

PEACH WEEKENDER | COVER STORY

'Breast artist' brings exhibit to the Toledo Museum of Art

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BY JANET ROMAHER
BLADE STAFF WRITER



Artist Pinaree Sanpitak poses with her work 'Anything Can Break' at the Toledo Museum of Art.

Overhead in a Toledo Museum of Art gallery, thousands of silvery gray boxes take flight on origami wings, tucked alongside what creator Pinaree Sanpitak calls breast clouds.

On view through Jan. 4 in a portion of Canaday Gallery, *Anything Can Break* is a ceiling installation made up of a steel superstructure and mesh from which the flying cubes and clear glass clouds dangle in what the artist calls "accurate randomness." The sculptural work, which took several days to install, is embedded with fiber optics and speakers linked to sensors.

As visitors move around in the space beneath the installation, the space comes alive with soundscapes.

Anything Can Break was first shown at the 2012 Biennale of Sydney in the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, and the installation at the Toledo Art Museum is downsized for space reasons.

The exhibition here has about 60 percent of the 5,700 origami boxes made by Sanpitak and an assistant who folded sheets of wrapping paper — some silvery shiny with delicate patterns, others plain with a grayish tone — into the work of art. About 200 breast-shaped glass pieces were made for *Anything Can Break*.

The Thai artist's focus on the female form — in metal, fabric, glass, or ceramic — is designed to prompt admiration, rather than shock, and her artwork has earned her accolades and solo exhibitions in museums and galleries, including in Los Angeles

and Singapore.

Another of her installations will be on display for a year, from this month to next November, at the Toledo Museum of Art where finishing touches to the transparent glass sculpture were being made a few days ago in the Glass Pavilion where staff artists made 632 bubble-within-a-bubble beads that have been tied together to create a hammock, playing on a theme Sanpitak explored in the aftermath of the 2011 flood in her native Thailand.

Sanpitak, 53, who finished high school in the United States, said the glass hammock is an extension of her *Hanging by a Thread* art work that featured printed material from relief bags delivered during the flood crisis. Fabric, that had been used to fashion cradles in which to carry babies or used as blankets, was cut and tied by the artist to create hammocks.



A detail from the ceiling installation.

"My work is about the body," she said, and the *Hanging by a Thread* hammocks — that were exhibited as though drifting aloft on a breeze — showed the body as both present and absent. Too, the hammocks were designed to give Thailand hope, hope for the better, she said.

Jeff Mack, glass studio manager at the Glass Pavilion, has worked with Sanpitak for several months on the glass hammock project, mostly by email and Skype, and he described the artwork as a good opportunity to collaborate with the artist, taking an idea to fruition. The hammock will be displayed in an outdoor area near the Glass Pavilion, across from the art museum on Monroe Street.

The artist wants the hammock — stainless steel cable keeps the blown glass beads in place — to have the look and feel as if it is suspended in mid air. Also, she's excited to see the beads glisten with reflections of the fall colors on the maple trees.

Glisten it does, and from each angle, the hammock takes on a fresh glint of artistry, a wonder of work that clinks like billiard balls and shines with the talents and skills of all of the artists involved.

Sanpitak's involvement with the museum began last spring when she visited to discuss with glass artists her role as a Guest Artist Pavilion Project — known as GAPP — resident.

The GAPP program invites artists from around the globe to create new work in glass. She came up with several ideas before settling in to work out the "how are we going to make this happen" details for the glass-bead hammock. She credited Mack and the other artists at the Glass Pavilion for bringing her idea to life.

People tend to remember Sanpitak as the "breast artist," but she said her works are about the body human.

She's made colored breast beads from Murano glass, and she has created dozens of breast-shaped molds for "breast-stupa cookery" events during which chefs use the molds in which to serve or to make foods.

Sanpitak said she began working with the breast form after her son was born in 1993, but emphasized that she was making a monument for womanhood, not just motherhood.

The ceiling installation is part of InSight: Contemporary Sensory Works, an exhibition that also features ceramics by Magdalene Odundo, a Kenya-born artist from London, and two and three-dimensional works made of fiber and found objects by Aminah Robinson of Columbus.

The artists prove that while vision is the primary sense utilized, art is equally capable of stimulating minds through sound and texture, according to the Toledo Art Museum where the exhibition continues through Jan. 4.

Museums are moving towards creating "uber engaging" and interactive exhibitions, said Adam Levine, assistant director of the Toledo Museum of Art. Sanpitak's interactive installation is consistent with that movement, he said. The *Anything Can Break* installation, he said, "fits into her body of work in a meaningful way."

The opening of InSight: Contemporary Sensory Works kicked off the 47th annual conference of the International Visual Literacy Association. The conference, which continues through Saturday, is hosted by the Toledo Museum of Art.

All eight keynote presentations during the conference are open to the public free of charge. Speakers, including reconstructive plastic surgeon Joseph Rosen and documentary filmmaker Stephen Apkon, will share their views on the power of communicating visually. Information: 419-255-8000 or visit toledomuseum.org.