

SUE EISLER : UNTITLED



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Exhibition dates : June 6 to September 7, 2008

Support for this exhibition provided by: Regional Arts Commission, Arts & Education Council, Missouri Arts Council, Mark Twain Laumeier Fund, Friends of Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis County Parks, and by the Aronson Endowed Chair for Modern + Contemporary Art, UM-St. Louis.

Cover: Detail - *Untitled*, 1987, (gallery 4) loan courtesy of Nancy and Kenneth Kranzberg

acknowledgements

It is a great pleasure for Laumeier Sculpture Park to present Sue Eisler, *Untitled*, a retrospective exhibition that brings together important examples of work from the artist's intriguing 45-year artistic career. A truly fine exhibition, I am honored to be involved with it at Laumeier Sculpture Park and wish to thank Sue Eisler for honoring us with a beautiful and thought provoking show.

This publication attempts to convey aspects of the intangible qualities of Eisler's work; the quirky combination of materials and found objects; the ordinary and extraordinary histories intrinsic to the objects; and the seductive, humorous and provocative notations expressed in each of the works that are truly unexpected.

Extra special thanks are due to Nancy and Kenneth Kranzberg for their continued support of this annual exhibition series. I wish to extend special thanks to Olivia Lahs-Gonzales, for her early insight on, and support of, the Sue Eisler exhibition, and to William Shearburn for his perspective on, and knowledge of, Eisler's practice. Thanks also to Jim Schmidt for his thoughtful insights and support. Kim Humphries did a fine job on the exhibition and I would like to thank him, along with the entire staff at Laumeier for their work as a team across programs and events. To the Laumeier Sculpture Park Board of Directors I extend my gratitude for their role in governance and for the generous support they provide; we are fortunate to have such excellent group of individuals serve the institution. Laumeier Sculpture Park has many patrons who provide important support each year and I wish to acknowledge them here as a group for their unflagging belief in Laumeier's mission and vision for the future.

Very special thanks to Patricia Degener, Denise and Richard Deutsch, Alison and John Ferring, Sari and Carl Frieden, Nancy and Kenneth Kranzberg, Emily Rauh Pulitzer, Sissy and Ted Thomas, and William Shearburn Gallery for their support in graciously lending important works to the exhibition.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and everyone at Laumeier Sculpture Park I extend sincere thanks to the Regional Arts Commission; the Arts and Education Council of St. Louis; the Missouri Arts Council; the Mark Twain Laumeier Fund; University of Missouri, St. Louis, Aronson Endowed Chair; St. Louis County Parks and the St. Louis County Council; Laumeier's docent corps, volunteers, friends, and student ambassadors for providing a unified foundation of support both individually and collectively year-round.

Glen Gentele, Director, Laumeier Sculpture Park and Aronson Professor for Modern + Contemporary Art, UM-St. Louis



Gallery 5 exhibition view



Gallery 4 exhibition view



Gallery 1 exhibition view

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In this sixth installment of the Kranzberg Exhibition Series Laumeier is pleased to present a broad survey of the artwork of Sue Eisler. A graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana - Champaign, Eisler has been working in the St. Louis region since 1969. Her work has continuously evolved as she steadily processed new ideas and responds with her own hybrid artwork. Here the artist speaks with Laumeier's Director of Installations and Collections Management, Kim Humphries.

KH: The work in the exhibition spans four decades – some of it reaching back to the days as you transitioned from an academic environment to your first independent studio. Listening to you talk about finding your voice as an artist during that time is fascinating. You completed graduate work in printmaking with additional coursework in ceramics. You've told me about your eventual interest in the etched printmaking plates themselves rather than the prints. You also began conducting non-traditional processes with your first kiln, making the firing cones a part of the sculptural process. Your consideration of the printing plate as a sculptural object and the cone experiments with the kiln seem to have been seminal moments for you. It all seems very clear and natural now – the putting aside of what you were not interested in and the adding of things that you were interested in. Were you aware of the significance of the strategic shift at the time?

