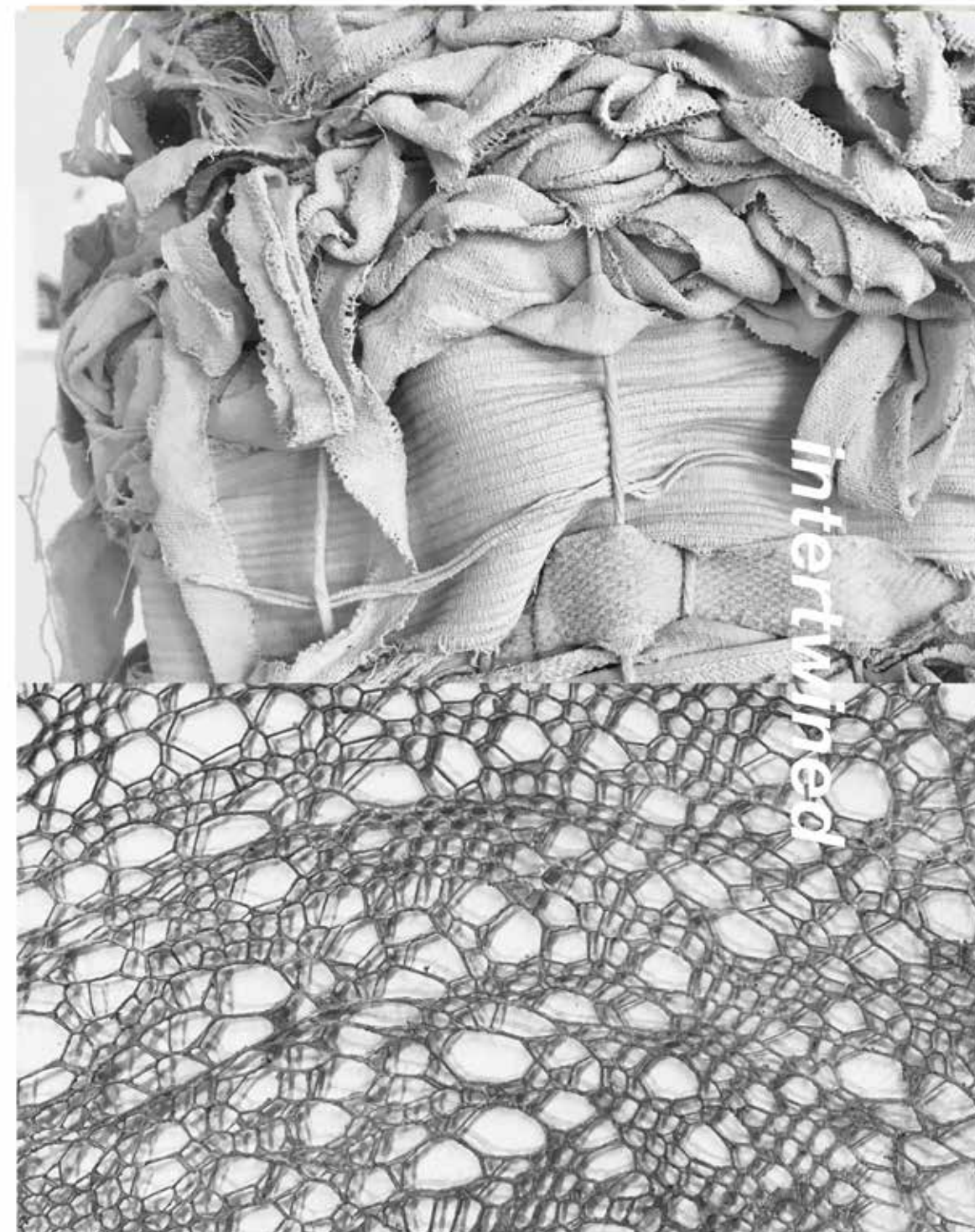


*Intertwined: fiber, process, dialog*



## **HEIDI MARIE FAESSEL**



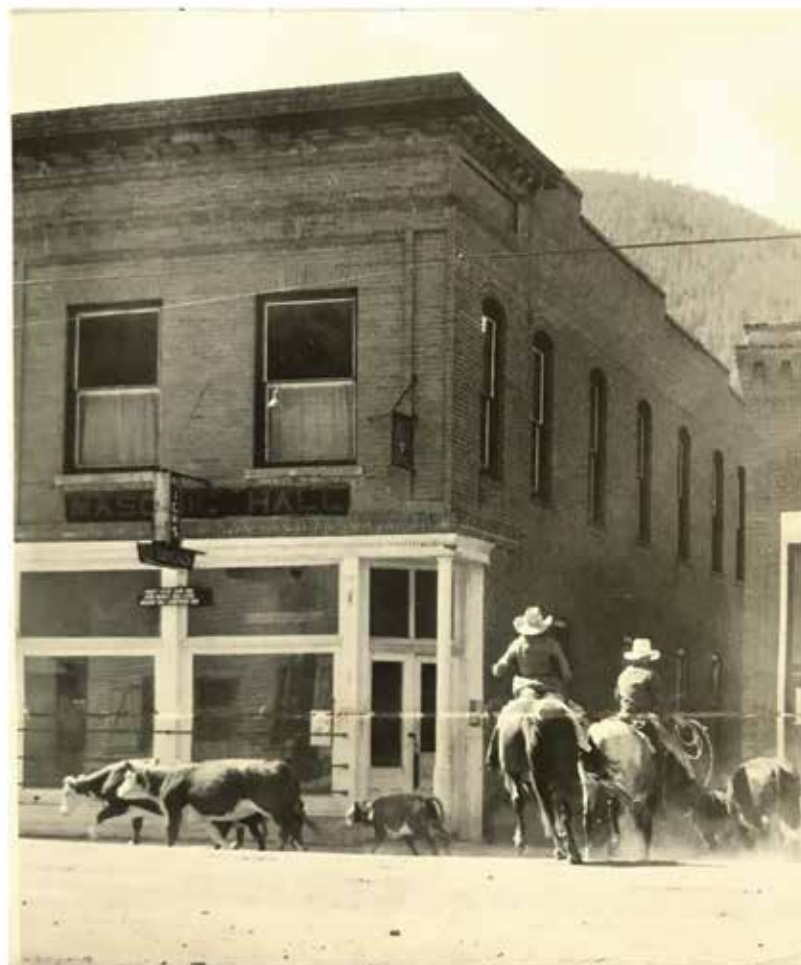
*I love the idea of taking something familiar and known, and transforming it into something new or unfamiliar.*

*This transformation of material excites me and fuels my creative process*

## **JENNIFER REIFSNEIDER**



*In the gap between knowledge and experience, I drop the seeds of my self. They grow into a ball of gnarled roots over which I trip and skin my knees.*



***REFUGE gallery***

Hewitt Building

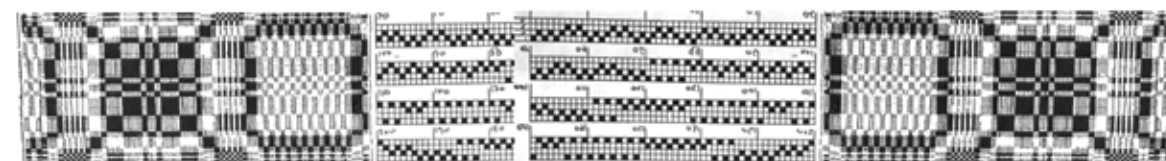
Cattle drive through Basin 1970's

***REFUGE***  
*gallery*

Basin, MT

May 7 - June 25

2022



*"We are two-handed creatures, and the close connections between hands, heart, and mind are a part of our being. The age of machinery greatly impoverished our lives through depriving our hands of so much of the work that for time immemorial have been their function. The great modern revival of handicraft is a wholesome thing, making for peace, comfort, and pleasant living... Even if nobody ever made a yard of hand woven fabric for sale." - The Shuttle Craft Guild Bulletin, May 1933, Mary Meigs Atwater*

**Intertwined: fiber, process, dialog**  
**In Context with a Short History of Fiber Arts in Basin and the Montana Artists Refuge**  
**by Jenny Bevill**

*Intertwined: fiber, process, dialog*, brings the work of Jennifer Reifsneider and Heidi Marie Faessel together in a show rich with experimentation, materiality, and a joyful disregard of the original purpose of things like discarded clothing, rope, baling wire, window blinds, stuffing, used soaker hose, or dried peas. The two mixed media artists have convened a group of sculptures that reimagine common items into curiosities that question how we live our lives, regard our bodies, interact, and move through the world.

