

'TapRoot #1', 2002, stainless steel cable, ht 450 cm



'Conjugations', 1996, fibre, cable and seeds, ht 122 cm

the precious task of reproduction and cover or seal surface wounds. Works such as *Nexus*, created from balls of string coated in graphite and wax, explore organic repetition and evolution. The work hangs like a nest of eggs or pods one might stumble upon in the dark corner of a disused attic or the bottom of an overgrown garden. This sculpture, and many others, feels as though its rightful place is in the natural world rather than a fabricated one. While it's Mudge's hands that fashions these beguiling forms, their manner is disarmingly close to the forms and textures nature creates. In addition to fertility, many of the artist's sculptures involve the capture of potential energy. For example, *Concretion* uses wrapped wire around a core of branches that are bound under as much tension as her physical strength could muster. The cocoon-like web articulates the idea of potential energy waiting to be released from the tension it

SUSPENSIONS IN MATERIAL MEMORIES

AMERICAN artist Anne Mudge works in a variety of materials and on different scales while maintaining a consistent aesthetic vocabulary that reflects the boundless energy that resides in nature. Over the past decade, Mudge has focused on forms that repeat and mutate with a sense of methodical purpose similar to the making of a nest or web. These organic forms feel as though they have emerged from a fecund world we have yet to encounter. Clusters of repeating forms allude to fertility in a state of constant mutation and evolution. Often ephemeral in their delicacy, Mudge's works reveal her ongoing exploration of fertility, kinetic energy and material memory.

Seeds are a readily available resource for Mudge who lived with her husband on a seed farm in Southern California for the past 20 years. This daily connection with the soil and natural growth inspires and directs many of the themes and materials she sculpts. She explains that the mundane nature of the materials she works with and their availability are important aspects to her working process. But so is the loaded symbolism which seeds provide. Seed-pods brim with life and can be seen as coiled energy awaiting suitable conditions for germination: captured growth waiting to burst forth.

From these associations the artist constructs clusters of shapes which look as though they are waiting to unfurl and grow large. Alongside the inevitable references to fertility that her materials offer are secondary sources: secretions such as wax and tape that capture stems and seeds, bind and secure the joints of vegetal growth, conceal and protect

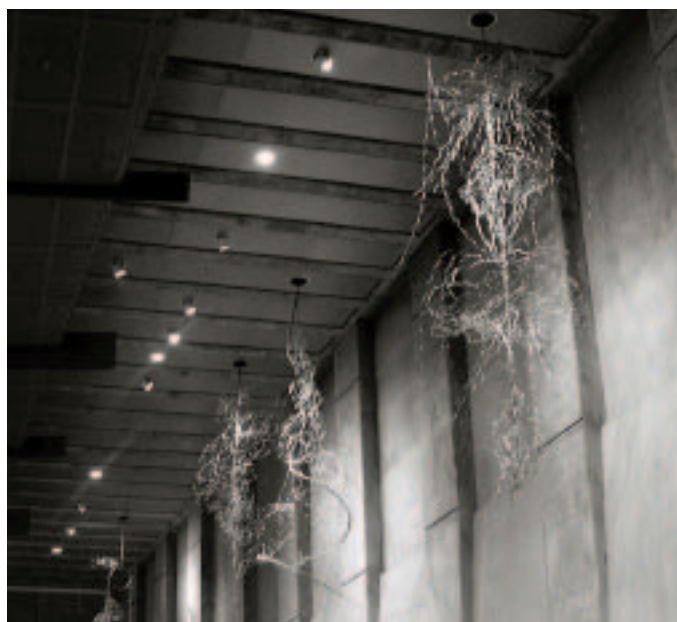
'TapRoots', 2004, one of five steel sculptures commissioned for the San Diego's subway station



'Nexus', 1998, fibre, metal, wax, 78.7 x 40.6 x 53 cm

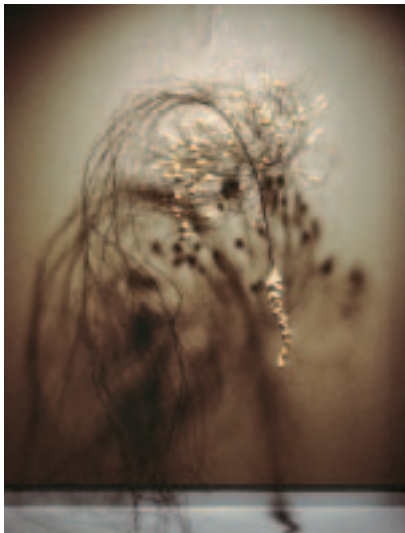


'Concretion', 2003, metal and fibre, 79 x 40 x 35 cm



resides under. While *Concretion* remains bound by its arrested energy, *Broadcast* captures that energy escaping into the air. This piece illustrates the far-reaching arc of seeds that are cast to the wind by hand and scatter over a large area, rather than sewn by a machine or planted individually. Mudge says that she sees her work as a *concrete* poetry of sorts. Her titles can often be understood in much the same way and usually come to her while she is building a piece rather than as an afterthought.

