



JESSICA RATH CHAIN-SAWING BASSWOOD ON THE PLUG MOLD FOR "RESONANT NEST," AN ACOUSTIC SCULPTURE DESIGNED TO RESONATE HUMAN VOICE INTERPRETATIONS OF BEE COMMUNICATIONS, AT SPECIMEN PRODUCTS.

PHOTO: MARC POKEMPNER, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

BELOW:
"RESONANT NEST"
(INSTALLATION VIEW AT UAM)
PHOTO: BRIAN FORREST

Jessica Rath's current exhibition, "A Better Nectar," at the University Art Museum at CSU Long Beach, is equal parts sculpture, sound and science—the latter abetted by microscopes, collected spores, and photographs of a science lab inhabited by a mysterious translucent purple tube maze. The exhibition focuses on "the plight of bees," but goes far beyond your typical segment on a TV news broadcast. Walking from room to room, one encounters a human-scaled interpretation of hatched bumblebee nests, sculptural stamens depicted thousands of times beyond their natural scale, scientific animations of how bees "see," and photographic documentation of bee-related research. Finding the right term to summarize Rath's approach is tricky: multi-faceted? multi-disciplinary? multi-mind-boggling? In talking with Rath, she settles on the term "multi-platform" —for the time being anyway, she adds with a laugh.

Rath's fascination with bumblebees initially took root while at a residency program at the Headlands Center for the Arts. She was then working out what would become her installation "Song to Snore" (2008) at the Torrance Art Museum, curated by Kristina Newhouse. While chasing down field recordings of a bird for her TAM installation, Rath encountered a building where a bee's nest had fallen to the ground. The moment proved to be a revelation. In an effort to keep warm in the cold November air, hundreds of bumblebees were "tumbling and interweaving to create heat, you could hear the exoskeletons and wings, churning, weaving and vibrating their bodies... that sound was so incredible and it stayed with me."

This initial inspiration incubated while she worked on other projects. "Can I recreate that on a human scale?" she wondered, "Not just the sound, but the sensorial experience. I started thinking about bees, but it was still about five years off." During this time, Rath gave birth to her daughter, whose breath was recorded and fused in alternation with the Headlands' bird's song to complete the conceptual core of the "Song to Snore" exhibition. This composition led her to connect with composer Robert Hoehn, who would become an integral factor to the current exhibition. Remarkably, over this same period, the composer would nurture a similar interest and become a beekeeper with a hive on his property. "So I went to his roof, to 'meet the bees' about one-and-a-half years ago," she describes, "when a swarm of bees came down the street... thousands of bees." She followed the swarm for about a block before returning to Hoehn. "We were giddy," she recalls, "and then, it was easy. Hard work, but a collaboration... when projects have their own volition, you just follow them. You try to keep up."

"Keeping up" included numerous collaborations, all of which manifest in the core installation of the exhibition, *Resonant Nest*—a seemingly simple, yet deceptively complex work. Three



separate clusters of hatched, human-scaled bumblebee eggs created in a honey-beige colored resin occupy the central gallery at UAM. The sound of the bees, reinterpreted and composed by Hoehn, and performed by 40 members of CSULB's high-caliber Bob Cole Conservatory of Music Chamber Choir under the direction of Dr. Jonathan Talberg, fills the room from speakers nestled within the nest. The score itself varies, from "Cold Huddle" to "Afternoon Forage" in response to changes in the time of day, temperature, weather, and even the visitors to the gallery space. The acoustics of the installation were designed in collaboration with Chicago sound "technician" Ian Schneller, who owns Specimen Products where he builds custom electric guitars, tube amplifiers and audio horn speakers. Rath contacted Schneller to assist in designing the speakers and casting the individual cells of the nest. Here the sounds of the individual voices and harmonies resonate within each nest, while the "single foragers" seem to roam throughout the room, from nest to nest.

Another vital collaboration was with Anne Leonard and her team at the University of Nevada, Reno, who shared years of research with the artist for this project. Leonard's specialty is the topic of "buzz pollination," in which a plant has evolved so as to only release pollen for a distinct vibration of a certain pollinator, such as the bumblebee, making their ecological and agricultural role all the more important. Rath represents the idea of buzz pollination with two human-scaled sculptures of Tomato and Manzanita Anthers. Standing under the larger-than-life Manzanita pod, the sound component of the work is hypnotic: recordings of human breath made from exhaling through a bass saxophone. The vibrations of the reed simmer just below the surface, with an occasional overtone. The slight variations in the breath range from building tension to utter relaxation, as though capturing the sense of release of pollen to the bee.

