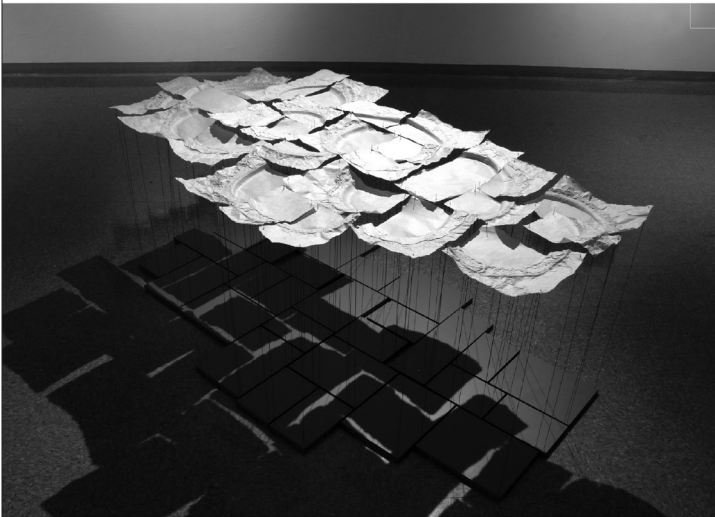


Onodera & Pearce



Contrasts & Correlations

Onodera & Pearce: Contrasts & Correlations

January 13 - February 11, 2024

Curated by
Lauren Fancher

ATHICA: Athens Institute for Contemporary Art is an independent, non-profit gallery promoting and supporting innovative contemporary art and artists through exhibitions, education, and events.

www.athica.org

Athens Institute for Contemporary Art

About the Artists

Masako Onodera utilizes craft techniques in her art and connects the audience emotionally to the materials and practices employed. Her creations suggest an experience of the body altered by the tactile and visual characteristics of the object.

Onodera's art is exhibited nationally and internationally in curated and juried exhibitions and is included in many private and public collections such as Toledo Museum of Art in OH, Mint Museum in NC, and Racine Art Museum in WI. She is the recipient of the Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award and a Mid-career Educational Endowment Scholarship from the Society of North American Goldsmiths. Her work is published in journals and books, such as *Metalsmith Magazine*, the *Art Jewelry Today*, the *Lark 500* series, and *ACTIVA* from Design Deffusion Edizioni, Milan, Italy. She graduated with an MFA in Metals from the University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign and currently is a Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonie, WI.

Website: www.masakoonodera.com

IG: @masakonod



Mary Hallam Pearce received her M.F.A. in Metal from SUNY New Paltz and a B.F.A. in Crafts with an emphasis in Jewelry and Metals from Kent State University. Her research centers around the symbolic and emotive resonance of jewelry and potent materials, and their intricate interplay with the fabric of culture. Her work has been selected for competitive exhibitions in museums and galleries both nationally and internationally and included in publications such as *Metalsmith*, *Ornament*, and *American Craft*. Curatorial projects include *Crafting History: Textiles, Metals and Ceramics* at the University of Georgia, *Parallels: Jonathan Wahl and Sondra Sherman*, *The Ring Shows: Then & Now*, *Putting the Band Back Together*, and *Coming into View*. She has been invited to give lectures and workshops at Penland School of Craft, Anderson Ranch, Kent State University, East Carolina University and Humboldt State, to name a few. Currently she is Associate Professor of the jewelry and metalwork area and Associate Director of Space and Technology at The Lamar Dodd School of Art in Athens, Georgia.

IG: @maryhallam





Masako Onodera
Party, 2020
 6'X3'X2.5'
 Washi paper, coffee, glue, wood,
 MDF board, paint, silicon, piano wire



Mary Pearce
Full Bloom, 2022
 5'X3'X3'
 Lead and steel

Thoughts and Conversation with the Artists

Introduction

ATHICA's Winter 2024 exhibition *Onodera & Pearse: Contrasts and Correlations*, features the work of two artists who share backgrounds in craft while embracing sculptural applications of metal, paper, gravity, and motion. Although I brought them together for this exhibition, the two artists were already known to each other through the craft community. I have been a fan of fellow Athenian Mary Pearse's work as an artist, curator, and educator, and followed closely the development of her magnum opus, *Full Bloom*, harboring a secret aspiration for this intricate and epic sculpture of lead blossoms to be presented at ATHICA. After I encountered Masako Onodera and her delicate, mysterious, and grave work at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, I proposed that the three of us develop this exhibition, which positions *Full Bloom* beside pieces from Onodera's *Vestiges and Phantoms* series, among other works. Both of these masterful artists demonstrate an acute conceptual depth, using materials that align and echo with layers of meaning. Of note is their mutual use of non-traditional materials to both play homage to and critique the gilt and silver domestic accoutrements of women. Heavy is light and light is heavy in this thoughtful and subversive exhibition.

