



dana lynn louis

faith: suspended



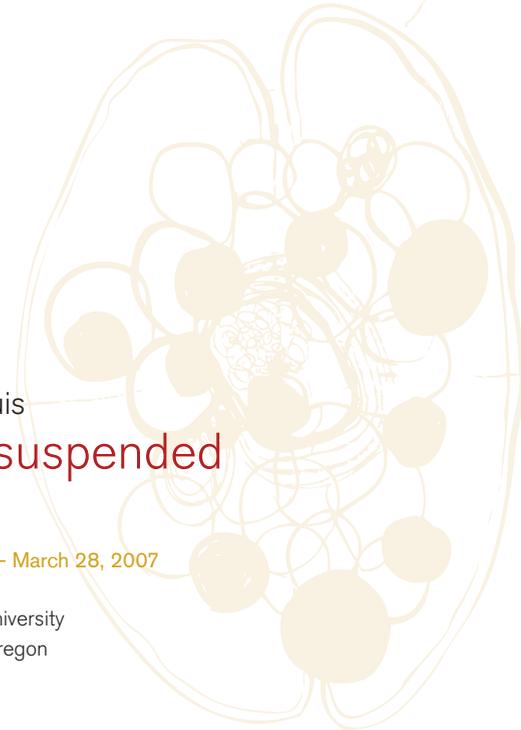


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February 25 – March 28, 2007

The Art Gym
Marylhurst University
Marylhurst, Oregon



Faith: Suspended, 2007 (detail)

Cover image: *Like snow in the desert*, 2007
Oil on Mylar, glass pins, paint on 12-ft. walls

Back cover image: *Centering*, 2007 (detail)
Oil on Mylar
44 in. dia., 2 in. deep

Left: *She Was*, 2007
Tempera on tissue
73 x 36 in.

Right: *Clearing*, 2007
Glass, beads, steel
93 x 35 x 19 in.

Dana Lynn Louis
Faith: Suspended

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Preface

In the ambitious installation *Faith: Suspended* in The Art Gym, Dana Lynn Louis builds on much of the work she has engaged in since coming to Portland in 1988 for a residency at the Oregon College of Art and Craft (then Oregon School of Arts and Crafts). Louis's sculptures and drawings are often about the internal workings of nature. Many of her early artworks remind one of the organs that do the body's dirty work, like the stomach and gut. Recently the artist's drawings and sculptures reference cellular arrays and the webs of tiny vascular structures that capture air, transmit electrical impulses, or carry nutrients to an organ, limb, branch or leaf. In addition, Louis has always been interested in animating the space above the floor of the gallery and has created installations in college and commercial gallery spaces that explored those possibilities.

Louis also works actively as a public artist, and two very recent commissions for Portland's City Hall and the Mary Bridge Children's Hospital in Tacoma, Washington, also provide the

springboard for The Art Gym installation. With *Suspended Migration* at City Hall, she created a hanging garden of multiple sculptures crafted from glass beads, kiln-formed glass and other materials to fill a four-story atrium. In *The Color of Breath* in Tacoma, Louis integrated thousands of glass circles with the three-story windowed façade, causing pools of colored light to migrate across several floors of the building as the day passed. Like *Suspended Migration* for City Hall, in *Faith – Suspended* the artist floats multiple sculptures to animate The Art Gym's sheer volume of space; and, as in *The Color of Breath* in Tacoma, Louis continues to experiment with cast shadow, light and intermittent color and with the idea of using a sequence of spaces in the formation of a whole.

For The Art Gym, in addition to sculptural work, Louis has integrated drawing into the installation. In one section, she has drawn a delicate tracery of white directly on the Art Gym's cream-colored walls, and overlaid that

web with drawings on circles and ovals of Mylar. She has also placed many of her delicate drawings on Japanese rice paper so they can be seen through and among the hanging glass, paper and Mica sculptures in the gallery's main space.

Creating images that suggest the delicacy and complexity that is intrinsic to nature and our place in it has been the subject of Dana Lynn Louis's work for many years. The Art Gym is honored to present this new work to the public and to accompany it with this publication.

