

Jill Viney



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Sarah Lawrence College
Bronxville, NY

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Jill Viney

"In calm weather, the diver can look upward to see the entire hemisphere of the sky compressed into a circle over her head—a phenomenon called Snell's window, caused by the bending of light as it enters water."¹

Light appears to travel in a straight line until it comes into contact with the surface of an object, where it can be absorbed, scattered, reflected or seem to bend as it does when it enters water. Light animates our universe, whether the sources are generated by volcanic activity, biochemical light from organisms such as jellyfish, or waves traveling from the sun. For a sculptor, light was traditionally used to enhance form, not as an integral part of the sculpture. However, in the twentieth century both Fiberglas, which holds light in its layers of spun glass, and Plexiglas, which allows light to pass through and around the forms, came into production, enabling sculptors such as Jill Viney, to explore light as both material and as subject.

Viney's fascination with light had its origin in her upbringing in California, where she explored the state's coastline and visited aquariums to view live projections of deep-water creatures. Subsequent diving trips around the world allowed her to experience the glorious undersea world first-hand, and to study the movement of light as it enters deep water as well as light produced by undersea organisms, which Viney refers to as "living light" or bioluminescence. Initially, Viney translated her interest into painting on canvas, but soon discovered the possibilities of plastics, which allowed her to create "structures to be built within structures creating...a double space—in which the outer mass exists and the inner one delineates what the first surrounds."² Light is then able to move around and through the forms and produce the sensation of a watery space that a diver might view through goggles. Viney enhanced her structures with subtle color, wire, fabric and electrically sourced internal light, all of which have enabled her over the course of thirty years to expand the expressive power of her sculpture.

Ocean Nest (2004), inspired by a miniscule, shell-less organism known as a Larvacean, exemplifies Viney's approach to combining form and materials to elicit content. Delicate and vulnerable, the Larvacean floats primarily in the upper sunlit portion of the ocean, surrounded by a skeleton-like "house" and filaments that help it feed. Viney's Larvacean, on the contrary, rests on a discomfiting

¹ Heidi M. Sosik and Sönke Johnsen, "Shedding Light on Light in the Ocean," *Oceanus* magazine, Vol. 43, No. 2, December, 2004.

² Jill Viney, "Artist Statement," 2016.

wire mesh bed and is surrounded by barbed wire that repels rather than attracts sustenance. Its translucent body contains orbs of electric light that appear and disappear, like warning lights, as one circles the sculpture. *Ocean Nest*'s uneasy mix of screen and barbed wire with the subtly lighted translucent body alludes to the ephemerality of life and the ferocious tenacity to survive.

Ephemerality and tenacity also have roles in *Orbital* (2007). However, the form and materials seduce rather than confront. The entire jellyfish-like sculpture, including the title, is a paean to the feminine and the cycle of life, beginning with the fleshy pink, undulating gathered net that makes up the "umbrella-shaped bell" of the organism and ending with the translucent pink non-stinging tentacles that are suspended from it. Nestled inside each of the udder-like tentacles is a glowing orb that suggests procreation and nourishment, both necessary for the survival of any species.

Whereas *Orbital* is a joyful affirmation of "the feminine, The Mother,"³ Viney's *Smokers* series is a somber reminder of the restless and relentless power of Mother Earth, brought into sharp focus through the current dangers of climate change. The title, *Smokers*, refers to Black Smokers, a type of hydrothermal vent found on the seabed near volcanically active areas—in essence, a fissure from which super-heated water issues as black "smoke." Over time, these emissions form chimney-like structures around the vent. Viney's *Smokers* lack the craggy, squeezed-out form of the Black Smokers but instead are all too human—breasts, buttocks, heads and thighs—are mashed together and covered in an acrylic facsimile of hardened lava. Rows of tiny holes pierce the surface revealing amber-colored light. Analogous to the LED warning light bars attached to roadway barriers and emergency vehicles, as well as the magma that seethes under the earth, the lights scream danger, danger.

Viney's light infused orbs that warn of danger in the *Smokers* series, provoke the imagination in *Orbital*, serve as enticements in *Ocean Nest*, are viewed by Viney as the "points of life,"⁴ that animate her sculptures, enable them to breathe and encourage her viewers "to explore the beauty with the breath...a lifeline to being in a privileged space."⁵

Judith Page, May 2016

³ Jill Viney, "Conversation," April 27, 2016.

