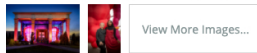


Ancient and modern intersect in 'Hive' exhibition at Krannert Art Museum

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ARTS | CAMPUS



The two inflatable sculptures of "Hive" are visible inside the glass-enclosed Kinkead Pavilion. The pink and red sculptures are lit from within and outside, and they will be on view until Jan. 23, 2021. Photo by Fred Zwicky

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — A new exhibition at Krannert Art Museum will be visible to the public 24/7. "Hive," combining two 18-foot-tall inflatable sculptures and an immersive sound installation, will be on view for the coming year in the glass-enclosed entrance to the Kinkead Pavilion, 500 E. Peabody Drive, Champaign.

The project involves two artists collaborating for the first time by making an installation specifically for the space at KAM. Nancy Davidson's sculptures in shades of pink are soft, bulbous and lit from within, providing a vivid contrast to the postmodern pavilion, designed by architect Larry Booth, with its glass panes and angular columns. Lakshmi Ramgopal's soundscape is comprised of abstract vocalizations of breath: inhales, sighs and hums.


The museum will host an opening reception for "Hive" from 5 to 6 p.m. Jan. 30, with an artist talk by Davidson and Ramgopal in the KAM auditorium at 6:15 p.m., followed by conversation between the artists and the project's co-curators, Amy L. Powell and Clara Bosak-Schroeder. "Hive" will remain on view until Jan. 23, 2021.




Artists Nancy Davidson and Lakshmi Ramgopal collaborated for the first time with "Hive." Davidson created the 18-foot-tall inflatable sculptures inspired by female figures from


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
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Davidson selected the 20 jobs and inspired sculptures, inspired by female figures from ancient Greece and the Mediterranean. Ramgopal created a soundscape based on sounds made by the breath. Their work raises questions about feminine bodies and identity.

Photo by Fred Zwicky



Powell, KAM's curator of modern and contemporary art, said the project is both a site-specific installation and a public artwork because of its visibility within the entrance to the Kinkead Pavilion facing Sixth Street. She described the architecture of the 1988 museum addition as "Egyptian Revival – a kind of Midwest mashup of classical references."

"Hive" will fill the space and alter our experience of it by introducing light, movement and sound all inspired by feminine bodies," she said.

Davidson – an Illinois native now based in New York – has created inflatable sculptures that reproduce certain features of the body, often feminine forms, and are influenced by the artist's interest in the carnivalesque and grotesque, humor and parody, and minimalism.

"Hive" was inspired in part by the ancient Mediterranean goddess Artemis of Ephesus, a mother goddess who is often depicted with multiple breasts that are sometimes said to represent a beehive or bull testicles. Davidson's red and pink sculptures emulate Artemis' "fecund and grotesque" form, she said.



Davidson works with graduate student Katie Netti as they secure part of a braid that emerges from the top of a sculpture. It was inspired by caryatids, sculptural female figures with braids that were used as support columns for buildings in classical architecture.

Photo by Fred Zwicky

Davidson also modeled her sculptures after the "Porch of the Maidens" at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry. Sculptures of female figures, or caryatids, are used as architectural support pillars or columns. Those in Chicago were modeled after caryatids at the Acropolis in Athens, Greece, whose thick braids increase the structural support. "Hive" features a thick braid emerging from the top of each sculpture and reaching the floor.

"Nancy has taken really iconic parts of ancient objects and made them completely new by putting them together in this way," said Bosak-Schroeder, an Illinois classics professor whose research includes examining how artists in later times have responded to the ancient world.

"I think the braid is the most startling part of the whole composition. If you look at the sculptures without the braid, they look large and abstract. The braid transforms them into figures," Bosak-Schroeder said.

Davidson's "hybrid maidens" will communicate with each other through light. From dusk to dawn, the colors of the sculptures will periodically change from warm reds and pinks to cool blues and greens.

"They pass colors back and forth like Morse code. It's definitely asking for a nocturnal audience," Davidson said. "It's exciting to think about these two big pieces communicating back and forth. It will feel like they've come alive. The sound and the light will enliven the sculptures and make them feel like they are beings."



The lighting for the sculptures is apparent during the evening hours. The colors change from warm to cool tones and back, as though the two figures are conversing.

Photo by Fred Zwicky

Ramgopal, a multidisciplinary artist and a history professor at Columbia University, based the "Hive" soundscape on sounds made through breathing. She recorded a number of vocalists from along the feminine and feminized spectrum of identity, including her two-year-old niece and a woman with severe asthma.



"I was thinking about the feminine body as something perceived as being difficult to control or in need of control in a socialized context or in a medical context. I wanted to think about the building up and breaking down of the female body," Ramgopal said.



Ramgopal directs the placement of multiple speakers that project her sound installation. A computer algorithm will randomize the sounds so they never repeat in the same way.

Photo by Fred Zwicky

She composed a portion of the audio with a “call and response” structure. For another section, she used a computer algorithm that will randomize the sounds so they never repeat in the same way. The blowing sounds made by the ventilation system in the exhibition space influenced Ramgopal to think about breathing in a medical context, such as a person using a ventilator.

“There’s something poignant to me of having a machine take over and randomize some of those sounds,” she said.

Bosak-Schroeder thinks “Hive” will elicit a range of responses from viewers.

“Davidson’s sculptures have exaggerated body parts, fragments and strange juxtapositions. The material and the animation make them kind of adorable or attractive, but also a little bit scary. I think there’s both attraction and aversion that they bring about in people,” she said.

They’ll also transform the space, Bosak-Schroeder said: “Even though they are very modern objects – they’re being inflated by cold air and lit up, and there’s audio – I think when people visit them, they’ll experience some awe that is akin to being in a sacred space.”



Davidson works with design and installation specialist Walter Wilson on the support structures for the work, including the lighting inside the sculptures.

Photo by Fred Zwicky



Ramgopal and Davidson laugh as they watch their work come to life at Krannert Art Museum.

Photo by Fred Zwicky

The museum will show a complementary selection of objects from its collection and from Spurlock Museum in the Kinkead Gallery adjacent to “Hive.” The exhibition “Artists Interpret the Ancient World” will use these objects to dive deeper into the themes of “Hive,” including gender, copies and casts, and sacred subjects. The items from Spurlock Museum include a fragment of a terracotta sculpture of an ancient Syrian goddess and reproductions of objects from ancient Greece and Egypt. The objects from KAM’s collection include a 1993 sculpture by Niki de Saint Phalle, who created colorful, feminine forms with exaggerated shapes, as well as paintings by Leon Golub and Frank Gunter, and engravings by 18th century English artist William Hogarth.

Editor’s notes: To contact Amy L. Powell, email alpowell@illinois.edu. To contact Clara Bosak-Schroeder, email cbosak@illinois.edu. More information about “Hive” is available [online](#). For information about Krannert Art Museum, contact Julia Nucci Kelly at jkelly@illinois.edu.