Imagine a world where you trip over E. Coli, stare into the eyes of giant insects, and come face to face with the pesticides that cling to your food. You have now entered the world of Christy Rupp. Since the 1970s, this prolific artist has been creating sculpture that makes invisible hazards, like pollution and the results of genetic engineering, visible. “Swimming in the Gene Pool!” the inaugural exhibition of Kidspace at MASS MoCA — includes Rupp’s sculptures of water creatures, viruses, bacteria, and her newest work, genetically engineered insects and “labels” for genetically altered food. With this sculpture, Rupp makes a powerful case that in the world around us things are not always what they seem.

Eleven of Rupp’s new sculptures depict what she calls genetically engineered insects—fantastic creatures that focus our attention on the unseen and unknown consequences of genetic engineering. Take a look at Switched, a bug fashioned of welded steel and delicate, earth-colored papers. The insects’ parts are in place, but Rupp has made an inconspicuous addition: in its thorax, between the head and abdomen, Rupp has inserted a light switch. This part inseparable from the insect is a three-dimensional metaphor for the process by which resistance in crops such as corn, potatoes, and soybeans “can be switched on (with) the application of different chemical sprays.” As crops are “turned on,” weeds and other natural pests are stamped out, but, as Rupp shows us, this seemingly advanced procedure may have unseen side effects. With the flip of a switch, man may have the power to alter an entire species. Rupp leaves it up to us to decide whether this species will be illuminated or eliminated once the switch has been flipped.

What is really in the food we buy at the supermarket and eat at home? Christy Rupp’s container and label series reveal what most food packaging conceals, alluding to what we can’t see and just maybe to what we aren’t supposed to know. Her store-bought plastic food containers say “Randomly Mutating Food,” “Anti-aging Vegetable” and “Weapons-Grade Seed Stock.” “Thank you for taking part in our experiment” says it most clearly.

Four close your eyes; you can see the evil menaces that cause your sore throat, your fever, or your flu symptoms! Once again Christy Rupp is working with the invisible — or in this case the microscopic — and making it visible. In Smallpox and E. Coli, two among many other colorful sculptures of viruses and bacteria, Rupp combines the imaginary and the scientific. Out from under the microscope, it is hard to believe that these beautiful pathogens can make us so sick!

Also swimming in the Kidspace pool are water creatures — sculptures of fish, turtles, and sea crabs. In Reef Tide #2, the turtles are stuffed with red Tide bottles and fight to survive the pollution they water really is. These sculptures make tangible the often unseen threats posed to marine life, reminding us once again that what we can’t see can cause the most harm to living creatures.

Kidspace at MASS MoCA is a child-centered art gallery where artistic excellence and educational experience are equally and emphatically presented. A collaboration between the Williams College Museum of Art, the Sterling & Francine Clark Art Institute, and MASS MoCA, the Kidspace curriculum is eager to expand the traditional art museum—art can play in the life of its community. Through programming that encourages students to view, analyze, and create art, this project aims to expand young people’s knowledge about artists and art-making, and to foster interpretation and communication skills. In its pilot year, all schoolchildren in North Adams, MA, will visit Kidspace, and their teachers will work closely with Kidspace staff. Kidspace is also open to the public during special hours. Call for times.

Kidspace is made possible by the generous support of the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute; the Williams College Museum of Art and MASS MoCA. Additional funding has been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts (a federal agency), the Charles family, and the Levering Charitable Trust in Trust for the benefit of Williams College. Additional support for scientific equipment (the use in the first exhibiton has been provided through the Howard Hughes Medical Institute grant to Williams College. Photo ©Deb Werenski
Thank you for taking part in our experiment.

Kidspace
at MASS MoCA
97 Marshall Street
North Adams, MA 01247
p: 413.664.4481 x8131
p: 413.662.2117 (museum info)
www.massmoca.org