Terri M. Hopkins
Director and Curator
The Art Gym

Foreground: *Evening*, 2007
Rice paper
87 in. x 45 in. diameter



Acknowledgements

The Art Gym is known for its publications on the art of the Pacific Northwest, and we are very pleased to be able to add this document on the work of Dana Lynn Louis to that library. We have many people to thank. Kate Bonansinga, director of the Stanlee and Gerald Rubin Center for the Visual Arts at the University of Texas at El Paso has written an insightful essay. Meris Brown of Fancypants Design has created a document that is responsive to Louis's delicate work. The artist and The Art Gym thank the Regional Arts and Culture Council for providing major support for this project through an Artist Project Grant. These grants to artists are invaluable in supporting new ventures in our community. We have also had wonderful response to our request for support for the publication, which is the artist's first. Both Dana Lynn Louis and Marylhurst University are grateful to all those who made it possible to document this work: Katherine Grant, M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust, Deborah Horrell and Christopher Gillem, Marilyn Murdock, Larry Kirkland, Scott Becker, Judy Hill, Philip

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The Lightness of Balance

The Lightness of Balance
by Kate Bonansinga

In *Faith: Suspended* Dana Lynn Louis continues her decadelong exploration of the concept of suspension. In a holistic installation composed of many drawings and sculptures, each individual work combines multiple abstract forms to refer to a complex system that is greater than the sum of its parts. Some focus on the microcosmic and suggest intricate webs or strings of cells. Others are botanical and derive inspiration from the branches of trees and plants. Still others look like compilations of internal body parts, some inflating and others falling in on themselves. All of them explore the idea of many small things working in tandem to create something larger.

The Roots of Suspension

Louis first implemented the idea of suspension, and of connecting sculpture to the ceiling above rather than the floor below, with the sculpture *Casting*, 1995. That and several subsequent works prepared her for *Suspended Migration*, 2002, a public artwork commissioned by a

group of individuals for Portland's City Hall in honor of then-Mayor Vera Katz. From the ceiling of City Hall's 75-foot light well, Louis hung several flocks of abstract forms, some made of mica and others of glass, all reflective objects that sparkle in the sunlight. Each group hangs independently of the others. The artist took advantage of the windowed elevator that runs along one side of the atrium and the windows to city offices on the other three. She could thereby provide many vantage points on the artwork's details, such as delicate stitching and strings of individual beads.¹

When Louis accepted the commission for *Suspended Migration*, she had already completed several public art works, including the three-story façade of Mary Bridge Children's Hospital in Tacoma, Washington. At the hospital, Louis applied hundreds of disks of color to a window to create *The Color of Breath*. As a result, the natural light that animates the interior space is a play of shadows and subtle, translucent colors that change depending upon

Wonder, 2006
Ink gouache, graphite on paper
30 x 20 in.

the weather, the season and the time of day. She applied the same attention to negative space and light in *Suspended Migration*. But the City Hall commission was different: It was originally intended to be temporary and, more important, was privately funded and thus free of the often-belabored committee process inherent to public art. Louis felt at liberty to approach the project as if it were part of her studio practice rather than a public work. Perhaps for this reason, compared with the other commissions, *Suspended Migration* is closest in approach and aesthetic to *Faith: Suspended* in The Art Gym.

Mobiles

Faith: Suspended meets the difficult challenge of engaging the cathedral-like space of Marylhurst's Art Gym. Louis utilizes almost every available surface, including floor and walls, in addition to occupying the space between them in this orchestrated installation. Although suspension as a method and a





concept has captivated Louis since 1995, *Faith: Suspended* includes her first mobiles, where forms balance on opposite ends of a horizontal support. Surrounding them are drawings hanging in groups, suspended by glass clips to float about an inch from the wall. Louis experiments with glassine, Mylar, sumi ink, thread, Japanese paper, wire, acrylic paint, and glass in her drawings and sculptures, blurring the line between two and three dimensions.

Promenade was Louis's first mobile. It is like a taste test for the rest of the exhibition, since it includes a myriad of forms and materials, most of which Louis revisits in depth in subsequent works. One element looks like a tubular dress bordered in lace, another like a pink rib cage.

In contrast, for the mobile *Wind* Louis settled on a single repeated form that she describes as an abstraction of a lymph node. These tiny structures, scattered in groups throughout the human body, act as its filters, collecting and destroying bacteria and viruses. The artist chose to use a single translucent material – glassine – to make *Wind*'s 58 two-sided “nodes,” or

pouches, inflated with the breaths of air that lend the piece its title. Louis was attracted to glassine because of its lightness and because of the unpredictable puckered-edged shapes the pouches adopt when they are filled with air.

