

SHEA HEMBREY



# CYCLE

The artworks in this exhibition come from a variety of series spanning a decade, but all depict or use simple natural elements. As a child, I would paint, draw, and sculpt with the materials that surrounded me in rural Jackson County, Arkansas. As an adult artist, I've made a conscious decision to work with these materials whenever possible. Agricultural byproducts, such as wheat straw and rooster tail feathers, are a mainstay in my sculptures.

Overall, my studio practice focuses on questioning reality. Are our current perceptions of the universe very accurate? How much do we understand of how the cosmos operates? If you dig into the particulars of its physical structure, how is our world actually put together? I want to understand our surroundings. I want to truly see the universe.

The ideas I am exploring always direct the methods and media that I use for a project. I spend time every day doing research about these subjects I'm trying to understand more deeply. Since my work focuses on the overall structures of nature, most of my research focuses on biology and physics. This research specifically determines the direction of each series of work: sometimes an idea is best explored in paintings, sometimes the artwork needs to exist out in nature, and sometimes the project needs to be ephemeral.

How can I work with nature in the broadest sense to get at a bigger picture: to question the mega and micro structures that we cannot see but that are vital to understand? In exploring this question, my work has often been engaged with current mysteries in physics about how nature is likely structured (such as dark matter and dark energy). In asking questions that question reality, I playfully call attention to ways of making and presenting art: sometimes I play trickster with identity; sometimes I use exacting realism.

The paintings in this show are still lifes pared down to bits of matter, space, and string (referencing the elemental building blocks of base particles, dark matter, and string theory). They are painted with fine trompe—l'œil technique to emphasize our continual quest for and questioning of what is real.

The vortex sculptures evoke the overall structure of a universe with their simple form that implies either the big bang expanding or a black hole swallowing.

In all these various works, I am playing with how to create an image that is a lyrical representation of our universe. How might I provide an apt, true likeness? How would I even know if I've succeeded? We know so very little about our weird and wonderful cosmos. Less than 5% of our universe is made of atoms. Gravity is one of the weakest forces in the universe. Clouds of sugar float in deep space. And just how many dimensions are there? How many universes are there? These questions are worthwhile for everyone to be pondering.

- Shea Hembrey

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[BradburyArtMuseum.org](http://BradburyArtMuseum.org)

*radius*, 2012  
wheat straw, wood, foam, plastic, paper, screws  
and acrylic paint  
84 x 84 x 27 inches (detail)