SE: I wasn't really aware of the "low level relief" sculptural sensitivity of the printing plates or of the results of the cone experimentation being a true sculpture. The cones were of interest to me because of the idea/concept that they presented. Yes, I began doing what I had become most interested in. My level of consciousness of that – I don't know. I was certainly not thinking about it on a surface level. I actually don't know exactly when that awareness came about. Soon I began working in wood – object making and altering found objects. Those works were sculptural – not monstrously dimensional but I was much more aware of the space and process issues on the table by then.

KH: When we were in your studio you were quick to reach for a well-worn copy of Eva Hesse by Lucy Lippard – you are not shy to discuss other artists that interest you. You seem quite confident and careful about what you allow into your artwork. Are these conscious decisions or natural and spontaneous responses to the world around you?

SE: Being artists we all have a conscious awareness of the work of others. We all filter and process outside information in our own ways. The same is true of materials – any aspect of the artistic process. Attitudes and concepts are available to be harvested or processed on so many levels. Every artist consciously or unconsciously uses them.



Gallery 2 exhibition view

KH: You began using the grid early in your practice. The wire mesh that you chose reminds me a bit of the low relief that you were attracted to in the printing plates. In many works it acts more as a support or ground on which to develop or hang more of the piece. In the 1980s and later, grids and mesh are more deeply incorporated in the work – they merge and converse with other elements.

SE: Initially using the grid was a way to avoid dealing with composition because the grid uses all the same kind of units. So what I did was, within each unit, I made an organic statement by twisting the wires – something like that. In some of the grid pieces I had two very different kinds of line, one that was a very firm wire mesh line and then a very soft colorful line with telephone wire, cloth loops, materials like that. A lot of these pieces began as sketches on graph paper. The wire mesh and fencing were, to me, three-dimensional representations of that graph paper. Soon I stopped seeing the grid as a planar element – it became part of the set of things at my disposal. The grids frequently became warped – bent. I have a long-term interest in compressing the three-dimensional and expanding the two-dimensional elements in my work. The grid was certainly part of that interplay. Eeek – it always feels so archaic to have to pin down the formal aspects of the work. I have to say that I occupy a lot of middle ground with-in my work – I ask a lot of questions.

KH: I see wire, string, and a variety of materials acting as two-dimensional lines in early work. Eventually they were used to draw in space – making them a three-dimensional element. That drawing in space really demonstrates your position of working in the middle ground that you mentioned. That said, I don't want to belabor the formal aspects of the work, but you do seem to be very aware of how objects and materials function formally in your work. Beyond the grid and drawing elements I see staples, nails, nail holes and perforations functioning as drawing-like marks in the work. I want to talk more about that – the real-world objects that find their way into your work.

