



## Precarious Weight

A graphite-obsessed artist chases a new thread

BY SCOTT INDRISEK

WHEN I MEET Lauren Seiden in her Greenpoint, Brooklyn, studio, she's clad in a smudged white bodysuit, like an astronaut on leave. It's a necessary protection for an artist whose practice involves, as she says, almost "literally bathing in" her chosen medium of graphite, which she applies—layer after painstaking layer—to crumpled, folded, and artfully mangled pieces of paper, creating sculptural drawings whose nuanced skins can resemble marble or metal. Most recently, in anticipation of a show opening February 28 at Denny

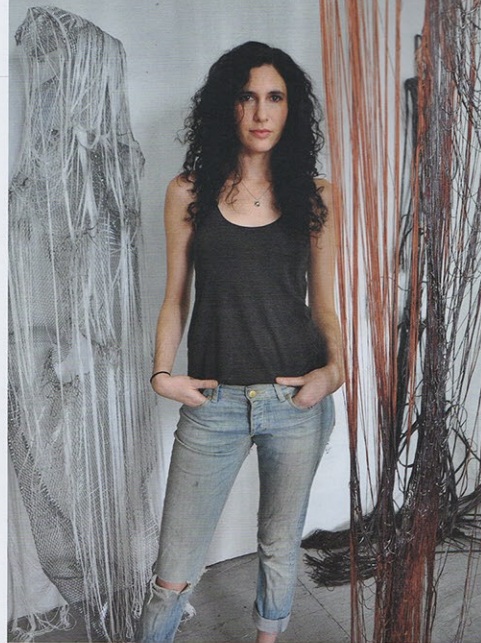
*Shield Wrap 12*, 2015. Graphite on paper, 41½ x 32½ x 11 in.

the wall, conjure myriad associations, from the bodily forms of couture to spiders' webs. (The obvious art historical reference might be the resin-soaked rope works of Eva Hesse.)

"I'm still using a drawing medium," Seiden says, when I ask her if this new method of working has moved her further from her foundation in mark making. "I always want to challenge a preconceived limitation of what something can't do. And I don't want to create these works as just surfaces for graphite; they're more like three-dimensional line drawings. It's not that I'm done with using paper, but I wanted something really tactile, almost like working with shredded paper." The incorporation of metal—not as an armature, she stresses, but as an integral component of the sculpture itself—came about entirely by accident. Seiden was moving an in-process thread piece down the hallway of her studio building when it became tangled with a piece of steel mesh, its small internal diamond structure as unforgiving as a cheese grater. At that point, Seiden was wildly receptive to new directions for the work; she let the twist of metal remain, a glinting, coiled presence in counterpoint to the seductive sheen of the graphite-coated thread. Now, the mesh (an outdated type formerly used for construction purposes but increasingly hard to source from retail stores) has become a pivotal component of many of the sculptures, either as an element snagged among the filaments of thread or as a more structural skeleton providing form.

For her February exhibition, Seiden is thinking in terms of a cohesive installation, with a series of the thread-based wall sculptures joined by two other key pieces. One is a low-lying pool, its perimeter composed of beveled marble, filled with a few inches of water loaded with raw graphite powder. The gray powder—at rest, or when the water's surface is disturbed—shifts and recombines into shapes that, for Seiden, suggest a type of marbling pattern. Also on view will be a roughly seven-foot-tall pillar, hewn from stacks of newspaper that the artist has blackened with graphite. It will be a "monument, a memorial, to information—or recycled knowledge," she says, one that aims to look both incomplete (additional stacks could always be added to the column) and, like the thread sculptures, has "a clumsiness, a kind of precarious weight," she says.

Such precariousness is also something that Seiden values in both the paper that she molds and bends and the thread she shapes, fixes, and draws upon. "They're hard, but they're fragile," she



says of the latter sculptures. "Without at least one support, the whole thing would collapse. With the paper, so much of it is about finding points that can remain secure—to have these folds and breakage points but to stay stable. With the thread, it's about finding how the piece secures itself, and I'm not totally in control of that." While Seiden's graphite-on-paper and graphite-on-Mylar works flaunt a deceptively tough exterior—a relatively soft surface presenting as something hard, even rocklike, upon first glance—the thread pieces retain a sense of tenuous, almost liquid delicacy. "It's important to show what things are," she says, "especially if they're masquerading as something else. Even with the paper, it is what it is—I'm not trying to pretend. It's just different ways of seeing." **WP**

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Seiden in her Greenpoint, Brooklyn, studio, 2015.

*Unraveling Void*, 2015. Graphite and mixed media on silk and polyester thread, 76½ x 19 x 13 in.

*The Future Is Lost in Yesterday's News*, an in-progress work incorporating stacks of newspaper covered in graphite.