⁴ Jill Viney, "Conversation," April 27, 2016.

⁵ Jill Viney, "Artist Statement," 2016.



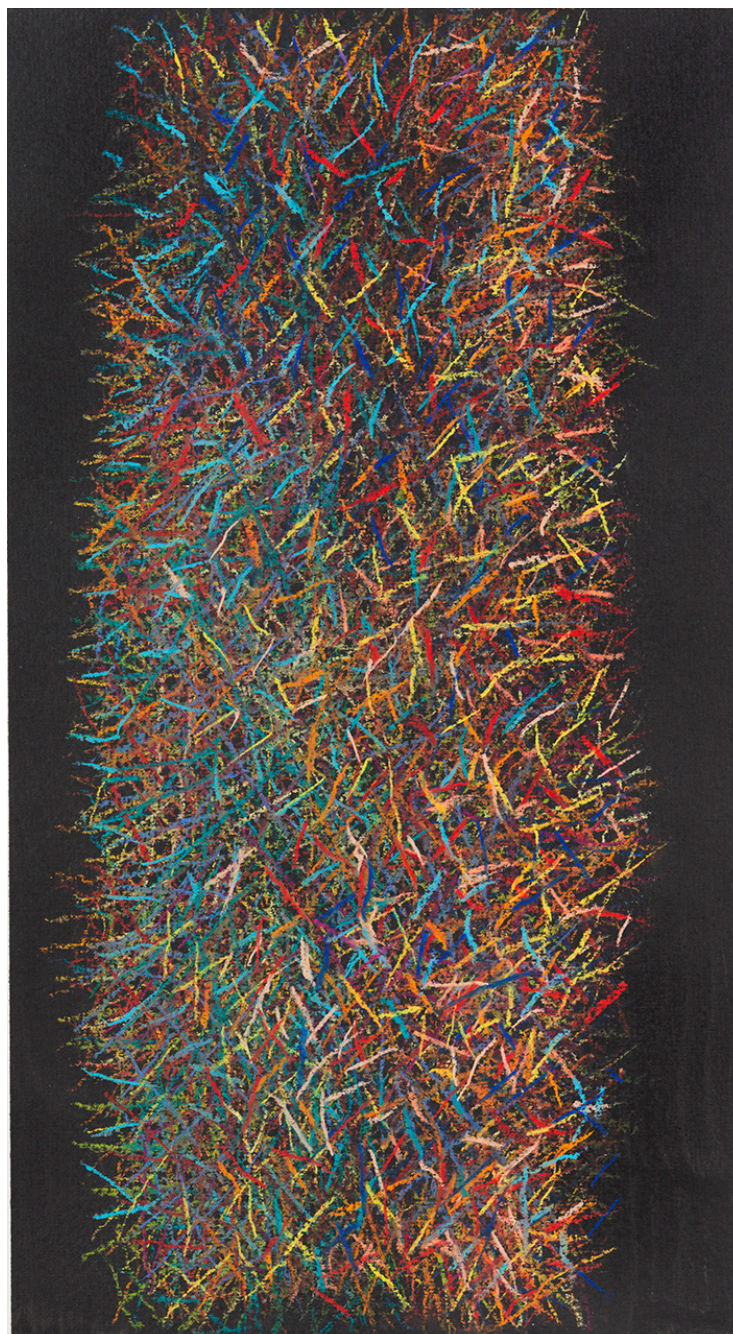
Orbital



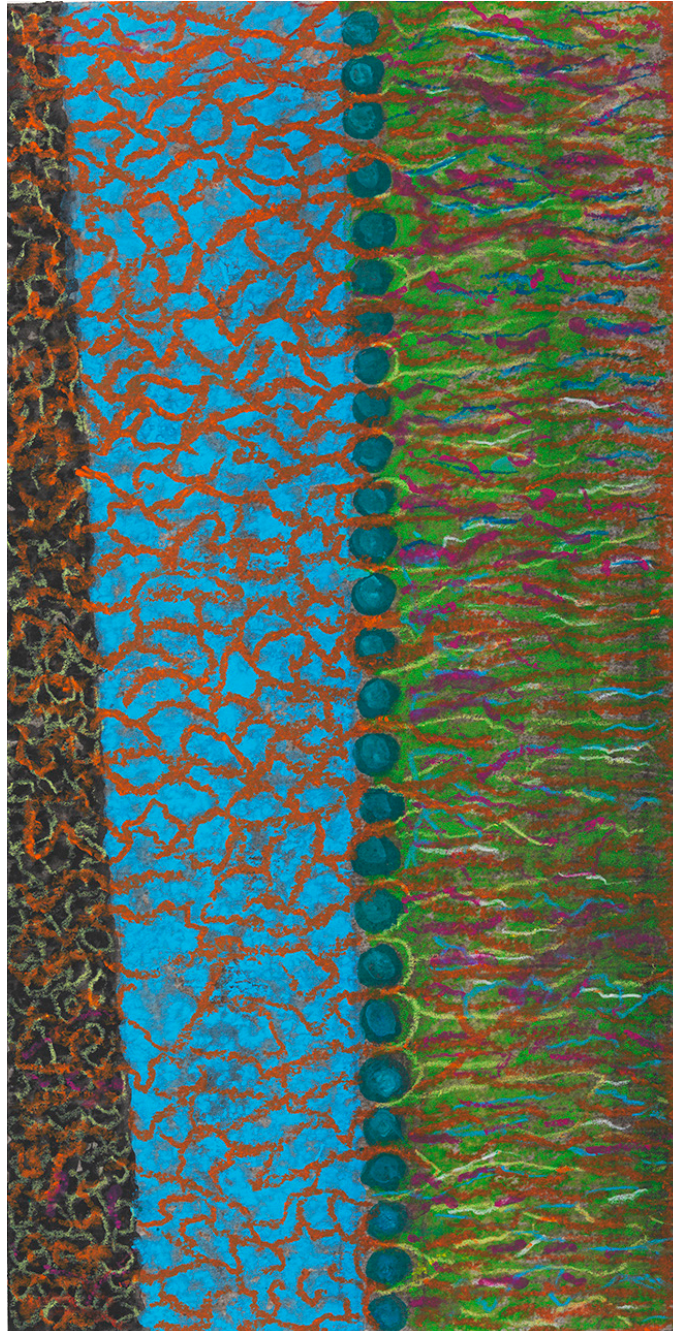
Ocean Nest



Smokers



Synapse #4



Synapse #3



Synapse #1

Index of works

Orbital, 2007

Fiberglass and mixed media

69" x 54"

Ocean Nest, 2004

Fiberglass, plexiglass, electric light and metal wire

34" x 53" x 46"

Smokers I, 2014

Fiberglass and electric light

29" x 32" x 34"

Smokers II, 2014

Fiberglass and electric light

35" x 28" x 37"

Smokers III, 2014

Fiberglass and electric light

30" x 35" x 29"

Synapse# 4, 2013

Pastel and ink on paper

9" x 7"

Synapse # 3, 2013

Pastel and ink on paper

9" x 7"

Synapse #1, 2013

Pastel and ink on paper

9" x 7"

Jill Viney

MFA Columbia University School of Arts

BA Sarah Lawrence College

Solo Exhibitions

2016 Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York

2007 Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus, New York

2005 Gallery 210, University of Missouri, St. Louis Campus, Missouri

2001 Pacific Northwest College of Art, Portland, Oregon

2000 Trans Hudson Gallery, New York, N.Y.

Group Exhibitions

1998 Hunterdon Art Museum, “Form & Space”, Clinton, New Jersey

Bibliography

2016 Sarah Lawrence College, Catalog

2006 Herron School of Art, Indianapolis, Ind., Catalog

2004 Gallery 210, St. Louis, Missouri, Catalog

2000 Trans Hudson Gallery, Catalog

1998 The New York Times, “Forces of the Soul”, art review, New Jersey edition; Barry Schwabsky, Photo

Commissions

2006 “Barrow”, Herron School of Art, Indiana

2004 “Dwelling”, Gallery 210, Missouri

Yaddo Fellow and member of the Board

