

QUEENS Chronicle

Artist Abstracts Life's Forms through Flame By Neil Chiragdin— November 22, 2017



Photo by Neil Chiragdin

Like drops of water, beads of wax slide down from a candle's flame. They represent a confluence of the elements; flame combusting with air and transforming the earthly material to a water-like form.

"Long Exposure," on display at the SculptureCenter in Long Island City, is the first solo institutional exhibition for Kelly Akashi, an artist who works in sculpture and photography. Candles feature throughout the exhibit. Curled around tree branches, sprouting up from the dark of SculptureCenter's lower-level recesses and soaking in flower-like basins of water. Occasionally, the candles are lit, meaning their form will change throughout the life of the exhibit. They're well suited to the museum's unique corridors down below, filling them with whimsy and light.

The flame is crucial to Akashi's work, which involves blowing glass into organic forms resembling everything from petals to pustules. Sometimes, these constitute vases that house some of the candles, and at other times, there is no obvious function to follow the sculpture's forms. Akashi seems at least somewhat interested in abstract representation of life's various shapes, and these objects are not guided by a pursuit for beauty, but some other intangible. On the walls throughout this exhibit, Akashi has created photograms in monochrome that abstract her sculptures' shapes even further. It is difficult to tell what the objects in these prints might have looked like in the first place, or even how many objects are in the photo at all. At times, Akashi's sculptures are united in small table-set displays that perhaps invite the viewer to create a narrative from their juxtaposition. An ortho litho film print of a leaf sits beside a vase with a bottom like a pile of foam bubbles and a length of rope through a glass disk. A coil of copper wire perched above bronze casts of fingertips, a beetle, a single twig and a tulip-like vase that Georgia O'Keefe might blush at — half-



Photo by Neil Chiragdin

filled with water and a half-dozen finger-sized candles. Concrete meanings may be elusive, but it is nonetheless fascinating to wonder at Akashi's curios.

Several larger-format works are part of the exhibition, including a sculpture that benefits from a projector's flickering light. "Shadow Film" is a loop that evokes embers dancing or leaves flying across a wall by projecting the light through an artfully cut screen. It brings warmth to one of the museum's dark nooks. In the courtyard, a tall concrete triangle block sprouts from the gravel. On its hypotenuse, a bronze cast of a hand points forward, and is bound around the wrist. The rope is attached to another bronze hand, this one with its palm open, and excess rope frayed out behind it to make a hempen bed. This balancing act evokes some small thrill, and is really quite pleasant to look at.

These bronze hands feature throughout Akashi's curios, and are certainly the most accessible form throughout the exhibition. Sometimes their palms are open to present us with a sculpture and sometimes their fingers are grasping. One hand cast, called "Be Me (Heat)," seems to have come down with something, laden with piglet pink glass growths and suffering in silence. They are the clearest entry of narrative into Akashi's work at the museum.

Akashi's work, though often small in scale, pursues abstract form in the organic shapes of life, and makes for a wonderful reason to visit the SculptureCenter's unique rooms.