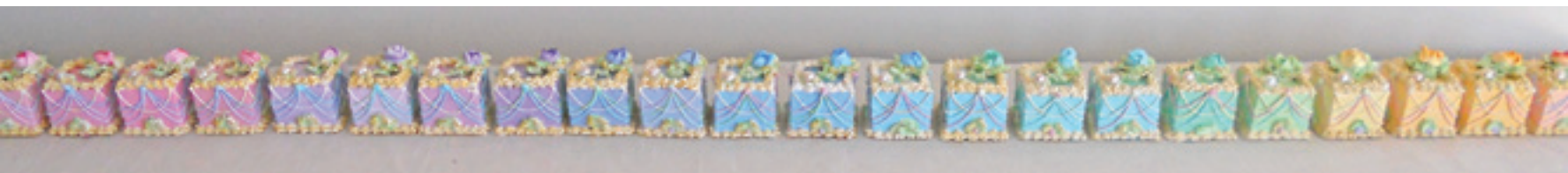


PAT LASCH

journeys of the heart



THIS BOOK IS NUMBER

IN A LIMITED EDITION OF 250 SIGNED BY THE ARTIST



Mara Gladstone

PAT LASCH

journeys of the heart

Palm Springs Art Museum

Published in conjunction with the exhibition *Pat Lasch: Journeys of the Heart*

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Front cover: Three *Untitled Petit Fours* (from 700 series), 2016, acrylic paint, wood, baroque pearls, glass beads; *Untitled Petit Four* (from 700 series), 2016, acrylic paint, wood, baroque pearls, glass beads;

*Yaddo I*, 2016, acrylic paint, wood, baroque pearls, Collection of Tom Minder and Duke Kulas

Inside cover: *Untitled Cake* (detail), ca. 2012, wood, acrylic paint, baroque pearls, Collection of Melinda Photis

P. 1: *Rainbow Petit Fours*, ca. 2012, acrylic paint, wood, baroque pearls

P. 2: *Cologne Cathedral Altar*, 1980, mixed media collage, handmade paper, mounted on board, Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, Gift of Norma Bussing

P. 6 and p. 56: *A Life Blessed: Wedding Dress* (detail), 2016, acrylic paint, baroque pearls, glass beads, crystals

Back cover: *Gypsy Rose Lee*, 2012, acrylic paint, gold leaf

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## FOREWORD

Palm Springs Art Museum is proud to celebrate Pat Lasch's extraordinary career with her first major solo exhibition and monograph in the United States. Born in New York, Pat established her career on the east coast, and she has also been a member of our desert community for almost 15 years. *Pat Lasch: Journeys of the Heart* surveys more than four decades of the artist's work.

As a pioneer who emerged from the downtown New York art scene of the 1970s, Lasch embeds her work with rich narratives from her personal journey. Her practice is rooted in spirituality, and always weighted with the pains and joys of heartbreak, age, and adventure. Driven by memory and experience, the artist incorporates a range of media, from ceramic, bronze, and cut paper to wood sculpture and lacemaking, into her art. Featuring the delicate cake and pastry sculptures for which she is best known alongside early stitched-canvas panels and stunning piped-paint dresses, this exquisite work is intensely biographical. At the same time, Pat's artwork stems from a resolutely feminist perspective that connects it to qualities and issues that next generation contemporary artists are working through today.

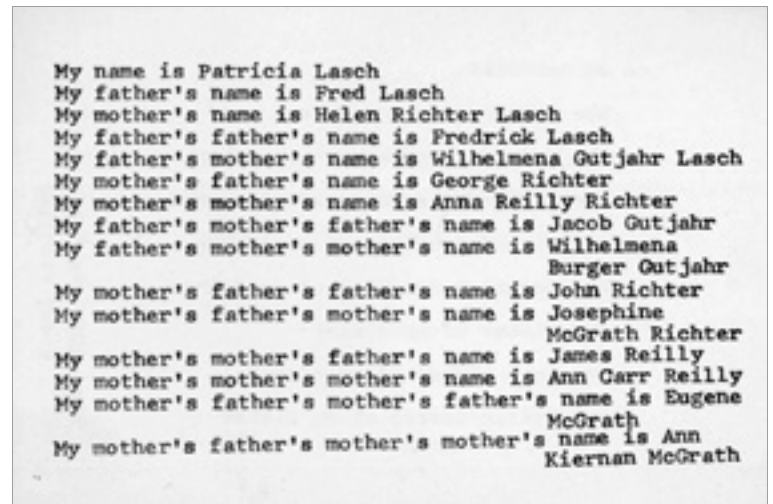
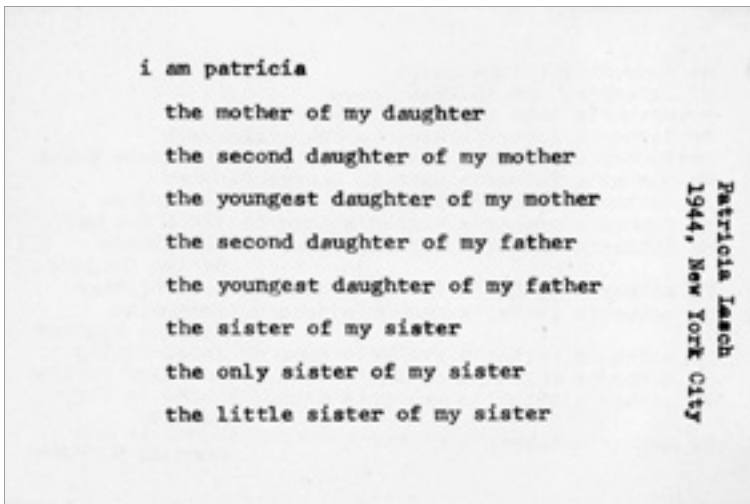
As the museum's programs showcase the creative work of internationally-known artists, we also focus on reflecting the unique voices of our region and more recent art histories. Our thanks go to chief curator, Katherine Hough, who has been a champion of Pat's work, as well as Pat's long-time friend Marilyn Loesberg, for their support of this project. We are particularly grateful to associate curator Mara Gladstone for her thoughtful, thorough, and inspired organization of this exhibition and publication. Working closely with the talented designer Lilli Colton, they have produced an almost ambrosial book that celebrates this artist's unique output.

