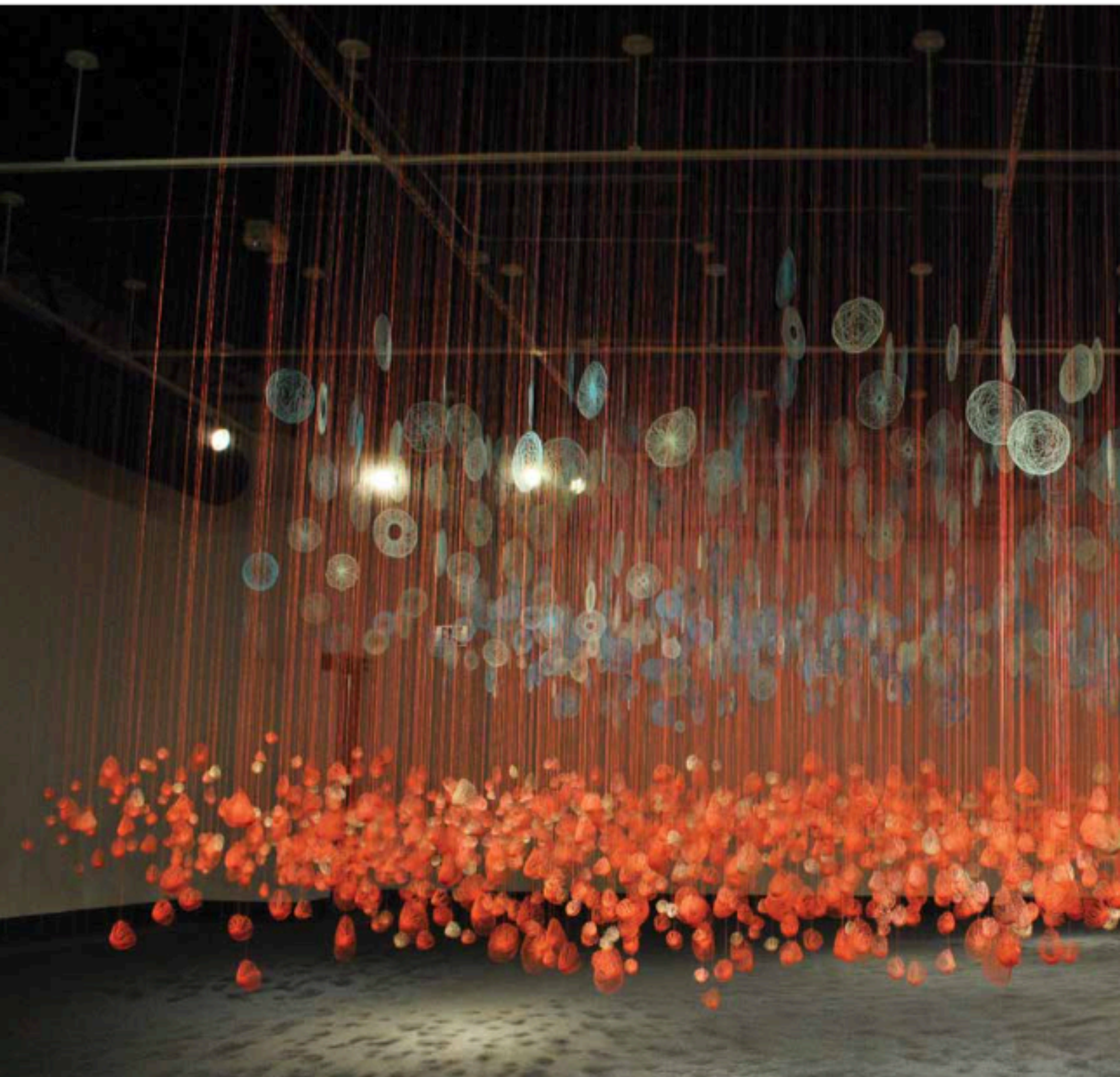
