

ANGIE BRAY

JANUARY 17 – MARCH 22, 2015

Otis Ben Maltz Gallery has a long history of presenting work of notable, provocative, and veteran Los Angeles based artists like Angie Bray who have been working and exhibiting here for decades yet steadily, and sometimes intentionally, fly just below the mainstream radar. *Shhhh* offers an illuminating overview of Bray's work with the presentation of four major installations and a series of autonomous works from the last 30 years.

Like many artists, Bray's work is derived from her observations of the natural world—mostly from her youth riding on horseback at a slow gait or gallop through the woods and fields listening and watching the landscape as she passed through it. For her, the empirical always comes before the verbal, the theoretical. She draws on her lived experience of perceiving nature as a mark-maker, a vital entity or energy that draws on a fugitive surface with sunlight, shadow, wind, earth, and gravity. "It is all the universe doing its stuff, and we are the stuff it is being done to," writes author Julian Barnes in *Levels of Life* (p. 127, Knopf, 2013). While Bray rejects the second part of Barnes sentiment, she does tap into the "universe doing its stuff," and partners with these elemental actions to make three-dimensional drawings with breath, light, motion, gravity, and sound.

Through the subtlety of her collaboration with elemental materials and the title of the show, Bray is telling us to "Shhhh," to quiet down; to look, listen, and see. Take a breath and let the aesthetic situations she has created be a catalyst for self-discovery. "I don't believe in meaning," writes composer Kubilay Üner, a friend of Bray's. "There is only process and experience. Meaning is there, but it's not the composer who puts it in the music. It's the listener [or visitor in Bray's case]. I do, however, believe in manipulation."

As the master manipulator and collaborator, Bray sets the stage for her installations and independent objects to take advantage of forces like gravity, air currents, light, shadow, and sound to activate the static materials and complete the work, gesture, or experience for her. Her 'literal' media arsenal includes twigs, leaves, smoke, coal, ink, quail eggs, leaves, and graphite. She often uses fragmentation and repetition in her work like the multiple panels from *Glimpse* (2000/2015), the segments of the photograph *Looking Out.....going fast* (1997), and the five units of *Smoke Drawing* (1994). Bray never reveals the entire picture, the blank spaces provide pause and reflect how we see, never the whole thing all at once.

The bedrock of Bray's art making is a combo of relentless curiosity, keen observation, and thoughtful action rooted in play. She never starts with an idea; she begins with materials and experimentation. In writing about the pioneering balloonist Pilâtre de Rozier who attempted to combine fire and hydrogen on a day with favorable winds, Barnes muses, "You put together two things that have not been put together before; and sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't," (*Levels of Life*, p. 33). Fortunately, Bray's creative experiments have not resulted in deathly explosions like poor Monsieur de Rozier.

As Bray says, "I play. I make the stuff. I look at it. I look at it again. I wait awhile and look at it again. If I continue to want to look at it, I keep it. Only later, sometimes much later, there may be a Bingo—'that's what I'm dealing with!—a realization after the fact, after the work has been completed." Her persistence, playfulness, and patience with her materials, give rise to her subtle, thoughtful and challenging work that reveals how she, as an artist in this time and place, sees the world.

—Meg Linton, Curator of the Exhibition
Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design