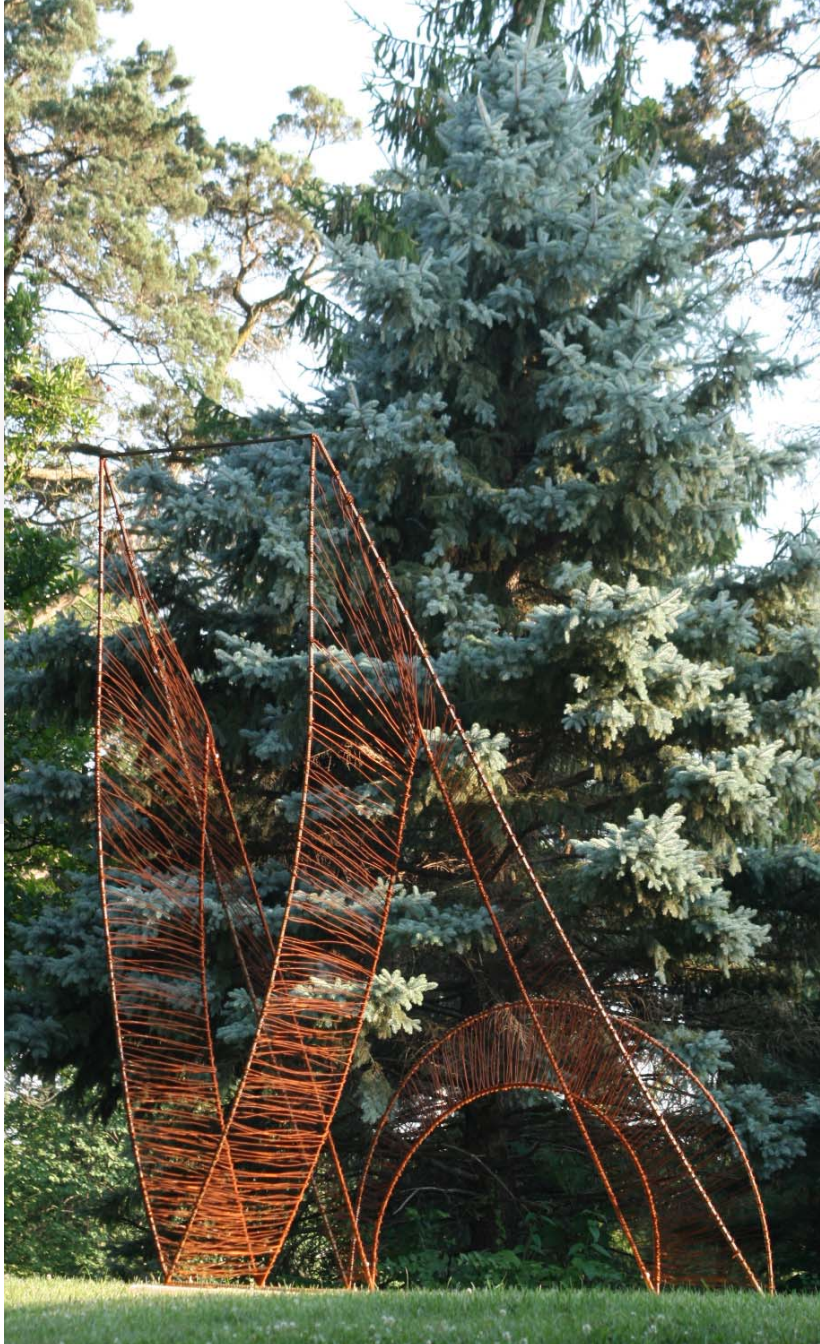
SE: Well, the longer I work the more territory I seem to be comfortable in. At this point anything is fair game. I'm not exactly sure why the found and common objects began to appear in my work. As you mentioned I was using nails, staples, string – that sort of material in my work. The rest just seems like a natural extension from that point.

KH: The objects in the work add a new layer of content. They bring time and narrative into the work in a very direct way.

SE: Yes, the books that I made of found gloves, cans, paper and cigarette packs really are probably some of the pieces that really show that side of the work. They have history – maybe some mystery as well. How many cars ran over each can? What person carried this cigarette pack? The books are collections of these unknown histories. The questions cannot be answered – one can only speculate and ponder. Humanity becomes an element in the work – not my humanity – I'm using unknown collaborators. The altered lobster buoys are another good example of this way of working.



Above: Preliminary drawing, gallery 1
Right: Outdoor gallery



KH: So after some early work in the traditional forms of printmaking and ceramics you moved toward additive sculpture. Now much of your work involves found objects that you bring back to the studio and often alter or combine with other objects to create new objects. It seems like you must always be “on”—scanning, considering, always looking for that next glove.

SE: Hmm. I was never interested in welding or casting. If you called me a scrounge or a dumpster diver that would not hurt my feelings. Yes, I am “on” most of the time – not all of the time, but most. I don’t know how other people look at the world but I’d assume that they are not looking for that next great squashed glove or something that they don’t even know that they are looking for.

KH: Your work often appears to come in groups or flourishes that seem to follow an initial epiphany – can you tell me more about that notion?

SE: Those flourishes are precipitated by seeing a material combined with my mind set which is, as I mentioned, running in the background most of the time. The combination comes together in a moment – flash – spark – insight and the series comes to life. I stop when the ideas stop.

