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LONG ISLAND CITY, NEW YORK Ann Sperry SculptureCenter

The work of the late Ann Sperry (1934–2009) is eclectic. Her sculptures can range drastically in size and complexity, addressing a wide range of sentiments. Some appear playful and mysterious, while others project a distinctly dark aura. Though Sperry used diverse materials, she favored metals. She was a master welder, one with the unique skill of employing metal in ways that transcend its inherent material limitations. Many of her sculptures generate a sense of weightlessness and are rich in intricate detail, as well as the occasional touch of poetic whimsy.

Despite the small size of this elegant exhibition curated by Pepe Karmel, it succeeded in capturing the core of Sperry's oeuvre—an innovative exploration of a material's emotional and psychological potential. Through an investigation spanning four decades, Sperry managed to follow a unique path while remaining unfazed by trends. Her determined pursuit is reminiscent of the quest of Lee Bontecou, another artist of her generation. Like Bontecou, Sperry carved out her own niche and remained detached from major movements. They also shared an interest in the universe, a theme reflected in works from Sperry's "Out There" series (1993–97). Several pieces evoke planetary constructions,

and one prominent work features a metal globe propped up on wooden stilts and wavy folds of metal. Reflecting Sperry's life-long interest in our planet and how human actions have affected it, this is a quiet, yet poignant contemplation of the magnitude and infinity of the cosmos. Sperry's works are the result of a very personal soul-searching, and each one embodies an attempt to clarify an aspect of identity. One of her best-known series, "My Piano: The Fragmentation of Memory" (2000–05), derives from reflections on her relationship with her father. Some of the works are made solely of piano parts; others, such as those featured at the SculptureCenter, add odd metal

Ann Sperry, *Untitled*, from the "Where Is your Heart" series, 1990s Mixed media, installation view.

shapes. Sperry's father died when she was still a teenager, and she described the "My Piano" works as fragments of conversations that she wished she could have had with him. Together, these sculptures demonstrate how Sperry fuses emotional content with the language of abstraction, transforming personal experience into elegant compositions devoid of literal references.

Sperry was an activist who, despite her interest in abstraction, never shied away from voicing feminist or political concerns. Her last series, "Lamentations" (2003–07), was

inspired by the Iraq War. She imagined that "the country's blood now filled its holes, like metal in a mold; Bodies dissolved—like butter left in the sun." The "Lamentations" works manifest as casts of these imaginary molds in the earth. Elongated, vertical masses of metal, they hang from the ceiling as if lifted from their burial site and, hence, the possibility of denial. Sperry pays tribute to the grim realities of existence, creating a memorial to the countless nameless.

—Stephanie Buhmann