Faessel, a former textile designer, has unleashed a ravenous curiosity about the tactile qualities of materials. Releasing herself from the confines of pattern, she clumps, piles, stacks, and loosely weaves to create new forms that are extremely confident while remaining mysterious. She experiments, with an intentional relaxing of rules, with binding, weaving, dipping, shredding, and recombining recycled and found materials in ways that encourage playful engagement. We are always just on the verge of figuring out what these forms are: some are funny, some whimsical, some a little bit anxiety-provoking. But Faessel is extremely comfortable in the zone of uncertainty and she keeps the work solidly in this liminal space, giving nothing away in title or representation. She trusts us to make our own meaning, and this only makes us more curious.

"I'm inspired by the fact that everything in our physical world is made up of repeating forms. Cells, atoms, subatomic particles and fractals are the building blocks of life. It's astounding to me that they collaborate in such a truly magical way, ultimately materializing as our bodies, our physical surroundings, and even our universe as a whole." - HF

If Faessel sculpts out of an earthy, organic curiosity, asking questions like: will this fit? or how tall can I make it before it falls over? Reifsneider is more contemplative and cerebral. She has a plan, even if she's going to deviate from it. She does in fact correctly crochet a pattern only to partially unravel it or incorporate holes in it.

"You can construct holes. You don't have to cut them. There's absolutely no reason for me to do violence to this piece. If I want a hole, I can build it...This was a little revelation...there were a couple of years there where I realized I have a lot of anger, but I don't need to be angry with my artwork." - JR

Reifsneider might be trying to understand the world precisely so that she can reshape and redefine it. She measures, but never with traditional tools. She uses her body to relate to the material world, going beyond simple sensory experience into the realm of interpretation and reporting. She measures distance, for example, by the reach of her arms, the circumference of her wrist, and time in the sound of dried peas being crunched underfoot on a wood floor.

"Patterns or systems more generally provide structure, security, stability, but when pursued can reveal a contradiction – chaos, decay, transformation, things greater and more marvelous than expected or assumed... through making I can feel wonder, brush up against contradictions, ruptures, absurdity. That sounds lofty and esoteric, but it's not meant to be. It's everyday present-ness, and part of the wonder of it is that it's right here, but so easily obscured." - JR

Together, the work of these two artists sparks a dialogue around materiality, measurement, and making (or unmaking) by hand. We look down at Reifsneider's Monument thinking, where is the monument, wait a minute, what is a monument? as she redefines what it means to memorialize, even going so far as to use bronze to coat a doily of crocheted lace. She inspires us to question the way we build forms of tribute.

By elevating the handmade, and prioritizing women's bodies, experiences, and thought processes as the standard measurements, we are invited to meld art and craft into a non-binary conversation questioning all the hierarchies. Both artists dialogue with the underlying organization of our world - the natural order as well as the mathematical, and the patriarchal. By choosing to accumulate stitches, tie knots, weave in non-traditional ways, or hand dip fibers into paint, and by elevating the discarded, shredded, or found, these artists re-assert the importance of our sense of touch, of time as an element of art, and most significantly, the joy of being a maker.

"Repetition in each work is a way to concentrate, be attentive, be quiet, be still, say a prayer. There's also a cycle of making, unmaking, and remaking individual works, and that's not necessarily visible in the final presentation. Going through that process requires both commitment and detachment. That balancing act is, in a word, resilience." - JR

Handcraft and the collaboration of women have been at the core of creative life in Basin, Montana since Mary Meigs Atwater established the Shuttle Craft Guild there in 1922.

"It was in Basin in 1916 that I began my study of hand weaving, not only to find an outlet for my own artistic impulses, but also to provide social service...For some time I had wanted to start something for the women of the community – a potential business.... An active and intelligent woman can't keep busy enough for comfort keeping house in a three-room shack. Renewed mining activity had brought a number of such women into Basin." - MMA

Atwater ran the Shuttle Craft Guild in Basin from 1924 to 1946. At the same time she was studying and collecting patterns for what is still considered a seminal work, *The Shuttle Craft Book of American Hand Weaving*. She also created and taught a correspondence course in hand weaving through the University of Washington, all before joining the army in 1918. At Camp Lewis in Washington she developed occupational therapy techniques to help World War 1 soldiers with PTSD. She used the connective essence of weaving fibers to heal.

