



ART REVIEW: The Pilgrim Soul of Anya Gallaccio

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by Janet Goleas

Since her emergence in the late 1980s, Anya Gallaccio has been embraced by the art world for site-specific works that are transitory, conceptually rich and often majestic in scale. In both thought and in actuality, her methodology is one framed by organic, climatic, chemical or geological contingencies. Decay and decomposition are commuted to resurrection; what is fleeting becomes permanent; what is unseen becomes material.

On view at Silas Marder Gallery, Gallaccio's four open cubes—two inside the gallery and two outside—speak to the mineral and the corporeal as well as to the landscape and to modernism and minimalism. And annotating a separate and distinct dialogue, a looped skein of gold lamé hangs on a prominent wall.



Front: "I love you more than moments we have or have not shared" by Anya Gallaccio, 2014. Limestone, Sandstone, 45 3/4 x 45 3/4 x 45 3/4 inches. Back: "If recollecting were forgetting" by Anya Gallaccio, 2006-2013. Gold lame thread, pins, 118 1/8 x 70 7/8 inches. Photo by Jenny Gorman.

Gallaccio's star rose early, ascending soon after her graduation from London's famed Goldsmiths College. She was one of 16 participants in Damien Hirst's 1988 landmark exhibition, "Freeze," a show that helped define a generation of London-based artists that would become known as YBAs (Young British Artists). Soon after, something of a latter day British invasion took the art world by storm, launching the careers of Hirst and Gallaccio as well as Tracey Emin, Chris Ofili, Rachel Whiteread, and Jake and Dinos Chapman, to name a few. In 2003, Gallaccio was nominated for the coveted Turner Prize.

She is a pilgrim soul, with a body of work that explores transience the way de Kooning explored oil paint. In her work *preserve 'beauty'* she sandwiched a grid of 800 red gerbera daisies between a gallery window and a glass panel. As the flowers dried and decomposed, their slow mutations altered the image field day by day.



“preserve ‘beauty’” by Anya Gallaccio, 1991-2003. 2000 gerberas, glass, metal and rubber. Photo courtesy of the Tate Museum.



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In Spain she collected pinecones from woodlands, cast them in bronze and returned them, scattering the sculptures across the forest floor. In 1994 Gallaccio painted the entirety of London’s Karsten Schubert Gallery with chocolate. That same year she transformed a derelict swimming pool in Tijuana, Mexico, by covering its broken surfaces with thousands of gold foil chocolate wrappers.



“forever” by Anya Gallaccio, 2001. 200 unique direct cast bronze pinecones scattered on forest floor, grass seed and water, dimensions variable. NMAC Foundation, Cadiz, Spain.



“stroke” by Anya Gallaccio, 1994. Dark couverture chocolate, coconut oil, card, gallery bench dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and Blum & Poe.

The works at Silas Marder have origins at Artpace in San Antonio, Texas, where a 1997 residency inspired Gallaccio to source indigenous stone from the Lone Star state. Sliced into bars, the quarried limestone and sandstone is fitted together here in open cubes that recall the minimalist sculpture of Sol LeWitt, Donald Judd and Jackie Winsor.

A mighty 500 pounds each, each stone surface reveals a geologic face dating back millenniums, like core samples. Marbled and pocked by time, the mineral components of each bar vary, with a range of color and topography that quietly remarks on the nature of materiality, mutability and

transformation. Their titles—*See the sky about to rain*, *All in a dream*, *Distance Equals Rate Times Time* and *I love you more than moments we have or have not shared*—underscore the sense of poetic free-association that runs through Gallaccio's expansive oeuvre.



Front: "Distance Equals Rate Times Time" by Anya Gallaccio, 2014. Limestone, Sandstone, 45 3/4 x 45 3/4 x 45 3/4 inches. Back: "See the sky about to rain" by Anya Gallaccio, 2014. Limestone, Sandstone, 45 3/4 x 45 3/4 x 45 3/4 inches. Photo by Jenny Gorman.

But beyond what they are, what the sculptures *do* is another matter. Over time, Gallaccio has made works about keeping and about losing, about growth and decay, about the nature of beauty and the poetry of the ecosystem. She's a very big thinker, moving from grand memento mori to fields of crystal amethyst to tiny bean pods cast in bronze. Neither provisional nor fleeting, the cubes are here to stay, and they act as frames with a view to a larger, more infinite world.

Wherever they are sited the open cubes define their environment, not unlike the way the Hudson River School or John Constable, Caspar David Friedrich and Thomas Moran defined theirs. Animated by the negative space that surrounds them, the inside and outside of the cubes are referents that encompass the landscape as well as the grid, as if the artist had thrown a gigantic and invisible net over the countryside.



Front: "See the sky about to rain" by Anya Gallaccio, 2014. Limestone, Sandstone, 45 3/4 x 45 3/4 x 45 3/4 inches. Back: "Distance Equals Rate Times Time" by Anya Gallaccio, 2014. Limestone, Sandstone, 45 3/4 x 45 3/4 x 45 3/4 inches. Photo by Jenny Gorman.

Back in the gallery, a golden net sweeps across the front-facing wall, pivoting into a "V" shape as it culminates at the top along a horizontal line of tiny nails. Titled *If recollecting were forgetting*, the gossamer loop is a genuine fishing net hand-knotted by Spanish fishermen. Made from gold lamé, the net functions like a line drawing in which the grid has been torqued into shifting planes.



“If recollecting were forgetting” by Anya Gallaccio, 2006-2013. Gold lame thread, pins, 118 1/8 x 70 7/8 inches. Photo by Jenny Gorman.

Gallaccio’s net “drawings” have been hoisted throughout gallery interiors, hung on walls and draped across floors. Something of an ode to the Golden Age and its abundance and peaceful abandon, the nets also evoke Renaissance drapery, papal vestments and the utility and craftsmanship of seines, trawls and casting nets, the use of which dates back to the stone age.



Detail of “If recollecting were forgetting” by Anya Gallaccio, 2006-2013. Gold lame thread, pins, 118 1/8 x 70 7/8 inches. Photo by Jenny Gorman.

At Long Island City’s Sculpture Center, in 2006 she deconstructed a weeping cherry tree felled accidentally by a construction crew. Reconstituting it in the main gallery with struts, anchor bolts and tight cables that induced it to stand upright, the huge tree was able to cling to a second life as it soared upward to the clerestory’s 50-foot ceilings.



“One art” by Anya Gallaccio, 2006. Weeping cherry tree, seed49 ft tree cut in 8 ft sections; reassembled w bolts and stainless steel tension cable. Sculpture Center, New York.

Part Frankenstein, part St. Sebastian, part “readymade,” Gallaccio’s *one art*, which borrowed its title from an Elizabeth Bishop poem, orbited both the sublime and the saturnine. Likewise, Gallaccio’s oeuvre is one that stretches from the operatic to the atomic and from the logical to the phenomenological as she transmutes form into concept, concept into visual theater, and then, again.

BASIC FACTS: Anya Gallaccio is exhibited from June 27 to July 26, 2015 at Silas Marder Gallery, 120 Snake Hollow Road, Bridgehampton, NY 11932. www.silasmarder.com.

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