

POWER LINES



Pick a flower on Earth and you move the farthest star. — Paul A. M. Dirac



THE AMERICAN CENTER FOR PHYSICS
One Physics Ellipse
College Park, Maryland 20740

DIRECTIONS

To reach ACP from the Capital Beltway: Take Exit #23-MD 201 southbound (Kenilworth Ave.); follow MD 201 for about 3 miles; turn right onto River Road at light; follow signs on River Road to ACP and Physics Ellipse; will see building on left.

To reach ACP from D.C.: Follow Rhode Island Avenue northbound; turn right onto MD 410 (East-West Highway); turn left onto MD 201 (Kenilworth Ave.); turn left onto River Road at 2nd light; follow signs on River Road to ACP and Physics Ellipse; will see building on left.

Metro: College Park - U. of Md stop on the Green Line.



POWER LINES

CHEE-KEONG KUNG
BARTON RUBENSTEIN
MERYL SILVER

SARAH TANGUY, CURATOR

Reception 1 May 2018

5:30 - 7:30 pm

Gallery Talk 6:15pm

The American Center for Physics
One Physics Ellipse
College Park, MD 20740

1 May 2018 –19 October 2018

For viewing information,
call 301.209.3000



Above top: Meryl Silver, *Simplicity Within #22*, 2013, color photograph, 22 x 18"; courtesy of artist.

Above: Barton Rubenstein, *Self-Portrait - a study for Portrait of a Nation Prize*, 2015, polished stainless steel, 12"h, and for *Mother Earth*, 2015, brushed stainless steel, 15'h; courtesy of artist.

Cover: Chee-Keong Kung, *Riptide (Dispersion No 3)*, 2013, ink & acrylic on canvas, 48 x 36"; courtesy of artist.

Power Lines investigates how lines, visible and invisible, can function as metaphoric shorthand to describe underlying forces or conditions in the world, with paintings by Chee-Keong Kung, model sculptures by Barton Rubenstein, and photographs by Meryl Silver. Though their approaches differ, all three artists poetically mine the formal linear and nonlinear elements in their work as well as phenomenological experience and the passage of time.

In Chee-Keong Kung's layered abstractions, gestural improvisation balances exacting precision as order and chaos intertwine, suggesting a vast universe in flux and multiple directions of possibilities. The lyrical interplay between the geometric and organic pulses throughout, reflecting on one hand his training as an architect and his affinity to an industrial aesthetic. On the other, his interest in natural phenomena and their representations provides a source of inspiration as powerful as the built environment. Kung is fascinated by buildings under construction and demolition, and by cloud formations with their ever-shifting shapes, colors, and transparencies. Chinese landscape tradition holds a particular draw, including the 13th century *Nine Dragons*, a hand scroll painting where dragons appear and recede into mist, clouds, fire, and mountains, in a sweeping indication of the dynamic cycles in nature.



Chee-Keong Kung, *Helix (Dispersion No 17)*, 2015, ink & acrylic on canvas 48 x 36"; courtesy of artist.

Guided by observation and memory, Kung considers time a raw material in his creative process: "For me, the act of painting slows down time...like a quiet inner center amidst the frenetic rush of daily life." He begins by intuitively laying down washes on a primed canvas. If the feeling is right, he proceeds with adding lines and brush strokes in tandem with chance patterning, each time engaging with the material and marks before initiating further action. Color washes are applied should the pictorial composition maintain his interest after several pauses

and by cloud formations with their ever-shifting shapes, colors, and transparencies. Chinese landscape tradition holds a particular draw, including the 13th century *Nine Dragons*, a hand scroll painting where dragons appear and recede into mist, clouds, fire, and mountains, in a sweeping indication of the dynamic cycles in nature.

Guided by observation and memory, Kung considers time a raw material in his creative process: "For me, the act of painting slows



Barton Rubenstein, *Skybound*, silver paper model; actual: 2012, stainless steel, 30 x 7 x 7"; courtesy of artist.

geometry can partner with nature, and representation with abstraction. An early interest in art and making things grew into studying architectural drafting, graphics, and lithography at college, while he earned degrees in physics, neuroscience and computer science. Now he combines engineering and design in his private and public projects, with special focus on the dynamics of water, wind kinetics, light, and suspension: "The goal of my artwork is first to create a level of intrigue, and then to allow for the gradual discovery of its secrets and complexities."

Rubenstein usually starts with sketches before fashioning paper or metal models, and then fabricates the full-scale versions using CAD software and tools such as plasma cutters, welding machines, and grinders. In the graceful *Skybound*, six arching components in the shape of diamonds hover on top of each other with no apparent attachment, while the three, linked elements of the S-shaped *Harmonize* respond independently to air current, and naturally realign when absent of wind. Because their sides taper in different directions, their non-planar surfaces generate myriad reflective patterns. By contrast, his global, sustainability-themed Mother Earth Project features a figurative sculpture that melds his profile and that of his mother. The self-portrait also became the National Portrait Gallery's *Portrait of a Nation Prize*, given biennially to five outstanding Americans. Here as elsewhere, the interaction of negative and positive space and spatial shifts animate the work.

and encounters. Out of this call and response, an evolving network of modulated shapes and lines emerges as seen in his *Dispersion* series, where the juxtapositions of mass and void, surface and depth trigger a spontaneous and immediate sense of energy and flow.

Lines become edges in the eye-dazzling sculptures of Barton Rubenstein. Typically rendered in stainless steel—a material he favors for its durability and ability to pick up the ambient palette of its surroundings, his works explore how

An attention to detail counterpoints an intuitive approach in the photographs of Meryl Silver. Her land, sea and urban studies reflect her love of travel and waiting for the perfect moment to click the shutter, typically during the magical light of sunrise and sunset. Though recognizable, the images expose a skeletal structure of interlocking lines and planes. In her early, black and white work, Silver documented the people and street scenes of her native New York City. Then in the 2000s, she switched to digital, a change that allows an examination of detail from an alternate viewpoint, revealing an overlooked world: "My goal is to explore how I can best capture the essence of a subject, whether mysterious, moody or emotional, or perhaps only an imagined event."

The majestic *Fire and Ice* presents the shoreline at dawn in a remote Icelandic beach. Shot at wide angle, the full impact of the rushing, diagonal lines resounds as waves recede, crash, and diminish into parallel bands and meet the horizon. The *Simplicity Within* series incorporates her recent exploration of adding texture through digital manipulation to intensify the subtle intricacy of an image. Here the focus is blades of grass and their reflections on a field of green and ochre washes. Like a visual haiku, the distilled composition is at once clear and complex. More abstract is her three-part sequence where a straight close-up of tulip petals and stem transforms into swirls of yellow, red and green, and becomes a group of red and yellow rectangles against a green background.



Meryl Silver, *Fire and Ice*, 2016, color photograph, 16 x 24"; courtesy of artist.

Power Lines brings out the passion of artists Kung, Rubenstein and Silver for the potential of lines to guide, balance, transport, and inspire. In their work, lines coalesce into soft and hard edges, map sweeping trajectories, or posit systemic interconnections, highlighting the very act of seeing and triggering a range of open-ended associations and emotional responses. As the recently departed, theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking urged: "Look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Try to make sense of what you see, and wonder about what makes the universe exist. Be curious."