself, she also looked at the Island campus as a whole when creating her art.

"This campus's architecture and map structure is based heavily on triangles, so you will see a lot of those shapes in my sculptures here," said Whittington. "I hope to inspire students to look more around themselves and really take in and understand their surroundings."

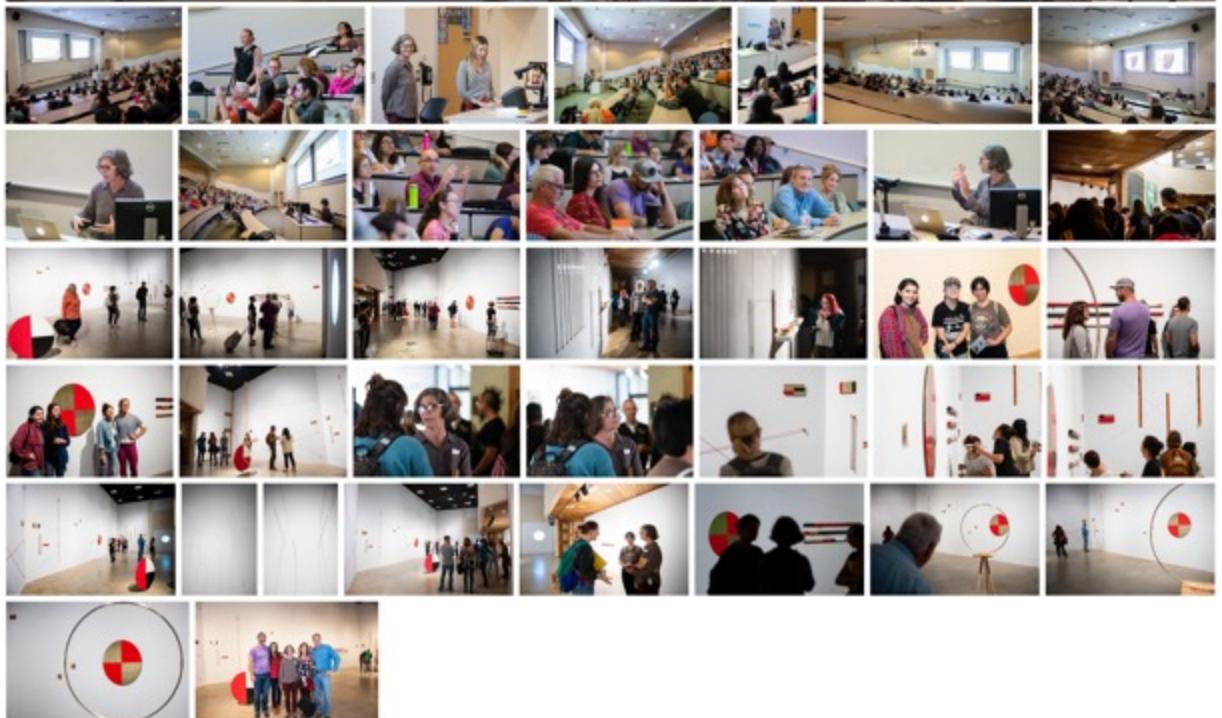
Along with speaking at an opening reception to introduce the public to her work on Nov. 5, Whittington also visited the studios of several Texas A&M-Corpus Christi graduate art students to give her unique opinion and feedback on their personal work.

"The students here are all so present and have such an energy," said Whittington. "It's been a joy to be here and work with these students."

This exhibition is Whittington's third time showing her work in Texas. Along with the Island University, she has been featured twice in Austin. She has also had installations at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Georgia, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Jacksonville, Florida, and has drawing works featured in the High Museum of Art in Georgia.

Whittington's work is focused on one central idea: exhibiting complex concepts through sculpted minimalism.

"Often I start experimenting with a material and then through research I discover something in history that I think is important," said Whittington. "I want to share these discoveries that are important to us, our thinking, and our world."



# Review: Charming meditation on wood, craft in Atlanta artist's show

Monday, Jan. 25, 2016

By Felicia Feaster - For the AJC

Artist Martha Whittington has a thing for wood. As of late, she's been making elaborate installations and sculptures from it, filling galleries and museums with strange worlds of her own invention, kingdoms of plywood and wood glue.

In **"Used Air"** at **Whitespace Gallery**, Whittington created an immersive show with wood contraptions as the centerpiece, built on the idea of coal mining. In "Deus Ex Machina" at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, she created a vivid world out of plywood and fabric, manned by unseen workers engaged in monotonous labors like slaves in some dystopian future.



Atlanta artist Martha Whittington makes wood, as in these mahogany branches, the centerpiece of her solo exhibition at Westside's Sandler Hudson.

Whittington's latest solo show, at Sandler Hudson Gallery, is, just in time for Valentine's Day, a love letter to a favorite material — wood — that most malleable and shape-shifting of media, the stuff of writing paper and furniture, guns and ships.

“With the Grain: Works on Paper” is this Atlanta artist’s sly celebration of wood’s incredible variety. Her solo exhibition incorporates the ladylike paper craft of quilling, a pastime of the upper crust since the Renaissance, and the working folk’s labor of wood splitting and furniture making. Lumberjacks and Shakers would feel equally at home in this wood-grain tribute to all things hickory, poplar and mahogany. It’s a celebration of the common urge of artists and craftspeople to make something new from the materials at hand.

Whittington’s shows often give off a tangible sense of the artist’s delight in making things and pursuing an idea in a multiplicity of forms. One of this artist’s true gifts is a very human approach, a warmth and wit and accessibility in the things she makes that let you forget their more conceptual elements, and just enjoy them as smartly made objects with a creative mind and deft hand behind them.



“QB215” by Atlanta artist Martha Whittington is featured at Sandler Hudson Gallery as part of her solo exhibition, “With the Grain”

With references to furniture making and craft, “With the Grain” features a selection of small sculptures, works on paper, as well as a few larger sculptures. Whittington’s work has often shown a low-key wit and sense of absurdity. Those characteristics are on winning display in the sculpture “MB315,” which features three abstracted branches carved from mahogany and leaning against a wall like loafers. The objects have a semblance of nature, but look more like neo-woody design courtesy of West Elm or Pottery Barn. These almost comical approximations of “branch” show the human propensity to bring nature indoors in the most circumscribed ways imaginable.

Craftsmanship is at the heart of other works too, like the small framed sculptural pieces in wood and paper that show a wedge splitting a log. Graphic and simple, these humorous illustrations of the task at hand suggest a textbook instructional on wood splitting. The way Whittington conveys “log” in the image is hilariously minimalist: with a simple knot hole.

“With the Grain” isn’t necessarily Whittington’s most spectacular moment as an artist, but more a suitably restrained, meditative digression fitted to the confines of a small gallery space. The heroic scale, compelling storytelling and theatrical impact of some of her most memorable shows at Whitespace or MOCA GA will certainly stand as far more memorable triumphs. But there is a lovely simplicity and elegance to the work in “With the Grain,” much like a finely crafted Shaker table.



Various forms of wood, including carved mahogany and quilled paper., are featured in “With the Grain: Works on Paper.”

## ART REVIEW

### “With the Grain: Works on Paper”

Through March 5. 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Mondays-Fridays. Free. Sandler Hudson Gallery, 1000 Marietta St., Suite 116. 404-817-3300,

**[www.sandlerhudson.com](http://www.sandlerhudson.com).**

Bottom line: A clever ode to wood and the shared preoccupations of art and craft.

## Martha Whittington Goes Beyond the Bark, at Sandler Hudson

Caroline Stover

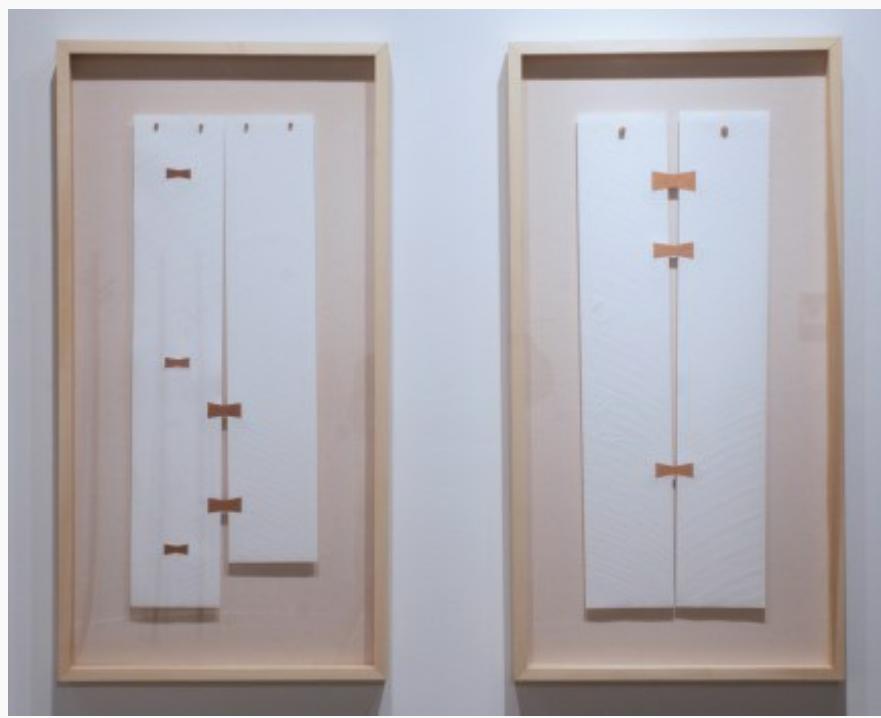
January 29, 2016



Installation view of Martha Whittington's "With the Grain: Works on Paper," at Sandler Hudson through March 5.

