

RESTON, VIRGINIA

Rebecca Kamen

Greater Reston Arts Center

A number of years ago, Rebecca Kamen decided to create a sculptural representation of the periodic table. In an effort to investigate and understand this Western organization of elements, she traveled to the Himalayas and viewed examples of Buddhist mandalas, which symbolize the universe, as well as the mind and body of the Buddha. Kamen developed an appreciation for this Eastern

er significance: the number of petals relates to an element's orbital pattern, while the number of stems is based on its electrons. The serpentine design of the garden pulls visitors in and encourages close inspection. From the center of the spiral, the flowers grow larger and more complex. Examples of the old-fashioned periodic chart help viewers match flowers with their corresponding elements. Alexjander's synthesizer soundscape captures the frequencies of each element in a dreamy

creating large installations, she is known for her collaborations.

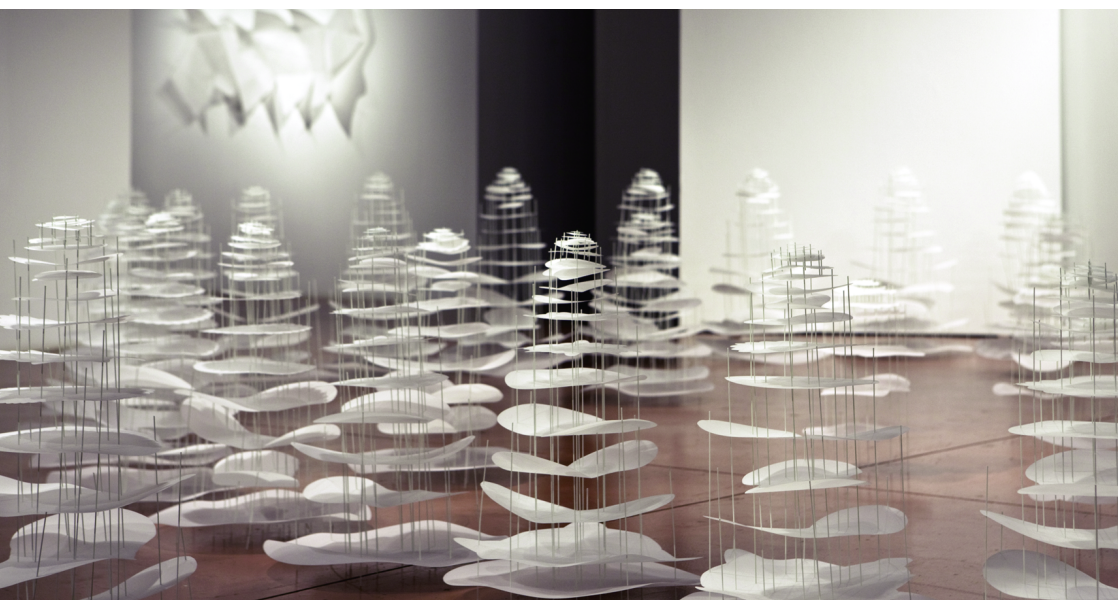
In an effort to elucidate the artistic process and the collaborations that were central to the installation's success, this presentation of Kamen's garden included a video interview with the artist in her studio, an example of a Mylar flower that could be touched, and Dearie's hand-drawn floor plan. Additional drawings appear in the exhibition catalogue. Five wall-mounted sculptures representing the original ele-

Museum curator Michael Darling from the collection of Jon and Mary Shirley, followed the precedent of 2005's "The Surreal Calder" at the Menil Collection by including black and white photographs of the artist by Herbert Matter. In Seattle, the photographs fleshed out a small survey that contained only one masterpiece, *Bougainvillier* (1947, which the Shirleys also lent to Houston). Installed on a protective white-painted platform, however, its power as a stabile—as Miró dubbed Calder's freestanding works with suspended elements—was somewhat diminished.

Surprisingly, the unexpected "felicity" (to use Clement Greenberg's term for Calder) of the smaller tabletop stables and maquettes, along with silver, gold, and brass wire jewelry, stood out best in this show.

Necklaces, brooches, earrings, rings, and bracelets revealed the inner formal core of Calder's oeuvre—line. Sinuous, organic, comical, and occasionally sinister, the jewelry requires the human body for its ignition (as in Robert Mapplethorpe's legendary portrait of ICA curator Janet Kardon wearing one of the pins). Other small works, including *Cow* (1930), *Hen* (1943), and *Untitled* (1947), pointed up the playful intimacy of Calder's hands-on approach compared to the later, monumental works.

Among the mobiles, *Dispersed Objects with Brass Gong* (1948), *Gamma* (1947) with its 35 separate elements, and *Untitled (prop for the ballet "Métaboles")* (1969) expressed the essential aspects of Calder's mid-century reputation as a pioneering Modernist sculptor: a sensitivity to kinetic movement that side-stepped Constructivist mechanics; a nature-based imagery of leaves and trees, reductive allusions akin to late-period Matisse; and a vocabulary of forms originating in the same abstract wing of Surrealism that appealed to the Abstract Expressionists.



Rebecca Kamen, *Divining Nature: An Elemental Garden*, 2009. Mylar and fiberglass rods, 24 x 24 ft.

version of cosmology and began to adapt it in her developing work, setting out to build a universe in her studio.

Divining Nature: An Elemental Garden was years in the making and involved noteworthy collaborations with an architect (Alick Dearie) and a composer (Susan Alexjander). Kamen's installation consists of 83 white "flowers" arranged on the floor. Each flower has a precise number of layered Mylar petals supported by fiberglass stems. The individual flowers differ in complexity and height, which adds texture to the overall field. There is also a deep-

sequence that sets the mood for a walk through the garden. Like the spiral design of the installation, it serves to slow viewers down to a contemplative pace in this remarkable intersection of art and science.

Kamen relied on Dearie's expertise to determine the correct dimensions and scale for the flowers and the overall design, which was patterned after a Fibonacci spiral. It may not be obvious to viewers, but the placement of the flowers, just like their assembly, is highly mathematical. Kamen has consistently produced work based on scientific themes, and although she is not accustomed to

ments—earth, fire, water, air, and cosmos—were exhibited in an adjacent gallery. Made of Mylar, the elements appeared as geometric forms unwrapped. Sprouting from the wall, these first elements formed an interesting contrast to the garden growing on the gallery floor.

—Mattie M. Schloetzer

SEATTLE

"Alexander Calder:

A Balancing Act"

Seattle Art Museum

"Alexander Calder: A Balancing Act," a selection of sculptures, prints, and maquettes chosen by Seattle Art