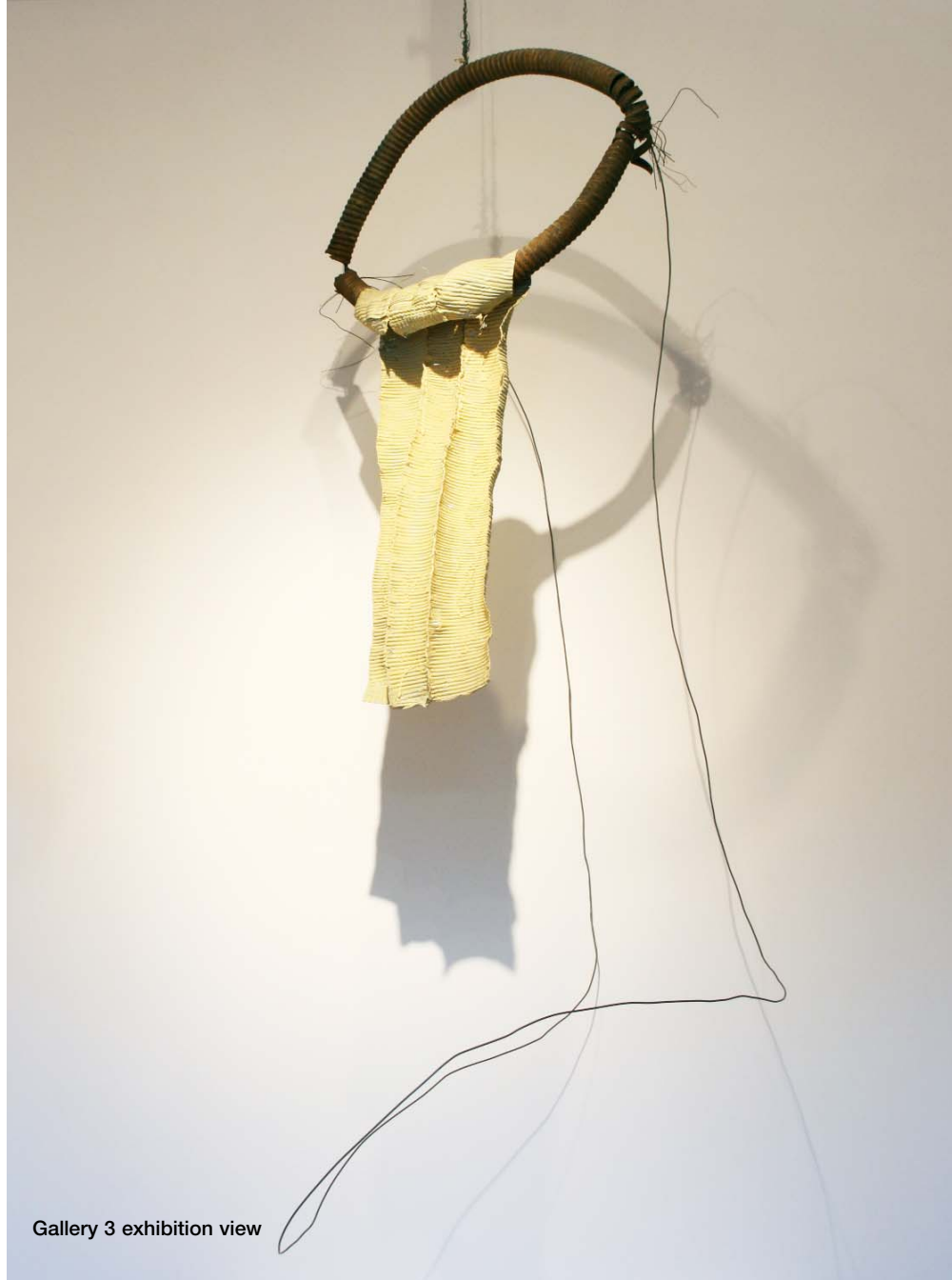
KH: As I walk through the exhibition I have a heightened awareness of those moments of creative combustion and wonder that you seek as you work. Thinking back to our work on the project a few moments have stuck in my mind. You mentioned that you had considered making a bumper sticker “I BRAKE FOR GLOVES.” Another time we were discussing one of the large sculptures and you said, “It’s fun to draw – with wire.” And when I asked you about one of the gourd sculptures you replied, “I put sunflower seeds on a gourd and I stuck it on a tuna can.” All of those moments were wonderfully direct and they were also humorous. What place does humor have in your work?

