

# ART REVIEW: Bastienne Schmidt Installation Probes Mysteries of Identity and Time

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by Eric Ernst

As both a painter and photographer, [Bastienne Schmidt](#) has always been fascinated by and focused on the ideas of identity and place as defining the personal and universal artistic mysteries of our shared past and present.

This orientation continues in her current Parrish Road Show exhibition, "[Bastienne Schmidt: Archeology of Time](#)" on view at the [Sag Harbor Whaling Museum](#) through August 24, 2016.

In this site-specific installation, the artist uses archeology and her perceptions of historic artifacts as a conceptual launching point to investigate the perpetually enigmatic elements of memory, time, and history. She recognizes that, much as the author [John Logan](#) has pointed out, "to be civilized is to know where you belong in the continuum of our art and your world. To surmount the past, you must know the past."

The Parrish Museum's Road Show series is designed to foster connections between aesthetic vision and commonplace existence by mounting exhibitions and presentations at venues separate from the main museum itself. At the Whaling Museum, Schmidt presents works that echo with a sense of historical antiquity that is both extremely personal and yet profoundly part of the collective human experience.



Parrish Road Show exhibition, "Bastienne Schmidt: Archeology of Time" on view at the Sag Harbor Whaling Museum. Courtesy of the artist.

The show's title, "Archeology of Time," gives a nod as well to the artist's personal history as the daughter of an archeologist who often took his family on digs in Greece and elsewhere. The exhibition itself, meanwhile, features a number of works that, it seemed to me, were designed as site-specific installations, offering a dynamic and fascinating melding of textural and calligraphic impulses. These gain in power from Schmidt's incorporating and reconciling the sometimes contradictory aspects of the logically systematic world of geometry and function with the wonderfully random spontaneity of artistic improvisational intention.

She accomplishes this reconciliation in large measure through the use of paper as the ground upon which she formulates her gently rhythmic constructs and abstract calligraphic narratives. This allows the artist to conjure a remarkably fragile elegance in the physical structure of the works, a sensibility that is further underscored by the seemingly evanescent elements of the materials

themselves.



Installation with boats, sand and artwork on paper by Bastienne Schmidt, 2016, as part of the Parrish Road Show exhibition. 30 x 44 x 3 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.



Installation view of the Parrish Road Show exhibition, "Bastienne Schmidt: Archeology of Time" at the Sag Harbor Whaling Museum. Courtesy of the artist.

Curated by the Parrish's Century Arts Foundation Curator of Special Projects [Andrea Grover](#), the exhibit is principally comprised of works from two series, *Threads and Grids* from 2015 and *Grids and Maps* from 2016. Augmenting these works are display cases featuring functional objects from the Whaling Museum's collection of historical artifacts that have been reinterpreted by Schmidt utilizing integrated organic components, paper, thread, and fabric.

Of singular interest from the *Grids and Maps* series are the three works that have been placed within the floor-to-ceiling windows in the exhibition space. Allowing light to stream through the works gives the paper ground a translucent effect that is visually arresting and also generates a visual effect reminiscent of both Japanese shoji doors and Chinese scroll paintings.



A mixed media art work by Bastienne Schmidt installed in the Parrish Road Show's exhibition "Bastienne Schmidt: Archeology of Time" on view at the Sag Harbor Whaling Museum. Courtesy of the artist.

This impression is particularly evident in the two works directly opposite each other in the gallery, although the physical constructs of each differ significantly. One of the pieces consists of a single large sheet of paper upon which the artist has attached a grid of small squares. Layered atop these squares are collaged pieces of heavy string that impart a literary sensation, as if the intertwined threads could be "read" as the viewer's eyes are drawn across the work.



Detail of a mixed media art work by Bastienne Schmidt installed in the Parrish Road Show's exhibition "Bastienne Schmidt: Archeology of Time" on view at the Sag Harbor Whaling Museum. Courtesy of the artist.

On the opposite side of the room, by contrast, Ms. Schmidt uses pieces of thread to connect the small squares of paper thereby constructing an architectonic grid composition that playfully interacts with the natural world seen outside the window frame it hangs within.



Detail of a mixed media art work by Bastienne Schmidt installed in the Parrish Road Show's exhibition "Bastienne Schmidt: Archeology of Time" on view at the Sag Harbor Whaling Museum. Courtesy of the artist.

Further adding to the work's impact is the artist's use of extremely subtle dyes and stains on the paper itself, thereby imparting, upon closer inspection, a sense of visually syncopated cadence reminiscent of the languid movement of water or smoke pushed along on a gentle breeze.

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**BASIC FACTS:** "Bastienne Schmidt: Archeology of Time," presented as part of the Parrish Road Show series, is on view August 7 through August 24, 2016 at the Sag Harbor Whaling and Historical Museum, 200 Main Street, Sag Harbor, NY 11963. [www.sagharborwhalingmuseum.com](http://www.sagharborwhalingmuseum.com) or [www.parrishart.org](http://www.parrishart.org).

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