Anyone who has walked into a [Martha Whittington](#) exhibition in Atlanta over the past several years might be surprised by her current solo show, "With the Grain: Works on Paper," at [Sandler Hudson Gallery](#). While her previous shows featured large sculptural objects within installations or environments that included audio and video accompaniment and even human performers, "With the Grain" is a series of mostly small works that simply seek to explore the form and beauty of wood.

Whittington is known for immersing herself in a celebration of her materials. The pieces in this exhibition are created with her signature precision and perfectionism, but the weighty themes that often characterize her installations — themes of death, mystical archetypes, mindless labor, cultural assimilation — are absent. In "With the Grain," Whittington's creative purpose is to make art that stands on its own as a thing of beauty.



Martha Whittington, *BJ515* and *BJ315*, 2015; hand-embossed Reeves BFK from poplar timber, inlaid with mahogany wood, each 20 by 38 inches.

Most of the works in the show are framed and wall-mounted, with the exception of a trio of aluminum and mahogany sculptures in the center of the intimate gallery space. In the smaller pieces, Whittington takes white Reeves BFK paper and golden-brown mahogany and crafts them into spare, clean, geometric shapes that are then mounted on cream linen and framed in bleached pine. The overall effect calls to mind midcentury Scandinavian design with its emphasis on minimalist objects made of wood and natural fibers.

There are several recurring shapes in these constructions. One shape is a white paper “plank” that she devised by hand-embossing wood on pieces of BFK, permeating the paper with a ghostly grain. The planks in one piece, titled *MT1115*, are connected to each other in a way that suggests mortise and tenon joints. In *BJ515* and *BJ315*, the paper planks are joined by mahogany bowtie keys, the wood pieces cut paper-thin, the paper planks embossed with wood grain. Whittington is playing with the fundamental relationship between the materials, the result being artworks that contain a quiet simplicity and sometimes a bit of irony.

Another common element in Whittington’s constructions is the mahogany tree/branch. *MB315* is an arrangement of three of these branches. The 6-foot-tall mahogany rods are narrow and perfectly straight except for small dowels that extend out from them like sawed-off twigs. The shapes are so pared down to their essence as to be almost abstract. In *QB215*, Whittington hand-cut two 9-by-8-inch mahogany blocks on top of which she placed a tiny tree, like an abstracted memory of what the block of wood used to be.



Martha Whittington, QB215, 2015; quilled Reeves BFK and mahogany blocks, 9½ by 8 by 2 inches.

In a 2014 interview with [BURNAWAY](#), Whittington talked about her process-focused approach to her art and her devotion to research. She said, “It becomes all about the material, the ability to manipulate and the countless hours of research on the subject matter. I love to research things!” When she embarked on “With the Grain,” she delved into paper art forms and discovered quilling, a Victorian craft that involves rolling paper into tight spirals and using them to make shapes and designs. She then quilled BFK paper into small, medium, and large spirals, which appear most notably in *TRQ315*, where the viewer has the “aha!” moment realizing the quilled paper represents tree stumps. Once again, the work is light-heartedly self-referential. To solidify the reference, Whittington placed a tiny golden-brown tree/branch next to each white quilled stump.

Four of the most striking pieces in the show are squares of embossed paper with hand-cut geometric shapes within a circular center. The circles represent saw blades, and the shapes inside them are the various cuts of wood the blades create. Obviously, Whittington is deeply drawn to trees, but she doesn’t hug trees so much as embrace the process that enables her to transform the tree’s essence. In “With the Grain,” she creates art that is as much about the beauty of the tools and the labor involved in working with wood as it is about the beauty of the wood itself.

*Martha Whittington’s “With the Grain: Works on Paper” is at Sandler Hudson Gallery through March 5.*

**Caroline Stover** is a resident of Atlanta who works in publishing.



Martha Whittington, *TRQ315*, 2015; each is made from one sheet of quilled Reeves BFK and hand-carved mahogany, 15 by 22 inches.



ATLANTA BALLET'S

15|16 SEASON

CLICK  
*for DETAILS!*

Atlanta's source for arts news and reviews

ART + DESIGN

MUSIC

DANCE

THEATER

BOOKS

FILM

CALENDAR

ABOUT + CONTACT

DONATE

SEARCH

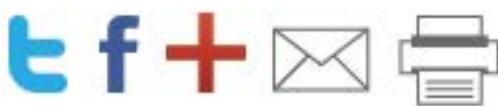
???

GO!

FOLLOW US



SUBSCRIBE  
TO OUR  
NEWSLETTER



# Review: Martha Whittington explores our dark history with Native Americans at Dashboard

July 15, 2015

TEXT SIZE + -

By MAGGIE DAVIS

Maggie Davis



*Martha Whittington: FPTRAP (First Peoples trade). Courtesy of the artist.*

In an eerie mix of Anglo-European and Native American cultures, symphonic music weaving around a foreboding drumbeat enmeshes visitors to **Dashboard**'s North Avenue gallery through July 18. Against this backdrop, the videos and eight minimalist sculptures in **Martha Whittington**'s *Exchange* pose questions about the impact of assimilation and commerce on Native American cultures and the parallels to our present consumer society.

To Anglo-European traders the New World was a paradise to be exploited for its abundant natural resources. In exchange for desirous but low-value trinkets, metal pots, woolen blankets and glass beads, Native Americans provided traders with high-value items of furs and skins that were manufactured into leather goods and beaver hats sold for substantial profit on European markets. The introduction of a Western monetary system, foreign to Native Americans, eroded the gift economy of indigenous people in which objects of equal value were bartered with mutual respect.



*Martha Whittington: FPBS (First Peoples burial scaffold). Courtesy of the artist.*

Whittington suggests the disastrous effect of these practices on Native American communities in the stunning ghost-like apparition at the entrance to the exhibition, a beautifully crafted wood sculpture of a burial scaffold floating ephemerally in the space. The slatted burial platform, supported by a single poplar pole, holds an elk hide and three unglazed porcelain pots reminiscent of the San Ildefonso Pueblo pottery made famous by Maria Martinez. The hide and pottery offerings in this contemplative work signal the ultimate price paid by indigenous people in their dealings with traders.

Nearby, a dark grey blanket drapes softly against the wall. Whittington described a childhood game of trade played with her brothers using a prized Hudson Bay blanket, as the inspiration for this work. Made of industrial felt with hand-drawn charcoal bands and stitched hatch marks, the facsimile trade blanket is paired with a video of a formless animated image. An ambiguity in the video, suggesting possible smoke signals or conjured spirits, hints at the misunderstandings at work through the spoken and often broken agreements between the Europeans and the native people.

There is no ambiguity in a finely carved teepee pole suspended from the ceiling. A clutch of sparkling stainless steel baubles hangs from one end, balanced at the other by a skein of rabbit furs. The reciprocity of the traded objects makes clear the empty exchanges that robbed Native Americans of their natural resources. Peering into the irresistible mirrored surface we meet ourselves, sudden participants in an uneven exchange of human desire.

Many layers of detail contribute to this finely tuned installation. The sound envelope that enfolds the sculptures was a collaboration with Rae Long, a composer living in Norway. Titles for the sculptures use a history museum trope of abbreviations, such as “FPSS” for First Peoples smoke signals. Whittington’s mix of natural and synthetic materials reminds us that reproductions of exotic objects were a means of assimilating Native American culture into Western culture.

Not least is the flawless blending of idea with craftsmanship that characterizes Whittington's practice. A satisfying pleasure can be found in thoughtfully designed details such as the leather cincture that grips the suspended balance pole. To make a fish trap, Whittington researched traditional methods for bending wood without using steam and even chewed some of the rawhide strips that join the frame together. Her jaw hurt for days afterward.



*Martha Whittington: FPSS (First Peoples smoke signals). Courtesy of the artist.*

In the prologue to *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America*, James Wilson states, "The belief that we all stand at the centre of a reality in which, in some way, past, present and future all converge, is common to many Native American cultures." Whittington's installation draws a close circle around our legacy of early contact with Native Americans and offers an opportunity to think differently about the place we occupy in this circle.

The rapacious plundering of cultures and despoliation of land for profit has reached new heights in the 21st century.

Whittington prods us to remember the past in light of the present and to seriously question the future.

# CREATIVE LOAFING



Newsletters

SEARCH

GO

FOOD &amp; DRINK

MUSIC

NEWS

A &amp; E

MOVIES &amp; TV

BLOGS

CLASSIFIEDS

ATL CITY GUIDE

BEST OF ATLANTA

UNANSWERED

100 DISHES TO EAT

NEIGHBORHOOD ISSUE

#SHUTITDOWNATL

DO GOOD ATL

PHOTO GALLERIES

ISSUE ARCHIVES

HOROSCOPE

FUN &amp; FREE SHIT

# Martha Whittington examines the human experience in 'Exchange'

Sculpture artist explores themes of commoditization via the lens of Native American culture

By Muriel Vega  @murielvega



COURTESY MARTHA WHITTINGTON

**MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE:** Part of Martha Whittington's installation at Dashboard Co-op.