Atwater had traveled the world - Chicago, Paris, Mexico, Bolivia, Guatemala, Boston - as a young art student, and later as the wife of a mining engineer, with a toddler in tow. After her husband's death, when it was her turn to choose where she lived, she returned to Montana and bought a ranch called Willow Run where she and her son raised beaver and she ran the guild.

"It seemed to me that for all those hours I was absolutely and perfectly happy. Old Thunderbolt Mountain with a little wreath of snow about his bald crown and the cloud shadows passing over his mild slopes and piny folds. The shout of the stream in flood. The smell of pine and sage and wet willow in that indescribable blend that is the breath of the mountains. Thunder and lightning for a while and a few splashes of rain. The many little wildflowers. The gophers and grasshoppers and frogs. And far up on Pole Mountain two pale beasts I chose to think were deer." - MMA, summer journal 1928

In the mid-1970's a group of young, queer, female artists and musicians including Nan Parsons, Joy Lewis, Nancy Owens, and M.J. Williams and others were also drawn to Basin as an affordable place to live and work in a beautiful, natural setting. This was not a smooth transition. In their exuberance to promote art and "culture" in rural Montana they failed to consider a couple of things. They were outsiders in terms of sexual preference, and newcomers to a town where families going back three or four generations had their own long-established sense of community and culture. The group experienced resistance to their bold ideas of art and community but despite the pushback they decided to stand their ground. "We didn't even think of leaving." - NP They settled in to quietly promote their ideas by founding the Montana Artist Refuge which hosted over 300 artists from across the state, and around the world, to live and create in Basin for a month or a summer between 1993-2011. The original mission statement was written around a kitchen table, kept on an altar, and attended to for 18 years.

"Everybody pitched in ten bucks or twenty bucks or something for postage and we sent out to all the arts papers in the different states like the Montana Arts Council puts out and we advertised that we had a place for artists to come. Well, they started coming. They trickled in. People, artists came from everywhere... from Poland, South Africa, Ireland, England, China, and New York." - NP

We can't read that original mission statement because when the refuge officially disbanded in 2011 it was placed in a coffin, paraded through town, and incinerated.

"We carried the coffin and made a little parade and Willy played her horn down the street, and Lorna, who had kept that on her altar the whole time was there with it. She read it and then we put it in the flames." - NP

After initially turning inward towards their own community, the group gradually began to build relationships with local residents. Many visiting artists engaged with local people. Children were fascinated. How could they ignore a six foot tall dancer with purple hair or the guy who played drums on cardboard boxes at the Boulder Library? Soon the grownups began to show up at Refuge events. In 2004 multi-disciplinary artist Bently Spang (Northern Cheyenne) convened Irish dancers, Indian dancers, belly dancers, break dancers and ballerinas for a work-in-progress, DJ'ed by Bert Benally (Navajo), which would become his famous Tekcno Powwow. An all time favorite event, the yearly Jazz Brunch fundraiser, drew folks from Butte, Helena, and Bozeman as well Basin and Boulder.

Though the Montana Artist Refuge disbanded as an official non-profit in 2011, the spirit of the refuge would not die. Over the next several years former residents returned, friends and families visited, the buildings were maintained and rented to cyclists, hikers and the general public. In the summer of 2021, the large room of the Hewitt bank building opening onto Main Street, that had been functioning as a studio/performance/workspace, was offered to Jennifer Thompson, a Helena-based installation artist working with primarily natural and found materials. She exhibited her work, *Name What Continues*.

In the spring of 2022 the gallery received a fresh coat of paint on the walls and retained the gorgeous royal blue ceiling. The works in *Intertwined: fiber, process, dialog* carry forward the history of creative collaboration in Basin, and create a conceptually ripe meeting ground for material dialogue. Over the years, not all of the collaborations in Basin have been driven by, and reflective of, the female experience, but most have. Mary Meigs Atwater wanted to give women a way to express themselves and the agency to earn money.

The experimental nature of the original Montana Artist Refuge provided artists with time and space to create and required no specific output of work from the visiting artists. The artists could (and did) rest, make work, play music, throw parties, put on shows, gather sticks, hang things from trees, or even spend their time making friends with the town dog.

One artist-in-resident "was very quiet. She didn't interact with people that much. She just walked in the woods. with this big black Newfoundland dog that lived across the street and she collected sticks. And she came back, she said, because of Albert, the dog." - NP

The Montana Artist Refuge founders legitimized all of this as essential parts of living a creative life. It was the essence of the place and of the program that artists should be self-directed in their making and in exhibiting. Although the Refuge program has not officially been restarted, this summer all five live/work residencies are full again and the gallery space is being kept open for July and August to see what happens. Someone might want to mount an exhibition, or throw a party, or play music.

