

Reviewed by Leora Lutz

Linda Gass: and then this happened...

Museum of Craft and Design
December 19, 2019–May 3, 2020
San Francisco, California, US | sfmcd.org

Artist and environmental activist **Linda Gass** is concerned about “climate change at the intersection of water.” Her solo exhibition, titled *and then this happened...* at San Francisco’s **Museum of Craft and Design** (MCD) addresses issues of failing infrastructure, human interventions, and disasters that impact the Bay Area’s varied terrain and fragile watersheds. For Gass, textiles are a way to use “soft material to talk about hard issues.”

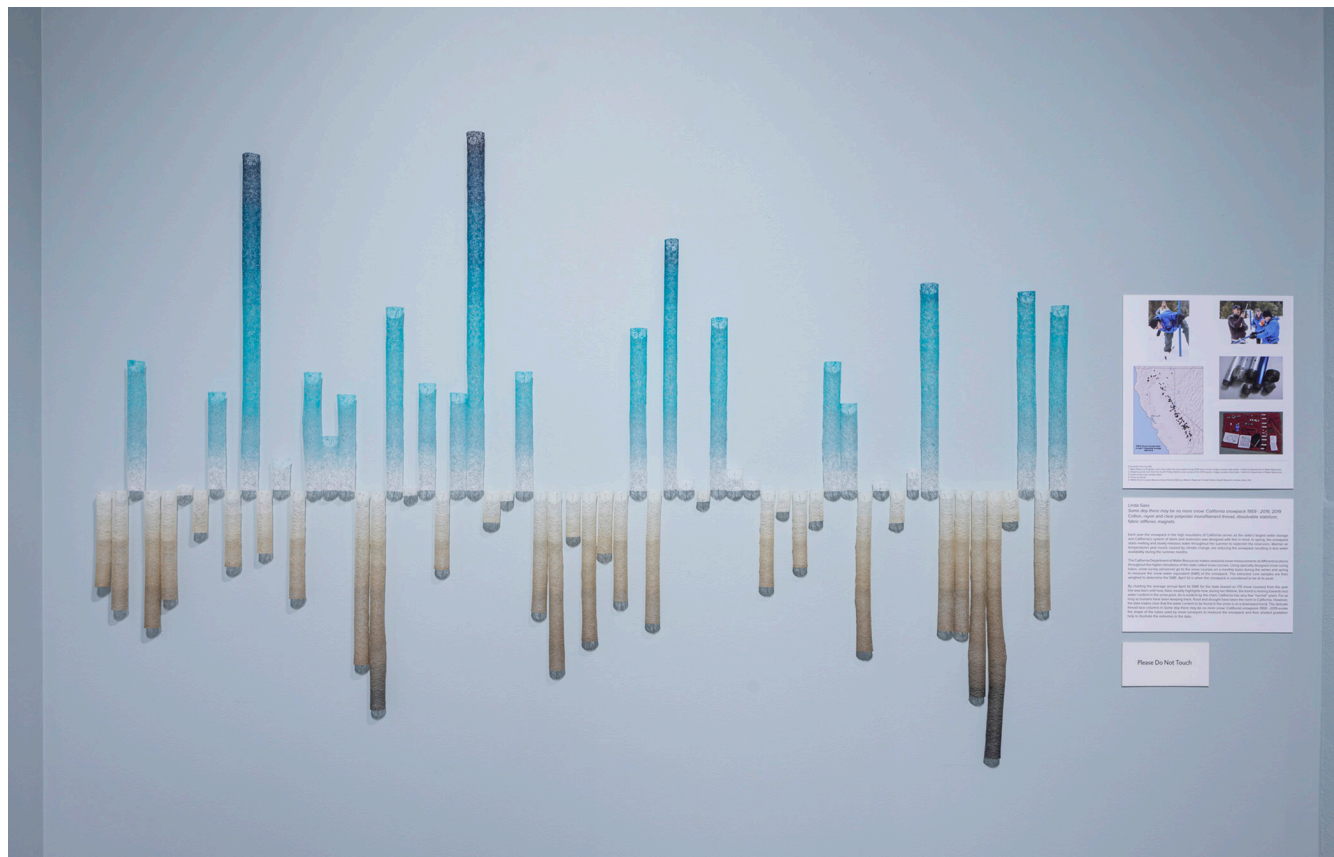
Gass works entirely in fiber techniques, referring to her objects as “stitched paintings and drawings.” Her labor-intensive practice uses traditional methods in contemporary ways, including silk-dyeing using resists, detailed free-form stitching,

