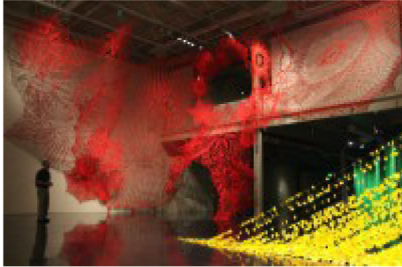




## Colorfast

**Big, bold and gasp-worthy**

By Amy Kepferle · Wednesday, June 29, 2016



When guest curator Amy Chaloupka recently brought a couple dozen kindergarteners to view the “Colorfast: Vivid Installations Make Their Mark” exhibit at Whatcom Museum’s Lightcatcher Building, she said many of the youngsters’ first response upon walking through the doors to the gallery consisted of audible gasps.

“There’s been lots of that, and that’s what I was going for,” Chaloupka says. “I want people to have a physical response to the work.”

While those visiting the museum will get a glimpse of the “color” in “Colorfast” before entering the main exhibit space via Elizabeth Gahan’s pieces at the outdoor and indoor entrances to the gallery—think triangular Rubik’s cubes alluringly laid out like climbing vines on preexisting structures—patrons likely won’t gasp until they walk through the tall doors and into the approximately 6,000 square feet of viewing space.

While the four enormous works of art that were created in response to Whatcom Museum’s architecture might appear to be simple at first glance, they’re anything but.

For example, the blood-red, oversized doilies draped like colorful cobwebs in California-based artist Ashley Blalock’s “Keeping Up Appearances” were hand-crocheted over the course of the last five years—and that’s in addition to the two to three months she spent making the largest piece for this exhibit. (Chaloupka says that while Blalock was in Bellingham to install the piece, she also crocheted three shawls.) Far from being cloying or cutesy, the red doilies dominate the room and imbue the work with a sense of power.

Because Blalock knew going in that she wanted to use the color red, the other artists needed to choose hues that would be complementary to her work. Seattle’s Katy Stone chose autumn-leaf-yellow for the thousands of pieces of Duralar—an archival plastic film—she painted on for the category-defying “Ray,” and many shades of blue in “Horizon,” a piece consisting of hundreds of wispy clouds making their way across the Lightcatcher’s giant walls.

In “Event Horizon,” Portland, Ore.-based artist Damien Gilley’s shape-shifting layers of bright green string hang from angles that make viewers question just where that elusive horizon is. You’ll want to walk through the angles and alignments he’s painstakingly constructed, but it’s best to walk around the long work to fully appreciate it (warning: you may get a little dizzy).

Chaloupka says “happy accidents” conspired to make the exhibit even better than she hoped it would be. She didn’t realize the gleam from the black floors in the gallery would add an extra element of reflection to the viewing experience, or the fan far above Stone’s “Ray” would cause the leaf-like pieces of painted material to flutter and shine. She also didn’t anticipate how connected the works would appear to be once they were installed.

“For the four artists in this exhibition, color, with all its emotional punch, is front and center in their work, but another commonality is the use of materials and processes of familiar or humble means which they all employ with surprising results,” Chaloupka says. “Whether walking under an archway of 16-foot crocheted, blood-red doilies, or meandering through a room-sized architectural diagram composed of neon-green string that morphs with one’s shifting perspective, visitors will have ample opportunity for discovery as they explore each installation.”