We are indebted to our wonderful Board of Trustees for their generous support of the museum and its programs. I am especially grateful to the Clinton Hill & Allen Tran Foundation and Donna MacMillan for providing major exhibition support, and to the museum's 2016-17 exhibition season sponsors: Carol & Jim Egan, David Kaplan & Glenn Ostergaard, Dorothy C. Meyerman, Marion & Bob Rosenthal, and the Herman and

Faye Sarkowsky Charitable Foundation. Finally, I wish to thank the many funders of this beautiful catalogue who are listed in the acknowledgments.

It is my hope that our audiences take joy in this exhibition, and see Pat Lasch's work as simultaneously a mirror and a lens into the life experiences we all share.

Elizabeth Armstrong  
The JoAnn McGrath Executive Director



above: Pat Lasch's index card contribution to the unconventional art book catalogue that accompanied *C. 7500: An Exhibition Organized by Lucy R. Lippard*, held at California Institute of the Arts, Valencia and other venues, May 1973 - February 1974.  
opposite: *Cake with Hanging Skirt*, 2012, acrylic, straight pins, wood, Collection of Donna MacMillan







Arrangement of Pat Lasch's pastry sculptures, 2012-2016.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a curator's dream to organize an artist's first major survey exhibition. And it is a true pleasure to work with an artist as generous and kind as Pat Lasch. Though I have come to know Lasch rather late in her career, I have been quick to understand the power of her work and its resonance among her many friends and collectors. I extend my deep gratitude to the individuals who have made this long-overdue exhibition and catalogue come to fruition.

The exhibition was made possible with the support of the Clinton Hill & Allen Tran Foundation and Donna MacMillan. The accompanying publication, which you hold here, was created thanks to the generosity of Marilyn Loesberg, William G. Butler, Susan Goodman and Rodney Lubeznik, Susan and Richard Grausman, Jane and Michael Murphy, Audrey Ratner-Strachan, Ellen Cantrowitz, and Shirley Fitterman.

The museum's collection of work by the artist consists of gifts from Roger W. Barrett, Albert Aaron, and Norma Bussing. I am grateful to the many lenders who shared their precious sculptures for this exhibition, including Elise and Eric Batscha, William G. Butler, Elaine Finkelstein, Jennifer Grausman, Marilyn Loesberg, Donna MacMillan, Jane and Michael Murphy, H. Tony and Marti Oppenheimer, Melinda Photis, Meredith Ward and Debra Wieder, and anonymous collectors.

On the ground, I am fortunate to have worked with a wonderful exhibitions team at the museum, including Elena Incardona, Tom Johnson, Juan Lopez, Julianne Aguilar, and Cara Gallo. I am grateful to Executive Director Elizabeth Armstrong for her strong support of this exhibition at its inception. The curatorial wisdom of Daniell Cornell, Christine Giles, Brooke Hodge, and Katherine Hough guided me and this project to its lovely finale.

I extend sincere gratitude to Lilli Colton for her gorgeous book design. Her enthusiasm for and knowledge of Pat's work inspired the special details in this publication. Martica Sawin's insightful essay provides wonderful personal and historical contexts for the artist's early inspirations. My appreciation goes to Meredith Ward, Kristen Accola, Kat Griefen, Martine Fougeron, David Plakke, and Max Finneran, who augmented this

exhibition and catalogue in myriad ways, offering varied, important contributions towards more fully visualizing and understanding Lasch's work.

Finally, I send many blessings to Pat Lasch, for her beautiful spirit and for making art's labors look gloriously easy. And to my children, Violet and Rex, whose journeys of the heart are only beginning.

Mara Gladstone, PhD  
Associate Curator



*Five Hearts Presented to God for Judgment*, 1989-1990, cast iron, blackened bronze, carved stone, cast lead, gilded bronze, chamois cloth, Collection of H. Tony and Marti Oppenheimer



*A Life Blessed: 50th Anniversary Golden Egg*, 1985–1986, plaster, thorns, gold leaf,  
Collection of Jennifer Grausman



*Untitled Cake*, ca. 2012, acrylic paint, wood, baroque pearls, Collection of Melinda Photis



*Wedding Cake*, 2016, acrylic paint, wood, baroque pearls, Collection of Elise and Eric Batscha



*Wedding Tower*, 1978, paper, wood,  
acrylic paint, metallic thread, needles,  
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum,  
Gift of Roger W. Barrett



## CECI N'EST PAS UN GATEAU

One of the most tantalizing of ephemeral creations is the decorated cake with which we celebrate our various rites of passage, most often birthdays and weddings. Ceremonial festivities are climaxed by the presentation of a cake clothed in a sugary substance that has been coaxed into all manner of fanciful forms. This visual delight promises a gastronomic treat as well, but to experience the latter, the former must be destroyed. After a ritual blowing out of candles or a traditional first cut made jointly by bride and groom, the magnificent creation is demolished and parceled out among the assembled well-wishers.

Sculptor Pat Lasch has seized on this sacrificial object with its multiple connotations and, with her innate artistry and a practiced hand trained in her father's bakery, has given it permanent form using acrylic paint over a wood base. Poised on lace mats woven of fine strands of acrylic, bedecked with colorful rosettes and lattices of delicate filaments, and surrounded by ruffles covered with gold leaf, Lasch's cakes will last from anniversary to anniversary, recalling festive moods, enticing the eye, and mischievously tempting the appetite. The cakes introduce us to the essential Lasch, an artist with a predilection for pretty surfaces, for domestic arts, for emotional expression, and at the same time possessed of an underlying irony, a fascination with the macabre, and an obsession with the life/death dichotomy, this last evoked, for example, by an exquisite bronze of a bathing nude, with a skeleton lurking beneath the tub.