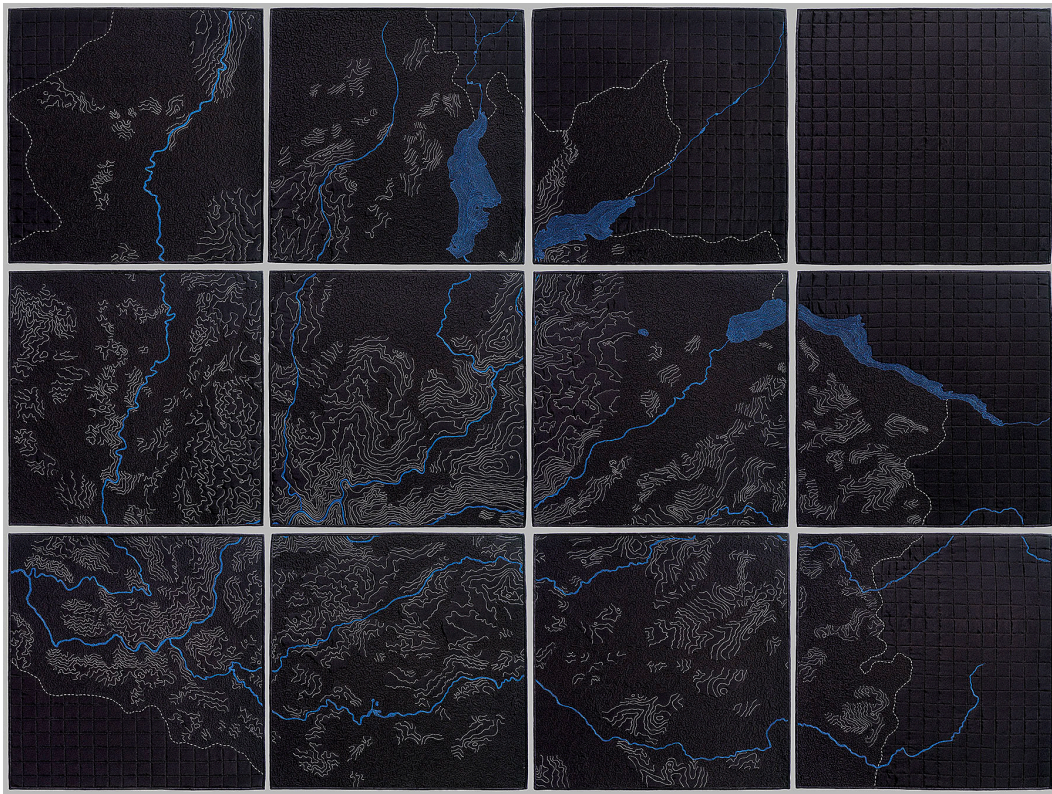
quilting through layers of batting, and delicate hand/machine-made lace. The familiarity of the materials draws the viewer in, while the subject matter prompts contemplation.

Part of the California drought issue is that the watershed is not being properly replenished each year due to lack of viable snow which creates water flows after the snow melts in the spring. As part of the research in making work for the show, Gass spent time with scientists at the **California Department of Water Resources** who weigh “snow core” samples to gauge freshwater predictions for the region. *Some day there may be no more snow: California snowpack 1959 – 2019* is comprised of delicate, translucent tubes depicting a graph of snow cores spanning over 50 years.