The Refuge program was always a "seat of the pants operation," according to Parsons, and a true collaboration. Reifsneider and Faessel carry these values forward and welcome being responsive to and influenced by one another. Although they live in Missoula and Whitefish respectively, each responded to reciprocal studio visits with resonant new work that springs from this overlap and interplay.

Collaboration, co-influencing, communal creativity, and making by hand are as central to Faessel and Reifsneider as it was to Mary Atwater in the days when there was no other option.

"I think a conversation happens between the material being worked upon and the body and the mind; they transform together. Making is a way of thinking, one way to experience how the world is many parts moving together as one. "When making, I am aware that I am a part. I am not outside the system." - JR

Collaboration can look a lot of different ways. Today Zoom make-alongs, YouTube tutorials, and online communities allow us to be in relationship to others without being in the same physical space. Virtual connections have been a lifeline during the pandemic and for those who already lived in remote places. But nothing can replace working together in the same physical space, living next door, visiting every day, sharing meals, experiencing the same weather, or overcoming adversity as neighbors

The impulse that women and artists throughout history have had to work together, or side by side, using their hands to solve problems, heal, express themselves, and enjoy the felt sense of materials still exists today, perhaps even more strongly than ever. This exhibition and the history of creative collaboration in Basin, Montana, point to a possible way of restructuring faulty systems, repairing relations, and rebuilding community on a local, national, and even global scale.







Contingency  
(Set Study)  
Jennifer Reifsneider

Thread, copper, patina,  
2022



True Until False

Jennifer Reifsneider

Rope, 2022



artists statement

**JENNIFER REIFSNEIDER**

Almost all of everything can be explained with chemistry and physics. For the bit left over, we write poetry and make art. My art is looking for the space between measurements and metaphors.

—Most of my work from the last eight or ten years takes the form of diagrammatic sculptures. I often begin by thinking of my flesh-and-bone body like a planet in space. I map my latitudes, perimeters, rotations, and orbits. With repetitive processes, I seek an elusive moment when what is exact in the mind becomes fluid in the hand, a place where “thoughts untie themselves,” as Matthieu Ricard says.

Fiber materials are well suited to this effort. From plain weave to Gordian knot, fiber is quiet and confounding, invisible and ubiquitous, a membranous skin and a taut line. A single stitch has the power to turn two into one. A crochet hook — once bone — is immanent with the infinite, irrational, sublime, fractal universe.

—I don't believe in transcendence. I'm a systems thinker looking for recursive paths through fluid boundaries. My research meanders through disciplines, including cognitive psychology, mathematics, and philosophy.





Untitled (Be Here Now) Heidi Marie Faessel

Discarded t-shirts, house paint, thread, 2019

## *artist's statement*

# **HEIDI MARIE FAESSEL**

Currently, my artistic practice focuses on manipulating both salvaged materials, and common materials in order to discover new sculptural forms. These forms are born through the process of creative investigation. Experimentation with materials, problem solving, analysis and editing, constitutes this inquiry. I'm searching for an imaginative outcome; one that embodies my creative vision and artistic intent.



Working with salvaged materials intrigues me because by using them, I am giving new life to something that would be discarded, as well as extending its life into another form. Equally, I find common, everyday materials compelling. I love the idea of taking something familiar and known and transforming it into something new or unfamiliar. This transformation of materials excites me and fuels my creative process.

The art works included in this exhibit are made primarily from discarded t-shirts, pantyhose, paper pulp (made from my torn-up journals), discarded textiles, liquid rubber, baling wire, and graphite. My process begins with experimentation with the materials. I draw from a list of actions, and then see where each one leads. These actions include ripping, dipping, mixing, stretching, stuffing, cutting, weaving, winding, rolling, binding, wrapping, fusing, bending, tying, knotting, stitching, and sewing. I challenge myself to think outside the box and move past the obvious solution with the hope of arriving at a new outcome.

Themes of impermanence, interconnection, and transformation underscore my work. I'm interested in the human experience and through my work, I'm searching for ways to make sense of life. I look to philosophy, psychology, ancient wisdom, and science to help me understand life through a broader lens.

