

MARKS THE

SPOT

WORDS BY ASHLEY BREEDING
PHOTOGRAPHS BY LANCE GERBER

A GROUP OF FIBER
ARTISTS EXPLORE
THE CONCEPT OF
"SHELTER" WITH A
COLLABORATIVE
MULTIMEDIA ART
INSTALLATION DURING
THE BIENNIAL ART
EXHIBITION, DESERT X.

A hard stone's throw from Makerville Studio, artist Lydia Tjioe Hall balances on her toes beside a dirt trail, holding a copper-mesh oculus to the sky through a few twisted tree branches. Ten acres of this serene wilderness in the Santa Rosa Mountains belong to Makerville's founders. The rest is national park land – a landscape of conifers and chaparral, and the wildlife that roams among them. For a few breaths, the air is still. The silence is interrupted by a piercing whistle as the wind tousles Hall's dark, wavy hair. She rests on her soles and turns around.

"I have a couple ideas for my piece," says Hall, one of 16 women artists and one man contributing to the "Looming Shelter" art installation at Makerville, a Desert X Parallel Project that will be open Feb. 9 to April 21. (For those unfamiliar, Desert X is a biennial contemporary art exhibition that invites artists from around the world to create work focusing on and interacting with the desert environment; its Parallel Projects feature similar site-specific works from local nonprofits, that are free and open to the public.)

Hall's installation will be part of the outdoor Looming Shelter exhibit, but not attached to the main piece. One idea is to suspend a large hoop-and-cloth piece from four poles rooted in the dirt, in which viewers could experience sound and movement while gazing into the sky through the hoop, as the attached fabric – a tube of sorts – gently sways or whips to the tune of the wind. Another idea is to hang a smaller sculptural piece from a tree, made of copper mesh as a "window to the sky." She likes the way copper patinas

over time, revealing a rusty warmth from the desert elements as opposed to the green color you'd see in a coastal environment.

"I'm drawn to the space where the land meets the sky," Hall says. "I'm intrigued by the endless feeling here and how it puts you in a contemplative state. I want to invite people to experience it the way I do."

But it's a harsh, unforgiving environment. She's here to play with the aspects of the wind and sand and sky – so she can build something beautiful that will survive them.

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

A collaboration between the Palm Springs Center for Creativity – a nonprofit established by Makerville's four founders – and Textile Arts L.A., Looming Shelter is a "fiber-centric exhibit that plays with questions of shelter, inclusion and retreat, as well as exposure, scarcity and consequence," says co-founder Debra Hovel.

The concept was conceived during a charrette that included a network of fiber artists, mostly from Southern

Annette Heully begins work on her piece of Looming Shelter at Makerville.





The wooden scaffolding symbolizes the larger defining community while allowing space for individual artists to perform their own commentary.

California, and one from Australia. “We came up with this idea of looming together various works – made from macramé, found objects, discarded textile remnants, whatever – into one large structure,” Hovel says.

“The artists will respond to the monumental framework (45 feet long, 15 feet high, and 10 feet wide) that provides structure but not content or context, and each artist will react in a way that reflects upon, challenges and embraces what it means to seek shelter, how shelter is created, what is necessary, and what can be let go,” she explains. Each artist will create their piece independently, and then “sew” it onto the larger work.

The largest piece, the wooden scaffolding erected by Makerville’s generous group of volunteers, symbolizes the larger defining community, while allowing space for individual artists to perform private gestures and commentary.

“Visitors will be invited to walk through and around the structure, experiencing its liminal nature, while 3-foot benches set into the scaffolding’s base will offer a perch from which to observe and ponder,” Hovel says. Sunshine filtering through the gaps between the fibers will create a dappled light effect.

In addition to Hall’s standalone piece, smaller-scale shelters constructed from debris will dot the landscape and offer different interpretations on the idea of shelter. Inside the Great Room of Makerville lodge, another extension of the exhibit will feature elegant, large-scale hanging origami folded from industrial synthetic paper and other industrial materials, as well as another sculptural work created with paper books.

Nestled off Highway 74, a far climb by car along the winding mountain road, Makerville is one of the more distant Desert X exhibits. Most are in or near the Coachella Valley. When the festival was born in 2017, Hovel told its founders, “We want to be a part of this.

“But they told us we were too far up the hill,” she says. So Makerville pulled together its own exhibit that year called Art Marks the Spot, a compilation of diverse, unrestricted works. This year they’re thrilled to be part of the real thing: “We hope we’ve made something

monumental enough to entice the public to make the drive,” Hovel says.

