

The Boston Globe

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20, 2016

GALLERIES | CATE MCQUAID

ART
SERIOUS
SUBJECT MATTER

Exhibitions at area galleries feature art tied to water scarcity

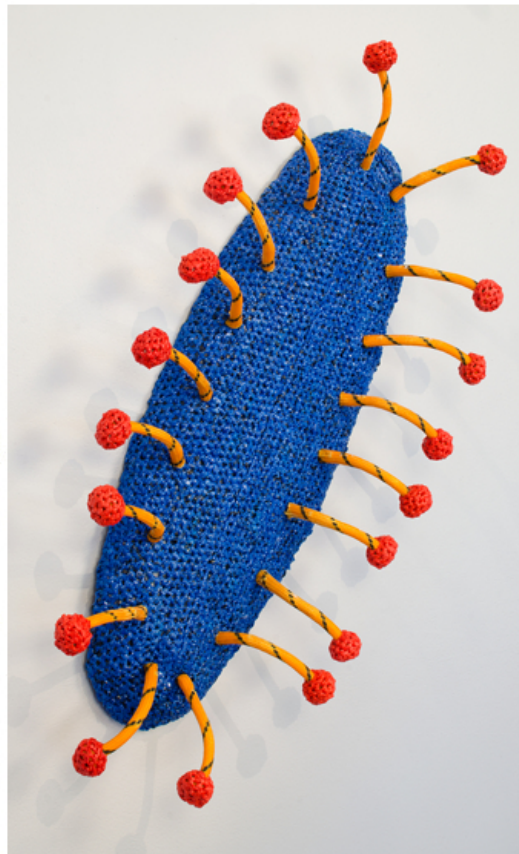


Dry humor

Nearly a fifth of the world's population lives with water scarcity, and climate change is exacerbating the problem. Two artists at Boston Sculptors Gallery tackle the issue with humor, Jessica Straus sardonically, and Michelle Lougee sweetly.

Straus builds creaky metal containers and wraps them in bright signage denoting non-potable water. You can't read the signs; she chops and layers them into abstraction, but the message of the conical "Oiler," and of "Non Potable," which looks like a gas can, cannot be missed. How do fossil fuels impact water supplies? And then: Drink, anyone?

In a second body of work, Straus morphs globes into blimps and balloons. "Churn #2" looks like a water balloon drooping and swollen below a hand crank, and "Blimp #1" turns the earth into a bloated dirigible, and we all know what happened to the Hindenburg.



Lougee crochets plastic bags into biomorphic sculptures, letting her commonplace, unrecyclable material do the talking. The installation "Ubiquitous," a constellation of wall sculptures representing micro-organisms in a single water droplet, looks like it could decorate a child's bedroom: bold colors, goofy forms, knobby textures. Resin makes them shiny.

The bright blue "Mover" has orange tentacles tipped in red. "Large Red and Orange" is red with rings of turquoise surrounding jutting orange sphincters. Sphincters aside, these funky, endearing works — in "Ubiquitous" and elsewhere — feel approachable; each piece might be a character in an animated cartoon.

We almost forget they're all crafted with throwaway plastics — handy for us; poison to the environment. But the material is ever-present and insidious. Both shows insist: Wake up. Preserve the water. Steward the planet.