Artist Martha Whittington likes to hone in on the details. Every piece in her new show at Dashboard Co-op, *Exchange*, was carefully handcrafted in her studio. After studying early indigenous techniques, she began to build freestanding sculptures as a way to explore the commoditization of Native American culture.

The works resemble original pieces, but are made from modern resources as to call out the European faux and Native American-inspired goods.

## RELATED EVENTS

 **Exchange** @  
Dashboard Co-op

31 North Ave N.W., Atlanta

Free

Wednesdays, Fridays, 4-7 p.m. Continues through July 18

"In particular, I was focusing on the North American natives and when the Europeans started trading," she says. "They had depleted their resources for their fancy hats. That's where I got the idea about commerce and the exchange of inferior goods for something that was very laborious. In Europe, the Industrial Revolution was going on and everything was mass-produced. That's where it began."

In line with *Exchange*, part of the [Artist Project Grant](#) from the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs (OCA), Whittington's work focuses on sculptures that showcase themes of hard labor, technology's influence on the workforce, and the unsung characters of the blue-collar industries, past and present.

"The hard part with this work is that I didn't want it to become trite and look like dream catchers. I wanted to pay tribute to the culture, but also look at the removal of their culture," Whittington says. "The assimilation; this was the most interesting part during my research. There were the training lodges. They would almost do a sweatshop and hire an entire tribe of women weavers and then have them use Asian patterns."

Along with a sound element from composer Rae Long, the exhibition features a large drum that took Whittington two weeks to build, and Native American burial scaffolding that borrows its techniques from different tribes. Whereas a piece may include elk hide and look authentic, Whittington says they're actually coming from more present-day home improvement store chains, further adding to the theme of commoditization.

"Yes, they are contemporary materials like poplar wood from Home Depot or stainless bolts that are polished, but they have a contemporary spin in that they are abstract," she says, adding that her focus is making the idea of trade (or exchange) tangible. "... What did it look like, what did it feel like, what did it sound like if you were one of the original people being attracted to a shiny object."

# BURNAWAY

Join Our Mailing List

enter your email address

DON'T MISS

Jim Waters: Conductor of Light, at the High Museum

f

t

Home > featured > Studio Visit: Martha Whittington

## Studio Visit: Martha Whittington

By Deidra Tyree Smith on April 28, 2014

 Tweet

6

 g+1

 Pin it

 Like

133

Martha Whittington is a sculptor and educator whose work involves controlled objects and site-specific arrangements. The Southern native has received many awards and grants and has exhibited nationally and internationally. She's a professor at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Atlanta and has work in MOCA GA's permanent collection. Over the past few years, her work has been evolving from small pieces of into flawless creations. A force to be reckoned with, Martha is a naturalist who defines minimalism on her own terms.

Whittington has had a busy year—Dashboard Co-op selected her as one of its artists, she will do an Elsewhere Southern Constellations Residency in Greensboro, North Carolina, this summer and has had several solo shows and collaborations. Under the cabana outside her studio, we watch her two dogs and four cats play while discussing the historical evidence materials leave behind, the clash between life and chaos, and how research fuels her inspiration.



**Deidre Tyree:** I've noticed that you've been attracted to the same palettes of wood, metal and glass lately. What about those materials are you drawn to?

Martha Whittington. (Photo: Elyse Defoor)

**Martha Whittington:** You could call me a minimalist, or a purist I guess, because all my work over the last few years has been stripped down to just the essentials, like the contour of something. But the materials I choose have these memories to them: when you look at it, what memory does it evoke?



Installation view of *Shift Split*, 2014, at Blackbridge Hall Gallery of Georgia College, Milledgeville.

**DT:** Yeah, maybe it's all about what or how the material makes you feel, right? Like the emotions, or feelings that come to mind when you touch or smell it?

**MW:** Certainly if you're process-oriented like me, the concept isn't first. So, it becomes all about the material, the ability to manipulate and the countless hours of research on the subject matter. I love to research things! I'll be working on a new subject and it will remind me of something else. An object in my last work reminded me of a snare [trap], even though I'm totally against any kind of animal entrapment. That led to researching **Boy Scout lashing** and pioneer construction techniques. Through that research, the concepts for the forms start to develop, then what I see [in my research] really becomes the work.

**DT:** So, are you trying to make some kind of statement about labor?

**MW:** No, not at all, although my work over the past few years references labor and industry. It's not always directly about that, but rather about me and the labor that it takes to produce the work. So, through that, I'm pretty honest in talking about labor because it's been a laborious effort for me to execute the work. It's also about experimenting with the ways of making that I'm researching.

**DT:** Experiments in old techniques seem to not only be a part of your process but also become themes in the work.

**MW:** Yeah, like how to make a tent. You know, I explored many different types of tents, how to make tent poles and the types of knots and the guidelines to the stakes ... I mean, it's just a lot of research. But regarding the materials, they become an important element to the work. Material is like a storyteller, like wood or the hide of the cow. If there's a scar, it's recorded history. If a tree's been chopped into, or had a nail in it, we see in the rings that the nail itself is still there. It's the same with the work. It already has some kind of evidence of a previous purpose.

**DT:** Like being able to have a physical experience with the evidence of a historical event?

**MW:** Yes! I think that it sets a good tone for some of the work that's so minimal and precise. Then to bring in natural elements is offsetting. When people see my work, they think that I'm this "neat freak" because it's so clean and precise. But, you know there's chaos when I'm working! Through the chaos comes this clarity ... the end result. It may be a precisely crafted installation piece, but it emerged from a cesspool of materials, animals, and life's interruptions. My work is my way of making sense of everything.

**DT:** It sounds exactly like Mother Nature, in how she creates something around all this chaos.

Something is still given life, and the experiences are attached to it. Or even the human life and how things continue to move, cycle, or generate, which you can see on our skin or in our hair. But what about metal, and how does that fit into the chaos?

**MW:** Well, I can only speak about my most recent use of metal in creating *Shift Split* for Blackbridge Hall Gallery of Georgia College down in Milledgeville, which was totally a game of reversals. I made tree forms of tubes with notches cut out like you were cutting a tree down, but they were out of mirrored chrome steel instead of wood. The saw blade was made out of cloth instead of metal, and the tent is made of metal instead of cloth. Instead of using wood, making it feel like you're outside a cozy log cabin, the reflective surface and coldness works with my need for it to be sterile and institutional. In that series, everything is reversed so that it takes on a different type of feeling.

**DT:** So, the steel cots from *Untitled ID* at Dashboard Co-op's "Cosmos" show at Midtown Plaza also speak to this theme of materials recording history and memories because you leave them in their natural state, which allows the viewer to see the process of the making, or the transformation into what it is now.

**MW:** And the steel can even tell you its life. The type I used is heated on a giant roller as it's created, and the temperature change shows in the discoloration of the metal. There's evidence that it was sitting out in a shipyard because of water droplet stains. But, I also like the dullness because it reminds me of a dirty bed!



Whittington outside her home studio.



Martha Whittington, installation view of *Untitled ID*, 2014, in Dashboard Co-op's show "Cosmos," at Midtown Plaza. (Photo: Batterman)

**DT:** I was actually thinking that too, because up to this point, most of your work has been very pristine and clean. Even the show, *Used Air* at *Whitespec* was very much the same, though the theme was about a community of people living in substandard living conditions. For *Untitled ID*, you've taken a step further to strip things down even more, keeping it raw and as found.

**MW:** Exactly! And the pillows on top provide a nice contrast when lying down to listen to the whispers of lucid dream stories. Each bed represents Freud's categories of Dreams, while the rotating moon above your head shows the passage of time. The individual sound elements in each bed are reminiscent of the work *100 Whispers*, which seems like it could be soothing. Yet lying down in front of people without a blanket puts the viewer in a vulnerable position.

**DT:** Have you thought about other associations with the action of lying on a "cold slab of metal?"

**MW:** Well, beds are supposed to be safe comfy places, but I wanted the viewer to have mixed feelings while lying there. Initially, I was going for a standard cot size typical of a military cot to keep things simple and generic, but now that you mention it ... yes, it's like a morgue table, a prison bench, or prison bed!

# THE COLONNADE

The official student newspaper of Georgia College & State University

HOME

NEWS

LEAD STORIES

A&E

SPORTS

SPECIAL SECTIONS

OPINION

S

Our Blog

Contact Us

Join The Colonnade

Podcasts

About Us

Advertising

Thursday, January 23rd, 2014 |  Posted by Gray Lindsey

## 'SHIFT SPLIT'

"Shift Split" is sculptor and Savannah College of Art and Design professor Martha Whittington's newest exhibition of her work. It opened Jan. 13 at Blackbridge Hall Art Gallery.

Curated by senior museum studies major Erika Mimms, the pieces in the exhibit come together to create what she describes as "a campsite from a time far earlier than our recent memory."