"If you make a mistake, put a rose on it," was the advice baker Fred Lasch gave to his daughter when at the age of fourteen she began helping in his bakery. Trained in his native Germany, Lasch had perfected the classic cake decorator's repertoire and had developed a fine hand with a pastry tube, a skill which he passed on to his daughter during the time when she was learning more conventional ways of making art at New York's High School of Music and Art. Roses, however, have thorns, and, while the latter may not always be visible in a cake's decoration, there is a latent power of suggestion that evokes some of the less joyful undercurrents of celebrations, such as rekindled animosities in family gatherings, or apprehension over the swallowing up of years. The intricacies of a colorful flower-strewn frosting may turn out to be a mask for underlying shadows with intimations of lurking dangers that remind one of fairy tale offerings of a tempting morsel that contains a deadly poison or a magic spell.



above and left

*Box of Poison Chocolates*, 1983, wood,  
enamel and acrylic paint, silver leaf  
opposite, from left

*Heart Worm*, 1985, mixed media, gold leaf;  
*Bardo Black Cake*, 1980-1981, wood, acrylic  
paint, cut metal



That Lasch is well aware of the dual message of her concoctions is evident in some of her other works such as *Box of Poison Cookies for Past Lovers*, or *Woman Gone Mad*, a book with a shocking-pink cover detailing the murderous impulses that followed the breakup of her marriage. Her wall-hung hearts of lead or wood may be adorned with delicate flowers, but they have doors that can be opened to reveal threatening contents such as vial of toxic cobalt or a parasite, reposing in a gold-leafed compartment. In the early 1980s she brought one of her all-black cakes to an exhibition staged in the aftermath of the blow-up at Three Mile Island, *Artists Against Nuclear Madness*. Its potency was in inverse ratio to its small size, like the original atom bomb, and it cast a sinister pall over the whole event. Also on the dark side are her dragons and monsters: a skeletal prehistoric bird with the skull of an actual bird, a dragon fashioned from black wire mesh after a Leonardo drawing, or a death ship of feather-covered wire inspired by Bosch. And indelible in the memory are the slender, bristling, all black apparition-like pieces that she says were inspired by the story of her grandmother who was married in a black dress and whose long black hair was all that remained when her body had to be dug up for re-burial.



*Roman Resurrection I*, 1983, plaster, wire mesh, twigs, mixed media



above  
*Bardo Black Egg I*, 1981, plaster,  
sand, acrylic paint, watercolor, pins  
right  
*Wilhelmina's Bone Tower*, 1979-1980,  
wood, acrylic paint, bones,  
cut paper, silver thread

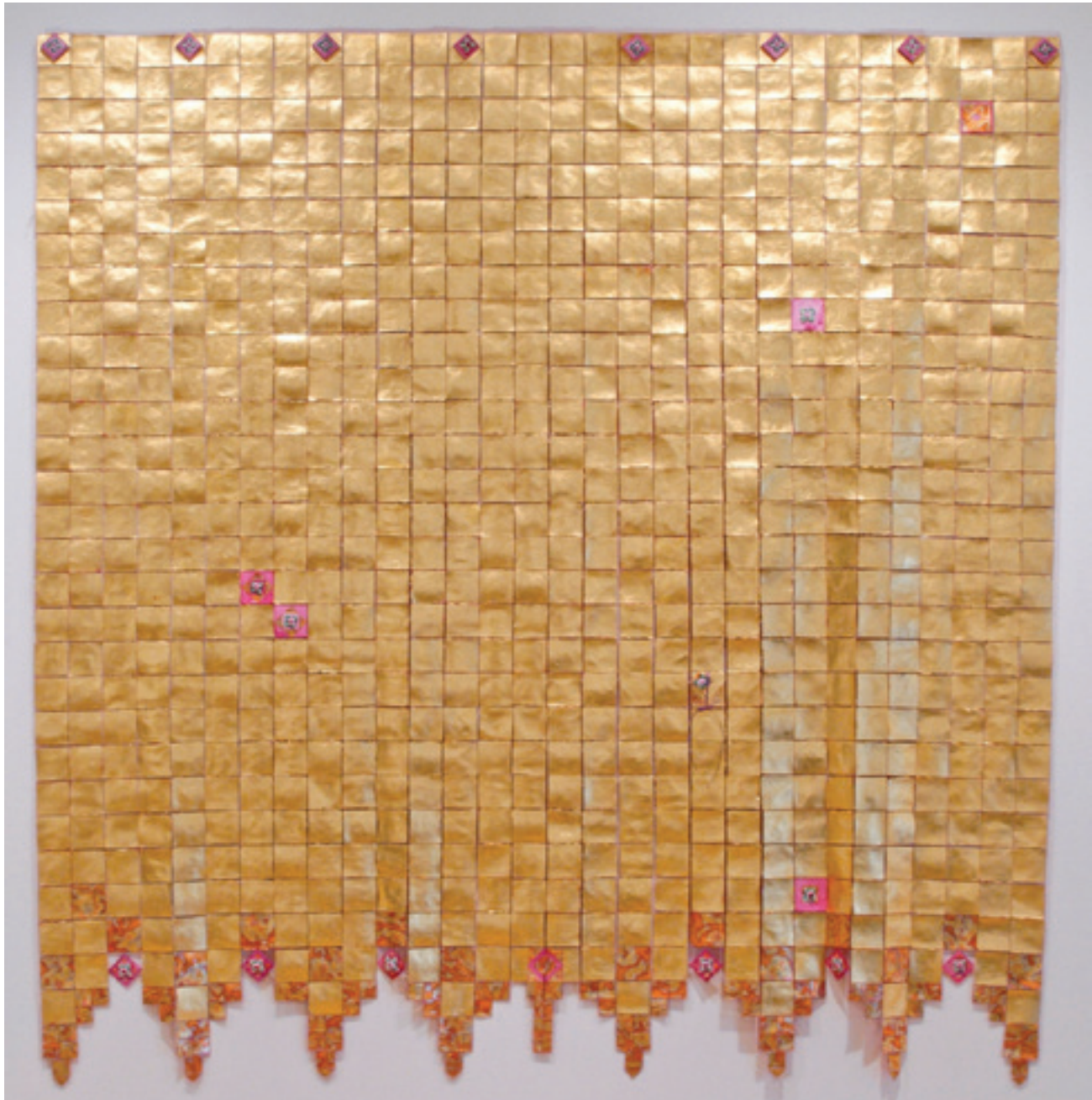


Lasch was an early member of A.I.R. Gallery which she joined in 1973 and her involvement with the Feminist Movement probably served to reinforce her impulse to deal with her own emotions as a daughter and a mother and to see herself in the light of family history. When she was an undergraduate at Queens College she studied with Richard McDermott Miller who encouraged her to honor the history she came from. She began trying to discover who she was, logging things in grids, using string or thread when she couldn't get the kind of line she wanted in paint. For eight years she worked with small stitches on muslin attached to shaped stretchers. Another teacher was Richard Serra (with whom she had a year-long relationship) who, she says, opened her mind to new ways of thinking when he assigned his students to read Kubler's *The Shape of Time*. Her stitched circles were intended to represent the cycles of generations moving back in time.

