

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

It's a long story that has brought Rebecca Kamen to this culmination of work, a journey of approximately thirty years.

Rebecca Kamen began first to consider materials for their resonant surfaces, and form for its associative influences, following graduate school. Early sculpture explored tactile, physical characteristics and how to draft them to the service of other effects. Beginning with rubber inner tube material, Kamen became interested in how the process manipulation of something industrial and unaesthetic could transform its soft black matte skin into an object of sensual undulating appeal. Wrapping the rubber to encase wood forms, Kamen employed the wall to support and situate these early works, to distance the functional place of the tire from the ground and site it where objects go to be offered eyelevel importance and consideration. These early sculptures were heavily involved with contour, positive and negative, and with the repetitive process of wrapping. They led the artist to incorporate tarpaper, through which she would interpret the tube origins, often framing in one dimension, in some continually developing manner, a void and/or a portal. The ambiguous portrait of a reverberating aperture shifted again through another medium to become ephemeral receiving devices in her current series entitled Listening.) Kamen was also, at that earlier time beginning to investigate scientific and sacred writings, and collecting natural and cultural phenomena that discharges or conducts energy. Energy would eventually become Rebecca Kamen's underlying thesis. She would, over the years, explore and tease it out in its various manifestations in every series that she undertook.

I met Rebecca Kamen some fifteen years ago, about midway through her art career to this date. She was then beginning a collaborative project with Zhao Shu Tong, a Chinese sculptor in Sichuan Province. Their collaboration was at a very early point in the reestablishment of the West's relations with China. It was also a period when once esoteric computer terminology was moving into common parlance, and terms - such as integrated circuitry - were becoming part of our collective experience. Zhao and Kamen undertook an exploration into determinant mathematical systems that could be identified as significantly in ancient Chinese landscape principles as in the effective organization of the computer's circuit board. Out of this collaboration, her Kami series of paintings on aluminum became suspended gardens which indicated visually diagrammed energy. Soon after this period Kamen was including found stones in her media and considering orbits of emanation. The marriage of ideas later influenced the tableau sculptures that preceded and gave way to her Meditation pieces.

Kamen was also becoming fascinated with the psychological effect of artifice, developing surfaces that seemed to be one material, when in fact they were a contradictory medium, not unlike gardens made of stone and sand that intend the metaphor of a green garden. During the period that she was making dynamic floating realms that housed a rock somewhere within, she was contacted by a Native American tribe, who had taken notice of Kamen's work. They possessed a rarified collection of highly valued meteorites and were looking for someone to steward it, following the death of a previous caretaker. Kamen accepted the honor and was given several of the meteorites for safekeeping. In holding them each in turn in her palm to consider their origins and their fall to earth she felt inclined to isolate and place their message on white sheets of Mylar. Tracing their aura on the fluid surface, following the lines that her pencil sensed from the space broadcast by each fragment, she made a series of automatic drawings that gave form to the force within each meteorite. Recent dynamic works as *Doppleganger*, *Halo* and *Reverberate* would commemorate this exercise, now created essentially through recall.

Kamen came to understand that she was, in essence, mapping objects, and began to research alternative methods of mapping and documenting time and occurrence. Three-dimensional navigational maps for sailing across a flat sea, constructed of natural matter by South Pacific islanders, and ancient astrological or global charts turning the world of dimension into something flat became fodder for ideas that would enter Rebecca Kamen's work. And she too would slide back and forth between describing highly structural concepts on a flattened ground, or drawing deep architectural space - as she does currently with her wire pieces. In *Whisk* and *Network*, one experiences a complex, animated drawing charted in mid-air as the forms nimbly venture from the white ground and return again.

A stay in Italy led her to experiment with gravitational impact of draped materials in current pieces like *Wave Piloting*. While sabbatical visits to Egypt, Cambodia, Laos, Burma furthered her interest in ancient places of cultural and spiritual significance and ambient magnetism, they also introduced Kamen to the methods of identifying and mapping sites based on sacred geometry. Several evocative free-standing pieces came out of this period specifically including *Meditation I* and *II*. A printmaking residency at Pyramid Atlantic inspired by a Ming Dynasty Astronomy Treatise was pivotal in discharging Kamen's use of space. This is most evident in the later works when she abandons hard materials for more mutable ones that permitted the transfer of light.

Colleagues too introduced diverse resources, recognizing affinities in Kamen's work with other scientific phenomena that she was not aware of. Quipus (cryptic string and knot systems by which the Incas recorded their history and laws), and String Theory (a

hypothetical model that attempts to unify rival physics such as atomic, electromagnetism and gravity to enable them cooperate simultaneously in our universe) are examples. The three wire sculptures, *Coded Sequence 1,2 &3* are direct descendents of these coinciding sources.

The Mylar that Kamen experimented with originally, to translate the potency of the meteorites, eventually became a tremendously important substance to her work. Over time she learned to circumvent its rigid properties, working it into a facile malleability. As energy is to Kamen's thesis, Mylar is to her work's distinctive poetry. The translucent material provides an evanescence, a release realm, a scrim to separate spatial realities.

In the last decade, and especially in the last year that this exhibition has been on the drawing board, Kamen has experienced several encounters with loss through death, including that of her father and two close friends. She extrapolated from those events of deep grief a point of view or conviction in her work to offer a sense of countenance and continuity by understanding energy as metaphor, and metaphor as an ever active compass to renewal. *Blessing* is one of those works, *Across the Way* another.

It has been an inspiring delight knowing Rebecca Kamen for much of her period of development. The tremendous body of work presented here is principally made in the previous two years but exemplifying many before. She is a prolific artist, inspired by the hidden stream of life that carries with it the profound and the mundane in the same clear, cool water. She is driven to interpret our world and through her work to offer evidence that our existence is interconnected and purposeful. She uses scientific principals but principally as credible, rational witnesses to something that thrives most optimally in the intuition, extending through time, making it now part of our long journey.

Deborah McLeod,
Exhibition curator

Deborah McLeod is an independent curator, writer and art critic, now living on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, where she reviews for the *Easton Star Democrat*. She served as Director of Exhibitions at the McLean Project for the Arts, and curator at the Hand Workshop, Cultural Arts Center at Glen Allen, Peninsula Fine Arts Center and the Second Street Gallery. She has contributed art reviews regularly to *Style Weekly Magazine*, *The Virginian Pilot Ledger Star* and *Art Papers* and published in *Ceramics:Art and Perception*.