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Pasadena Museum of California Art – Three Exhibitions 2016

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Installation view, "Claire Falkenstein: Beyond Sculpture," April 17–September 11, 2016, Pasadena Museum of California Art, photo © 2016 Don Milici.



From the press notes:

The **Pasadena Museum of California Art (PMCA)** is proud to present *Claire Falkenstein: Beyond Sculpture*, the first comprehensive museum exhibition of international artist Claire Falkenstein (1908–1997). Though her enduring reputation rests on her sculpture, this prolific female artist began and ended her career as an inventive painter, and her body of work also includes printmaking, jewelry, glass, films, stage sets for dance, public murals, fountains, and monumental architectural commissions. The retrospective spans the varied oeuvre of this international female artist and vanguard and assembles preeminent examples from each media, presenting the full range of one of America's most experimental, productive, and peripatetic twentieth-century artists.



"Game" by Claire Falkenstein – 1944, forged iron. Photo by Pauline Adamek.

Of note is one of Falkenstein's first sculptures; a small work entitled "Game," made of forged iron and less than a foot square in size. Created in 1944, it's deceptively simple, the welded piece has a bold and exploratory shape and construction.

Falkenstein would go on to explore wire and metal sculpture, creating suspended works as well as ones that seem to crouch on the floor. Evident is her deliberate choices – where and when to leave holes or gaps inside the metal interiors.

One suspended piece, a scenic element for a dance piece, is reminiscent of a Calder mobile.



"Suspension," by Claire Falkenstein, 1958. Copper tubing and copper wire.

One shimmering and gorgeous medium piece – entitled "Flora (Topology), 1973" – is comprised of sheets of bronze teamed with wires topped with balls, all bronze. Closer

examination reveals that the sculpture is raised on a platform and its construction includes a "kinetic engine." Is it, thus, a moving sculpture? It is indeed! Unfortunately, the piece is considered too fragile to be displayed in motion. One imagines a bell-like sound as the ball-topped wires tap the bronze sheets. Not so...

Having viewed a video of the work in motion, it proves disappointing – the wobbly rotation somewhat deficient in its mechanical execution... Oh well, not all art experiments are 100% successful. In this case, the work presents well as a stationary piece and it's actually best left to the viewer's imagination as to what it would look or sound like in motion.



Flora (Topology), 1973. Sheet bronze, kinetic motor, 48 x 60 x 36 inches. The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York.



"The Sign or Moving Points," by Claire Falkenstein, 1961

Nevertheless, there is an unmistakable and driving sense of kinetic movement and energy within all her works, especially the pointillism of her 'arrow' paintings that depict schools of tiny arrows massing and converging like small fish or unseen air currents.

Falkenstein is remarkable for her exhaustive artistic exploration, having worked in every single media imaginable: paint, glass, etching, intaglio, collage, wood, metal, resin, wire, terra-cotta, and so on.

Claire Falkenstein: Beyond Sculpture marks the first comprehensive exhibition of her work since 1997, and covers her oeuvre that spans a career of 65 years.