

Lyla Rye's thread sculptures spin out metaphors

By DEIRDRE HANNA

Sculptors traditionally use mass and volume to make aesthetic, philosophical and emotional statements. For the past two years, Toronto's Lyla Rye has experimented with the *absence* of volume and mass to create abstracted three-dimensional forms with a powerful dramatic and emotional impact.

Her delicate constructions fill galleries and industrial spaces with gossamer networks of tough nylon thread — the kind used to sew sails — that tackle improbable tasks. The threads of the untitled work she created for last month's show by the

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LYLA RYE: BETWEEN HERE AND THEN, on view at Glendon Gallery (Glendon College, 2275 Bayview) until October 29. 487-6721.

Nether Mind collective — which Rye co-founded in '91 — supported the weight of concrete-filled traffic safety cones.

"I can avoid ephemeral, wishy-washy assumptions when the piece has a job to do," Lyla says while standing in her *Between Here And Then* installation, currently on view at Glendon Gallery. "If the thread

has to support concrete blocks, that clarifies a lot of the decisions that have to be made.

"I studied architecture for two years, so I know something about physics and structural engineering, and I like the fact that my work has an engineering side to it.

"The thread pieces actually came out of some research I was doing into quantum physics — the fact that light can be both a wave and a particle — and my first thread pieces were white-on-white, so they were only visible at certain times of the day.

"But I quickly got into thread's associations with gendered labour. The process I use is like sewing," Rye demonstrates using her hands, "with the threads going up and down. Thread is associated with feminine tasks, so I like to have delicate threads doing a macho job."

Rye transforms the former reception room of the Glendon manor house into an ethereal, asymmetric chamber with a sloping "ceiling" constructed of a transparent parallel lattice of grey threads that go from the top of the north wall to about waist height on the south wall.

Taut strings

The strings are threaded through eye hooks screwed into the walls, and are kept taut by lucite blocks containing the salvaged thread from Rye's past four shows — including her master of fine art thesis exhibition for the San Francisco Art Institute and recent solo outings at Toronto's Koffler and Robert Birch galleries.

The upper half of the south wall contains a set of 100 drawings done on tracing paper as preparatory studies for the Glendon show. Two electric fans resting on the floor make the flimsy paper rustle.

"When I started work on this show, I had my working drawings pinned on my studio wall, with the win-

dows open for ventilation," Rye explains. "The wind came in and blew the papers around, and I liked the quality of the sound they made. Once I decided to use the studies in this way as part of the installation, I put off making a final decision on what exactly I was doing until I had enough drawings to fill the wall."

Prior to starting the thread pieces two years ago, Rye worked with clusters of large cubic polygons coated with visually dense black rubber. With the lovely and compelling *Between Here And Then*, Rye looks as if she's ready for another radical shift. It's very much a summary exhibition, marking the closure of a series that has helped Rye crystallize her aesthetic goals.

"The lucite blocks contain my past work, the sketches contain the future. I've got drawings in there of labyrinths and Persian screens. Architecture school was a really bad experience, and it took me a long time to get comfortable with incorporating architecture into my sculpture, which I've done with the thread pieces.

"I've gotten a little frustrated by not having anything except a bundle of thread when the show comes down. It's not a commercial concern — and it's great from a storage point of view — but it's simply a matter of not having time to live with the work. With the thread pieces, I never know if I'm working on a good piece until it's already in the public domain.

"I've just come back from San Francisco, where I spent five really long days installing a piece I've done with bungee cords in the Southern Exposure gallery. It was only up for one day before I had to come home. I won't see it again, except in photographs.

"I'll keep on making site-specific works, but I want to make art I can live with in my studio." ●