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Left and above: Bruce Checefsky, 3 views of *Unsealed and Delivered: Portrait of a Collector*, 2018. Mixed-media installation with (left) Mildred Thompson's silkscreen *Caversham Press*, South Africa, 1999.

ignorant public. Here, bending
 to peer at Beuys's portrait,
 viewers see only their own reflection,
 echoing Socrates's injunction: know
 thyself. The exhibition opening
 enabled this poke at human vanity
 with a fellow sitting in the back
 of the gallery mindlessly banging
 away at a drum, his face covered
 by a mask imprinted with Trump's
 defining features.

Beyond Dadaesque political pot-
 shots, *Unsealed and Delivered:*

Portrait of a Collector also engaged

in a good-hearted laying bare of
 the art gallery's diurnal activities.

Unpacking, unpacking, shipping,
 mounting shows, and taking them

down were all acknowledged—
 the drudge side of a realm often

considered glamorous.

A felicitous collaboration of film-
 maker Bruce Checefsky and gallerist
 Wesley Cochran, *Unsealed* offered

satire on several levels. One was
 an indictment of cultural prejudice,
 another held vain folly, both artistic
 and political, up for laughter, and
 a third was just fun. One is reminded
 of Mark Twain's astute observation:
 "Everything human is pathetic. The
 secret source of humor itself is not
 joy but sorrow. There is no humor
 in heaven."

—Dorothy M. Joiner

LINCOLN, MASSACHUSETTS
"Sculpting with Air"
deCordova Sculpture Park and
Museum

Ian McMahon and Jong Oh are both
 interested in shaping the intangible,
 though their work, and processes,
 couldn't be more different. Brought
 together for "Sculpting with Air"
 (on view through September 30),
 they also introduced a new experi-
 ence for deCordova visitors, who

were invited to watch the progress
 of their site-specific installations.

McMahon, because of the size
 and complexity of his works, has to
 plan everything down to the last
 detail. Engineering and computer
 modeling are essential for him.
 His process (much simplified) goes
 something like this: first he blows
 up big plastic forms, then he sprays
 a plaster coating inside, lets it
 harden, peels off the plastic, and
 voila—a rigid form that looks soft
 and balloonish. Of course it's more
 complicated than that—the inter-
 connected balloons are big enough
 to walk into, and they have to be
 airtight. Inside, the plastic is
 supported by a wooden armature;
 where the forms come together,
 McMahon builds a wooden doorway,
 sealing the joints between units
 with plywood lath. He inflates them
 during the plaster-spraying phase

with powerful air compressors, and
 he has to construct a double-doored
 airlock to enter into his construction.
 He builds the whole thing in his
 studio first. Besides being a plasterer,
 he is a carpenter, materials specialist,
 metalworker, designer, mechanic,
 and computer geek. A video shows
 the spectacular destruction of earlier
 McMahon works—columnar forms
 smashed by one swing of a long pipe.
Tether will also be destroyed at the
 end of its run, but viewers won't get
 to see it happen.

In contrast to this massive work,
 Oh produces delicate, challenging
 lines in the air. Because his installa-
 tions depend on optical illusion,
 he has to see and think about the
 spaces they are to occupy before
 he knows what he wants to do. Here,
 he worked in two adjacent small
 galleries. The first appears to be an
 empty room. As eyes and brain
 focus, forms, lines, and boxes begin
 to emerge. One horizontal seems
 to pierce the wall and continue into
 the next room. For the verticals,
 Oh uses extremely fine chain, some-
 times with a brass plumb bob
 on the end so it will hang perfectly
 straight. He makes the horizontals
 with fine diameter rod; fishing line
 contributes but remains invisible.



Left: Jong Oh, *Between Two Rooms (Monochrome) #1*, 2018. String, weights, Plexiglas, metal chains, graphite, and paint, detail. Above: Ian McMahon, *Tether*, 2018. Plaster and steel hardware, 65 x 25 ft. Both from "Sculpting with Air."



Oh's works demand that we concentrate and truly see.

Though McMahon and Oh couldn't be more unlike, they are both illusionists. McMahon's work, an engineer's dream, looks like it's full of squishy stuff, but it isn't. Oh's geometries convince us there is a form hov-

ering in space—and there isn't. His works are subtle and intellectual, a thinker's art. Pairing these two artists was curatorial genius, an inspired way to get us thinking about the seen and unseen, about how air shapes the world as we know it.

—Marty Carlock

NEW YORK
Magdalena Abakanowicz
Marlborough Gallery

Who can you trust when all's been lost? "Embodied Forms," a modest but compelling retrospective of fiber, wood, and bronze works by the late Polish sculptor Magdalena Abakanowicz, raised this existential question and charted the artist's way through it. Set in a niche at the gallery entrance, *From the Anatomy Cycle: Anatomy 29* (2009) features a strange limb—a cast burlap arm, with a hand at each end, resting on a knotted, riven wooden beam. It reverberates with the memory of Abakanowicz's mother, who lost her arm in 1943, shot by drunken German soldiers who burst into the family home. Abakanowicz's sweet childhood vanished in a flash. From then on, she trusted only her intuition and the natural world of her childhood—the mystical forest where she played out her childhood fantasies. These realms nurtured a daunting body of work that, by turns intimate and monumental, speaks of her resilient spirit.

Each of Abakanowicz's sculptures dwells within this psychic landscape, a charged space that relinquishes boundaries between earth and epic human themes such as freedom and loss, victimization and survival, destruction and resurrection. The juggernaut of tensions drives works such as *Marrow Bone* (1987), from the "War Games" series. Abakanowicz began this series in response to the politically and financially motivated denuding of Poland's timberlands—once proud, muscular trees seized, stripped of their identities, and abandoned. She reclaimed cast aside trunks deemed unworthy for lumber and gave them new life as riveting objects rife with metaphors of life and death. *Marrow Bone* (the title references the fatty and bloody life substance in human bone) consists of an amputated horizontal trunk fitted with iron casings at either end, knife-like metal projections protruding from their hollow cores. Just as the work memorializes felled natural lives, so does it sadly convey humanity's seamless and mindless drift from innocent victim to brute aggressor.

The elegant warp and raw weft of Abakanowicz's tapestries, made from hand-dyed unwound sisal rope, weave similarly unnerving metaphysical landscapes. *Abakan Rouge III* (1971, now in the collection of the MFA Houston), a jaw-dropping example, is a massive and provocative vaginal form, its rich red surface equates the color of fresh blood. The central slit bisecting this lush, knotty fiber-scape equates the womb with the comfort of a serape-like blanket. It takes a moment to experience this roughened stretch of fibrous cloth as a slashed organ, hemorrhaging down a stark, white wall.

"Coexistence" (2002), another series of fiber-based works, consists of a cast burlap phalanx of mythical animal-headed creatures with human torsos. Standing mute like sturdy oaks in a forest, these hollow figures conjure forest spirits morphed from

TOP: CLEMENTS PHOTOGRAPHY AND DESIGN, BOSTON. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MARC STRAUSS GALLERY
BOTTOM: CLEMENTS PHOTOGRAPHY AND DESIGN, BOSTON. COURTESY THE ARTIST