The “cores” are created entirely of thread lace made by Gass, embroidered by machine over a water-soluble stabilizer. The lace was stitched one color at a time, using varying shades

Linda Gass *Some day there may be no more snow: California snowpack 1959 – 2019* 2019, cotton, rayon and clear polyester monofilament thread, dissolvable stabilizer, fabric stiffener, magnets, nails, 58" x 90" x 1.25".





Linda Gass *Severely Burned: Impact of the Rim Fire on the Tuolumne River Watershed* 2015. silk crepe de chine, cotton batting, silk broadcloth, cotton thread, polyester thread, 54" x 72" x 2". Photo: Don Tuttle.

to create subtle gradations. For the wet years, she used silk thread to symbolize water because it imparts a slight sheen. For the drought years, she used cotton thread for its matte and dry-appearing qualities. The installation is highly effective, reiterating the fragility of the water situation at large.

The droughts have also made the landscape particularly vulnerable to devastating fires. *Severely Burned: Impact of the Rim Fire on the Tuolumne River Watershed* features twelve 14" squares evenly spaced apart in a grid, giving the impression of a quilted blanket. Black crepe de chine acts as a metaphor for the blackened and charred terrain where only charcoal remained. A wandering Tuolumne River stitched in blue silk floss traverses through each panel, adding a striking glint.

The piece is impactful in its quiet activism, emphasizing the tremendous loss of vital vegetation necessary to keep the ecosystem alive and sustain the water cycle. "The water cycle is chaotic and extreme," explains Gass. If no rejuvenation occurs, eventually the land will become a desert. This poses a particular threat to San Francisco and the surrounding cities who rely on the water from this river area.



Linda Gass *Urban Power vs. San Lorenzo Creek – What's next?* (triptych) 2019, silk crepe de chine, silk broadcloth, silk Indian Douppioni, silk dyes, water soluble resist, polyester batting, rayon/viscose and polyester embroidery thread, each 59" x 12". Photo: Don Tuttle.

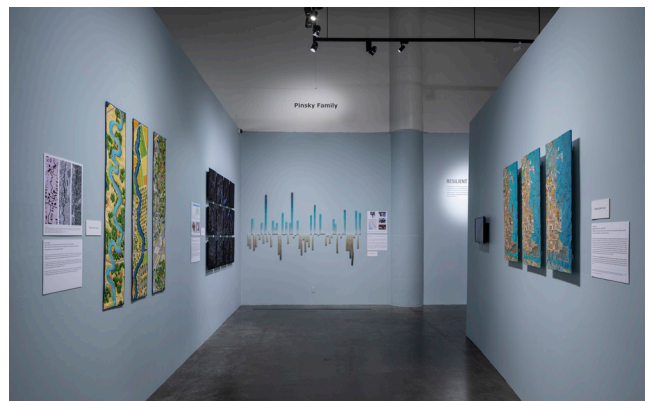


Linda Gass *Dogpatch: the sea is rising: 0, 3 and 6 feet* (triptych) 2019, digitally printed silk crepe de chine, recycled polyester batting, Lutradur, rayon/viscose, polyester embroidery thread, each 35.5" x 18" x 1.5". Photo: Don Tuttle.

Dogpatch, the sea is rising: 0, 3 and 6 feet, features the bay's shore that spans the neighborhood called Dogpatch, where MCD is located. The triptych reads from left to right, illustrating the progression of several city blocks of industrial buildings, grasslands, and marinas which will become submerged over time. One imagines a foreshadowing of the Bay Area becoming an Atlantis.

As climate change takes its toll, ironically sea levels are rising at alarming rates while freshwater diminishes. By addressing these issues, Gass hopes that her work "inspires more people to advocate for change before it's too late."

—Leora Lutz is an Oakland, CA based interdisciplinary artist and writer. Her writing has been published in print and online publications including *Artnews*, *Elephant*, and the *Art Newspaper*. Her artwork has appeared in public spaces and galleries including *Palm Springs Museum of Art*, *Angel Island* and the *Belgrade Embassy*.



Linda Gass: and then this happened... (installation) December 19, 2019–May 3, 2020 at the Museum of Craft and Design, San Francisco, California.