

CARIBIANA: TROPICAL SIGHTS AND COLORS BY SANDRA GOLBERT

The Hess Gallery at Pine Manor College
400 Heath Street
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

Through August 1

INVISIBLE CURRENTS OF AIR CREATED BY VISITORS ENTERING THE HESS GALLERY ARE REVEALED AS SANDRA GOLBERT'S "SUN ROOM" INSTALLATION RIPPLES A WELCOME. SUSPENDED JUST BEYOND THE ENTRY GATE, THIS CURTAIN OF HAND-PAINTED SILK RIBBONS LIGHTS UP THE SPACE WITH A GRADIENT OF SUNSET HUES, CONFRONTING EVERY ENTRANT WITH SUBTLE MOVEMENT.

"Reef," a similarly constructed piece of suspended fabric elements, is the keystone of the fiber arts show "Caribiana: Tropical Sights and Colors by Sandra Golbert" at the Hess Gallery, located in Pine Manor College's Annenberg Library. A cascade of hand-painted silk crepe de chine and organza slowly turning in the library's atrium, "Reef" has only been on display once before, in a church. Its indigo-to-turquoise hues conjure at once the celestial and the nautical realms. Golbert envisioned each component as a floating painting, working with French cold-water dyes and salt to achieve brilliantly speckled, cooling washes of color.

The sea resonates in Golbert's work as a lifelong muse. In a series of enviable life-stops that read a bit like a romance novel, Golbert's past mailing addresses include her native Puerto Rico, Curacao, Mexico, New York, and now a studio on Massachusetts' North Shore.

The seascape's influence is evident in works like "Shipwreck," a diaphanous blob of studio detritus ranging from burnt polymer clay to cast paper and whorls of nylon thread, preserved behind

acrylic panel. Although it looks very spontaneous, like a proudly displayed low-tide discovery, Golbert insists the work was actually "very architected."

Most of the work reflects this tendency toward careful construction, not surprising since Golbert began her career in costume and dress design. Getting her start sewing dolls' clothing and doing detailed beadwork as a child, by high school she had moved on to design colorful Carnival costumes and fine debutante and bridal dresses. At the tender age of 21, Golbert's designs were even featured in Vogue Magazine.



Barnacles, hand-embroidered silk in barnacle-shaped cones, 18 "x 6"x 2".

"It was all downhill from there" she quips.

After moving to Mexico, Golbert had to table her fashion design ambitions due to work restrictions on alien residents. From designing for the body, she deftly moved to designing for the wall, a realm in which "artists could take more license." Eventually she moved to Curaçao where she had her first solo show at the Curaçao Museum in 1974.

Costume couture peeks through in pieces like "Piruli," which is tucked in the gallery's back corner. Coils of luminous silk bound with thread in pastel hues of teal, mauve and sunset pink tumble softly like the mane of an imaginary horse. Golbert's machine-pleated work, "Oleaje," is truly pleasing to view at eye level, appearing to sprout organically from the gallery's neutral linen walls.

In this exhibit, visitors can get a taste of Golbert's work from the micro to the macro, although pieces like "Reef" tease as models for something even bigger. Modestly sized pieces like mixed-media baskets and the sweetly representational "Barnacles" show off Golbert's fine detail work and



Reef, hand-dyed silk, approximately 13'.

beading skills. Other pieces read more as charming material studies, particularly a series of small shadow boxes arranged on the wall like an inspirational pinboard (the new social media craze Pinterest comes to mind). "Fruit Packet" contains a grid of handmade paper bundles bound with thread; "Color Poles" is a color study using rods wrapped in luminous cotton perle yarn.

"I like to experiment ... I am always experimenting," Golbert said. Although she considers herself to be a craftsperson, she insists that the artist comes first. "Fiber artists have worked so hard to be considered artists," she stresses, "not just artsy-crafty people."