

MEDIA RELEASE

University Galleries of Illinois State University is pleased to present *Anna Von Mertens: Glass, Metal, Thread: Building Our Observable World* from January 17 through April 2, 2023. All events are free and open to the public.

Encompassing astronomy, history, materiality, attention, and labor, *Glass, Metal, Thread: Building Our Observable World* presents drawings and textiles made by artist [Anna Von Mertens](#) from 2015 through 2022. She writes, “I think objects can absorb time, absorb our physical presence. That is why I make detailed drawings; that is why I sew quilts by hand.” The artist’s close observation and meticulous making are evident in the three discreet (yet in dialogue) series on view: *Remnants*, *Measure*, and *Objects (100 Emojis)*.

This exhibition premieres Von Mertens’s *Remnants* drawings, for which she finds inspiration in the formation of precious metals through exploding stars. To acknowledge the chain of cosmic processes, the artist developed her own complex process. First, she gathered gold and silver necklaces and arranged them on light-sensitive paper in swirling forms that recall a nebula or supernova. Then, she exposed them to sunlight to complete the cyanotype process. The three-dimensional tangles of jewelry created both points of contact on the paper, and slippages into shadow, which she scanned and projected onto black paper. She then painstakingly drew the forms with metallic gold and silver pencils. Von Mertens writes, “A necklace might simply act as reminder of someone, the bestower of a gift. These elements are a connection to others. Here, in my drawings, they indicate the connection to all things. These elements came from cosmic events so far from our reality, so physically distant—and yet, here they are; here we are.”

The exhibition includes the entirety of works that comprise Von Mertens’s research on American astronomer Henrietta Leavitt (1868–1921). Leavitt was a Harvard “computer” who studied photographic glass plate negatives of the stars. Her observations and calculations of cycles of brightness in variable stars gave astronomers the first tool to measure the distance to faraway stars. Leavitt’s discovery led to those by other scientists who have become household names, including Edwin Hubble. Von Mertens celebrates Leavitt’s contributions as she makes graphite drawings of the original glass plates she studied, which the artist accessed through the Harvard College Observatory during the formation of her research-based exhibition at the Harvard Radcliffe Institute. Von Mertens also used software to determine the position of stars above Leavitt’s birthplace on the day she was born and above the location of her death on the day she died. She hand-stitched the arcing star trails for each date into large black textiles, which are installed with a distance between them to represent Leavitt’s lifespan.

Colored-pencil drawings from Von Mertens’s *Objects (100 Emojis)* series animate the symbols we view on our phones using patterns that reference traditional quilts. In giving a different kind of attentive awareness to these objects, Von Mertens brings the virtual world into contact with our physical world, a revealing and enriching act.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 3, 2023

Glass, Metal, Thread: Building Our Observable World is the center point of multiple educational programs. Anna Von Mertens will give a public artist lecture and meet with students. University Galleries' staff will lead art-making workshops for ISU students, families, K-12 students, and community members. University Galleries continues collaborating with the Children's Discovery Museum for Art Around You, a series of exhibition tours and workshops for children ages 7 through 10. Free virtual and in-person curator-led tours are available by appointment for the duration of the exhibition.

Anna Von Mertens: Glass, Metal, Thread: Building Our Observable World is organized by Kendra Paitz, University Galleries' director and chief curator. This exhibition and programming are supported by University Galleries' grants from the Illinois Arts Council Agency, Harold K. Sage Foundation, and the Illinois State University Foundation Fund.

Artist biography

Anna Von Mertens's work has been exhibited at Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University; Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College; Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland; and National Museum of Art, Architecture, and Design, Oslo, Norway, among others. Her work is included in the collections of Smithsonian American Art Museum's Renwick Gallery, Washington, D.C.; RISD Museum, Rhode Island School of Design; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley; Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York; and International Quilt Study Center and Museum, Lincoln, Nebraska, among others. Von Mertens has been awarded a Smithsonian Artist Research fellowship, United States Artists fellowship, and a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Biennial Award. She received her M.F.A. from California College of the Arts and her B.A. from Brown University. She is based in Peterborough, New Hampshire.

Events and programming

All events are free and open to the public.

- Saturday, January 28 at 1:00 p.m.
Tour and workshop: Art Around You. Co-presented with the Children's Discovery Museum.
Register at childrensdiscoverymuseum.net
- Tuesday, January 31 at 4:00 p.m.
Artist lecture by Anna Von Mertens
- Tuesday, January 31, from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m.
Artist reception with Anna Von Mertens
- Saturday, February 4 at 1:00 p.m.

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Tour and workshop: Art Around You. Co-presented with the Children's Discovery Museum.
Register at childrensdiscoverymuseum.net

- Saturday, February 25, from noon to 2:00 p.m.
All-ages artmaking workshop. Materials and instruction provided by University Galleries' staff.
- Saturday, March 25 at 1:00 p.m.
Tour and Workshop: Art Around You. Co-presented with the Children's Discovery Museum.
Register at childrensdiscoverymuseum.net
- Saturday, April 1, from noon to 2:00 p.m.
All-ages artmaking workshop. Materials and instruction provided by University Galleries' staff.
- Field trip program, curator-led tours, and workshops available by appointment throughout the exhibition. Reimbursements are available for K-12 schools or community organizations to offset the costs of transportation. Please contact University Galleries at gallery@ilstu.edu or (309) 438-5487 to schedule an appointment.

University Galleries

University Galleries, a unit in the Wonsook Kim College of Fine Arts, is located at 11 Uptown Circle, Suite 103, at the corner of Beaufort and Broadway streets. Parking is available in the Uptown Station parking deck located directly above University Galleries—the first hour is free, as well as any time after 5:01 p.m.

You can find [University Galleries](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#), and sign up to receive email updates through the [newsletter](#). Please contact gallery@illinoisstate.edu or call (309) 438-5487 if you need to arrange an accommodation to participate in any events related to these exhibitions.