

and the intricacies of lighting, persuading the viewer's perception to merge the artwork with the workings of the building itself. The electrical cords and plugs are left visible. Simultaneously organic and mechanized in appearance, Aschheim's structures adhere to the interior like parasites, with their tentacle-like tubes punching through the gallery walls and claiming territory.

The pod clusters dominate the space, alternately illuminating and emitting noise, presumably captured by the reconnaissance pods in other rooms. Their crystalline delicacy and intricate lines appear merely decorative at first, until one focuses on the activity within each cluster. Two clusters of pods contain six small cameras each, displaying a live feed of the viewer's face from different angles. They resemble a carnivorous plant, with their alluring peculiarity drawing the viewer in to be observed and documented. Another cluster of pods spies on visitors in other galleries of the museum, making the viewer complicit in the machine's voyeurism. Cameras in a fourth cluster reveal the artist setting up the current installation, representing memory and possibly the machine's awareness of its own creation, while those in two other clusters display views of previous incarnations of the installation, perhaps indicating recollection of its more primitive ancestry.

Neural Architecture resembles medical life support systems: camera footage of previous installations even displays blood-red tubing, inviting speculation on the vulnerability inherent in relinquishing control to increasingly complex technology. The structures actively react to the stimulus of the viewer's presence in an unsettling imitation of consciousness, while the viewer remains static. Aschheim's incorporation of devices designed to protect infants suggests the additional theme of innocence subjected to

an invasion of privacy (nominally to ensure safety), an association that endows her installation with topical significance.

—Laura Dillon

MCLEAN, VIRGINIA

Rebecca Kamen

**McLean Project for the Arts,
Virginia**

Death is a nexus of events that allows the feeling hand of the artist free rein, and evidence of this potential resonated throughout Rebecca Kamen's recent solo show. Far from a bleak or static atmosphere, "meta" radiated spark and transformation as it examined the exchange of energy on a cosmic and human level and probed the organizing principles behind life and death. Lines whirled and planes fluttered, while forms fragmented and restructured in response to unseen forces. The effect was exhilarating, like the tingling sensation when a limb wakes up from temporary sleep.

Kamen has long been interested in systems analysis and mapping; her researches range from antique astronomical texts and instruments to the *quipu*, the Inca string and knot method of recording history and laws. In the last few years, developments in knot theory, a branch of algebraic topology that studies the placement of a unit circle into a three-dimensional space, and superstring theory, a field of physics that seeks to unify quantum mechanics and general relativity, have also captured her imagination. She has synthesized these and other sources into intricate visual analogues with her intuition as guide.

Wave Piloting marks Kamen's first use of Mylar and represents a breakthrough in her evolution. Earlier works, such as *Code Sequence 3*, explored overlapping circuits of metal wire and nodes that conjured orbital or neural pathways. In *Wave*

Piloting, two sheets of the translucent material appear to float diagonally off the wall. Already frosted on both sides, the Mylar is painted with turquoise and umber washes, while a bent wire grid both defines and restricts its now undulating identity. Tiny holes underscore the physicality of the Mylar and allow light to pass through and team up with cast shadows, positing an alternate ethereal work. The tension erupts at the center where several connections break up and leave wire filaments stranded over a void. Abuzz with staccato energy, the composition suggests the convulsive markings of a heavenly or terrestrial chart.

By contrast, *Tsunami* is a meditation on the unpredictable and destructive forces that forever change our lives. Here, a single Mylar ovoid projects downward from a corner, the knots of its metal cage becoming menacing thorns. Its palette is somber, similar to blotches of mud and dried blood. Loosely echoing its positive counterpart, a central aperture has either sucked everything in or spewed out debris, which has accumulated on the floor in the shape of wire balls. The archetype of death assumes the wanton form of a limbless figure in *Portage*. Its head folded over onto its torso, the figure calls out in silence to its partner, the diminutive *Immortal*, a mummy-like cocoon of wire.

The ladder and cloud motifs in *Transit* bring to mind Jacob's Ladder. In the Biblical story, Jacob, after lying down on a stone pillow, envisioned a ladder or staircase, which rose from the ground to disappear into heaven and which angels used to descend and ascend. Kamen interprets this idea of bridging heaven with earth, and death with life, through a delicate yet stable steel rod and wire ladder. Its rungs are knotted on a diagonal axis to the rails, the whole construction twist-



Rebecca Kamen, *Whisk*, 2003.
Copper and steel wire, 40 x 5
x 19 in.

ing slowly in an upward spiral. Near the open-ended top, a vortex of steel and galvanized steel wire of varying width and shine obfuscates the trajectory of the ladder. The diaphanous cloud instills wonder and thwarts any attempt to fathom its interwoven course and means of suspension. Pulsing with mystery, the two-part composition seems to suggest that we can only under-

stand so much with our minds, and the rest we must grasp by other methods.

