

JACQUELINE SURDELL | *Score!* | May 14 - June 25, 2022

We are very happy to invite you to the first solo exhibition at Devening Projects for Chicago artist Jacqueline Surdell. *Score!* brings together a series of Jacqueline's most recent sculptures, a video and several new editions. The exhibition will open to the public on May 14th; an open house for Jacqueline will take place on Saturday, May 21st from 2 to 5 pm. The exhibition will then continue until June 25th.

The qualities that make Surdell's most recent sculptures mesmerizing and hypnotic may be hard to name, but they're certainly deeply felt. Resonant with references to venerable tenets of our existence, the work is regal in scale and deeply allusive. Materially dense—formed by tying and weaving cotton and nylon rope with the confidence and instincts of a master weaver—her skillful handwork twists out bodies full of visceral presence. These are intricate, robust and exuberant beings burdened by gravity and weighed down by emotional unrest. They hang on steel armatures as if displayed—or splayed—after experiencing something profound. One feels the interiority of these works; it's a feeling rooted in the emotional and substantive gravity of each sculpture.

So much of the conversation about Surdell's practice will focus on its compelling formal characteristics. Material, scale, texture, color and surface are important elements for communication here, but they are only a useful delivery system for the ideas and subjects foundational to her work. Often personal and linked to Spiritual and Totemic Abstraction, the work is rooted in the history of painting and craft, referencing sacred places of contemplation such as grottoes, altars and shrines. There are also associations with symbiology and numerology, ties to ritual acts and athletic training. Encompassing all this, Surdell's work finds meaning in its ability to create a primal link to greater forces of consideration

For Surdell, a particular production may begin with an idea of scale, or more specifically with a steel scaffold upon which she will lay in the cabling that forms the matrix of a piece. Using various weights and densities of nautical and climbing ropes, she quickly weaves into, around and on top of the first layers. As she builds the piece, it becomes more stable—and more assertive—and pushes itself forward spatially. As she's working, she's carefully calibrating innumerable possibilities and choices: line weight, weaving patterns, color balance, contrast, and visible and camouflaged imagery are all wrestled into a slightly wobbly but structurally sound form. Cohesion and balance are never the final goal. Instead, we experience the expansion and dissolution of her ideas simultaneously. Feeling tenuous but held securely in place, we sense an unraveling even though the image that has emerged appears steady. Wavering on a carefully balanced tightrope, these are works forever alive by that wobbly tension.

One might be tempted to see the ritualistic, meditative and repetitious act of construction as a way to assign value-through-labor in this ambitious work. But the real value is the state of intense concentration that leads Surdell to discover a new lead, excavate an unearthed form or encounter some unexpected pattern. The time spent and the labor exerted is necessary to the stability of her ideas, but not primary to the deeply thrilling layers of thinking governing her practice.

Jacqueline Surdell received her MFA in Fiber and Material Studies from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2017; in 2015 she received her BFA from Occidental College, Los Angeles, California. Her most recent major project was *Asymmetry*, a two-person exhibition with Robert Moreland at Library Street Collective in Detroit, MI. Other recent solo and small group exhibitions took place at Patricia Sweetow Gallery, San Francisco; Kunsthal KadE, Amersfoort, Netherlands; UW Parkside, Kenosha, Wis.; Antenna.Works, New Orleans, LA; South Bend Museum of Art, South Bend, IN; and Apparatus Projects, Heaven Gallery, Western Exhibitions and the Chicago Artists Coalition, Chicago. Jacqueline Surdell lives and works in Chicago.