DREAM WEAVERS

From ceramicists and basket-weavers to metalsmiths and sculptors, Looming Shelter’s artists will come together to feature a patchwork of woven, knotted, loomed and linked pieces that will canopy the shelter frame. But before that, they’ll come up with a concept and spend months creating it in their individual work spaces. For many, it’s their first time working on a project of this scale – and that takes time.

Artist Carrie Burckle, who teaches fiber arts at Cal State Long Beach and is a co-founder of Textile Arts L.A., says she started out as a weaver and dyer, mostly creating items like wall hangings on the loom. She grew up in the ’70s when macramé was all the rage. “Eventually, my work evolved into something more sculptural,” she says.

For Looming Shelter, Burckle is sculpting “Hanging Cloud,” a voluminous sculpture made from white paper core that mimics the clouds and will hang away from the structure. She’ll use a knotless netting process that will cover several large wire structures.

“The desert floor sits open to a vast skyscape,” Burckle says. “My idea is to bring the sky into focus by giving attention to clouds.” She’s also paying homage to the rain gods, she adds. “Clouds bring rain – and we desperately need rain.”

Taylor Kibby started out as a professional pastry chef, only dabbling in ceramics for fun. Then she went back to school to earn her MFA and now works as an artist full-time in L.A. What she’s creating for Looming Shelter resembles chainmail or a loose-knit scarf. But it’s made of clay.

“It’s a tapestry of ceramic chains,” Kibby says. “I’m building the individual parts over time and will put them together at the end to form a larger piece.”

Working with a mix of porcelain and stoneware, Kibby shapes the wet clay into small rings and then attaches them to one another; the result is a fabric of sorts, tactile and kinetic. Then she fires them to Cone 6 and continues to build – and fire – until the tapestry of unglazed brown, white, and gray earthen rings is complete.

“ I LOVE THE IDEA OF PEOPLE TRAVELING FAR OUT OF THEIR WAY TO SEE TRANSITORY ART THAT IS MEANT TO MERGE AND DISSOLVE INTO THE ENVIRONMENT.”



Kibby says the installation will be pretty simple, using a metal chain to hang the work from the existing structures. “A couple points of support, some steel wire and nails should do it.”

For some artists, like Hall and Tyler Burton, initial concepts have changed course or evolved into new ideas entirely. Burton, a multimedia artist who resides in L.A. and Palm Springs, is known for bringing attention to timely issues through her artwork,

whether subtly or overtly.

“I use the power of art to draw attention and explore solutions to issues like water crises, global warming and plastics consumption,” says Burton, who works mostly with sculpture and photograph processes.

For this exhibit, she’s created a cyanotype print (where the process results in a cyan-blue image) “referencing the disappearance of the Salton Sea, and how little is being done

about it,” Burton says. “I would like there to be more awareness around the issues surrounding this.”

Desert X, she feels, is a great opportunity to share her work and an important message.

Carol Shaw-Sutton, a fiber-sculpture artist from Ojai, says she also shares a deep concern for the natural world and its people. “My work often consists of poetically narrative objects ... that use ancient and modern textile processes,”

IF YOU GO

Looming Shelter opens Feb. 9 with a party from noon to 3 p.m. Open hours are as follows:

February 10: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
 March 9 and 10: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
 March 23 and 24: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
 April 6 and 7: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
 April 20 and 21: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

For more information, visit makervillestudio.com.

she says. Hoping to transcend our usual concept of linear time through her work, she also aims to “embrace its boundaries.”

For four labor-intensive months, Sutton-Shaw has looped together locally gathered plant fibers to create a large fabric to secure to Looming Shelter.

“The idea came from my thoughts of immigration and boundaries,” she says. “I hope these forms will serve as shelter and comfort for migrating birds as they fly from north to south into Mexico and South America – and perhaps even on their return flights.

“I’m very intrigued with the idea of art in the desert that is not bound by gallery walls or institutions,” Sutton-Shaw continues. “I saw this as a chance to work with an inspired group of artists as well as be a part of the Coachella Valley’s formidable desert landscape. I love the idea of people traveling far out of their way to see transitory art that is meant to merge and dissolve into the environment.”

While each artist has reserved their space on the shelter or grounds upon which to build or hang their work, no one knows what the project in its completeness will look like until the last nail has been hammered and tie has been secured. For some, the mystery is an exciting aspect.

Adds Hall, “I love that they’ve brought together different artists to create something – and to see what comes of it.” 🌱



TOP: Artist Aneesa Shami works on her piece at Makerville; BOTTOM: Makerville founder Richard Hovel holds a small-scale model of the wooden scaffolding erected on his property for Looming Shelter.