The choice of glassine as a material also adds meaning. Typically used for archiving works on paper, it is associated with the attempt to maintain and conserve the ephemeral. Here the ephemeral is the body, and the life that it carries. In *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, a publication that has profoundly affected Louis, Sogyal Rinpoche emphasizes time and again the concepts of transience and impermanence. “Nothing has any inherent existence of its own ... and this absence of independent existence is what we call ‘emptiness.”² Rinpoche's writings, along with a daily yoga practice, have deepened the artist's commitment to maintaining perspective and balance, qualities inherent to the mobile.

While *Wind* has an undeniable humanness, *Like snow in the desert* alludes to connections among various life forms, plant and animal. In this white-on-white installation in The Art Gym's

project room, Louis has painted a group of what may be veins, branches or sinews directly in white onto three of the gallery's cream-colored walls. Circular and elliptical translucent shapes are the ground for individual drawings that convey similar subject matter. These hang about an inch from the wall, overlaying the larger drawing. The shadows they create add an additional layer of imagery and information, made possible by the space between things. Juxtaposed with this "snow" is the red of the drawing *Centering*. This artwork on Mylar uses thousands of tiny circles to form a 40-inch-diameter cellular cluster.

Journey

Louis has seized opportunities to travel over the past five years, including a trip to Japan and three trips to Africa. *Cellular Shift* and its predecessor, *Nocturne*, draw parallels between the process of travel and the process of life. *Nocturne's* 19 drawn images imply human and nonhuman existence, and many connote leaves, flowers and pods. In *Cellular Shift* seemingly tangled lines of beads loop and intertwine.



Interspersed among these hairlike strands are flat, oval pieces of clear glass fused with white dots, reminiscent of cells under a microscope. If the strings of beads are a meandering pathway that often folds back on itself, the clear glass oases are zones for rest and what Louis calls those necessary “moments of grace.” These zones of peace are similar to the space between things in Like *snow in the desert*. They can be thought of as a place of tranquility and emancipation: heaven to Jews, Christians and Muslims; Nirvana to Buddhists; and the point of concentration to many Hindus, as stated in the raja yoga sutras of Patanjali.³

The cellular imagery of *Centering* recurs in several other works, including *Oasis*. For this 4-foot-diameter drawing, Louis tore large sheets of red Japanese rice paper into small, circular sections and then reassembled them to form a magnified single cell. It is a large version of the small glass oases in *Cellular Shift*. She also used the surface of this very thin paper as a circular ground for drawn marks. Because the

rice paper is also absorbent, the marks appear integral to its structure rather than afloat on its surface. Displayed on hidden supports to hover three inches above the floor, it suggests a magic carpet for two. *Oasis* also refers to prayer rugs, which Louis saw in Africa at least five times each day when Muslims knelt to the ground to pray.

Hanging near *Oasis* in The Art Gym installation is *Evening*, a red conical form. Its strong color and large scale make it a focal point of *Faith: Suspended*. Like *Oasis*, it consists of pieces of torn, red rice paper. In addition to their palette, tactility and translucence, the two works share the intention of bringing two people into very close proximity. *Evening*'s shape allows it to function like a tent, its translucency like a veil. It seems as likely to shelter as it does to float away, its strength counteracted by its levity. It protects something precious but is vulnerable, emphasizing the duality and polarity of balance.

In addition, both *Evening* and *Oasis* suggest a kind of personal space that can be created

without walls. In the heat of the summertime, the people of Mali bring their mosquito nets into the outdoor public places, where temperatures are more comfortable, to spend the evening and sleep. Thus their lives often play out for others to hear and sometimes see, if the moon is bright or full. In her travels Louis noticed that the boundary between personal and public space was more flexible and transparent in Africa and in Japan than in the United States.⁴

Heat, a composite work of numerous oval drawings, also addresses the subject of Africans coping with nearly intolerable temperatures. Activity ceases between late morning and early evening, and midday becomes a composite of quiet moments. *Heat* portrays a string of these midday moments through 19 drawings with gold marks on red ground framed by lacelike curves that make them look like doilies. The gold color and small scale make each drawing seem like a personal, portable icon to foster patience in times of waiting.





Heat, 2006

Ink, gouache and pins on paper

85 x 32 x 2 in.

Much of the installation is organized in zones of color. For example, *Heat*, *Evening* and *Oasis* form a zone of red at the heart of the exhibition. Smaller red artworks *Fitini* and *Shhh* punctuate areas of the installation where black, white, tan and pale yellow predominate and pattern is emphasized.