This sense of environment in Whittington's work was one of the things that drew Mimms to Whittington's work.

"I liked her use of space, particularly the way she deals with objects," Mimms said. "The pieces in this exhibit are not separate. Taken as a whole they create a scene, which the spectator is free to walk around in and experience first hand."

The pieces in "Shift Split" are reinterpretations of the kinds of tools and equipment that one might find in the living space of an American pioneer. Whittington was drawn to the nature of these objects – that they "were connected together not with nails but with ropes." For Whittington, these tools point to the relationship between art and science – the way applied math and creation often go hand in hand.

Whittington contends the lives of early pioneers was only an inspiration for this exhibit. The pieces on display in "Side Split" are the product of experimentation over time.

"I would say that the inspiration was with tools but that was only the outline," Whittington said. "As with any creative endeavor, you begin with the outline and it expands over time."

The act of creation itself is a central theme to the exhibit. The growth of Whittington's work is apparent as the spectator goes between the two gallery rooms of Blackbridge Hall. The bulk of her work resides in the larger room – the product of the time she spent with these ideas, crafting and experimenting. Saws made out of felt and a tent made out of reflective metal fill the space among other similarly inventive pieces.

In the smaller room, tiny models of what Whittington based her larger pieces on litter wooden table-tops. A series of stop-motion videos featuring these models adorn the walls.

"The animated stop-motion videos are like nothing I've done before," Whittington said. "They are kind of a chance for me to laugh at myself but also to show nature in a different light. As humans we are always the one intervening in nature, but in the videos you see nature intervening."

The videos act as sketches written and performed by a troupe of sticks and twigs, demolishing intricate, man-made objects. In a way, they too reflect the sense of "applied math" seen throughout the exhibition (generally thought to be a human invention). They go through a process of trial and error until they find what works.

Students' reactions to Whittington's work were generally favorable, although what drew individuals to these pieces differed.

"I liked that she included the models because it's not often that you seen artist showcase the history of their work in the actual exhibition," junior art major Sam Williams said.

Benton Meadows, a senior creative writing major, was drawn to Whittington's way of turning the familiar on its head.

"Things that are normally hard are soft, and things that are normally soft are hard," Meadows said. "I also like the sense of environment, how it feels like a campsite, but it's just a white room."

Mimms was pleased with the way the exhibit turned out.

"I couldn't be happier with the capstone process here. [GC] gives everybody a chance to be unique," Mimms said.

Martha Whittington's "Side Split" will be on display in Blackbridge Hall until Feb. 7.



Broken Clouds  
H: 78° L: 57°  
[Weather](#) | [Traffic](#)

# The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Credible. Compelling.

[HOME](#)

[METRO/STATE](#)

[SPORTS](#)

[BUSINESS](#)

[INVESTIGATION](#)

▼ [LATEST HEADLINES](#) ▼

[HOME](#) / [ENTERTAINMENT](#)

## An artist's take on working in a coal mine

Posted: 12:00 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 26, 2013

[Email](#)

4

[Share](#)

31

[Tweet](#)

0

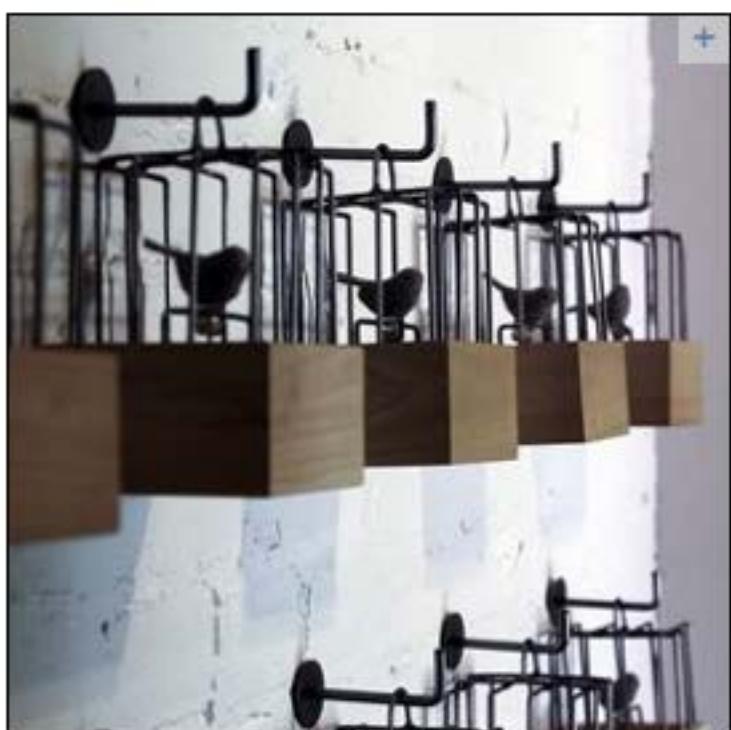
[ShareThis](#)

47

BY FELICIA FEASTER - FOR THE AJC

For those who think art-going is a passive experience, a contemplative act of observing and mulling over, Atlanta artist Martha Whittington's show, "Used Air," at Inman Park's Whitespace Gallery may be a bit of a surprise.

Occasionally art exhibitions go a different route and allow viewers to immerse themselves and participate in the alternative reality an artist has created. Such exhibits offer a chance to be invited into a more complex and fleshed-out vision of the artist's imagination.



Atlanta artist Martha Whittington encourages visitors to her show "Used Air" to take a mechanical canary in a cage into her ... [Read More](#)

Whittington, who is primarily a sculptor but has lately delved into large-scale, more theatrical and immersive environments, has created just such an experience in "Used Air." The inspiration for the project, said Whitespace Gallery owner Susan Bridges, was the metal coal chute tucked into the ground floor of her 1893 Inman Park home, the site of both Whitespace and the smaller Whitespec gallery where Whittington's work appears.

That presence of a place where coal ashes were once collected by servants intersected with Whittington's already evident interest in the meaning of labor.

"Used Air" has much in common with Whittington's 2012 solo exhibition "deus ex machina" at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, an installation centered on work, in which desks, machines and costumes suggested some future-world factory.

"Used Air" is about work too, specifically the dangerous, messy, complicated job of descending into the bowels of the earth to extract the coal that will heat a stranger's house. Viewers may feel immediately ill at ease and entrapped as they step over the raised threshold of the Whitespec gallery that occupies the low-ceilinged, ground-floor cellar of Bridge's home. Whittington uses the small, warrenlike space effectively to give a sense of enclosure and create a change of attitude in her audience. That sense of entrapment is reinforced by a large, graphite-coated, black wooden support beam in the center of the space that Whittington uses to lower the ceiling and shrink the space.



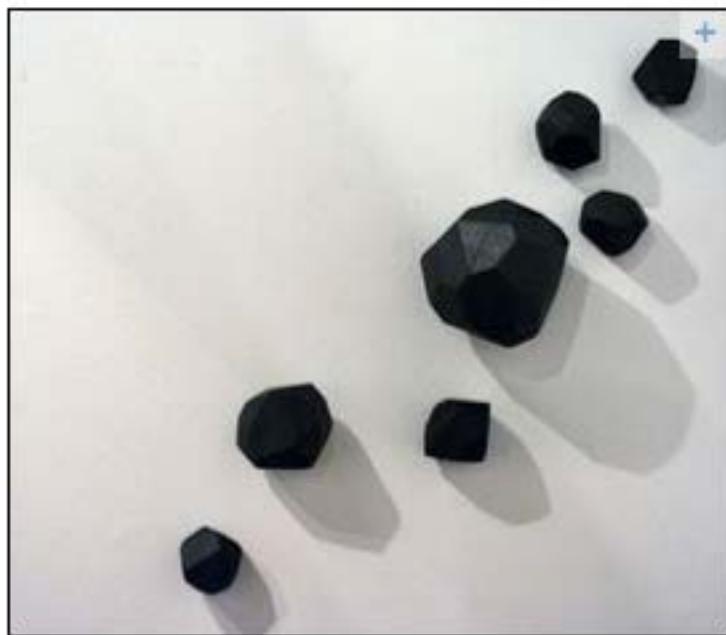
Artist Martha Whittington, pictured here in an image from her show "Used Air," uses the metaphor of the coal mine to ... [Read More](#)

doom is immediately established since the canaries' tweets soon fade out.

Inside the space, Whittington has created a minimalist rendition of a coal miner's workspace. Visitors are invited to cut a piece of string from a roll of twine and affix a metal disk with a number to emphasize the anonymity of the job at hand. A number of pieces also reiterate themes of futility, entrapment and absurdity. A small wooden bucket hangs on a wall with a rag for washing up. Except the bucket has no bottom to hold water and the rag is filthy, coated in a layer of black graphite. On another wall are black rubber cups that promise refreshment, but again contain no bottom.

Ten birdcages housing 10 abstracted canaries with gray felt bodies and featureless faces hang on hooks to be taken into the gallery. Wind the boxes up and the canary will tweet in a slightly menacing, frantic way until its song dies down. The pieces reference the custom of coal miners once taking canaries with them into the mines to test the atmosphere for deadly gases. A sense of

What Whittington has created is an example of existential labor that leads nowhere, of pointless gestures to get clean or have a drink that never transpire.