On the advice of her close friend at the time, Phillip Glass, she traveled to India, bringing one of her stitched cloths to Lama Kalu Rinpoche. When she presented it to him he blew his nose in it, which she interpreted as a rebuke for indulging in too much ego. Although raised a Catholic, Lasch has an over-arching interest in various religions and has done retreats in both Buddhist and Christian monasteries. After the deaths of her parents she began making "prayer cloths" using squares of gold leaf affixed to netting mounted on



*Ancestral Patterning: Yab Yum I, 1974-1975, gold and silver thread on canvas*



*A Couple's Prayer* (from the *Prayer Cloth Series*), 2006, gold, silver, and copper leaf, netting, and acrylic paint on Arches paper, Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, Gift of Albert Aaron

heavy Arches paper with Buddhist prayers sealed inside. As a memorial to her mother she took the flowers from her grave and pressed them into squares of handmade paper which are fastened to netting and assembled in a grid. A work of 1998 consists of 25 “letters to the dead” folded over and sealed with sealing wax and similarly mounted as a grid. The radiance of the gold leaf gives these “prayer cloths” a reverential aura that lifts them out of the ordinary and turns them into shrine-like objects.

During a Prix de Rome year in 1983 Lasch began picking up bits of flotsam around the American Academy grounds and finding ways to incorporate them in her sculpture. She has generally been drawn to unorthodox materials or has found new ways to use conventional processes, such as casting in bronze or modeling porcelain. Whatever the material may be, she uses it with consummate skill, so that her love of the magic in processes of transformation makes itself felt in the final product. She is especially intrigued by works of art that push materials to an extreme, an example being Bernini’s *Apollo and Daphne* where the marble becomes the metamorphosis of fingers into a lace-like intertwining of twigs and leaves. It could be said that she is possessed by a driving force to bend materials to her will, whether she is building a house—which she has done twice—or shaping paint into fragile flowers.

Over almost four decades now, Lasch has mined her own experience—her loves, her angers, her feeling for family—and shaped it in completely unorthodox ways. Possibly she shares some DNA with the Brothers Grimm whose tales so often combined the enticements of beauty with the shadow of lurking horror. Enjoy these dazzling cakes, but partake with caution.

Martica Sawin

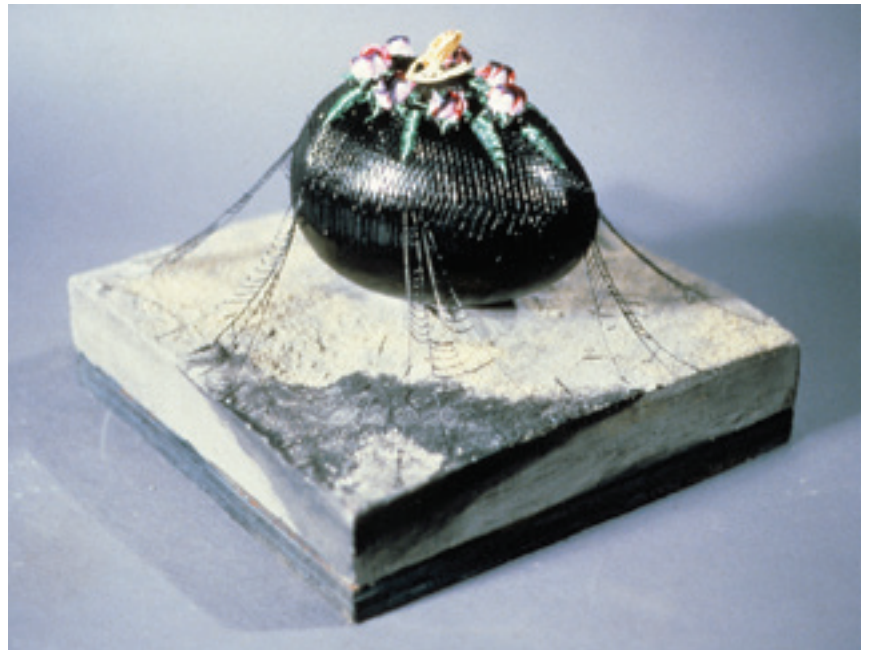
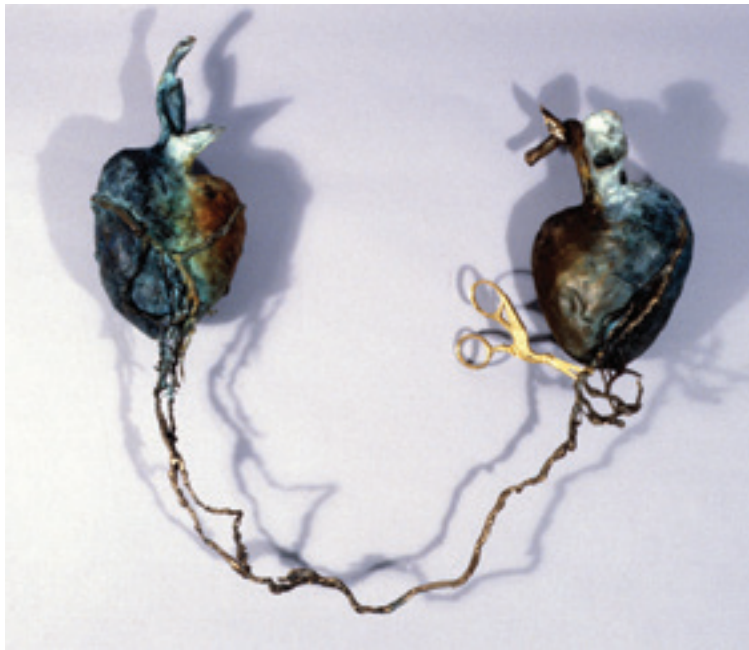