Ultimately, I am driven by the spirit of discovery, and find deep satisfaction in the creative process. For me, it exemplifies one of the mysteries of being human: the ability to create something from nothing.



Untitled (Pillar)

Heidi Marie Faessel

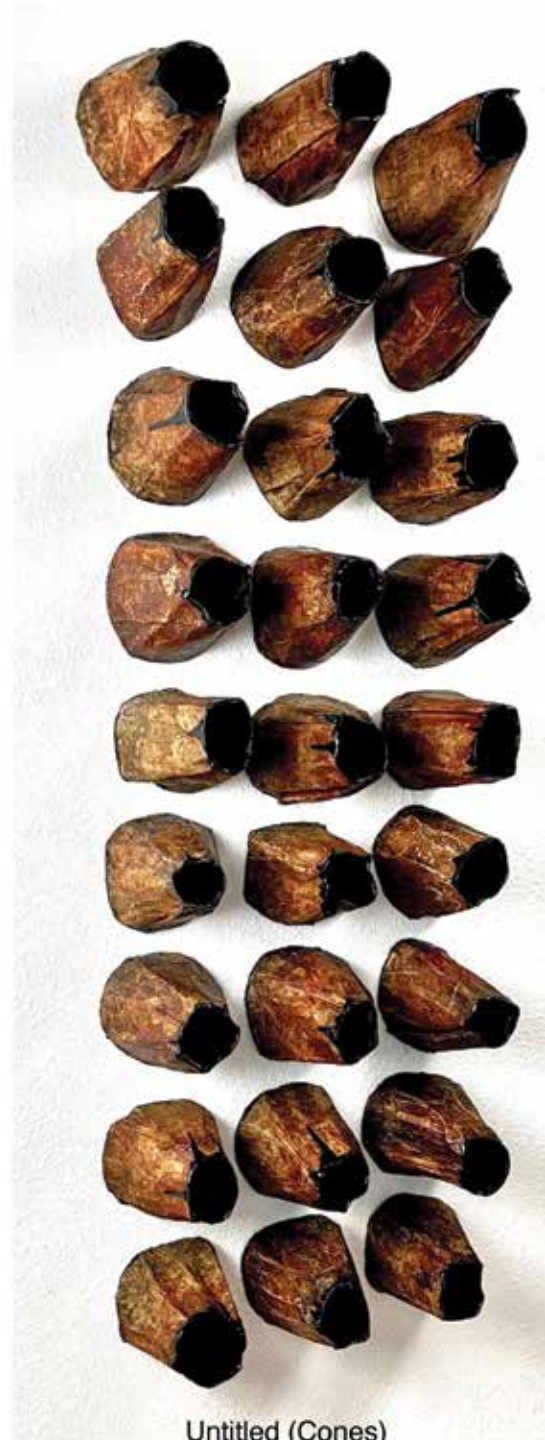
discarded household textile, house paint, cotton twine.



Monument (Latitudes Study)

