

The New York Times

Pieces That Invite a Closer Look

Feb. 13, 2014

Arts Review | Long Island

Heather Layton with her piece “The Blind Spot Underground” as part of the “Shock-U-Mentaries” exhibition. Kathy Kmonicek for The New York Times



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Grace Beza of Islip had strapped a small light onto her forehead and entered a dark, cavelike room. Inside, dozens of images painted on the walls showed men wearing headlamps on helmets. When she emerged, she was intrigued but mystified. The figures looked like miners in a womb, Ms. Beza said.

Phyllis Ozarin, another visitor to the room, part of the “Shock-U-Mentaries” exhibition at the [Islip Art Museum](#) in East Islip, had also put on one of the headlamps and examined the

images. “You couldn’t see anything unless you shed light on it,” said Ms. Ozarin, a board member of the Islip Arts Council, which oversees the museum. “It’s a perfect metaphor for how we go through life.”

Actually, neither interpretation is precisely what Heather Layton, the artist who created “The Blind Spot Underground,” had in mind. But it is O.K. with her if viewers fashion their own stories around her work, she said.

Part of Tobi Kahn’s piece responding to the 9/11 attacks. Kathy Kmonicek for The New York Times



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Ms. Layton had been thinking about the environmental threat of mining in Nauru and other Pacific islands, she said, and “the blind spot to the long-term consequences” of the mining activity. The work includes a blood-red background (that looks black or purple in the dark) and a three-dimensional figure perched near the ceiling that represents “the only one that has profited” from the mining, she said.

The artist, who lives in Rochester, made the installation in three days, while the exhibition was open to visitors, an idea that she and Beth Giacummo, the museum’s exhibition director and the curator of the show, had agreed upon.

“I wanted her to interact with viewers,” Ms. Giacummo said. “It’s really a new environment, kind of like stepping out of a gallery and into a mine.” It has a sound component, making it multi-sensory.

The “Shock-U-Mentaries” title, Ms. Giacummo said, “reflects the intended experience that the viewer may have in exploring the installations and the works.” Each of the five artists — there are four installations and a single piece in the show — offers a response to a man-made or biological circumstance, she said, and touches on themes of disintegration and rebuilding. Ms. Giacummo wanted to feature installations, she said, because the Carriage House, a nearby space that specialized in them, lost its funding from the Town of Islip in 2012 and had to shut down.

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Jeffrey Allen Price’s work with plaster obelisks. Kathy Kmonicek for The New York Times



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Lorrie Fredette, another artist, did not get a room of her own, but she was given the entire entrance hall, a large space that she filled with about 300 handmade pods covered in off-white wax. They are meant to suggest a virus taking over the museum’s “main artery,” she said. The

clustered pods cling to the walls and hang from the hallway's arches and ceiling. "It's an unknown contagion," said Ms. Fredette, who lives in West Camp, N.Y., in Ulster County. "You never know what's lurking." Her piece, "Complex Interplay," reflects her interest in "architecture, people and disease," she said.

Around the corner, in a shorter hallway, hangs Tony Ingrisano's "Landmarks," a gridlike composition of drawings and photographs. It includes images of a bridge and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, said the Brooklyn-based artist, and explores his interest in "the way we form these systems around us." Ms. Giacommo said Mr. Ingrisano's "obsessive lines" and structures "read like a map of Chutes and Ladders, and they lead everywhere and nowhere all at once."

The rise and fall of civilizations are represented in the gallery that Jeffrey Allen Price filled with "9 Broken Obelisks With Brain Sand/Obeliscus Enneas Concisus et Corpus Arenacea." It is a new piece that Mr. Price, who lives in Lake Grove, finished in the gallery. He fabricated the plaster obelisks, which weigh about 200 pounds each, elsewhere, he said, but toppled eight of them on site to create an authentic look of deterioration and debris. "I wanted to make sure they looked natural," said Mr. Price, who in 2012 curated a show of potato-themed art at the museum.

The central obelisk still stands but shows signs of damage at its base, he said. White-painted pine cones that hang in various places are meant to symbolize calcified pineal glands at the center of the brain, he said. "Some people say the pineal gland is the 'third eye,' our intuition or psyche," he said. Most people have lost that sense, he said, but it could be reawakened.

Lorrie Fredette with her "Complex Interplay."Kathy Kmonicek for The New York Times

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Another room, which many visitors said they found moving, is filled with "Embodied Light 2011-2014," a response by [Tobi Kahn](#) to the events of 9/11. It includes elements that were shown in 2011 at the [Ernest Rubenstein Gallery at the Educational Alliance](#) in Manhattan but are here installed in a new layout, the artist said.

A table toward the back of Mr. Kahn's gallery is filled with 220 blocks, representing the 220 floors of the former twin towers. Each one was decorated by a different person. Over a three-month period, Mr. Kahn said, he gave one plain block each to people he knew, including fellow artists and "the guy who makes my coffee every morning," and asked them to draw, write or otherwise convey their memory of 9/11. "Nobody didn't give one back," he said. "And nobody did the same thing."

The blocks include images of a heart, the American flag, skeletons and (from the composer [Elizabeth Swados](#)) a music score. A sign encourages museum visitors to wear thin white gloves (provided) to handle the blocks and "rebuild" with them. On the floor nearby is a sculpture Mr. Kahn made of many small pieces of wood and covered in white acrylic to resemble

a dense cityscape. Lining two walls are shelves holding seven sculptures that, he said, are meant to evoke an angel standing between the two towers.

On another wall, a series of bronze memorial lights, each cradling a candle, sits on two long shelves and suggests an altar, said Mr. Kahn, who lives in Manhattan. "I create meditation spaces," he said. "I want my work to bring your soul to a higher place."

"Shock-U-Mentaries" is at the Islip Art Museum, 50 Irish Lane, East Islip, Thursdays through Sundays through March 30. Information: (631) 224-5402 or islipartmuseum.org.

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Jacobson, Aileen. "Pieces That Invite a Closer Look." *The New York Times*, 13 February 2014. [https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/nyregion/a-review-of-shock-u-mentaries-at-the-islip-art-museum.html?_r=0]