In Africa women dress in layers of fabric printed with colorful patterns. In many areas of *Faith: Suspended* and in numerous individual artworks, Louis picks up on the layering and the repetitive quality of pattern but strips back the color so that the imagery dominates. In these works, she distills the visual activity encountered in Africa to encourage quiet contemplation.

The artist admires the black-and-white portrait photographs of Seydou Keita (1921 – 2001), one of the first African photographers to work in Bamako, Mali.⁵ Keita deliberately chose to limit his palette to black and white. "Color was around of course, but you had to send the films to France, and anyway, I didn't like it.

For me it was the black and white that was the right thing."⁶ Louis makes the same choice in *Faith: Suspended*.

Louis also cites the art of two seminal females as influential. She shares Louise Bourgeois's (b. 1911) love of drawing and her fearless approach to materials. Kiki Smith (b. 1954) is also a likely connection, given their common interest in the unity of all things, in the human body, and in death and rebirth. But whereas many of Smith's works seem to be in the process of decay, Louis's sculptures seem to be pausing, on hold, deciding whether to land or to fly. They are poised at a formative juncture on a journey marked by periods of waiting and by rare moments of repose. Each hovers between the earth and the sky, suspended in space and time.

Death

In 2000 Louis's younger sister died of lung cancer. The artist traversed the pain and

confusion of that loss and emerged with a renewed commitment to her belief that the life we experience here and now is one of many. Death is just another moment of transition and transformation. "The ideal way for a person to die is having given away everything, internally and externally."⁷ Free of all attachment, the end becomes a beginning, the ultimate liberation. The irony, of course, is that art as beautiful and compelling as that presented here fosters desire and its consequent feelings of attachment. Do we not want to look at these drawings and sculptures forever, make them part of our everyday experience? Do we not want to possess their buoyancy, feel their lightness, float and balance as they do, literally and metaphorically? They test our ability to engage and then disengage. They become our instructors, our touchstones to what is important, our calmness and liberation, our spiritual nourishment and air as we reside fully in the present. They represent a weightlessness that we strive to share with others while we are in this life, and after we have moved on from it.

¹ So well loved was the sculpture that the same group of people who had commissioned it purchased it from the artist. *Suspended Migration* still hangs in City Hall today.

² Rinpoche, Sogyal. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. San Francisco, Calif. : Harper, Collins 1993, p. 37.

³ Louis is Jewish and committed to the practice of yoga.

⁴ In Africa, the weather and phase of the moon determine the blurring of those boundaries; in Japan the dense population means that personal space is at a minimum.

⁵ He began photographing in the 1940s, and continued through the decades following Mali's independence from France in 1960. Although clearly connected to long-established conventions of studio portraiture, his portraits convey a unique expressive style that both confirms his clients' status within the community and reflects their desire to be seen as cosmopolitan. Since the early 1990s, his work has attracted interest internationally for its formal qualities as well as its engaging subjects.

⁶ As quoted in an interview with Dominique Anginot, www.zonezero.com

⁷ Rinpoche, p. 224





Faith: Suspended, 2007
Installation overview



Essence, 2007 (detail)
Oil on glass, steel beads
88 x 27 x 27 in.



Faith, 2006
Sumi ink and gouache on silk-rice paper
49 x 29 in.



Capitulation, 2006
Sumi ink on silk-rice paper
52 x 30 in.







Like snow in the desert, 2007

Oil on Mylar, glass pins, paint on 12-ft. walls

48 linear ft. x depth 1½ in.



Tracking, 2006
Glass beads, wire
82 X 17 x 22 in.



September, 2006
Gouache and sumi ink on tissue
55 x 24 in.



Left

Cellular Shift, 2006

Kiln-formed glass, glass beads, wire
86 x 19 x 18 in.