Black geometric lumps coated in graphite and affixed to the gallery walls mimic the coal mined from deep beneath the earth. ... [Read More](#)

The show uses the coal mine – for most people one of the most terrifying jobs imaginable – to comment upon work but also upon mortality. Few people reckon with the chance that they will die each day when they enter their office or workspace, but coal miners contend with that reality on a daily basis.

A drawback to the show is the necessity of a guide to the experience: We're used to keeping our hands off of artwork, but "Used Air" requires interaction and someone to let you know what is expected to appreciate the show's themes.

---

### Art Review

#### "Used Air"

Through Oct. 12. 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesdays-Saturdays. Free. Whitespec at Whitespace Gallery, 814 Edgewood Ave. NE, Atlanta. 404-688-1892, [www.whitespace814.com](http://www.whitespace814.com)

Bottom line: A provocative consideration of work and existence that requires some hand-holding to appreciate.



The Atlanta Journal-Constitution *Thursday, Dec. 20, 2012*

## **2012 Arts Year in Review: Creativity, ambition trumped economy in season of astonishing shows**

By Suzanne Van Atten

The economy continued to cast its gloomy shadow on the Atlanta arts scene, resulting in gallery closings, the end of a theatrical institution, and a temporary lock-out of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra in a battle over pay cuts. Nevertheless, the year saw some astonishing productions and exhibitions in venues both big and small. For every mega show like Thornton Dial's retrospective at the High and "Twyla Tharp's The Princess and the Goblin" at the Atlanta Ballet, there was Ben Roosevelt's "The Blue Flame" show at Get This! Gallery and the CounterPoint Festival of electronic dance music in a field 20 miles south of Atlanta. Low points aside, there was plenty to celebrate in 2012. Our critics share their favorite events from the year.

### **Visual arts: Some galleries close; others redefine themselves**

Audiences had to take the good with the bad this year. There were notable gallery closings, including Solomon Projects (at the tail end of 2011), Kiang Gallery, Jennifer Schwartz Gallery and Saltworks Gallery. But though they often gave up their brick and mortar spaces, several of these shuttered galleries launched "pop-up" shows at venues from the W Midtown to Schwartz's one-night-only shows at sites around the city. Established galleries hung tight in a tough economic climate, but plenty of independent curatorial ventures such as Dashboard Co-Op continued to stage inventive, provocative shows in unusual spaces.

Here are some of our favorites from 2012.

#### **"Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial," High Museum of Art**

In the South it's easy to be a little jaded when it comes to folk art. Too often such self-taught art reinforces cliches about the region that involve religious obsession. Alabama seer Thornton Dial's operatic canvases shatter that stereotype with a dark, poetic vision and a profound engagement with social issues.

#### **Dashboard Co-Op, "100,000 Cubicle Hours," Atlanta Contemporary Art Center**

This freelance curatorial group founded by Beth Malone and Courtney Hammond garnered a prestigious \$30,000 grant from the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation this year. They also staged a tight, clever show-within-a-show, upstaging the Contemporary's "Day Job: Georgia" with their own fugue on working life. "100,000 Cubicle Hours" proved these young'uns can hold their own against established spaces and deliver a cohesive vision.

#### **Meg Aubrey, "Domiciled," Whitespace Gallery**

In her chilly, pared-down paintings, Meg Aubrey continues to deliver scathing visions of suburban life. But in this show the artist enlarged her view to show how the economic crisis is affecting the cul-de-sac set.

#### **Martha Whittington, "deus ex machina" Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia**

This Atlanta-based sculptor delivered an immersive, profound installation at the Buckhead museum that centered on soul-crushing labor, a topic treated with both despair and humor in a vivid, canny show with shades of Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" and George Orwell's "1984."

#### **Ben Roosevelt, "The Blue Flame," Get This! Gallery**

In this atmospheric show, Ben Roosevelt transformed the small Westside gallery into a David Lynch-style dive bar. There was art, a working bar with cheap beer and a suggestion that rather than an elitist, inaccessible institution, the art gallery could be a comforting gathering place that just happens to feature art on the walls.

— Felicia Feaster

## Martha Whittington and Beacon Dance Seek Gods in the Machine at MOCA GA

Written By Andrew Alexander on October 4, 2012 in [Dance](#), [Reviews](#)



Photo by Karley Sullivan.

[Martha Whittington](#)'s exhibition of sculpted objects at the [Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia](#) (MOCA GA) entitled *deus ex machina* recalls "the moment when machines became gods and workers became machines," according to a phrase freshly painted in antiquated script on the space's far wall. From the look of the objects themselves, I imagine that Whittington might place that moment somewhere between the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and the opening of the twentieth century, though it could just as easily be another imagined time.

The objects suggest the shift in society from field to factory. There's an obvious anxiety about the moment: it's an unpleasant, alienating time when some natural proclivity in humans for productivity and industriousness is exploited for material profit and at a spiritual cost. This mood is best articulated when the dancers of [Beacon Dance](#) under the direction of choreographer D. Patton White activate the objects at performances occurring at various times throughout the exhibition.



Photo by Karley Sullivan.

Whittington gives a gorgeous tightness and precision to her sculptures. They appear polished, monolithic, almost detail-less at first glance, but examination reveals their almost obsessive handmade craftsmanship. The needle of a Victrola is sewn to its arm with leather straps showing an airless exactitude in the perfectly even stitching. Canvas booths with porthole screens in felt cases display instructional videos of repetitive tasks: when not working with the machines, performers watch videos showing them how to work. Straps, stiff felt aprons, polished steel wheels, a wheelchair for one of the performers, mirrored eggs pulled from pigeon-breasted black bags, a hand-cranked gramophone that makes a plaintive high-pitched wail to call orkers to and away from work—these objects don't waste an atom's worth of space.



Photo by Karley Sullivan.



Photo by Karley Sullivan.

But the overall purpose, the endgame of all that efficiency, remains disturbingly elusive. Paired with Beacon Dance's choreography, the artwork enacts a constant dialogue between the seen labor of the performers using the machines and the unseen labor of the sculptor: the carving, cutting, chiseling, sewing, and building that occupy the working artist's life.

There's a tidiness to the exhibit, a simplicity that functions both in its asset and against it. By subtracting extraneous details in favor of fresh-from-the-factory cleanliness, the works make it clear that the moment is being *recalled* to the present, brushing away any sense of dustiness or nostalgia. It impresses with its sharp lines, polished surfaces, and snugly fitting joints, but the cleanliness occasionally gives way to sparseness.



Photo by Karley Sullivan.



Photo by Karley Sullivan.



Photo by Karley Sullivan.

The white cube of a gallery space can rarefy an object, pulling out its fascinating characteristics, and at other times rob it of its vitality. I did wonder what the performance might look like at a venue like the Goat Farm Arts Center or MASS Collective—some place that shows the bruises of history, perhaps with the objects themselves showing some bruises, as well.

I longed for more activity in the performance, too. There was clever activation of the ladders with a rope hung between them supported by a long staff, but there was an overarching somber stillness through much of the choreographed work. It needed more doing, more business, more activity, and less rigidity and slowness.

Still, *deus ex machina* takes a fascinating, provocative stance through its self-reflexive, hall-of-mirrors examination of effort and industriousness. For what purpose is all that measuring, carving, chiseling, polishing, and *making*? In the end, as the exhibition's title suggests, Whittington just keeps her head down as she goes about the tedious but necessary task of trying to pull a god out of the machine.

*Beacon Dance* returns to [MOCA GA](#) for a final performance at IPM this Saturday, October 6, 2012, which also serves as the closing date for Martha Whittington's exhibition.

[Events](#) [Venues](#) [Movies](#) [Restaurants](#) [Performers](#)

What are you looking for?

Where is it?

When is it?

City &amp; State or ZIP

Tonight, this weekend, May 5th...

[Home](#) [Celebrities & TV](#) [Events](#) [Food & Restaurants](#) [Movies](#) [Music](#) [Fashion & Style](#) [Games & Comics](#) [Holiday Guide](#) + Add a Listing**August 2, 2012**

## Artist's point well-suited to our times

By [Felicia Feaster](#)

For the AJC

Martha Whittington is a sculptor who has, at times, lost herself in the tactile, dramatic properties of her medium, falling in love with material for material's sake. In her solo show at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, "deus ex machina," the artist pulls off a far more satisfying feat, creating a fully-realized world. The sculptural vignettes she has crafted are like pieces of a theatrical tableaux that comes alive when a viewer enters the space.

Funny, ominous and creepy, the exhibition employs a relatively bare-bones array of materials: stainless steel, wool felt, leather and unstained wood to evoke a vivid, multi-dimensional world — Joseph Beuys meets Home Depot. Whittington has filled the gallery space with a series of work stations, tall ladders, wheeled devices and tools that conjure up a place where mysterious actions unfold.

As the inscription on the gallery's far wall makes clear, "deus ex machina" is about work. Written on that wall in antiquated script is the phrase "recalling the moment when machines became gods and workers became machines." The words conjure up all manner of dystopian science fiction, from George Orwell's "1984" to the 1927 Fritz Lang German-Expressionist film "Metropolis," in which workers are soulless machines resigned to a life of perpetual labor.