Letters to the Dead (details), 1998, mixed media on paper



*Box of Poison Cookies for Past Lovers*, 1985, mixed media,  
Collection of Elaine Finkelstein



from left

*Two Hearts for Three Friedas*, 1987-1989,  
bronze, stainless steel scissors

*Bardo Black Egg III*, 1981, plaster, sand,  
acrylic paint, watercolor, lacquer, wire



*A Life Blessed: Anna Reilly II, 2012, acrylic paint, baroque pearls, beads*

## JOURNEYS OF THE HEART

Pat Lasch's oeuvre is comprised of wondrous and lovely things: richly decorative towers of cake, gilded prayer cloths, diminutive bronzes and ceramics of figures in various states of repose, and most recently, an array of life-size, three-dimensional dresses constructed entirely of acrylic paint. Beyond the beauty of these works is complexity and darkness culled from the pain of journeys of the body and heart. Amid this dialectic, Lasch's unwavering, unabashedly decorative practice draws attention to the feminism of femininity, the value of pleasure, and the concept of locating power in the sensual. For more than four decades Lasch has harnessed the seductive powers of beauty as both a subject and a mode of practice. She has created an oeuvre that orbits around a constellation of physical, intellectual, and emotional elements: tactility and physicality; fascination, expectation, and disenchantment; reason and abandon. Her discrete yet closely interwoven bodies of work are linked by the biographical narratives from which they are drawn, as well as the patient, masterful hand of their maker.

The exhibition *Pat Lasch: Journeys of the Heart* at Palm Springs Art Museum is the first to survey the artist's 45-year practice. The earliest works in the exhibition are some of the largest, and yet are also Lasch's most minimal. The circular canvases of the *Yab Yum* series are marked with equally spaced stitches radiating from the center. Each stitch stands for an ancestor, with the spacing representing time connecting one individual to the next. The detailed half inch-length stitching marks the needle's punctures upon the muslin from front to back, in and out—a methodical tracing of time, a family tree transposed into a minimalist form that attempts to simplify and capture the complexity of the many lives before hers. A circle of life. It is not surprising that during this time Minimalist proponents such as Richard Serra and Phillip Glass were in Lasch's social orbit. In Tibetan, *Yab-yum* translates as father-mother, the traditional union of compassion and insight in Buddhist philosophy. It represents a sacred intercourse, a dialectic embodied in the memory of the parental union, an ongoing discourse of life and death, an essential dualism and endless coming into being.



Members of A.I.R. Gallery, New York, 1978: Mary Beth Edelson, Sarah Draney, Nancy Spero, Donna Byars, Rachel bas-Cohain, Dotty Attie, Anne Healy, Clover Vail, Ana Mendieta, Daria Dorosh. Pat Lasch is at front, left.

By 1973, Lasch joined A.I.R. Gallery, a women's artist collective which would play an important role in the art history of the period. A.I.R. offered camaraderie, functional gallery space, and a haven for the many artists who'd been pushed aside by the art market and its dealers at the time. Friends and colleagues such as Mary Beth Edelson, Donna Byars, Nancy Spero, Dotty Attie, Ana Mendieta, and Clover Vail composed this group. Concurrently, Lasch turned away from minimal forms. She adhered to the minimalist process of repetition in gesture, but began to fully incorporate her training as an apprentice in her father's bakery. A master pastry chef, Lasch's father taught her the fine art of baking and how to ornament its surfaces. An expert at icing, Lasch took her skills in confectionery application, but replaced the sugared butter with acrylic paint, and candy sprinkles with pins and pearls. "Cakes marked time," Lasch has noted. "Birthdays, weddings, communions, bar mitzvahs—cakes were the witnesses to our living process." The resonant qualities of these early sculptures, coupled with their temptingly fine detail, gave quick rise to Lasch's reputation. Indeed, Nicola Humble writes, "Cakes are very strange things, producing a range of emotional responses far out of keeping with their culinary significance."<sup>1</sup> A cake's relationship to our social and cultural memory and experiences far outweighs its actual taste. The much admired fondant coatings of wedding cakes are often best left uneaten, the cake itself a representation of a moment of coupling, and perhaps the grandeur or wealth associated with the union.

*Wedding Tower*, 2012, wood, acrylic  
paint, baroque pearls, gold leaf,  
Collection of Meredith Ward and Debra Wieder





left

*Wilhelmina's Bird Tower*, 1979-1980, wood, acrylic paint,  
glass beads, cut paper, hair, silver thread

above

*Slippery Soap*, 1989-1990, bronze, glass





Installation view of Pat Lasch's *50th Anniversary Tower 1929-1979* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1979, from the artist's archive

Lasch found it striking that life's occasions would be commemorated with cake, though never for death, "one of our last and most important transitions." Besides her beautiful ivory cake towers, including one commissioned in 1979 by the Museum of Modern Art for its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, Lasch made a series of black cakes. The delicately elaborate towers were coated in black paint and embellished with dark details such as cut paper, bird feathers, pins, bones, and hair. These organic elements, with their sinister qualities, exhibit Lasch's affinity with German Expressionism and contemporaries such as Joseph Beuys. Her *Wilhelmina* cake towers are emblematic of this fusion of the decorative and the dark romanticism and folklore of her heritage. "The myths of German culture were ingrained in me since I was a small child. My father believed in Poltergeists. He told me stories of his own memories of his mother *Wilhelmina* . . . *Wilhelmina* was married in a black wedding dress with a white veil. She died when my dad was six." When her remains were moved to a common grave 25 years later, *Wilhelmina's* bones and long hair were still intact. Lasch has incorporated her own hair into the towers and other work, making tribute to and finding connection with the grandmother she never knew.

Lasch's work is seductive not solely because of its material properties, which are lush and elaborate, but because each work is driven by her heart. Moved by personal stories of struggle, despair, and hope, Lasch makes tributes to people she knows and to those she never knew, to those who helped her ancestors, and to strangers whose stories compel



*Death of the Princess II*, 1981, feathers, paper,  
wire, beads, gold thread

her to find representation in her artwork. These stories are particularly apparent in the artist's cut paper work, a recurring two-dimensional form in Lasch's oeuvre. *Death of the Princess II*, for example, is a tribute to an unnamed Middle Eastern princess who had been stoned to death at the order of her grandfather. Like other works from the artist's 1980s *Wedding Veil* series, it similarly has a layered, veil-like quality. Large sheets of cut paper are embellished like a cake, but layered and mounted on board. The romantic, flower-marked paper and flowing, undulating lines reference a veil, which serves to shield—and control—the female figure. By presenting the veil without a female form, Lasch reclaims the traditional covering and celebrates its delicate beauty, but also preserves it as a relic of the past through the use of opaque materials.