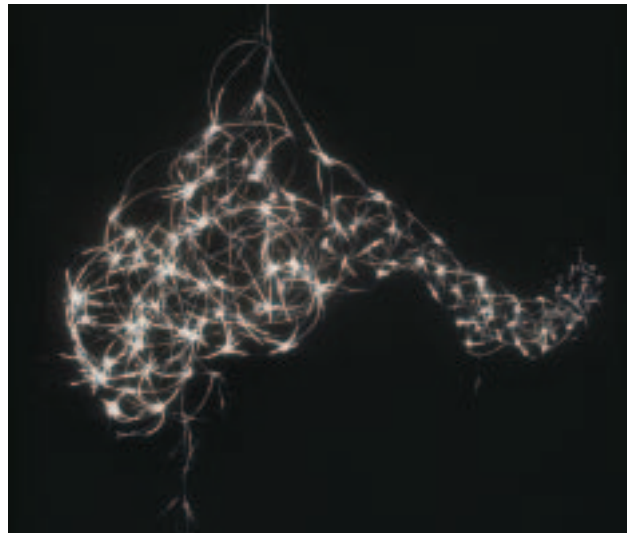
Material memory is also a central concern to Mudge. The corkscrew of an original cable strand, the twist of a bobbin or the coil of a bound bundle, all offer Mudge the kinetic energy which her sculptures can either choose to resist or enhance. This memory infuses her otherwise ephemeral works with something



'Broadcast', 1998, cable, seed, tape and asphaltum, 229 x 91 x 91 cm

akin to life force and strength. In the delicate forms she constructs there is a sense that something is harnessed or brewing beneath the delicacy which is much stronger than first appearances may suggest. For instance, *Repertoire* is actually built around a flexible stick and wrapped with string. After binding the individual bundles, the artist continued wrapping the thread between the masses to enclose the space between the spheres. Finally the stick spine was removed, leaving a concealed void which runs through the centre of the sculpture. Traces of original elements, such as the now absent spine, remain central to the finished work.

Although the symmetry of biology is apparent in much of her work, once in a while Mudge finds herself challenging the tidy equilibrium of nature. *Tangent* is one such exploration. Suspended from the ceiling, its cantilevered arm, uncanny in its resemblance to a human arm, was an attempt to extend the cantilever as far as possible. Building from the centre out, Mudge learnt that it often took no more than a single strand of wire in the wrong place to tip the sculpture off balance. Such lessons proved vital to the large-scale installations which have been the focus of her studio work in recent years.



'Tangent' (detail), 1996, metal and fibre, 104 x 206 x 30.5 cm

works. Instead of a gallery, these sculptures are suspended almost 10 metres above commuters' heads and reside in a concrete underworld of commuter transport. Wind from the arrival and departure of trains will cause the sculptures to swivel, offering an ever-changing play of shadow and against the cold concrete of the station walls.

Inevitably, the difference of scale required for the *TapRoots* series demanded a dramatic shift in the artist's working practice. Rather



'Satchel' (detail) 2000, metal, glass and silicone, 76 x 23 x 25.4 cm

than the contemplative pleasure of working alone with materials that bent under Mudge's own strength, the public commission required work in a studio large enough to allow for the fabrication of these 5.5 m tall works. More drastic was the transition she had to negotiate from the use of hand-held pliers to a team of assistants, blow torches and ladders, all necessary to configure the large gauge steel used for the project. It is testament to Mudge's eye as an artist that these ultimately unyielding materials continue to exude the pliable and ephemeral feel of her quarter-scale models created in string and natural fibres.

In observing Mudge's work over the past decade it becomes apparent that certain forms appear in uncanny repetition. *Conjugation*, for example, takes on a great similarity to *TapRoot E*, the first large-scale sculpture commissioned for the SDSU trolley station. These repetitions of form, if not scale or material, are an important key to understanding this artist's work. It is a language that speaks through an observation and intuition of the energy that is central to the fertility and growth of a natural world similar – yet somehow distant – to our own.

Jessica Hemmings



'TapRoots', 2004, one of five steel sculptures for San Diego subway station



'Repertoire', 1994, fibre and plastic, 19 x 66 x 11.5 cm