It is clear from the spartan work stations, tools and presence of some task-master overseer, that the workers in this place are living a joyless life of repetitive and possibly forced labor. A "Containment Fence," made of cotton string and hung on one wall, suggests a prison of sorts, or perhaps even a self-imposed trap that these industrious workers have woven themselves. Whittington summons up a world that mixes references to Industrial Age past and some grim future in which workers wear strange garb to do even stranger activities involving stainless steel balls, wood and repetitive knot-making.

It does not appear to be a happy place. An "Overseer Cart," suggests the unseen labors are cruelly monitored. The cart boasts a wooden platform on wheels with a small bench where some unseen foreman sits. Next to the seat is a round metal circle like the kind of massive key ring sported by janitors, apartment landlords or jailers. Dozens of round metal pieces on the ring suggest the human lives under the overseer's control.

A series of four canvas "Changing Screens" set up in the gallery with a wooden bench behind each summon up the idea of a locker room where workers change into their workaday garb. Hung on the wall behind each screen is a uniform "Wearable Objects," for the task at hand: cotton webbing belts, heavy felt aprons, or in one case a metal mesh backpack that looks like something a beekeeper might sport. In videos hung inside heavy wool felt cases, the "work" in question is shown, like some tutorial for each laborer's specific task. The black and white videos show hands performing bizarre gestures: knot tying, wood smoothing, the careful handling of a stainless steel ball.

Whittington's point is well-suited to our own age: Many of us work at jobs whose end result is unclear, full of tedium, routine and labor detached from creativity. To an occupant of the past surveying our own world, our labors — hunched over keyboards typing frantically away at some mysterious task — would probably seem just as bizarre as the ones evoked in "deus ex machina."

**The Bottom Line: An Atlanta sculptor conjures up an impressively vivid world in beautifully evocative details and craftsmanship.**

#### **Art Review**

"Martha Whittington: deus ex machina"

Through Oct. 6. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays. Free for members and U.S. military with ID; \$5 for non-members; \$1 for students and seniors. The Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, 75 Bennett Street, Suite A2, NW, Atlanta. 404-367-8700, [www.mocaga.org](http://www.mocaga.org).

## Review: Martha Whittington's meaningless labor, pointless activity, humans as machines

August 2, 2012

By [JERRY CULLUM](#)



Martha Whittington's installation "deus ex machina" depicts workers as totally alienated from their labor.  
(Photos by John Ramspott and Martha Whittington)

Martha Whittington's Working Artist Project installation "[deus ex machina](#)," at the [Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia](#) through October 6, is described in silent-film-caption wall lettering as a recollection of "the moment when machines became gods and workers became machines." The echo of such German Expressionist depictions of labor as the celebrated film "Metropolis" is unmistakable. So is the Expressionist lineage of Whittington's immense woven and wooden sculptures, although there are more contemporary artistic parallels to their rough linear geometry, which is pared down to essentials that are the very opposite of sleek.

Although the artist describes her materials as "referencing traditional modes of early industry," the extensive use of wood suggests an even longer arc of history. This is a semi-mythic look at the all-too-literal use of the human body as an incidental implement, an energy-producing machine part for the

production of God knows what, but the workers making the product don't. Here the alienation of the workers from the results of their labor is total; it's clear that, regardless of the purpose of Whittington's sculptural objects, they are machines in which the people who operate them have no emotional stake and no financial stake beyond payment received for their particular actions.



The sculptures by themselves look appropriately but mysteriously clunky. They include such objects as a wooden cart with mirrored-steel wheels (the checklist calls it an "Overseer's Cart"), a couple of oddly shaped tripod ladders and a workstation ("Assessment Table") with objects in sacks. Everything seems more or less familiar and alien at the same time, which of course is Whittington's intent.

The relationship between one object and another doesn't become apparent until the installation is set in motion by the artists of [Beacon Dance](#), scheduled to perform at different times (but more or less weekly) during the run of the exhibition. As a musical score composed by [Jon Ciliberto](#) begins to play, the dancers dress in the work clothes appropriate to their functions. Beacon Director D. Patton White, for example, puts on a complicated harness appropriate for heavy lifting, though he heaves no implement more strain-inducing than a hand-made, hand-cranked Victrola-style record player.

Ranging in age and physical condition from fresh-faced and youthful to gray-haired and wheelchair-bound, the dancers/workers carry out their appointed tasks. Metal globes are removed from the sacks and deposited, one by one, into an adjacent bin. A rope is attached between the two tall ladders and supported by a notched pole at its midpoint. The Victrola's record is played. The overseer, seated on her cart, keeps track of the action by moving numbers of pierced metal disks on a large ring.

What does it all mean? Nobody involved in the process knows, and that's the point. This is work in which the routine is related only to itself, from the before-and-after floor sweeping to the rope tying to the globe transferring, and there is no need for anyone involved to know the meaning of their actions. The skill set involved in manipulating ropes and ladders is a bit more advanced than the elementary one required to move metal balls around, but there is still no need to know the purpose of the activity.



In this case, the artist is the decision-maker who knows why all this is going on. Whittington's artist's statement explains how "the intense toil that utilizes these objects produces no discernible end result" other than a "testament to the requirement to labor continuously, with rest and retirement removed as options."

She further describes her objects and devices as having been "meticulously, manually constructed from rough hewn to finish, in a manner similar to traditional factory methods, much like the sweat shops and sewing factories of [the] past." And as the antiquated feel of the scene implies, this surely represents long ago and far away — a place and time in which it would be cheaper to turn human beings into repetitive robots than to invest in the skill-intensive machinery that requires worker responsibility for the processes of production.

What else it might represent is left to what Whittington calls the viewer's "perhaps uncomfortable decisions."

## Martha Whittington's *100 Whispers* a palpable sonic map at Studioplex

January 6, 2011

By [Staci Stone](#)



Installation view of 100 Whispers at Studioplex, Martha Whittington, 2010. Photo courtesy the artist.

A detailed understanding of acoustics and audio technology is not required to lose yourself in *100 Whispers*, [Martha Whittington's](#) current exhibition at [Studioplex](#). The variety in tone, accent, and interpretation of the same spoken word, "whisper," transmitted through a dynamic composition of repurposed artifacts, offers a calm familiarity to anyone who will listen.

Whittington's soundscape is a collection of recordings taken from 100 local Atlantans, composed into an intricate network of sound by the artist. Each voice is produced through a seemingly empty shining bowl that allows individual sound to rise and fall in one unidentifiable place, giving way to the next anonymous whisper. 100 of these vessels fill the gallery and are placed on platforms, creating a cluster of sound from every corner as the word is repeated. The tempo is inconsistent and yet the voices don't overlap, like an unpredictable but polite conversation between strangers. Whittington's acute sense of space and discretion with materials compels us to navigate and eventually stand still in the midst of the dialogue.

Detailed view of smaller sound vessels, Martha Whittington, 2010. Photo courtesy the artist.

The spacious gallery has been enclosed for the exhibition to provide a sense of privacy, giving the viewer a moment to interpret the meaning of such an intimate spoken word. Recorded participants sound as if they are spreading rumors or sharing something deeply personal. The exposed speaker wires reveal a delicate and tangled movement of sound, while creating a visual linking system. Whittington's raw aesthetic and use of mundane materials is similar to the work of several Dadaist sculptors, but also seems to draw visual cues from current sound artists such as [Ed Osborn](#).

A thin and continuous horizon line is drawn along the walls at eye level, allowing us to imagine that what is heard in this small gallery could actually converge in space and vanish. As the viewer walks toward the horizon, it materializes as a linear account of written names; each person who participated in the project is identified on the same line that traditionally separates ground from sky and determines the depth of a scene. Whittington's sensitive transformation of the gallery into a navigable geography allows vaporous sound to become a tangible part of the built terrain.

Detail view of horizon, Martha Whittington, 2010. Photo courtesy Staci Stone.

Reconstructing an open space with static objects that usher a viewer through the space is something that has always been a byproduct of the artist's installations. In earlier works such as *Raddle Cross*, the randomly patterned movement of repeating wooden discs attached to a motor impelled viewers to continue moving through the gallery. The current exhibition at Studioplex creates the same compulsion for us, but is guided by the distribution of recorded audio. A traditionally kinetic artist, Whittington has found a new way to activate a lifeless space with this echoing, enigmatic melody.



# VIZARTS

## A Moving Experience

MARTHA WHITTINGTON'S "DOWSING" at the Emory Visual Arts Gallery is the latest in the Atlanta artist's memorably mechanized installations of moving sculptures.

In this case, the work comments on the old method of hunting for water underground by holding out a stick or dowsing rod and waiting for the stick to pull downward.

One mechanized rod gently taps on the floor in the middle of the gallery, centering on a small circular mirror that represents water. Several other similar mirrors surrounding it cast reflections like water droplets on the wall. (Also, some of the "reflections" are painted directly on the wall, another Whittington visual trick.)

Other sticks click against one another on the wall. A group of small, droplet-shaped light bulbs glows when a visitor approaches it. Here, the raindrops behind them are clearly painted, not reflected.

It's all commentary on how we discover anything, what we imagine to be true in our searching, and how sometimes what we think to be one thing is actually something else.