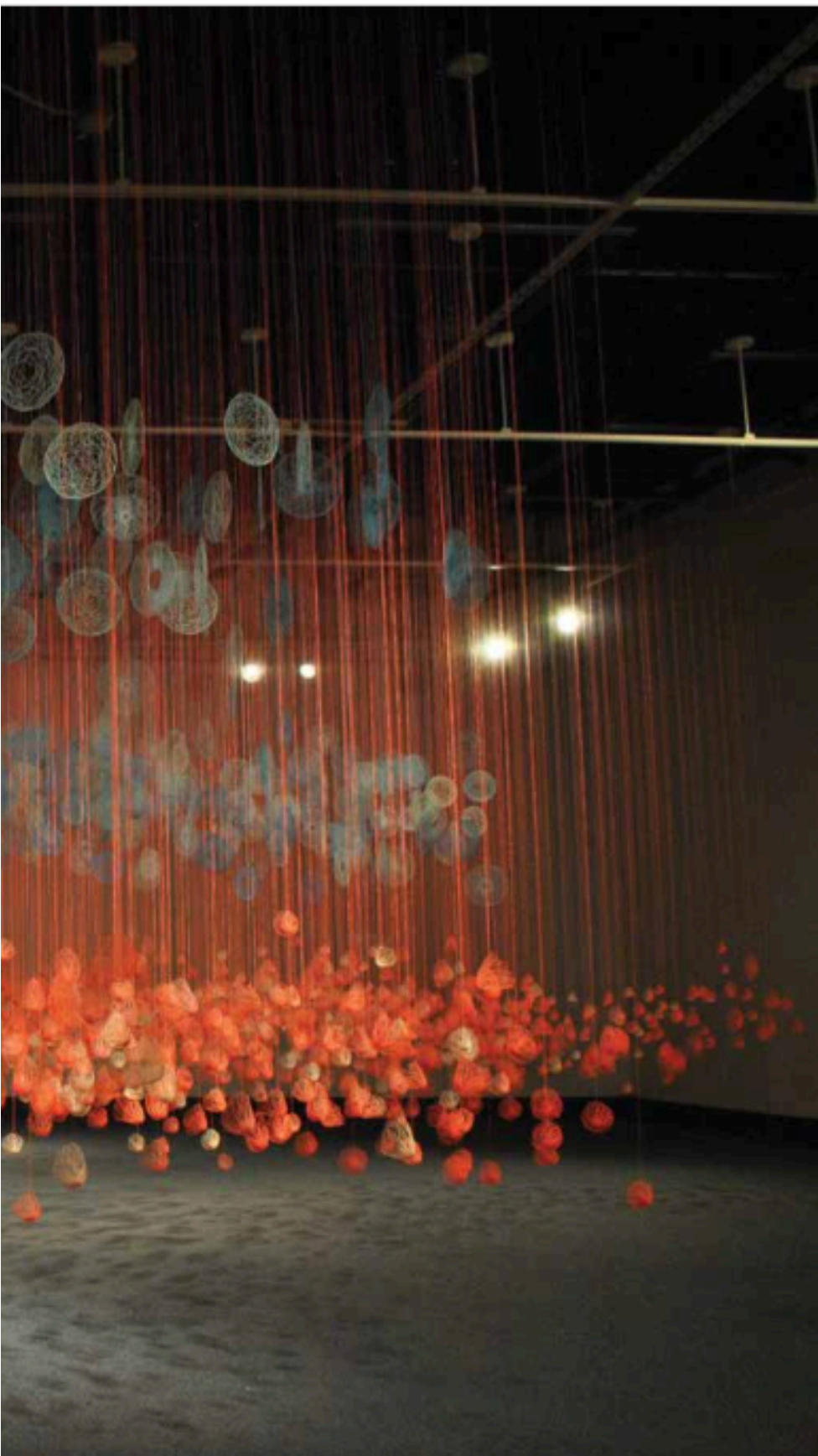


