

Conversations



Stefano Catalani



Gail Grinnell

Welcome to *Conversations*, a new feature in **BAM**'s newsletter where **BAM** curators speak with Northwest artists about their work, ideas and aspirations. In our inaugural issue, Stefano Catalani (curator) talks to Seattle artist Gail Grinnell about her new **BAM** installation, *Lightly Here*, the role of light, coffee stains and more.

Stefano: *Lightly Here* is an installation particularly made for **BAM**'s Forum space. How important is space and light for this particular piece?

Gail: *Lightly Here* is a large drawing made up of many small panels which can be configured in a site specific way. At **BAM**, the Forum space visually (and actually) telescopes toward the front window where

Lightly Here is installed. This makes the window appear smaller than it is, lending a lace-curtain intimacy to the twenty-foot span. The modernist architecture works to accentuate the domestic appearance of the piece that arises from my working process.

The light that pours into this west-facing window provides constantly shifting compositional focal points. The transparencies of the material deepen the environmental effects of the moment – time of day – strength and angle of the sun.

Stefano: You're using a multitude of materials for this installation, from polyester to coffee stains to sumi ink. Can you explain why you picked these particular materials and what they mean to you?

Gail: The materials I use evolve from my everyday life – present day and intergenerational memories/knowledge. I'm looking for transparent lightweight materials that can adapt to a variety of environments. They must look delicate, but be strong and not tear easily.

The polyester base is pattern-making material from the world of clothing construction. I've intermingled images from the body and the domestic arts – visually blending and confusing the sources by changes of scale and context (as in where it is installed).

I've never made a dress, but I've been enveloped in that artful, many-layered world of caretaking and making on a domestic scale. My mother was a dedicated seamstress and did her work in the dining room of the home where I grew up. Coffee/tea were and are omnipresent in daily life and key to the causal connections between people through time and readily available traditional dyes. Painting and staining with sumi ink and brushes is an act of immediacy that keeps my focus in the present moment.

A final note: The clothes on our back define us. It is often all we bring with us to a new situation... new country... new culture... new landscape....

Stefano: You mentioned once that you "like to work with limitations." Please explain.

Gail: Limitations are sometimes material properties – what different materials can do in varied environments. Limitations are also ones own physical, emotional and intellectual capabilities, as well as cultural background, blind luck and circumstances that one chooses and circumstances that one doesn't choose.

I'm interested in working with what is in front of me – in looking at my life circumstances and breaking down the elements that define these circumstances into movements and material choices in the studio – things I can't change and things I choose combine to form the limits of my working process at any particular time. The creative tension lies in the space between challenging these limits and using them as content. The final visual form comes out of this process.

Stefano: What are you hoping visitors take away from seeing your installation?

Gail: I hope that visitors have multiple impressions of the work depending on when and from what vantage point they see it, and that on closer examination they are surprised by the transformation of the ordinary materials and the simple techniques. I also hope that they will experience the light through the window in a memorable way as it illuminates the different layers of the work.

Listen to a podcast with Gail Grinnell and Stefano Catalani at www.bellevuearts.org.

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Left: **Fiddleback Maple with Coco Bolo Insert** by Jack Wayne, Bothell, WA
\$225 members/\$250 non-members

Right: **Nuffy Bowl** by Tom Philabaum, Tucson, AZ
\$126 members/\$140 non-members

FEATURED OBJECT Gail Grinnell: Lightly Here



Gail Grinnell, *Lightly Here* Photo: Samantha Ruesch

Currently on view in the Museum's Forum (where admission is FREE all year round) is the installation *Lightly Here* by Seattle-based artist Gail Grinnell. It continues Grinnell's evolving exploration of the relationship between the earthly reality of the body and the lightly tethered spirit. The work uses imagery and materials from the art of clothing construction in combination with the drawn line to create figures that suggest an entwined sense of gravity and buoyancy.

The title, *Lightly Here*, is quoted from the song lyrics to *Boogie Street* written by Leonard Cohen.

So come, my friends, be not afraid.
We are so lightly here.
It is in love that we are made;
In love we disappear.

Interested in the remainders of human activity, Grinnell has created an ethereal installation that tells stories of the pressures of everyday life. Combining the theatricality suggested by the fluffy, weightless transparency of spun polyester with traces of the life that inhabited it, Grinnell's work layers the present and past detritus of human life.

Special Members' Event!



**Wednesday, December 2
5:30 - 7:30 pm**

An exclusive evening for **BAM members** with champagne, desserts, festive music & **double discounts** in the **Museum Store!**