It's smart, funny and worth the effort of hiking across the Emory University campus to get to it.

• THE 411: Through July 27. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Mondays-Fridays, noon-4 p.m. Saturdays. Closed July 4. Emory Visual Arts Gallery, 700 Peavine Creek Drive, Atlanta. 404-727-6315. 404-712-4390, [visualarts.emory.edu](http://visualarts.emory.edu).

— Jerry Cullum

# ART PAPERS



## MARTIN EMANUEL + MARTHA WHITTINGTON + SANG-WOOK LEE ATLANTA

Light, rhythm, and aroma activate the installations of Martin Emanuel, Martha Whittington, and Sang-Wook Lee [The Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia (MOCA GA); January 27–March 24, 2007]. Reminiscent of constructivist explorations of kinetic sculpture and light by László Moholy-Nagy and Naum Gabo, or California minimalism's light and space exploration in the 1960s, Emanuel's theatrical light construction *The Three Realities*, 2007, challenges perception. Viewers enter a darkened room through black curtains and creep past large shadowy scaffolding to approach a radiant abstraction. Comprised entirely of light, a brilliant violet oval form floats motionlessly within a large teal ellipsoid. Static chalk lines bisect the violet light shape, while glowing blue, deep red, magenta, and green stripes dodge and shift as the viewer moves. These colored shadow stripes are, in fact, a product of the refraction of projected light hitting the string tautly held between two nails, several inches in front of the image. As viewers approach, they cast their own colored shadows, adding another dimension of interactivity. Here, shadows' immaterial presence—their indication of absence—confounds reality: the three-dimensional reality of the string and the material reality of the chalk line. In this, Emanuel's installation tests our understanding of materials and prompts reflection on the mechanics of visual representation.

Martha Whittington's *Rattle Cross*, 2007, also enlists string and shadow to define space. The work fills the gallery's brightly lit and wide-open space with motorized tap-dancing formations—wooden discs suspended from the ceiling by cotton-wrapped twine. One small disc occupies the end of a narrow front corridor. Elsewhere in the space, the discs get larger as their groupings increase in numbers and the rhythm of their tapping intensifies. Initially captivating, the staccato tapping builds to a clattering crescendo in the center of the gallery as groups of three, four, and five discs slap the concrete floor. Over eight thousand feet of twine are strung vertically along the gallery walls, invoking the inside of a piano or an enormous loom. In fact, Whittington took her inspiration for this work from the

mechanical contraptions found in abandoned cotton mills. In weaving terminology, a Rattle Cross is a repetitive technique for crossing threads on the warping frame. Rhythmic but endless, the tapping of discs recalls the monotonous toil of workers in early factories, or the machine-like motions associated with obsessive-compulsive behaviors. Yet, the natural simplicity of the materials—plain flat wooden discs with common cotton twine—in the gallery's bright and open space counters the oppressive nature of its early industrial reference. In this light, the repetitive clatter recalls the noisy games of early childhood, and the room transforms into a nursery playroom.

Sang-Wook Lee built his imposing structure, 19620, 2007, from some 20,000 "bricks" of dried Ramen noodles. Eleven and a half feet tall, eighteen feet long, and over eight feet deep, Lee's semi-circular wall was directly inspired by the sandstone masonry of thousand-year-old Native American dwellings at Chaco Canyon, New Mexico. The Milledgeville, Georgia textile artist nostalgically identifies the Japanese Ramen noodles with both his South Korean childhood and his student years in the United States. Initially attracted by the fibrous quality of the noodle "bricks" as building material, Lee also welcomed the additional dimension provided by their salty smell.

The ancient sandstone masonry structures of Chaco Canyon have survived a millennium. By contrast, Ramen noodles are ephemeral and fragile. The sandstone of Chaco Canyon is indigenous, quarried locally. Ramen noodles are mass-produced in Japan for export to markets across the world. The buildings of Chaco Canyon represent ancient tradition; Ramen noodles are the epitome of mass-consumer culture. Its imposing size notwithstanding, 19620 is remarkably lightweight and easy to dismantle. For Lee, the work's impact is a function of such contradictions. Complex and at times contradictory, today's global culture finds a mirror in the confluence of Asian, American, and Native American cultural references at play in Lee's work.

—Diana McClintock

## KATHERINE MITCHELL ATLANTA

Lines multiply into texture, build into architecture, dissolve into atmosphere, and weave into poetry. Katherine Mitchell: *A Retrospective 1974–2006* (Gallery East; January 19–March 16, 2007). Each Mitchell's abstract geometric investigations is methodically exacting and deliberate. Collectively, they narrate an artistic trajectory from theme to theme and back again. Personal memories interweave with systematic manipulations of lines, colors, and structure. Her oeuvre is simultaneously vast and intimate, cerebral and intuitive, lush and minimal.

In *Earth-Line Series*, 1979, Mitchell photographs lines formed as by-products of human intervention in the environment. Simple handwritten explanations establish her intuitive yet deductive methodology, using chance circumstance to reveal innate formal systems: "The same forces which cause one line to be and break can cause another to be straight." In subsequent series, Mitchell continued her development of lines into architecture, remaining sensitive to the natural materials. *Broken Arch*, 1984, and *Inverted Arch*, 1987, present architectural configurations with carefully drawn parallel lines. Rendered with acrylic modeling paste on canvas, the delicate lines define the spaces. *Broken Arch* assume a material presence. By contrast, her use of conte and pastel on watercolor paper in *Inverted Arch* and *Portal* imparts an organic softness to the lines, producing schematic architectural figures that nonetheless inhabit the ideal two-dimensional space on the surface.

Line, form, and medium shifted to atmospheric compositions with ladder-like progressions of graphic lines in Mitchell's *Sfumato* series of the mid-1990s. Inspired by a rainy residency at the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts & Sciences and her discovery of the sixteenth-century Chinese painter Chao Meng-fu, Mitchell rubbed layers of light aqua, blue, and grey pastel on Arches watercolor paper to emulate the colors of clouds and mists in the mountains. *Water Column*, 1996, and *Nightwood*, 1997, were the first paintings completed after her brother's death. Created on seven-foot-wide pieces of intentionally crushed vellum, each fea-

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Sang-Wook Lee, *19620*, 2007; Ramen noodles and glue, variable dimensions; Martha Whittington, *Rattle Cross*, 2007, nails, cotton string, twine, and wood, variable dimensions (Courtesy of the artists and The Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia (MOCA GA), Atlanta).



Arts Visual Arts

### Contemporary contemplation

Three *Installations* at MOCA-GA

BY FELICIA FEASTER

Published 01.31.07

Put nearly 20,000 packages of Maruchan ramen noodles in a room and the air takes on a different quality. There is a subtly starchy, brothy odor.

There is the unspoken promise of a filling, quick lunch.

The Great Wall of noodles is the work of Sang-Wook Lee, a South Korean-born, Milledgeville, Ga.-based artist. It is one of three highly idiosyncratic installation works by three regional artists featured in the contemplative Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia exhibition *Installations*.

There are contradictions galore in Lee's piece: of mass-produced material and the deliberate and unique gestures of an artist. Titled "19,620," the hulking, room-filling piece is a poetic collision of the ephemeral and the eternal.

Meditative in another sense, Martha Whittington's "Rattle Cross" is like a persistent ladder lugging on your shirt sleeves to get your attention. The piece puts out a sound like pings-pung paddles sending a bell across a table that resonates through the gallery space. Wooden circles of varying sizes are suspended from the gallery ceiling on long strands of yarn and hooked to metal gears that send the chimes ringing off the concrete floors at metronomic intervals.

This quirky piece, both oddball and off-kilter, comments on the repetitive labors of living, though here the gestures are the opposite of productive: the necessary interactions between the hands never occurring.

Another brainteaser, Martin Emanuel's "The Three Realities," engages one of the art world's favorite subjects -- perception -- and the artist's ability to manipulate it. A room-filling application of gonzo materials for minimalist effect, Emanuel employs colored lights attached to two humorously giant scaffolds to create a shadow picture on the wall. Like a string stretched across a guitar, Emanuel has strung a blue string between two nails on the wall. The room's darkness and aimed beams of light create an optical illusion: a red shadow and a green one, and the artist's own blue chalk line to create another layer of representation. The result is a meditation on how reality is constructed.

*Installations* is certainly an affirmation that artists are engaged in a process much like Emanuel's, of creating their own physical realities to comment upon our own.

Martin Emanuel, Sang-Wook Lee, Martha Whittington: *Installations*. Through March 14. Tues.--Sat., 10 a.m.--5 p.m. The Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, 1447 Peachtree St. 404-881-1109. <http://www.mocaga.org/>.

## VISUAL ARTS

# Mystical machinery

Symbols resonate in the geometry of the spiritual

By JERRY CULLUM  
For the Journal-Constitution

In this installation, the ladders do their own climbing.

Three oversize metal ladders, set side by side in Martha Whittington's exhibition "Three-fold," clang up and down in rhythmic mechanized step. Across the room, a loop of red cord turns placidly on an eight-spoked wheel mounted on the wall. A pile of similar red cord lies next to it.