Jennifer Reifsneider

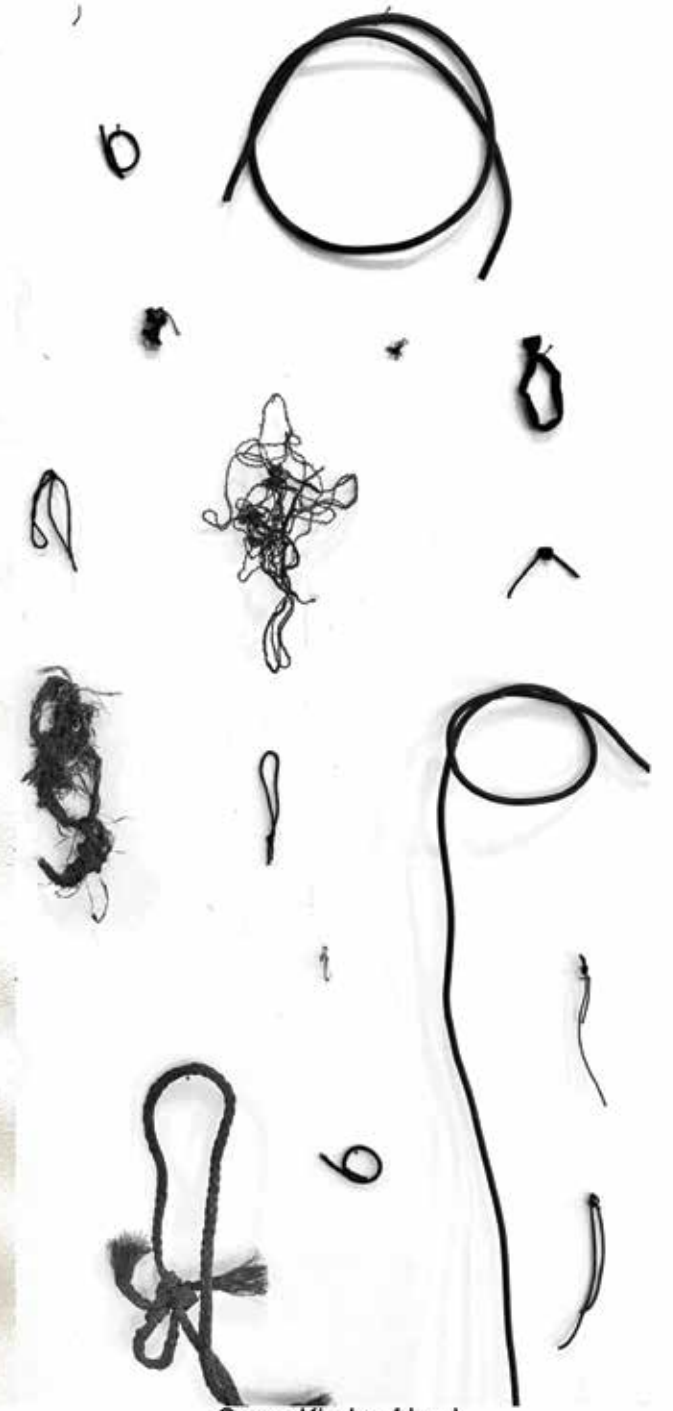
Cotton, bronze 2022



Untitled (Cones)

Heidi Marie Faessel

Food packaging, paper, paint, rubber, 2022



Some Kinds of Luck

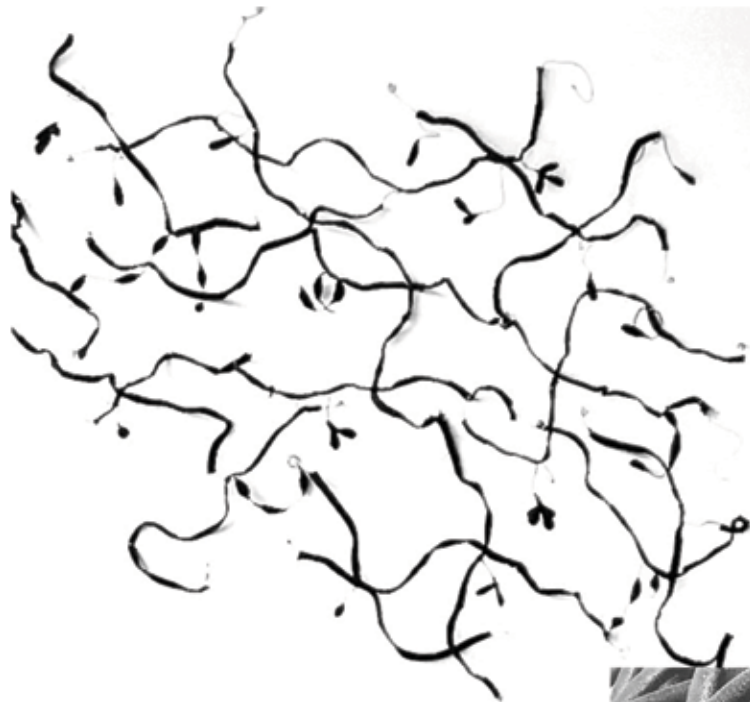
Jennifer Reifsneider

found knots 2003 -2009 ongoing

Untitled (Spacial Drawing with nodes)

Heidi Marie Faessel

Discarded t-shirts, baling wire, house paint, yarn, 2022



"While my work generally explores volume and mass, I am inspired by the way Jennifer's work often feels open and with so much space. Where I tend to work intuitively, I'm intrigued by her conceptual approach. The vining installation piece I made is in direct response to her work. It's a 3-dimensional spatial drawing that reflects both the openness and the linear qualities frequently expressed in Jennifer's fiber-based works."

