

# 'Force of Nature' Alyson Shotz's show at Hamilton College raises the bar (Review)

By Katherine Rushworth | Contributing writer, Syracuse Post Standard,  
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Some exhibitions are very good and you leave with a feeling that the artist met your expectations and gave you something to think about. But there are those rare shows where the artist actually raises the bar and the work leaves you feeling as if you've been privy to something extraordinary.

That is what resulted from a visit to the Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College in Clinton to see the one-person show by the internationally acclaimed contemporary artist Alyson Shotz.

The show's title, "[Force of Nature](#)," speaks not only to Shotz's source of inspiration, but to the very disposition of the artist.

Shotz's work grabs you as soon as you approach the gallery. Suspended from the gallery's towering ceiling is an expansive and mesmerizing piece titled "Invariant Interval," which is made of stainless-steel wire, aluminum collars and glass beads.

This work is sculpture, installation and a drawing in space that plays with the conventions of how we define volume, fill space and experience the laws of gravity. The piece undergoes a subtle metamorphosis as you move around it; redefining itself as light changes and moves over it throughout the day.

Further into the gallery you'll encounter the magical "White Fold," a 50-foot volumetric wall work made entirely of pins and white thread. Shotz created the piece digitally and then projected the final composition onto the wall. Intersections of lines are represented by pins that are joined by threads.

Standing back, you see the piece as a softly undulating expression of line and organic form; but up close, the piece becomes three-dimensional, with shadows cast by the pins and threads creating a depth that fades into the wall.

Much of Shotz's work bears the influence of ambiguity, with nature an obvious influence. In the series of six-pigment prints titled "Topographic Iteration," she plays perception against reality, two dimensions against three dimensions and sculpture against photography.

Shotz begins by photographing an unfolded crumpled piece of paper. She then prints the photographed image on a fresh piece of paper of exactly the same dimensions and then crumples that piece. The final piece rises and falls against the wall like a topographic map; projecting from and recessing into the picture plane, making it difficult to determine what contours are printed and what are actual.

She plays with our expectations and perceptions again in the set of six silver gelatin prints titled "Fundamental Forces." The photos were created by projecting light through shards of glass. The results are whimsical, sometimes roiling patterns of black and white that could be abstracted patterns from nature - sand dunes, waves, or cloud formations.

In "Imaginary Sculptures," Shotz writes 20 different statements on 20 pieces of enameled steel describing a possible sculptural form - "made of wind," "seeps into a corner," many of which seem to be realized in a set of 14 unglazed porcelain forms titled "Recumbent Folds - #15-24 and #25-28" (2013).

In "Imaginary Sculptures," she activates the imagination, goading you to visualize in the mind's eye what type of actual forms these phrases might provoke. In the latter piece, Shotz engages the laws of physics and gravity and the randomness of chance by dropping porcelain cylinders from varying heights, in different thicknesses and in a variety of atmospheric conditions to determine their outcomes. Each is different - one looks as if it's been windswept, another collapses in upon itself, and another seems to seep into a back corner. Each carries its own quiet grace.

There's also a 27-minute video titled "The Bedroom, Time Lapse" that uses a recreation of a Van Gogh painting, "The Bedroom" (1889), as a control to explore the passing of time, the effects of light and the influence of the elements upon our lives.

And there's an enormous (17 feet 7 1/4 inches by 16 feet 9 3/4 inches) latex print on vinyl titled "Emergent Structure" that serves as a one-stop summary of Shotz's work, materials, sources of inspiration and ideas.

This show is an example of someone working at a consistently high level, where medium and message are perfectly matched and executed with unwavering technical perfection and aesthetic sensitivity.

Alyson Shotz is an artist who doesn't disappoint, doesn't let down and will leave you thinking about her work and the ideas behind it for a very long time.

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