

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

"I see in Nature a magnificent structure...that must fill a thinking person with a feeling of humility"—Albert Einstein

"Invisible Sightings" brings together the works of Rebecca Kamen in an exhibition about the near and the far, quantum and cosmic patterns, non-linear phenomena, sight and insight, and crossover sensibilities. Connecting the inner and outer eye, she uses metaphor and transformation to see beyond the known as Einstein did when he imagined riding on a wave of light over a hundred years ago.

Kamen is an artist inspired by science, who seeks to probe the world around her and a means to describe her research. Abstraction and intuition are her common language. Rich in associations, the work conveys individual ideas and emotions. Kamen fashions wire-based sculpture, facing the challenge of visualizing movement and energy through static forms: her work is not literally kinetic, but succeeds, nonetheless, in suggesting motion and change, and instilling an empathetic wonder in the viewer.

The process of weaving and layering animates Rebecca Kamen's sculpture, which reflects her ongoing fascination with energy patterns and shape shifting. Rather than expressing micro-scaled behavior of the subatomic realm, Kamen's art focuses on the equally mysterious and invisible habits of celestial globes. Early encouragement by her parents and childhood memories of building a telescope and science fair projects fueled a life-long interest in the natural sciences and stargazing. As a practicing artist, she feels the thrill of cosmic creation each time she makes a work, and draws on a sweeping range of sources, including antique astronomical texts and measuring devices. An earlier collaboration with Chinese artist Zhao Shu Tong explored determinant mathematical systems affecting Chinese landscape painting and a computer's circuitry board. More recently, she has uncovered striking parallels between Quipus, a string and knot system of the Incas for recording history and laws, and contemporary string theory that unifies quantum mechanics and general relativity and knot theory, a branch of algebraic topology which studies the placement of a unit circle into a three-dimensional space.

Kamen's present sculpture honors Aaron Bernstein, whose 19th century writings on popular science kindled the imagination of the young Einstein. Attracted to steel wire for its humility and malleability, she seeks to transform its ordinariness into an uncommon beauty, while prizing copper for being an electrical conductor with alchemical ties. She often starts by manipulating continuous pieces of wire into nest-like spirals. Trusting in her intuition,

she builds her works by joining wire segments of varying widths and metals, and occasionally incorporates found objects and metal sheeting, finding the entire process liberating in its essential purity. One densely worked sculpture cradles a copper and steel wire nest within a steel spiral based on the Fibonacci sequence. Another composition evokes a miniaturization of the universe. An orrery made of ovoid steel bands and wire nodes enmesh three “planets” in their orbits: an aqueous rock, a fossil, and a metal bundle. Birthing takes center stage in an upward reaching piece. Three copper legs nestle a “hatched egg” made from steel wires, whose life force, after passing through a narrow copper sheathed and wrapped conduit, weaves itself into the continuation of the copper triad that has morphed into outstretched arms.

Finding grace in the everyday, Kamen explores the rich liminal zone where science and art cross-fertilize each other. At once familiar and strange, her impassioned works share a trance-like quality: getting lost in intricate energy mappings, we catch glimpses into Nature’s secrets. And as we join her exhilarating search for truth and meaning, we observe the beauty of recurring, archetypal patterns, and experience moments of coming together and splitting up in a vast chain of being.

Sarah Tanguy,
Exhibition curator

Art historian Sarah Tanguy, who has worked at several museums and art organizations, is an independent curator and critic based in Washington, D.C. She is a frequent contributor to *Sculpture* magazine among other publications.