Adventures and Journeys

Onodera and Pearse may have started out 7,465 miles apart in their respective birth places of Yokohama, Japan and Winston-Salem, NC, but through the twists and turns of fate and craft, they ended up in similar places as artists. In their early years, both did not self-identify as artists. However, both pushed against the conventional expectations of those around them, leading to epiphanies that caused them to pursue other directions.

In Onodera's case, she had been through the rigors of design school and professional exams and had followed a path through furniture and product design to landscape architecture and environmental design, working long hours in corporate positions. Along the way, she had been introduced to glassblowing and spent eight years developing her craft as a hobbyist and taking part in an emerging Japanese glassblowing scene. Some of Onodera's fellow enthusiasts sought out Dale Chihuly's Pilchuck Glass School in Seattle, returning with enthusiastic tales of the crazy things going on in America. "And I started dreaming: *Wow, they can do it. Maybe I can do it.* They had started the Toyama Institute of Glass Art, a public art school which specialized in glass, far away from Tokyo, and I thought *I want to go back to school, and I want to do it more seriously, I want to do art.*"

Onodera applied. "I passed the first entrance exam, practical skills: a 2-D drawing test and a 3-D clay test. The second exam was an interview with three professors and me. In Japan, you have to reveal everything about where you live and who is going to be sponsoring you and I was very honest and put

husband as my sponsor on my application. And they said *Oh you're married, what's going to happen to him?* And I said, *Oh, he has a job in Tokyo, so he will stay there.* And, they said, *Oh no, you're the wife, you have to stay with him.* So I didn't get in. My portfolio wasn't that good, a lot of little goblets and such, but I was very disappointed and also shocked by the comments I received."

But something had been kindled in her, a new determination to be an artist, and she took a big risk and went to Seattle to attend a workshop at the Pilchuck Glass School. Following that, she crossed the country to New York City, where she spent two weeks. Despite having limited English, she travelled on her own, explored the country, and expanded her horizons. Her life-changing journey culminated in a decision to stay in the United States and pursue her artistic interests, which continued to grow and develop, leading her from glass work into metalsmithing.

Pearse's family also had expectations that she would follow a traditional path. "But I completely rebelled against that. It took me a really long time to go through college because I was paying for it. I would go for a semester, and then take a semester off, and I would go see the Grateful Dead." While leading this life of the free spirit, she began to work with at-risk women in a short-term domestic violence shelter, which led to a job helping women transition from homelessness, psychiatric hospitals, and prison. "They were learning all kinds of really good life skills that maybe they never had the opportunity to learn, and I was like, *All right. I'm going into social work.*"

She was prepared to complete her four-year degree in social work when something unexpected happened. She had been organizing craft classes for the clients. As she had been doing some bead work, she brought that in as well. "There was one woman who was pretty angry and pretty tough. She made a pair of earrings but didn't say anything to me the whole time. Just made her earrings and left. The next week, she corners me, and she tells me she got a job. And she says *I think I got the job because I was wearing these earrings that I made, and it made me feel so good.*" Pearse was stunned. "I literally quit my job. I turned in my two-week's notice. I thought, *I'm going to learn how to make jewelry.*"

She went on the road looking for colleges that offered programs in jewelry-making. She discovered that there was a program at Kent State, a few hours from where she was living in Columbus. "I was supposed to be there for two years, and ended up there for four because I loved it. And that's how I got into making jewelry."

Craft and Confidence

Onodera and Pearse both traversed the country looking for the places that would allow them to learn and grow. They found hospitable incubators in colleges and craft schools, working with esteemed metal workers and jewelers. Passing through a necessary phase of technical foundations in metals, they

both initially focused on the more traditional end of jewelry-based craftsmanship. In their MFA programs, however, both expanded their range, and began to consider a variety of materials and approaches. Their technical proficiency allowed them to produce works that incorporated non-traditional materials such as found objects, fibers, and plastics. Conceptual foundations began to inhabit the ornamental. They were shifting on the spectrum between craft and fine art that has been hotly debated for centuries. While this distinction will likely never be resolved and is no longer considered as relevant in today's world of interdisciplinary arts, it is evident that for these artists, a shift occurred between the making of the wearable (and the sellable) ornament for the body and the making of an object for its own sake. As these artists realized their powers, they became more confident making things with high craftsmanship for the purpose of pure expression.