SE: There are many ways to draw people into considering the work. I use alteration, conversion or transformation of everyday objects. I’m not afraid of humor. Humor is an everyday thing. People understand it.

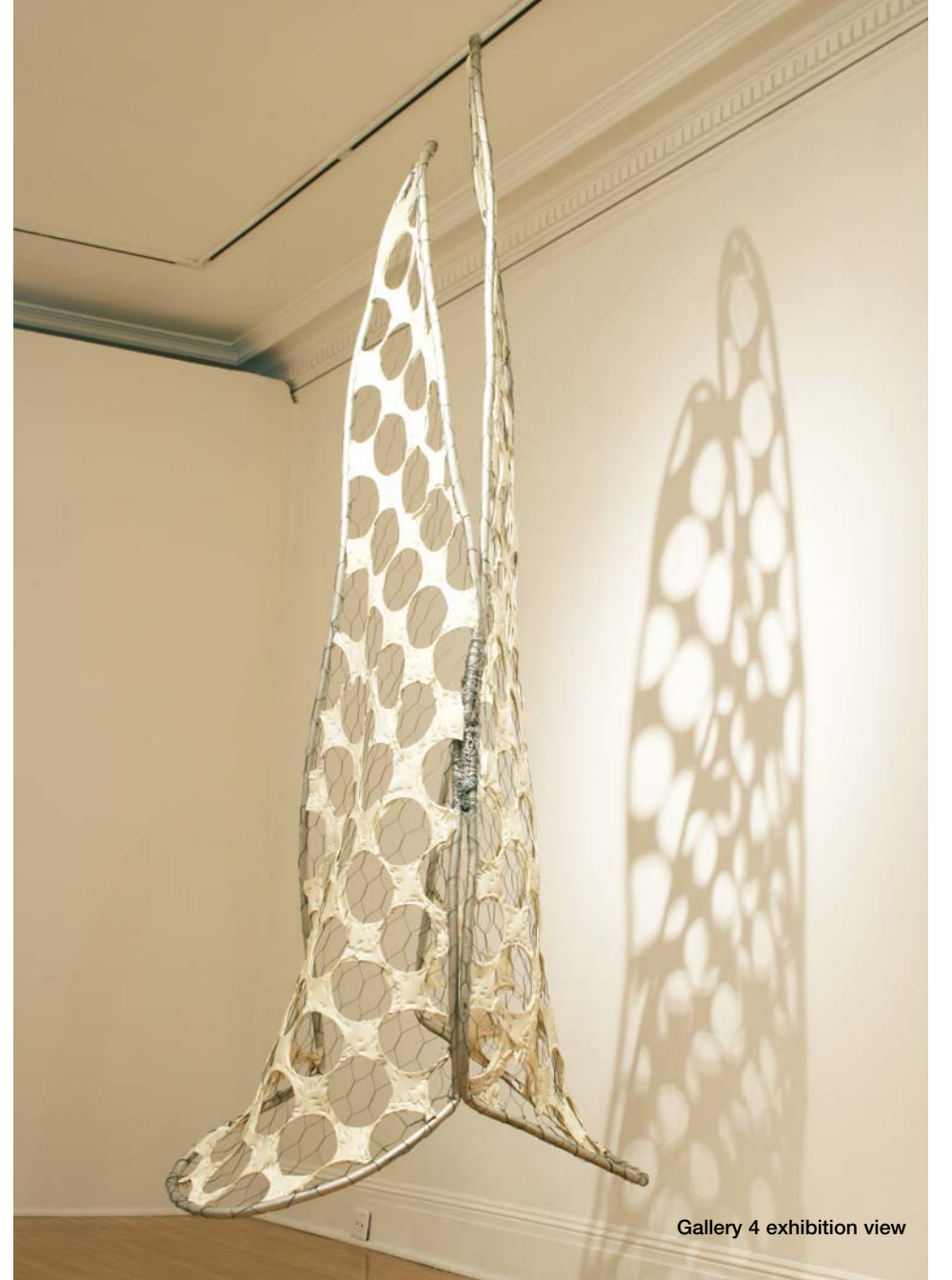
KH: When we discussed the title of the exhibition it didn’t take us long to come up with a solution – SUE EISLER: *UNTITLED*. The checklist for the exhibition is over 60 pieces in length. Each piece in the exhibition is *Untitled*. Tell me about that.