Nocturne 1-15, 2006

Ink on tissue - 15 drawings, various sizes

Right

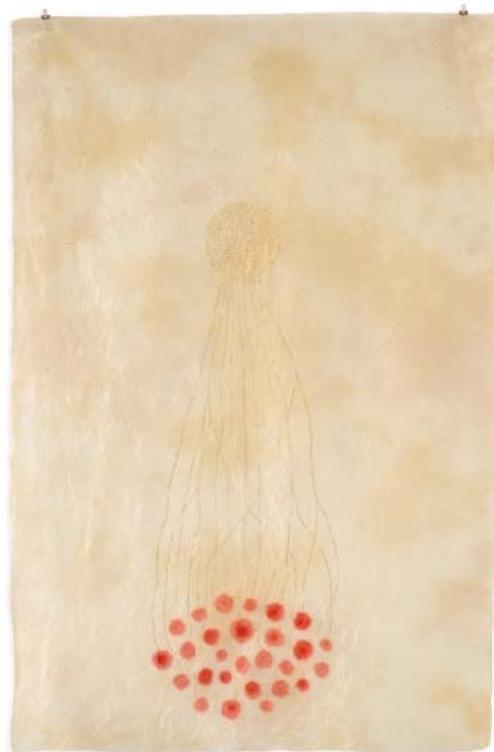
Spell, 2006

Ink on tissue, wire and glass
25 x 7 x 7 in.

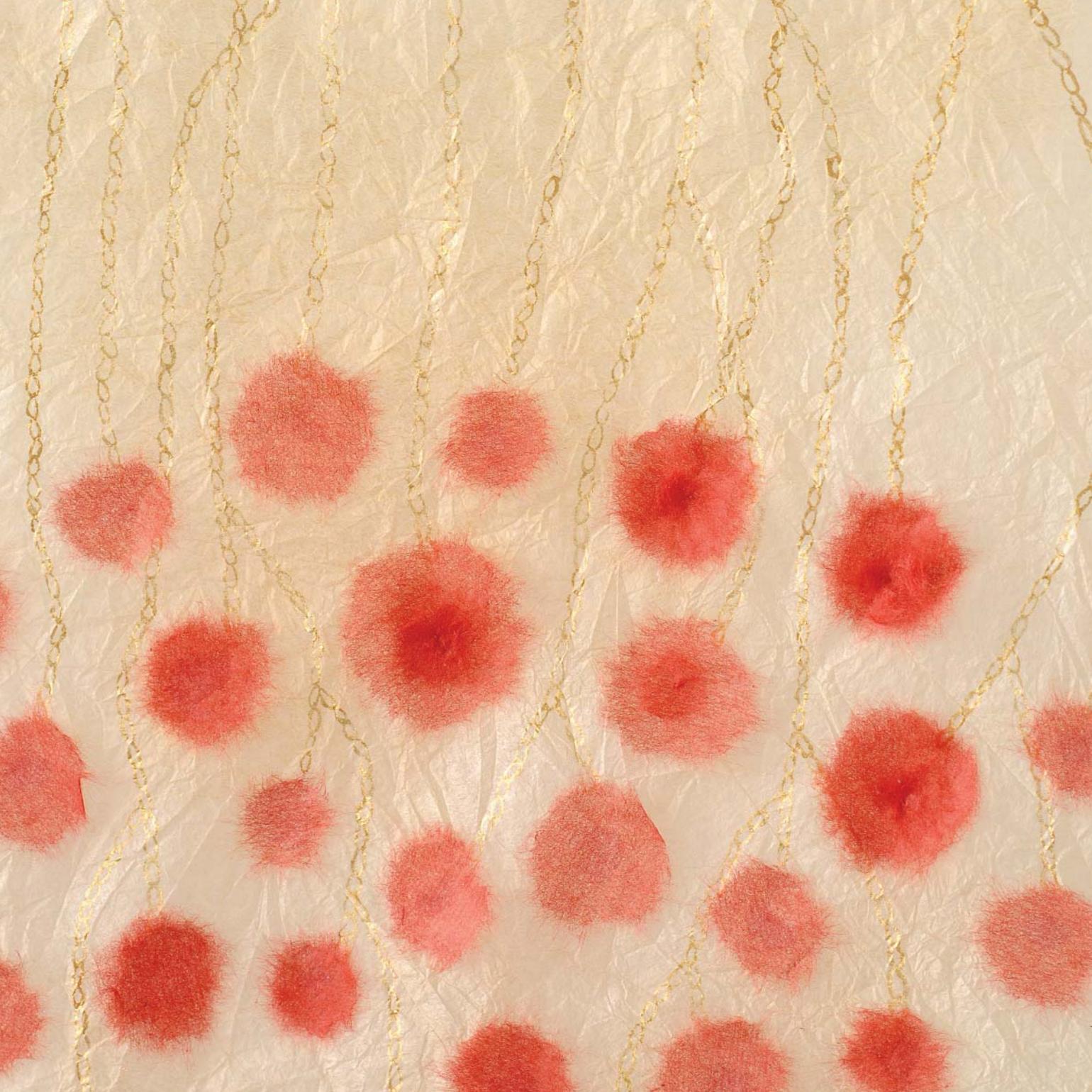




Seek, 2006
Gouache, on silk-rice paper
32 x 25 in.