The artist's retelling of personal narratives is traced by the lines of paint she pipes from a wax paper cone and the paper edges she cuts by hand. Yet written narratives are also part of Lasch's practice, such as the ones within the sealed *Letters to the Dead*. In the 1990s Lasch wrote letters to people who had passed away, including a man who saved her father from drowning in an icy river, only to die of the pneumonia he caught soon after. This format of sealed paper notes also connects to Lasch's wall-hung gilded paper prayer cloths, which she made in honor of her deceased parents.

Lasch's personal experiences with love, life, and loss drove the creation of these works. Linda Nochlin, whose critical inquiries established the discourse of feminist art history in the 1970s, cites the artist Louise Bourgeois for her transformative sculpture that emphasized "the role of biography in the interpretation of the artwork and the new importance of the abject, the viscous, the formless, or the polyform."<sup>2</sup> While Lasch's artwork is far from formless—it is, in fact, quite wedded to recognizable forms—the materiality of her processes and the biographical information embedded in her chosen media parallel Bourgeois's concerns.<sup>3</sup> Though Nochlin is primarily interested in the way that radical women artists have eschewed "representational doxa," it seems important to underscore alternative approaches to biography in art making. Creative perspectives that embrace the sensual and base feelings from the body are also aligned with Nochlin's feminist call for reorienting aesthetic strategies.

Lasch's work is always rooted in the body. This is most obvious in her figurative series made in bronze in the late 1980s (see p. 32) and those made in bisque porcelain about two decades later. Considered comparatively, these figures retain the polarity between



from top

*Sacred Breeding: Anna* (detail), 2007, bisque porcelain

*Sacred Breeding: African Prince* (detail), 2007, bisque porcelain, gold, paper



*Sacred Breeding:*  
*The Egg Handler*  
(detail), 2007,  
bisque porcelain,  
gold, silver, mirror

darkness and light of her black and white cakes. Whether in bronze or porcelain, the scale of the figures is similar—handheld size, akin to dolls. Yet the bronzes explore Lasch’s darker memories, with the female figure a vessel for contemplation, and the skeleton a specter of a difficult past—or an inevitable future. The sinister nature of the stories the bronzes tell is muted by Lasch’s fine modeling and attention to detail, as is her use of water and glass, reflective materials that separate and superimpose flesh and bone in each work. In contrast, the ivory forms from the *Sacred Breeders* series elevate youthful figures to quiet icons. They aren’t overtly idealized, and yet each is a very special figure. The bodily gestures convey comfort and ease, referring to the peacefulness that often comes from the very basic pleasures of sex. These porcelain works emerged later in Lasch’s career, when the trials of her personal heartbreak were no longer raw. Yet in both the dark bronzes and the more hopeful porcelains, the figure remains a subdued signal of fortitude.

The porcelain figure in *The Egg Handler* shows a young female dipping her arm into a reflective space filled with miniature eggs. The round form has been a recurring presence in Lasch’s work since her *Yab Yum* canvases, with the egg symbolizing an organic embodiment of a circle of life. In Clarice Lispector’s short and strange essay “The Egg and the Chicken,” the Brazilian writer uses an ordinary moment of domesticity in the kitchen to break into the question of life itself with a series of tenuously connected proclamations and observations about the humble egg:

In the morning in the kitchen on the table I see the egg. I look at the egg with a single gaze. Immediately I perceive that one cannot be seeing an egg. Seeing an egg never remains in the present: as soon as I see an egg it already becomes having seen an egg three millennia ago. —At the very instant of seeing the egg it is the memory of an egg. —The egg can only be seen by one who has already seen it.<sup>4</sup>

Lispector’s text seems to loop upon itself, the narrator circling repeatedly around its purported object—the egg—and in so doing posits the narrator’s thoughts as the true subject of the text. Though Lispector’s stories are notoriously difficult to interpret with certainty, the writer seems to posit that people are vessels through which creation passes. This is a narrative—perhaps *the* essential narrative—that Lasch’s oeuvre has continued to perform. For Lasch, the egg, whether cracked open and strewn with bones, as seen in *Chocolate Egg and Bones*, or gilded and fecund with flowers for a 50th wedding anniversary, is a source of life amidst death.



*Chocolate Egg and Bones*, 1983, mixed media

Lasch's latest body of work wholly embraces the female form and its traditionally feminine object of desire and objectification: the dress. Lasch began making dresses entirely of acrylic paint in 2012, and her exposure to hi tech paint formulations in 2015 during a Golden Foundation Residency activated the series with even more intricate detail and luminous finishes. Every dress is made entirely of paint, from the swaths of shiny satin to the lacy bodices and delicate sleeves. Each is remarkable, with silhouettes drawn from varied moments in European and American fashion history—a collapse of time and memory into familiar forms. The lace patterns are always different, sometimes crafted with the help of molds, or made entirely with piped paint. All are adorned with pretty details, such as baroque pearls and glass beads, carefully applied in the manner of Lasch's cakes. From a charmingly petite christening dress and a child's communion dress, to a gloriously embellished wedding gown with a nine-foot train, Lasch's dresses mark time, just as cakes do, but in even more elaborate form. Some miniature dresses celebrate a child's birth, such as *Welcome Hadley Grace*. Others pay tribute to a life lost, such as *Jeanne Hébuterne*, the muse and companion of Amadeo Modigliani, who committed suicide soon after the artist's death while pregnant with their second child. Without bodies, the dresses maintain ghost-like presences—an encapsulation of both life and death.