Throughout these formative experiences, they were connecting with the metalsmith community that is nurtured by craft schools and academic programs across the country. In fact, they met briefly at SUNY New Paltz, where Pearse was in the MFA program and Onodera was a visiting potential candidate. She elected instead to go to the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, setting up a future based in the Midwest. (Both Pearse and Onodera have significant Midwestern bona fides, both having spent time at colleges in Ohio and Wisconsin, and Onodera also resident in Illinois and Minnesota.)

These rebels were becoming established artists within a rigorous community of practice, in which discipline and improvisation are balanced through notions of craft and technique. In each of their lives, high-level performance and perseverance has been in tension with the need to individuate and have the freedom to improvise. The evolution of their careers in studio and in academia has continued to play this out, as both have become tenured professors at their respective universities while continuing to evolve their artistic practices.

It is evident in their conversation that they both enjoy teaching and the intrinsic rewards of helping students master their craft. However, I wondered if there is some other dialogue occurring between the classroom and their studios, asking both what role teaching plays in their practice.

Pearse was quick to identify her pleasure in learning about her students' lives, their stories, and their work. "Whether it's social, political, or personal, they tell me something about themselves. I love that aspect of teaching, that I get to know these people. And sometimes we stay in touch for many years. And I think there are times when I'm working in the studio and I think *Oh I'm going to give this as an assignment: to texture a wax five different ways*, because I'm playing with the wax myself to try to figure out its properties. I think that's what's rewarding about being in an academic environment, is that there's an exchange of ideas on different levels. And it's nice when it's egalitarian."

Onodera concurs, musing that "Helping students is, in a way, an open-ended process where I don't have control for what's going to come out. So, in exchanging ideas or giving them suggestions, I am constantly brainstorming and problem-solving and I enjoy those challenges. Those experiences do affect my work indirectly."

Sculpture and Scale

The large works on exhibition in *Onodera & Pearse: Contrasts and Correlations* represent turning points for both artists, in which they venture into larger scale, sculptural installations using materials that are not found on the traditional metalsmith's tool bench. In Onodera's pieces *Party* and *Ghost*, metal appears only as a whisper in the form of the piano wires that hold aloft the cast paper impressions of the silver platters she had previously been deconstructing. The wires enable the motion that activates these pieces. They seem to murmur, like a ghostly party, as they can move from invisible winds and air currents from passers-by. There is a meditative and oblique dialogue taking place between these fossils of once-ornate and once-valued silver domestic objects and our human experience.

Masako Onodera
Ghost. 2020
7'X8'X0.5'
Washi paper, ink,
glue, thread,
piano wire



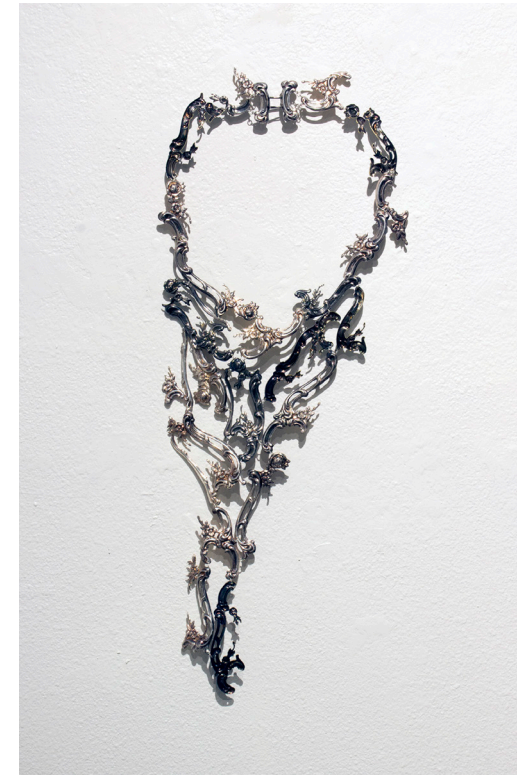
Themes of loss, of cultural forgetting and devaluation, and the fragility of and erasure of the feminine are common to both artist's large works. The primary material in Pearse's wall piece, *The Tears of Things*, is the faded artificial flowers she has collected from the cemetery-adjacent woods where they have been thrown or blown, persistent as grief and as unwelcome. Her hanging pendant sculpture, *Full Bloom*, is a both a floral teardrop and a wrecking ball, a tender glove encasing a 500-pound fist. Here, Pearse's discarded artificial flowers are transformed in lead, a material of resonant associations around beauty and disfigurement (when used in cosmetics), madness (when ingested), death (when used to line coffins), and paradoxically, protection (when used to contain radiation). A hint of humor, a wry smile of the enduring feminine, leavens these works.