Sow, 2006
Gouache on silk-rice paper
37 x 24 in.







Relish, 2007
Gouache, graphite on silk-rice paper
57 x 28 in.



Gift, 2006
Sumi ink, gouache, and tissue on paper
9 x 6 in.

Sevare', 2006
Sumi ink, gouache, and pins on paper
9 x 5½ in.



Faith: Suspended, 2007
Installation overview





Capitulation, 2006
Sumi ink on silk-rice paper
52 x 30 in.



Wind, 2006
Glassine, steel, wind
116 x 42 x 40 in.



Shhh, 2007
Rice paper
20 x 9¹/₂ in. dia.
Photo: Brian Foulkes



Essence, 2007
Oil on glass, steel
beads
88 x 27 x 27 in.



Heat, 2006
Oil on kiln-formed
glass, beads, pins
on paper
85 x 32 x 2 in.



Charm, 2006
Oil on kiln-formed
glass, beads, wire
10 in. dia. x 1¹/₄ in.



Oasis, 2007
Sumi ink on rice paper
47 in. dia.
Photo: Brian Foulkes



Evening, 2007
Rice paper
87 in. x 45 dia.



Wish, 2006
Oil on glassine
24 x 47 in.
Photo: Brian Foulkes



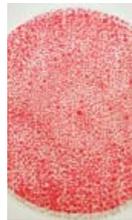
As the moon rises, 2007
Seven components, kiln-formed
glass, oil, netting, thread
93 x 60 x 60 in.
Photo: Brian Foulkes



Promenade, 2006
Paper, Mylar, glass
beads, glassine, oil, tape
67 x 21 x 18 in.
Photo: Brian Foulkes



Wonder, 2006
Ink gouache, graphite
on paper
30 x 20 in.



Centering, 2007
Oil on Mylar
44 in. dia., 2 in. deep



Like snow in the desert, 2007
Oil on Mylar, glass pins, paint
on 12-ft. walls.
48 linear ft. x depth 1¹/₂ in.



Severe, 2006
Sumi ink, gouache,
and pins on paper
9 x 5¹/₂ in.



Gift, 2006
Sumi ink, gouache,
and tissue on paper
9 x 6 in.



Seek, 2006
Gouache, silk-rice paper
32 x 25



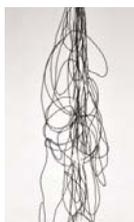
Fitini, 2007
Silk-rice paper
9 x 12 in.
Photo: Brian Foulkes



Hope, 2006
Mica, glassbeads, wire
84 x 19 x 18 in.
Photo: Brian Foulkes



Sow, 2006
Gouache on silk-rice paper
37 x 24 in.



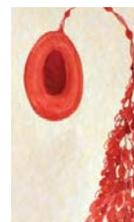
Cellular Shift, 2006
Kiln-formed glass
86 x 24 x 19 in.



She Was, 2007
Tempera on tissue
73 x 36 in.



Cleaning, 2007
Glass, beads, steel
35 x 19 x 96 in.



Heal, 2006
Oil on glassine
24 1/2 x 37 in.



June, 2006
Sumi ink and tempera
on tissue
16 x 10 1/2 in.



Tracking, 2006
Glass beads, wire
82 X 17 x 22 in.



Relish, 2007
Gouache, graphite on
silk-rice paper
57 x 28 in.



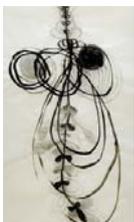
September, 2006
Gouache and sumi ink
on tissue
55 x 24 in.



Faith, 2006
Sumi ink and gouache
on silk-rice paper
49 x 29 in.



Spell, 2006
Ink on tissue, wire, glass
25 x 7 x 7 in.



Nocturne, 1-15, 2006
Ink on tissue,
various sizes



Miel, 2006
Gouache on rice paper
26 x 16 in.
Photo: Brian Foulkes



Seeds (1-5), 2006
Gouache and graphite
on paper
10 x 5 1/2 in. ea
Photo: Brian Foulkes



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