HMF

"The conditions to respond to Heidi's work were just right. The gallery gave us the opportunity to make our own cohesive selection, so I focused on a limited palette in the knot installation and created "Sunder Study" to explore the mass and density that impresses me in her work. Nan created the conditions for dialogue by staying welcoming and responsive to our ideas, and everyone made an effort to visit, ask questions, and connect on a personal level - that fueled the creative process." JR



Second Sunder Study: No Need  
Jennifer Reifsneider  
rubber, enamel, 2022



Above - (Bound Rings)  
Heidi Marie Faessel  
Cloth window blinds, cotton twine, paint, 2022

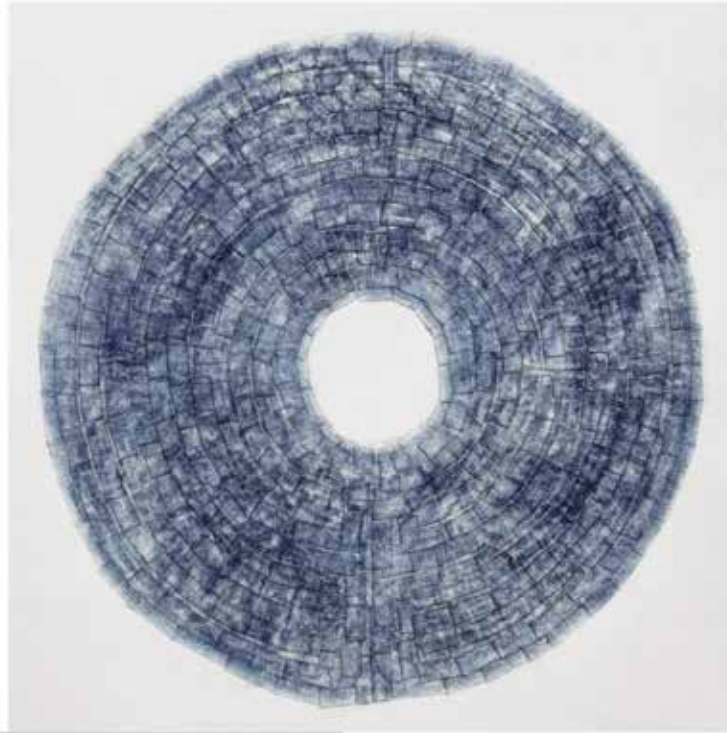
Far left - Some Kinds of Luck  
Jennifer Reifsneider  
Dried peas, snowless netting, pulley, 2009

Center - Some Kinds of Luck  
Jennifer Reifsneider  
Found knots, 2003, 2009 - ongoing

## Labyrinth

Jennifer Reifsneider

Masking tape, dry pigment,  
2017



## acknowledgements and thanks

*The Refuge Gallery acknowledges that Indigenous weavers and basket makers lived and worked in the area since time immemorial, using cedar root, bear grass, dogbane, and other natural fibers. We honor their craft and creativity and recognize that Salish people continue to practice and celebrate their traditional arts today.*

*The impulse that women and artists throughout history have had to work together, or side by side, using their hands to solve problems, heal, express themselves and enjoy the felt sense of materials still exists today, perhaps even more strongly than ever. This exhibition and the history of creative collaboration in Basin, Montana, point to a possible way of restructuring faulty systems, repairing relations, and rebuilding community on a local, national, and even global scale.*

Jenny Bevill is an artist, educator, and collaborative curator who is passionate about sharing contemporary art with folks of all ages, abilities, and identities. She spent a decade as a teaching artist and teacher mentor at the Guggenheim Museum and served as the Educator and Outreach Specialist at the Missoula Art Museum from 2018-2021. She now coordinates the Democracy Project and travels the state leading workshops on creativity for Humanities Montana.

### Sources:

*Reiter, Mary Jo and Patterson, Veronica. Weaving A Life: The Story of Mary Meigs Atwater. Interweave Press. 1992*

*Interviews with Nan Parsons*

*Boulder Historical Society*

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## Untitled (Elevated Fluff)

Heidi Marie Faessel

Pillow stuffing, cardboard  
packaging, baling wire, cotton  
twine, textile, paint, 2022

## ***Intertwined: fiber, process, dialog***

Works by Jennifer Reifsneider and Heidi Marie Faessel



## **REFUGE** *gallery*

### *Mission Statement*

*The **REFUGE gallery** offers opportunity and space to creative people of all colors, mediums, dimensions, disciplines, and ideologies; welcomes collaboration, encourages all to participate fully in the installation and production of events.*