"A Better Nectar" continues Rath's previous explorations of the intersections of agriculture and commerce, genetics, aesthetics and desire, with *Take me to the apple breeder* (2012-13), and a series of works in various media on the subject of tomatoes, collectively titled *Ripe*. Thus, it is unsurprising to learn that Rath, who received her MFA from CalArts in 1996, grew up on a farm in the Missouri Ozarks. Her father was a farmer; her mother and, later, stepfather were both artists. Rath recalls, "I've never not been making art... there was no difference between studying science and art. Art was always a way to make meaning." In her art, and worldview, it is all connected. "I am trying to create a space where you can have your own experience."

—MOLLY ENHOLM

"Jessica Rath: A Better Nectar" is on view at the University Art Museum at CSU Long Beach, in Long Beach, CA. January 27 – April 12, 2015 <http://web.csulb.edu/org/uam/>

Ruth Pastine:

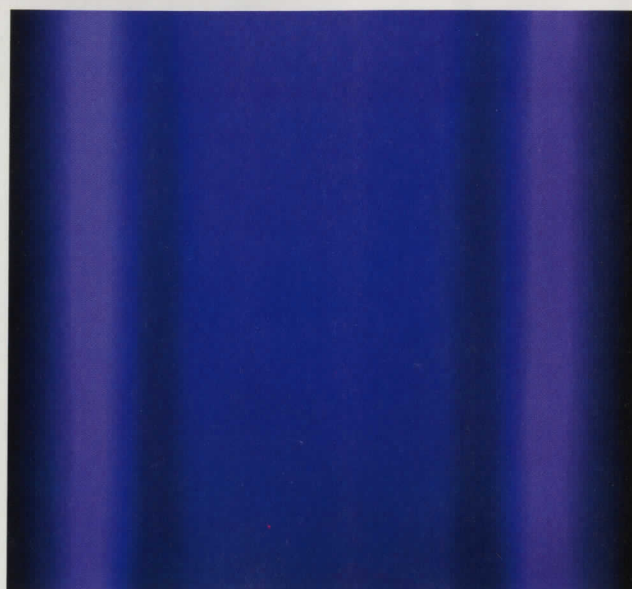
PRESENT TENSE

perceptual
interactions
of color
and light

**March 15
thru
May 24**

**Artist's
Gallery Talk:
Ruth Pastine**

April 2, 2015
6:30pm

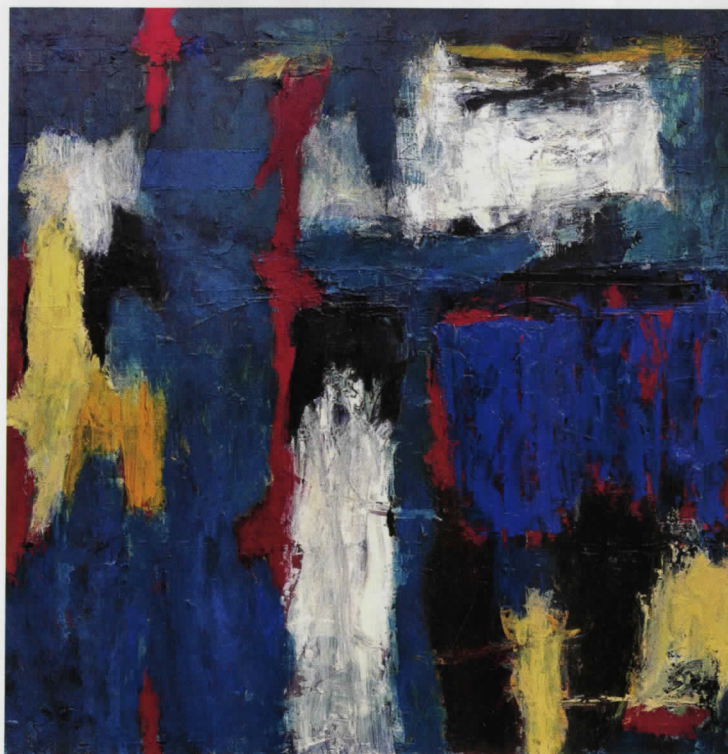


Blue Orange 1-S6060 (Blue Deep), Present Tense Series, oil on canvas on beveled stretcher by Ruth Pastine, 60" x 60", 2015.

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PETER K. BROOKS



Untitled (RO 1-15) January 2015 40" x 40" acrylic on canvas

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