SE: We talked about the artwork asking questions. I choose not to provide answers.

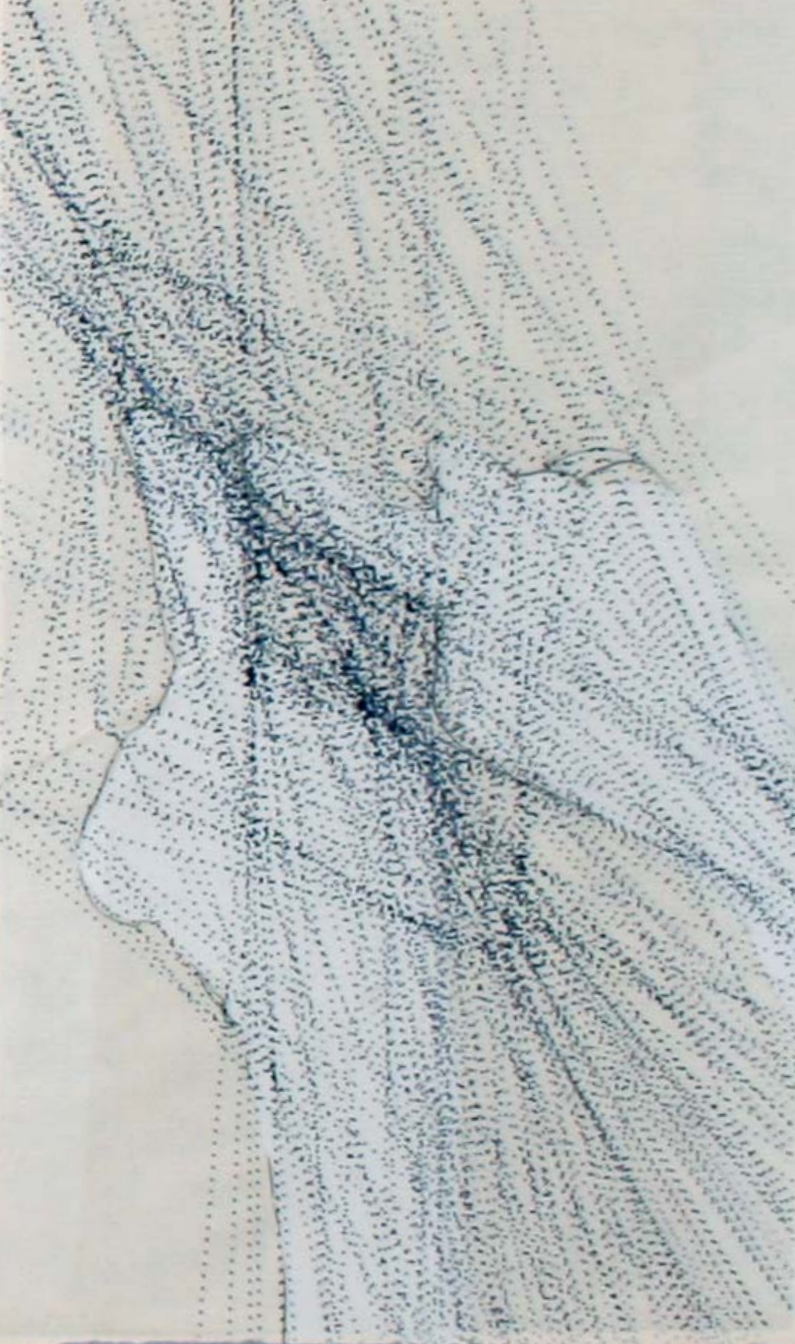
This discussion was compiled from conversations with the artist in May and June, 2008.