IN AN ESSAY ON ART AND FEMINISM TODAY, Christine Wertheim proposes that “a critical art would not be one that dealt with disembodied information and a desire for liberation from material labor, but one that refuses commodification by insisting on the value and pleasures inherent in the processes of work itself, at least, of re-productive work.”<sup>5</sup> Citing Lasch along with Miriam Schapiro and Harmony Hammond, Wertheim's call is not new, but it continues to be relevant.<sup>6</sup> Lasch's work is ostensibly about the body and the objects that frame bodies: the stuff that fills the senses, the pastries and sweets that brighten social occasions; the dresses that adorn the body and delight the eye. It is unabashedly feminine. It might be simple to label Lasch's aesthetic as that of women's work, yet her practice doesn't rest comfortably in the world of craft. For Lasch, repetition is a fundamental component of her creative process, with methodical, meditative gestures the essential link between her varied bodies of work. This ceaseless re-productive labor gives the artist great pleasure, as anyone who has visited her studios can attest. Lasch approaches every new work with unbridled energy, a faithfully autobiographical perspective, and genuine delight in her materials, from viscous paints to baroque pearls.

*A Life Blessed: Wedding Dress*, 2016, acrylic paint, baroque pearls, glass beads, crystals







*Welcome Hadley Grace*, 2015, acrylic paint, pearls, beads, Collection of Jane and Michael Murphy



*Lillian: Two Births*, 2014, acrylic paint, Private Collection



*Christening Dress, H.V., Four Pregnancies, Two Births, 2014, acrylic paint, baroque pearls*



*A Life Blessed: Communion Dress*, 2015, acrylic paint, baroque pearls



*Jeanne Hébuterne: Two Pregnancies, One Birth, 2014, acrylic paint*

This embodied perspective—one that has historically been pushed aside as inferior by the cultural establishment—must be embraced. From the “bad girls” that Marcia Tucker and her curatorial cohort identified in the seminal 1994 New Museum exhibition, of which Lasch was a part, to the kind of libidinal “bad feminist” that Madonna recently proclaimed she is, Lasch’s practice has always been rooted in universal phenomena: love, body, sex, death, and all of the objects that come with them.<sup>7</sup> Lasch’s gift has been to capture the experiential, resonant magic of these phenomena into permanent icons, a similar impulse shared by pop artists of the 1960s and 70s. There are other longstanding aspects of Lasch’s work that share resemblance with the practices of emerging generations of artists today. A part-time resident of the Coachella Valley for almost 15 years, Lasch’s deep-rooted spirituality continues a line of inquiry that denizens of the desert have long held. And if women’s work and craft were once marginalized, these practices have surged in use by artists of all intersectional identities and conceptual approaches today. Over 45 years Lasch has created an oeuvre filled with beautiful, eloquent work that speaks to spirits of past and present, and to impulses of delight and desire. To all those who’ve experienced the pains of life, Lasch’s work offers hopeful tribute for our collective memory.

Mara Gladstone

## NOTES

1 Nicola Humble, *Cake: A Global History*, London: Reaktion Books, 2010, 8.

2 Linda Nochlin, “‘Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?’ Thirty Years After,” in *Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2015, 313.

3 Bourgeois and Lasch showed work together in the exhibition *13 Women Artists*, held March 1972 at a loft on Prince Street in New York. This exhibition would be the incubator for the creation of A.I.R. Gallery later that year.

4 Clarice Lispector, “The Egg and the Chicken,” *The Complete Stories*, New Directions, 2015, Kindle edition, location 3640.

5 Christine Wertheim, “After the Revolution, Who’s Going to Pick up the Garbage?” *X-TRA*, Winter 2009, Vol. 12, No. 2, <http://x-traonline.org/article/after-the-revolution/>, accessed November 2, 2016.

6 Gayatri Spivak was a pioneer of this discursive formulation, positing the female body as a site of liberation in the context of commodification, value, and pleasure. See “Feminism and Critical Theory” (1985), in *The Spivak Reader*, eds. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, New York: Routledge, 1996, 53-74.

7 Lasch’s shocking plaster mask *Birthing My Husband* (1992) appeared on the cover of the New Museum’s newsletter as a representation of the *Bad Girls* exhibition. See *New Museum Views*, Winter 1994, vol.1 no.4, and Marcia Tucker, et. al., *Bad Girls*, New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994. Madonna proudly called herself a “bad feminist” for expressing her sexuality and desire during her Billboard Music Woman of the Year award acceptance speech on December 9, 2016.



*Katherine, the Given Away Child*, 2012, acrylic paint, beads, buttons, Collection of William G. Butler



## EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

*Ancestral Patterning: Yab Yum III*, 1974-1975, gold and silver thread on canvas

*Ancestral Patterning: Yab Yum IV*, 1974-1975, silver thread on canvas, Collection of Donna MacMillan

*Wedding Tower*, 1978, paper, wood, acrylic paint, metallic thread, needles, Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, Gift of Roger W. Barrett

*Wilhelmina's Bird Tower*, 1979-1980, wood, acrylic paint, glass beads, cut paper, hair, silver thread

*Wilhelmina's Bone Tower*, 1979-1980, wood, acrylic paint, bones, cut paper, silver thread

*Cologne Cathedral Altar*, 1980, mixed media collage, handmade paper mounted on board, Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, Gift of Norma Bussing

*Saint Sebastian's Cake*, ca. 1980, wood, acrylic paint, pins, Collection of Marilyn Pearl Loesberg

*Bardo Black Cake*, 1980-1981, wood, acrylic paint, cut metal

*Bardo Black Egg I*, 1981, plaster, sand, acrylic paint, watercolor, pins

*Bardo Black Egg II*, 1981, plaster, sand, acrylic paint, watercolor, lacquer, wire

*Death of the Princess II*, 1981, feathers, paper, wire, beads, gold thread

*Box of Poison Chocolates*, 1983, wood, enamel and acrylic paint, silver leaf

*Chocolate Egg and Bones*, 1983, mixed media

*Roman Resurrection I*, 1983, plaster, wire mesh, twigs, mixed media

*Box of Poison Cookies for Past Lovers*, 1985, mixed media, Collection of Elaine Finkelstein

*Heart Worm*, 1985, mixed media, gold leaf

*A Life Blessed: 50th Anniversary Golden Egg*, 1985-1986, plaster, thorns, gold leaf, Collection of Jennifer Grausman

*Two Hearts for Three Friedas*, 1987-1989, bronze, stainless steel scissors

*Echo*, 1988-1990, bronze, water

*Five Hearts Presented to God for Judgment*, 1989-1990, cast iron, blackened bronze, carved stone, cast lead, gilded bronze, chamois cloth, Collection of H. Tony and Marti Oppenheimer