Kamen emerges as a channeller of energy and her sculptures as shape shifters. Although the exhibition could have used more space, and some of the earlier works appeared to address different issues, “meta” was a memorable offering, and the aptly chosen title points to a larger organizing principle leading from one body of work to another, from one connection to another in the artist’s life. Through highly focused, repetitive motion, orbs and webs become prayers of healing and of hope in Kamen’s hands. Laced with embryonic narrative, her work deftly balances observation and experimentation with engineering, while inviting us to explore the mysteries of natural phenomena and the timeless power that binds us all.

—Sarah Tanguy

SEATTLE

Michael Peterson
William Traver Gallery

Michael Peterson’s recent show dealt unapologetically with the wooden object—15 different configurations using sawn, sandblasted, and pigmented madrone logs and burls. Strictly formal and abstract for the most part, each work featured a hollowed-out rectangular wooden shape positioned on a

pedestal or mounted on a wall. Working within extremely limited material means, Peterson managed to convey a great variety of imagery that necessarily alluded to natural states.

However, by pairing, stacking, and piling the wooden elements, Peterson created more complicated compositions, going beyond the more familiar carved driftwood sculptures widely prevalent in Pacific Coast souvenir shops. Although these works tread on dangerous ground, Peterson’s insistence on squared-off hollow rectangles denies the found-driftwood sensibility. His approach recalls that of northern California wood sculptor David Groth. But Peterson combines colors, shapes, and positions, whereas Groth sticks to an overall color (stained found Norfolk pine) and intervenes with more cutting and carving.

Chockstone, *Coastal Stack*, *Bench*, and *Coastal Objects #2* (all 2005) all offer interesting combinations of shapes juxtaposed horizontally or vertically. Attached pieces of oyster wood resemble gray stones, so that some of the sculptures become still lifes, as in *Chockstone* and *Coastal Stack*. The latter is the most complicated, with three hollow blocks set on a uniform wooden plank. The smaller curved and weathered elements suggest shells or fossils, and

the colors complement one another handsomely.

With its empty center, *Bench* is impossible to use, but its 50-inch width and casually interlocking two-part composition give plenty of play to an beautiful overall orange coloring. The two supporting struts at the base point up a common formal problem for artists like Peterson and Groth who are working to revere and preserve basic wooden materials: the issue of sculptural support. One would think that the pedestal offered support enough, but with the wood’s often irregular bottom surface, some of the pieces will not sit evenly on a pedestal. Peterson’s solution is the simple strut or the wooden plank. Such requirements add an unnecessarily fussy note to the compositions, not to mention an ambivalent note of over-presentation.

All this is obviated by the wall-mounted pieces, which sacrifice a full, volumetric view but gain a leaner, more direct visual encounter. *Slot* and *Earth + Stone III* and *IV* (all 2005) hang simply on the wall, free of plinth or pedestal nuisances, and abruptly jutt into space with their smoothed and rumpled wooden surfaces. Like *Bench*, they have a uniform color, all the better to allow the irregularities of the log to shine through. In his most varied and accomplished body of work yet, Peterson is underscoring the continued sculptural potential of hand-wrought natural materials such as wood.

—Matthew Kangas

Left: Michael Peterson, *Bench*, 2005. Sawn, sandblasted, and pigmented madrone burl, 17.5 x 50 x 12 in.
Right, top: Yolanda Gutiérrez, *Tamoanchan*, 2004. Ceramic, 300 x 40 x 40 cm.
Right, bottom: Robert Lobe, *Blow down III*, 2004. Hammered, anodized aluminum, 85.5 x 25 x 35 cm. Both works from “El Bosque/The Forest.”



MEXICO CITY

“El Bosque/The Forest”
Palace of Fine Arts

In the strictest tradition of Macbeth’s Birnam Wood, whose mobilization meant the end of this Shakespeareian character, sculptor Naomi Siegmann devised a portable forest to make the public aware of the excessive felling of trees worldwide. “Have you ever imagined a world without trees?” asks Siegmann, a U.S.-born artist who lives in Mexico and is known for