Gallery 3 exhibition view



Gallery 4 exhibition view



Gallery 1

Gallery 5

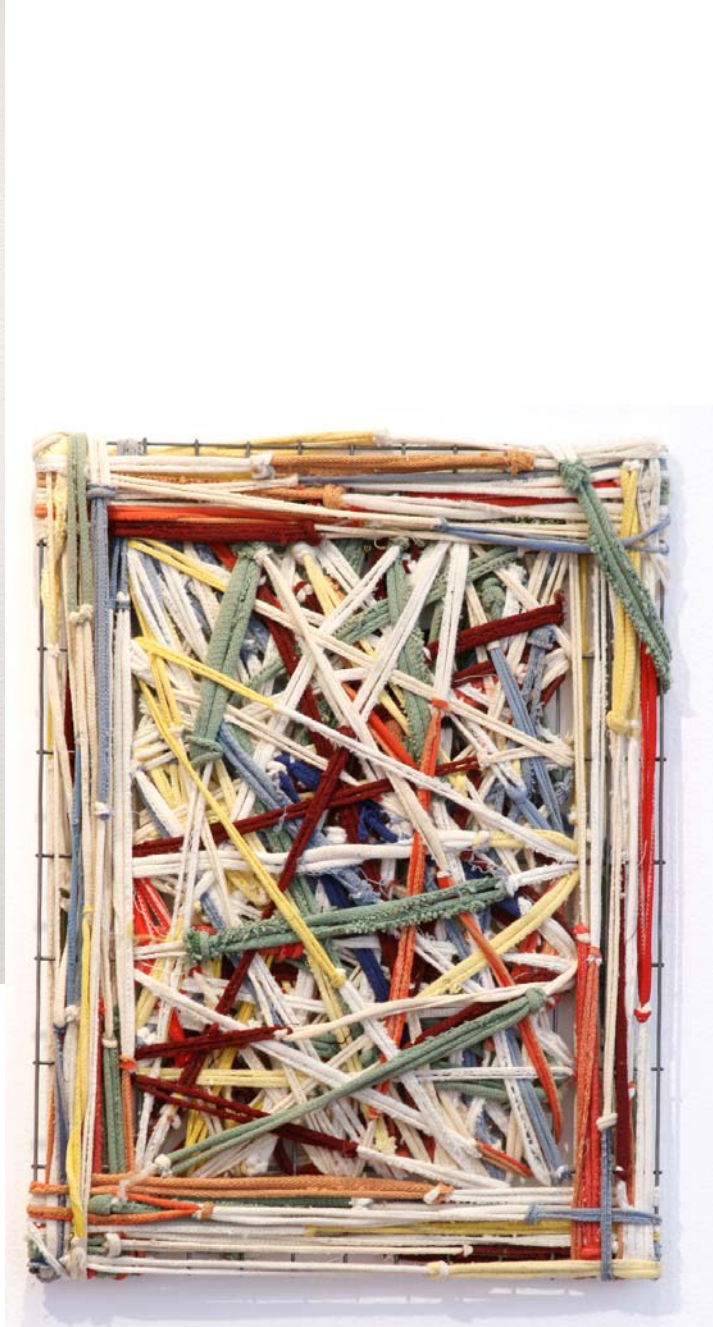




Gallery 3 exhibition views



Above: Hallway
Right: Gallery 3



artist bio

A graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Eisler has been working in the St. Louis region since 1969. Her work has continuously evolved as she steadily processed new ideas and responded with her own hybrid artwork. She is currently represented by the William Shearburn Gallery, St. Louis.