*Slippery Soap*, 1989-1990, bronze, glass

*Letters to the Dead*, 1998, mixed media on paper

*A Couple's Prayer* (from the *Prayer Cloth Series*), 2006, gold, silver, and copper leaf, netting, and acrylic paint on Arches paper, Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, Gift of Albert Aaron

*Sacred Breeding: African Prince*, 2007, bisque porcelain, gold, paper

*Sacred Breeding: Anna*, 2007, bisque porcelain

*Sacred Breeding: The Egg Handler*, 2007, bisque porcelain

*Sacred Prayers I*, 2008, gold, silver, copper leaf, acrylic paint on Arches paper

*Sacred Prayers II*, 2008, gold, silver, copper leaf, acrylic paint on Arches paper

*Wedding Tower*, 2012, wood, acrylic paint, baroque pearls, gold leaf, Collection of Meredith Ward and Debra Wieder

*Thirteen Petit Fours*, 2010–2012, wood, acrylic paint, Collection of Marilyn Pearl Loesberg

*A Life Blessed: Anna Reilly II*, 2012, acrylic paint, baroque pearls, beads

*Black Petit Fours*, 2012, wood, acrylic paint, Private Collection

*Cake with Hanging Skirt*, 2012, acrylic, straight pins, wood, Collection of Donna MacMillan

*For Anni and Josef Albers*, 2012, paint, aluminum leaf, Collection of Meredith Ward and Debra Wieder

*Gypsy Rose Lee*, 2012, acrylic paint, gold leaf

*Lillian*, 2012, acrylic paint, fabric, pearls, mounted on panel

*Untitled*, 2012, acrylic paint, silver leaf

*Katherine, the Given Away Child*, 2012, acrylic paint, beads, buttons, Collection of William G. Butler

*Small Cake*, ca. 2012, acrylic, straight pins, wood, Collection of Donna MacMillan

*Untitled Cake*, ca. 2012, wood, acrylic paint, baroque pearls, Collection of Melinda Photis

*Lace Handkerchief Panel*, ca. 2013, paint, fabric, pearls, mounted on panel, Collection of William G. Butler

*Jeanne Hébuterne: Two Pregnancies, One Birth*, 2014, acrylic paint

*Christening Dress, H.V., Four Pregnancies, Two Births*, 2014, acrylic paint, baroque pearls

*Lillian: Two Births*, 2014, acrylic paint, Private Collection

*A Life Blessed: Communion Dress*, 2015, acrylic paint, baroque pearls

*Welcome Hadley Grace*, 2015, acrylic paint, pearls, beads, Collection of Jane and Michael Murphy

*A Life Blessed: Wedding Dress*, 2016, acrylic paint, baroque pearls, glass beads, crystals

*Wedding Cake*, 2016, acrylic paint, wood, baroque pearls, Collection of Elise and Eric Batscha

*A Life Blessed: Shroud*, 2017, acrylic paint

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The artist at work on *A Life Blessed: Wedding Dress*



The artist's materials  
in her studio.

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Born 1944, New York City  
Lives and works in New York and Rancho Mirage,  
California  
B.A., Queens College, City University of New  
York, 1970  
M.F.A., Georgia State University, 1990  
Professor Emerita, University of Massachusetts,  
Amherst

### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

Solo exhibition, A.I.R. Gallery, New York, 1973.  
C. 7,500, California Institute of Arts, Valencia;  
Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford; Moore College  
of Art, Philadelphia; Institute of Contemporary  
Art, Boston; Walker Art Institute, Minneapolis;  
Smith College, Northampton; Garage Limited,  
London, 1973-74. Curator Lucy Lippard.  
Solo exhibition, Zabriskie Gallery, New York, 1975.  
*Private Notations: Artists' Notebooks II*,  
Philadelphia College of Art, 1976. Curator  
Janet Kardon.  
*A.I.R. Overview*, P.S.1, New York, 1978.  
Solo exhibition, Galleriet, Lund, Switzerland, 1980.  
*Decorative Sculpture*, Sculpture Center, New  
York, 1981. Curator April Kingsley.  
*Street Scenes*, Institute of Contemporary Art,  
Philadelphia, 1981. Curator Janet Kardon.  
*Precious*, Grey Art Gallery, New York, 1985.

*Food*, Malmo Konsthall, Malmo, Sweden, 1984.  
Solo exhibition, Thomas Segal Gallery, Boston, 1988.  
Solo exhibition, Marilyn Pearl Gallery, New York,  
1988 and 1990.  
Solo exhibition, SculptureCenter, New York, 1993.  
*A.I.R. Gallery: A Twenty-Year Retrospective*, New  
York, 1994.  
*Bad Girls*, The New Museum, New York, 1994.  
Curator Marcia Tucker.  
*Division of Labor: Women's Work in  
Contemporary Art*, Bronx Museum of the Arts,  
New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los  
Angeles, 1995-96.  
Solo exhibition, Museo de Ciudad, Queratero,  
Mexico, 2009.  
Solo exhibition, Meredith Ward Gallery, 2012.

### AWARDS AND HONORS

Yaddo, 1978, 1980, 1994, 2016  
C.A.P.S. Grant, 1980  
National Endowment for the Arts, 1980-81  
American Academy in Rome, 1983  
New York State Council of the Arts, 1984-85  
Pollock-Krasner Grant, 1987-88  
Lilly Fellowship, 1993-94  
University of Massachusetts Faculty Research  
Grant, 1993-94  
National Academy of Design, New York, 1995



New England Foundation for the Arts, 1995–96  
The National Academy Museum, Speyer  
Sculpture Award, 2005  
Golden Foundation Residency, 2015

#### SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio  
Eli and Edythe Broad Museum at Michigan State  
University, Michigan  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Museum of Modern Art, New York  
National Academy Museum, New York  
National Museum of Women in the Arts,  
Washington, D.C.  
Orlando Museum of Art, Florida  
Palm Springs Art Museum, California  
Polk Museum of Art, Florida  
Queens College of the City of New York  
Rutgers University, New Jersey



opposite and above: Pat Lasch at work during her Golden Foundation Residency, New Berlin, New York, 2015.

above: The artist at work on *Welcome Hadley Grace*

