

The Water Gatherers

Upon entering the space formed by this mixed media installation by Mary Babcock, you may feel underwhelmed.

Wait. Breathe.

Let the subtlety of these translucent panels draw you in. As you stand inside the quiet rectangular gallery that is Babcock's forest of varied light, you gradually begin to discover what is happening in each of these large, elegant, seemingly weightless compositions.

Ever-changing illumination from surrounding windows, passes through huge laminated piecework hangings of household wax paper, inviting us to see - and see again - just as a forest reveals itself with each shift of light.

As one realization gives rise to the next, we experience depth where there is none, in the usual sense.

These floating compositions are, at most, several semi-transparent layers of paper thick and yet they draw us in ... where we discover intricacy and splendor.

We recognize the fallen leaves of 'Ōhi'a - or is it water ?! - and find bursts of lehua blossoms at our feet.

One end of this "room" of lightly moving walls is a massive weaving, the title piece, *The Water Gatherers*.

It's a forest of monofilament — fish net, fishing line and other reclaimed fibers, extracted from seas burdened with our tangled waste, becoming trees conducting water into the earth where we stand. Looking up, there is a stunning extension of this

tapestry's forest canopy with Volcano's tree tops framed in the window above.

We look up into the tangle of this double canopy while we stand on water-soaked earth.

Another panel ... a frolic of feral pigs in a paper forest. And another, the barely concealed mass of a dozer at work, crushing every green thing in its wake.

The artist's quiet, elegant, pieced and stitched and woven interpretation immerses us in the surrounding Volcano forest and so much that informs our lives here.

Her intricate compositions invite us to consider water in its many aspects as the wax-filtered light recreates the life-within-a-cloud that is Kīlauea's 'Ōhi'a rainforest ... an overcast, cool-moist mood and meditation.

Mary Babcock renews our view of what is happening right here, right now, in this forest on the slope of the island's youngest erupting volcano, Kīlauea.

Caroline Garrett