AMANDA MCCALOUR: Diaphanous Embroidery

By Jennifer Farley Gordon, Ph.D.



Amanda McCavour, *Pink Field, Blue Fog*, Louisiana Tech University School of Design Gallery, Ruston, Louisiana, 2016. Photo by Amanda McCavour



When visitors enter Amanda McCavour's new exhibition at 108|Contemporary in Tulsa, they become not just viewers, but participants of a sort. The very presence of bodies moving in the space causes a ripple effect on McCavour's work, a large-scale installation comprised of thousands of lightweight, vibrant circles of embroidery (which she refers to as spirographs) that move and sway as audiences maneuver around and through the work. Her dreamlike installation, *Amanda McCavour: Diaphanous Embroidery*, has been years in the making, and its ethereal nature belies the meticulousness of the artist's creation. For some time, McCavour, jokingly referring to herself a "human spirograph" machine, has produced about thirty to forty circles a day, slowing building enough pieces for the cohesive installation that will float within the gallery.

McCavour's work challenges traditional definitions of embroidery. For centuries, textile artists have used embroidered motifs to bring surface beauty to the fabrics we wear and the textiles in our homes. Her process, on the other hand, reconceives embroidery as an extension of drawing, and transforms thread from a decorative element to the work's structural core. This process was developed largely through experimentation. As a student at York University in Toronto, she began to view thread as a "sculptural line," challenging herself to produce embroidery without backing, and settling on a water-soluble fabric as her favored material. To form each thread spirograph, she works with an embroidery hoop and a sewing machine, turning the hoop in much the same way the familiar mechanical spirograph drawing toys operate. McCavour builds layers of connected stitches to produce the characteristic geometric curves, before dissolving the fabric and starching and shaping each standalone threaded piece to give dimension to the flat embroidery. According to McCavour, "the overlapping lines [within the spirograph design] create the strength in the work." Despite appearances to the contrary, hers is no fragile, delicate art. These connection points brace the circles and are not easily undone. Rather, the pieces are durable, flexible, and resilient—all qualities that appeal greatly to the artist.

Each individual spirograph is a building block, but McCavour's vision is not fully realized until they are brought together in the space. "They really need those spaces to exist," she has observed. From her perspective, it is after installation and the opening of

(continued to page 6)

(continued from page 5)



Visitors experiencing McCavour's work from another vantage point. Amanda McCavour, *Pink Field, Blue Fog*, Louisiana Tech University School of Design Gallery, Ruston, Louisiana, 2016. Photo by Amanda McCavour



A spirograph in progress. Photo: Amanda McCavour

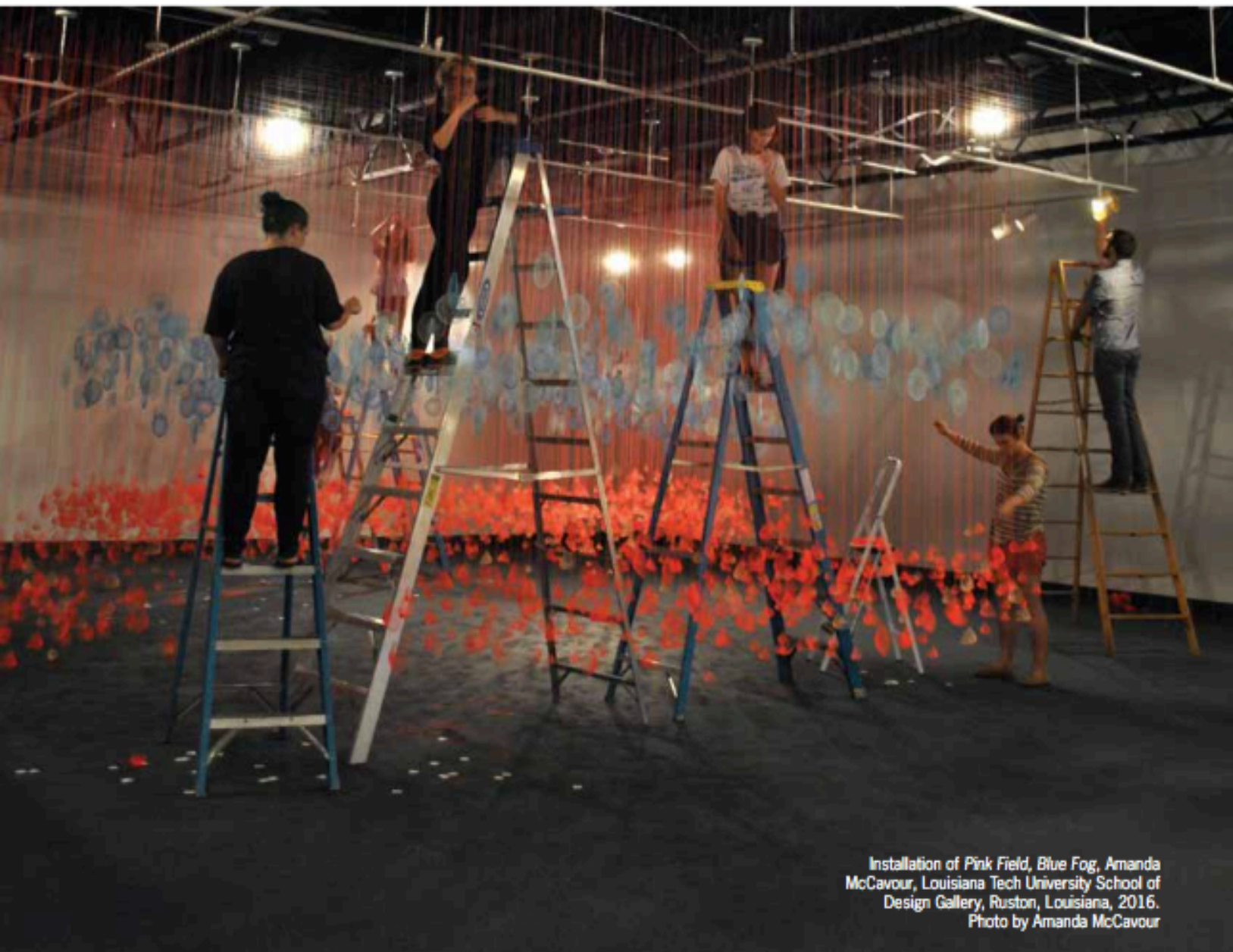
the gallery's doors that the work is brought to life: So much of "the art happens when people are viewing it." For this exhibition, McCavour has chosen to illuminate the environment with a brilliant palette of neon green, neon pink, and bright blue, colors selected for the optical effects they create. As she noted: "It's hard for your eyes to focus on one line of the thread... When I start to build up those multiple lines, it creates this sense of saturation... a blur or glow to it." Through this effort, the viewer becomes much more aware of how he or she is viewing the work.