Other pieces in the exhibition echo these themes and carry on a dialogue that is just as insistent, while making shifts in scale and focus. Onodera's *Time* wall piece reads like an excavation of a Victorian tearoom, with once shining tea pots now appearing puddled in grime and the shadows of history. *All is vanitas*, we are reminded. Adjacent, Pearse's *Leaded* considers lead's protective capabilities, a traditionally feminine trait, in contrast with its death-dealing bullets.



Mary Pearse
The Tears of Things
2022
6'X3'X3'
Discarded flowers
and Styrofoam

Fabrication techniques in the artists' smallest works mirror each other: Onodera literally excavates sterling silver platters to produce lacelike elements in her pieces, while Pearse builds up encrusted surfaces with conglomerations of cast objects. Hovering in a space between sculptural and wearable, the beauty of these introspective and delicate works harmonizes and haunts.



Masako Onodera
Elements. 2020
26"X10"X1"
Sterling silver, silver-plated
platter, oxidized



Mary Pearse
It Takes Two. 2023
3"X2.5"X1.5"
Sterling and pearls

The contrasts and correlations of Onodera and Pearse reverberate, both in their works on view and in their individual journeys. They share thematic concerns but also a moment, notable and rare, in which an artist has a breakthrough. Isn't it wonderful to witness? I am so glad that we can share this moment with them.

—Lauren Fancher, January 2024



Mary Pearce
Leaded. 2019
36"X 36"X 1"
Lead, silk



Mary Pearce
Collar. (Detail). 2024.
6"X 7"X.75"
Silver and satin



Masako Onodera
Black and White. 2019
3.5"X3.5"X1"
Silver plated platter, sterling silver, pearls,
silk thread, stainless steel, oxidized



Masako Onodera
Medicine Box, 2021
5"X15"X1"
Silver plated platter, red brass, sterling silver,
silk cord, silk thread, pearls, oxidized



Masako Onodera
Time, 2021
Left: 24"X16"X20"
Right: 24"X14"X16"
Washi Paper, ink, glue,
thread, piano wire

Complete Schedule of Events

Exhibition Dates: January 13, 2024 - February 11, 2024

Opening Reception: Saturday, January 13, 2024, 6:00-8:00 PM

Curator/Artist Talk: Sunday, January 14, 2024, 4:00 PM

Onodera Visiting Artist Lecture at Lamar Dodd School of Art: Tuesday, January 16, 2024, 5:30 PM

In Memoriam

John English

ATHICA's longest-serving and most devoted board member,
trusted advisor, artist, activist, journalist, occasional gadfly, emeritus professor
of UGA's Grady College of Journalism, Peace Corps volunteer, and true Athenian

Exhibition Credits

Curator: Lauren Fancher

Preparators: Mary Pearse, Masako Onodera, Lauren Fancher

Lighting: Jon Vogt

Catalog: Lauren Fancher

Student Employees: Karah Flowers, Shana Jackson

Staff: Lauren Fancher, Director

Support

Onodera & Pearse: Contrasts and Correlations is sponsored in part by The James E. and Betty J. Huffer Foundation and the Georgia Council for the Arts through the appropriations of the Georgia General Assembly. Georgia Council for the Arts also receives support from its partner agency – the National Endowment for the Arts.

ATHICA Board of Directors

Mickey Boyd, Allie Calcote, CC Calloway, Christina Habibi, Ray Lee, Jim Moneyhun, Jon Swindler, Jon Vogt

ATHICA is a community-supported, all-volunteer, 501(C)(3) organization.

Our new home has been made possible through the support of our strategic partner,

The James E. and Betty J. Huffer Foundation

and the wonderful community of art and art lovers that has kept ATHICA going for over 22 years.