fellowships

- 1989 Missouri Visual Artists' Biennial
- 1979 National Endowment for the Arts Artist Fellowship

selected solo exhibitions

- 2008 *Sue Eisler: Untitled*, Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis
- 2006 *Sue Eisler: Deconstructed/ Reconstructed*, William Shearburn Gallery, St. Louis
- 2003 *Sue Eisler: Patterns*, William Shearburn Gallery, St. Louis;
Ongoing Permutations, Gallery 210, University of Missouri-St. Louis
- 1999 *Sue Eisler: Perforations*, William Shearburn Gallery, St. Louis
- 1997 *Works On Paper: Sue Eisler*, Messing Gallery-John Burroughs School, St. Louis
- 1996 *Recent Sculpture*, William Shearburn Gallery, St. Louis
- 1994 *Recent Paintings, Sculpture and Works on Paper*, William Shearburn Gallery, St. Louis
- 1993 *Sue Eisler - Currents 55*, St. Louis Art Museum
- 1992 *Sculpture*, Lindenwood College, St. Charles, MO
- 1991 *Sculpture*, Utopian Loft, St. Louis
- 1989 *Sue Eisler: Recent Painting and Sculpture*, Schmidt/Markow Gallery, St. Louis
- 1988 *Sue Eisler: Sculpture*, Messing Gallery-John Burroughs School, St. Louis
Sue Eisler: Recent Works, St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley
- 1984-85 *10 Year Retrospective*, Mark Twain Northland Bank, St. Louis
- 1984 *New Work*, Brentwood Gallery, St. Louis

selected group exhibitions

- 1993 *Sculpture: Eisler, Szostalo, Weber*, St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley
- 1992 *East Side/West Side*, The Forum for Contemporary Art, St. Louis
- 1991 *(Drawing) After (Image)*, MMC Gallery, Marymount Manhattan College, New York, NY
Eisler Books, MJF Gallery, St. Louis
- 1989 1989 Missouri Visual Arts Biennial
Mask Hysteria: A National Invitational, Pro Art Gallery, St. Louis
- 1988 *To Be Touched: An Invitational Exhibition for the Blind and Sighted*, St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley
Midwest Visions, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE
- 1987 *Alternatives: Bold Selections from Saint Louis Collectors*, St. Louis Gallery of Contemporary Art, St. Louis

- 1986 Art St. Louis, St. Louis Arts Festival
Future Tense, Craft Alliance Gallery, St. Louis
- 1985 *Summer Show*, Brentwood Gallery, St. Louis
Art St. Louis, St. Louis Arts Festival
- 1983 *Five Choose Five*, First Street Forum, St. Louis
- 1982 *Group Show*, Okun-Thomas Gallery, St. Louis
- 1981 *In The Summer Space*, Okun-Thomas Gallery, St. Louis
- 1980-81 *Missouri Artists: Work on Paper*, Missouri Arts Council Traveling Exhibit

selected collections

- Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, OH
- Belleville Area Community College, Belleville, IL
- Mark Twain Bankshares, St. Louis
- Measure Graph Corporation, St. Louis
- Retina Consultants Ltd., St. Louis
- St. Louis Art Museum
- Steinberg Gallery, St. Louis
- Superior Tape Corp., St. Louis

special thanks to the following for lending works to the exhibition

- Patricia Degener
- Denise and Richard Deutsch
- Alison and John Ferring
- Sari and Carl Frieden
- Nancy and Kenneth Kranzberg
- Emily Rauh Pulitzer
- Sissy and Ted Thomas
- William Shearburn Gallery

All works in this exhibition are titled *Untitled*. For a complete list of works in the exhibition, contact Laumeier Sculpture Park.



Gallery 3 exhibition view

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Published by Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis
12580 Rott Road, St. Louis, MO 63127
314.821.1209 www.laumeier.org

ISBN #978-0-940337-21-3

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Catalog information This catalog was printed by Alpagraphics, St. Louis, on 100# Pacesetter cover and 32# Mohawk book, using the Helvetica Neue font family. Photos by Mike Venso. Call 314.821.1209 extension 17 for more information.



ISBN #978-0-940337-21-3

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