McCavour's thoughtful attention to audience interaction is aided by her background working in a public gallery and her careful observation of how visitors engage with the art on display. At 108|Contemporary, visitors will see the expansive *Pink Field, Blue Fog* as well as new work made for the exhibition, all

designed and installed to be experienced not just through shape and color, but also through movement. *Pink Field, Blue Fog* draws some of its inspiration from the pathways created within garden spaces, elements McCavour was drawn to while working on her MFA at Temple University in Philadelphia. As she explained, "In 16th century garden design you were meant to look at your garden through your kitchen window... so it operated very much like a picture. But as garden designs developed, there was this idea that you'd walk through the garden and that's how you'd experience it." One reading described this sea change in design as "dissolving composition," a sentiment apropos to McCavour's own way of working. Like a garden pathway, she stated, "There's an invitation to walk in amongst the works and see them as you move through them."

McCavour experiences her own work in a very tactile way. "I would say that a lot of my enjoyment in the making process comes from interacting with the material and touching and moving that material around." Viewers are also similarly drawn to the textile-based work, and while handling of an artwork is generally not permitted within galleries, she sympathizes with the desire to "understand it through touch." For that reason, she is holding a one-day workshop in conjunction with aha Tulsa. "Once you know how the pieces are made, you can in your head understand it, but then to go through the steps of working with the material, and being with the sewing machine, and dissolving the work... when you return to the exhibition, you see it in a different way."

She hopes that viewers will embrace the idea of looking at her work from multiple vantage points, even encouraging viewers to



Installation of *Pink Field, Blue Fog*, Amanda McCavour, Louisiana Tech University School of Design Gallery, Ruston, Louisiana, 2016.
Photo by Amanda McCavour

lay beneath the installation—a practice she has adopted upon completion of the work. Some may find the installation joyful, others meditative. “There’s no one way to look at it.” Like the lines of thread that form it, McCavour’s work has many interconnected layers.

Amanda McCavour: Diaphanous Embroidery is on view at 108|Contemporary, 108 East MB Brady Street, Tulsa, from August 3 – September 23, 2018. Registration and further details for

the workshop, “Experimental Surfaces: Machine Stitching and Unexpected Materials,” held on Saturday, August 4, 2018, can be found at ahhatulsa.org. ■

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