## REVIEW

**"Three-fold: an installation by Martha Whittington"**

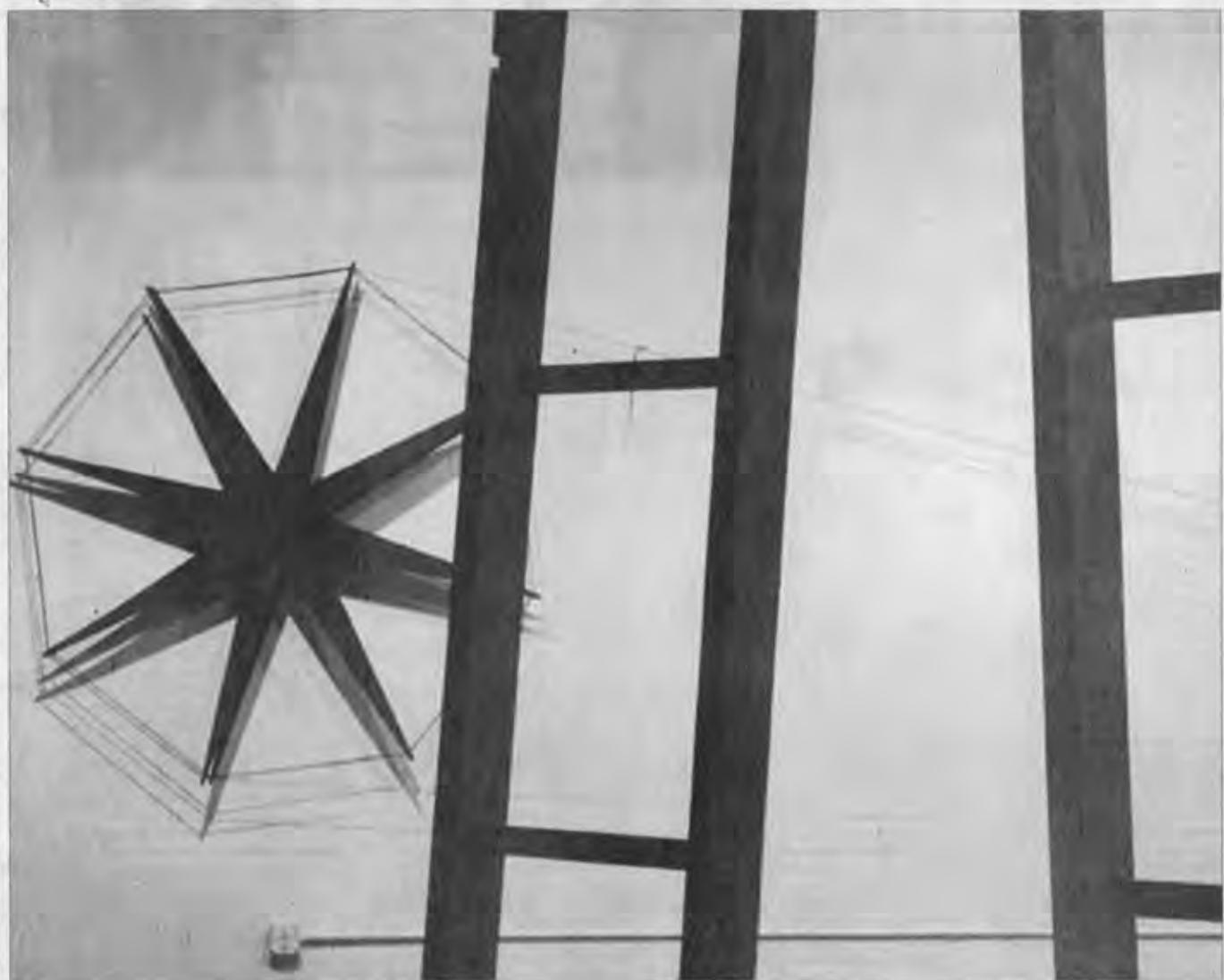
Through Nov. 24. 3-8 p.m. Fridays; 1-6 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays. Eyedrum, 290 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive S.E., Atlanta. [www.edrums.org](http://www.edrums.org)

**Verdict:** Machines of revelation that really work.

ed by the pentagram of boats shrouded in artificial fog in the next gallery. The boats fulfill the double meaning of "vessels," because their hulls hold water instead of floating in it.

We're not used to seeing a symbol turning on its own axis, or otherwise dependent on principles of engineering. So the seemingly self-propelled ladders (their power source is on a timer that makes them start and stop moving) and the endlessly turning wheel have a different emotional tone than most objects meant to convey mysteries. (The boats in the fog are a different story, even though the gently puffing fog machine is out in the open, giving the game away.)

As is so often the case when it comes to symbols, this arrangement of machines contains more arche-



types than the artist knew or intended, all playing out in mystical math.

The length of the boats, for example, was consciously based on Whittington's height. The relationship of the whole room to the proportions of the geometric formula known as the Golden Section was as unintentional as the appearance of the numbers of the famed Fibonacci sequence (where a sequence of numbers is built upon the sum of the previous two) in

other proportional relationships in the installation.

Traditional mystical geometry became mystical because the numbers involved in "good design" appear to obey a very few principles. Thus the disciples of Pythagoras developed a religion of mathematics alongside dry geometric theorems.

Whittington plugs into all of this by accident as well as design — assuming that anything in these matters is ever an accident.

Detail of Martha Whittington's "Three-fold" exhibit at Eyedrum.

# Flesh-and-blood reality speaks

By PAMELA BLUME LEONARD  
For the Journal-Constitution

"Limbs Heart Tongue & Teeth" at Agnes Scott College's Dalton Gallery reminds us that our bodies are not mere flesh.

They locate us in place and time (remember Martha Stewart's ankle monitor?) and tell us how we feel. Our bodies are focal points for negotiating status, mediating the spirit world and experiencing imperfection. All 11 artists are women who use visual art to analyze their in-body experiences and show us both the power and the vulnerability this exploration inevitably uncovers.

Julia Fenton, who recently returned to live in Atlanta, adopts a matter-of-fact approach to working with female fluids, which she argues are considered dangerous in our culture. Starting with papier-mâché, she added a dollop of menstrual blood, feces, milk, urine or salt and transformed these flushable substances into five sturdy sheets of gilt-edged handmade paper in neutral tones of white, blonde and umber. No longer dangerous, are these fluids — now bound, framed, and gilded — still powerful, still female, or tamed by beauty?

"Exoskeleton" is Atlantan Joan Tysinger's study of the brace and shoes that she must wear to walk because of a lifelong disability. It is a beautiful drawing, a classic study, that implies as much as it shows. Like the lines in an old face, the worn shoes and dangling buckles on the brace hint at the weight of being in a particular body over time and the universal longing for a "normal" body.

Clarina Bezzola, a Swiss artist who lives in New York City, concentrates on protection of the physical body and the damage to the inner self caused by insults to the body. "Mattress Dress" is barely wearable even though it is shown on a mannequin and



The protective armor of Clarina Bezzola's "Mattress Dress" allows the wearer to think everything's under control. The view from behind, however, reveals her back is barely covered.

there is even a photograph of a beautiful woman wearing it. It's cushion-covered from chin to ankle in front, with only a gauzy slip seen from the back. Like many garments, this pseudo dress constrains more than protects, tricking the wearer more than the beholder, who sees a disarming wall of blue floral print with a face perched on top. This pretty facade assumes that danger comes only from the front. We know the wearer's tactic leaves her open from behind.

With "Lamentation," Bezzola surrounds a female mannequin with a pair of giant lobes, like inflated lungs front and back, and lengths of fabric tubes dragging from the rear. It's a body cracked open, with the organs enlarged, that cries for women who have felt their



Physical boundaries disappear from hand to tree in Marta Maria Perez Bravo's "More Than a Tree."

Perez Bravo's "More Than a Tree" serves to mediate not only between physical and spiritual realms but also between flora and fauna. Slender limbs extend from the spread fingers of an extended arm, making the hand the center of a grove of leafless trees. This stark image sends the clear message that the boundaries between objects in the physical world are penetrable.

In "Corpse Bog," the floor of a dim sunken room is covered by loose-fill insulation, thick and gray. Motorized rakes clear circular patches in the litter. Eventually, Atlanta artist Martha Whittington tells us, we all become dust, to regather in another form. The piece focuses our attention on substance/insubstantiality. Who among us will ever forget the dust-covered New Yorkers who ran for their lives from a smothering cloud made up of the atomized World Trade Center?

Smartly curated to offer a panorama of the sacredness of our corporeal selves, "Limbs, Heart Tongue & Teeth" raises questions about the control we have over our flesh, how we regard the bodies of other people and how these questions shape us individually and socially.

## REVIEW

### "Limbs Heart Tongue & Teeth"

Through Nov. 20, 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m. weekdays; noon-4 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays. Dalton Gallery, Agnes Scott College, 141 E. College Ave., Decatur. 404-471-6244; daltongallery.agnescott.edu

**The verdict:** Smartly curated group show of women artists who adroitly transform the body into works of art.

bodies swell in cycles of puberty, pregnancy or sickness.

Cuban Marta Maria Perez Bravo uses photography to interpret her religion, Santeria. Worshippers believe that objects, as well as sentient beings, hold spiritual power.