I came upon my material by chance—immense mounds of netting the color of the ocean's luminous cerulean blues with bits of fiery magma reds. As I walked the beach I might have tripped over them, but instead I was caught. Both repelled and attracted, I, too, became entangled.

I take what has been labeled refuse and work with the beauty that is nonetheless inherent within. 1° 55’ 30” N (Self Portrait as Atoll) is part of a 10-year series of tapestries woven from refuse—abandoned fishing nets and lines. The nets are gathered across the Pacific—some harvested from Oahu’s shores, others collected by local fisherman in the American Northwest, still others voyaging 1,300 miles from Kure Atoll and the far reaches of the Northwest Hawaiian Islands via cleaning missions by NOAA and the Surfrider Association. I title works after latitudes—geographical lines of connection—traveling through and beyond sites of particular ecological vulnerability. Latitude lines connect us all.

Geographically, an atoll is a ring-shaped coral reef circumscribing a lagoon. Ghost of an ancient volcano, coral grows on the extinct volcano’s rim. The ocean’s erosion of this living land mass must not outpace the reef’s ability to grow upward and outward. Culturally and ecologically, atolls serve as homes to a rich multitude of people, plants and animals. Lying no more than 16 feet above sea level, these spaces are the canaries of climate change, harbingers of the impact of sea level rise. Considered “remote” from the perspective of major nation-states that define themselves via terrestrial boundaries, this vast range of homelands continues to be threatened by the environmental and cultural destruction resulting from U.S.
militarism and unfettered consumption—our misguided disconnection from the natural, interconnected world.

_1° 55' 30 N (Self-Portrait as Atoll)_ addresses one such space. _1° 55' 30 N_ traverses the Maldives, a gathering of atolls situated in the Arabian Sea. This country faces submergence within our children’s lifetimes, largely due to our mass consumption and greed. In this work, I become the atolls themselves, my figure disintegrating and reconfiguring. The gesture was inspired by my newborn’s self-rescue swimming lessons, in which she learned that when she rests her head back, the water supports her—it is the useless struggle that draws her under the surface. The same is true for us. Nature is not separate, and our ineffective struggle against ourselves is what leads to our drowning.

The inspiration for _5°38'50"N_ (constructed from marine debris and nets, obsolete as the result of overfishing) was flood inundation maps of Kili Island, a geographically tiny atoll in the Marshall Islands with a tragic history of monumental global significance. Kili served as home to many original
inhabitants of Bikini Atoll, following post-WWII nuclear tests that decimated Bikini and ultimately made it uninhabitable. Today’s Kili, like the rest of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, is threatened by sea level rise and king tide flooding. Recent appeals for assistance from the U.S. government have been denied, leaving the Bikinians not only as nuclear refugees, but as climate refugees as well. The fate of Bikini, Kili and its people is highly emblematic of the way we consume, and then disown, once someone or something is no longer a part of our desire.

I remain deeply interested in gaining greater understanding of empathy and compassion and of our proclivity toward destruction, our enduring entanglement. The nets are very much teachers. I fell into them because they are tactilely interesting; they became tactically interesting as well, serving as a vehicle for both exploring and communicating our inherent interconnection. The nets and I struggle with all the same things I grapple with in daily life. I literally get entangled in them and have to devise ways to make them malleable enough so that I can work with them, while respecting the materials that they are. All of the conflicts and paradoxes are sorted and filtered through my hands, and then returned to the workings of my mind. Having worked with the nets and walked the beaches for years, my understanding of myself has shifted. I now think about myself—all of us—as water. As we learn more about the water and its patterns, we learn about ourselves and our engagement with the social and material worlds. Learning about the workings of our minds, we learn about those waterways; they are one and the same.

Ultimately my work is about the act of witness—the importance of witnessing the complexity of both internal and external worlds. I have been highly influenced by Buddhist thought, where the distinctions between self and other, interior and exterior, are not the discrete distinctions I was raised to understand within Western thought. I investigate “making” as a form of contemplative action—my interactions with materials as vehicles for illuminating tacit knowledge of our deeper humanity.

Breaking Ground is one such piece. We are striving, ever striving, for something not yet in our reach, never realizing the barriers we meet are constructions of our own entrapping minds. Inspired by observations of ice melting in nature, Breaking Ground explores the quiet fracturing of false ideologies that happens gradually and naturally under the light of awareness. It is both a reflection on the natural world and on the deceptive territory of our minds. Ironing and stitching for hours and hours, I immersed myself in the Buddhist notion of “groundlessness”—the experience of uncertainty—and observed the very human resistance that keeps us trapped in our often limiting and claustrophobic beliefs and self-projections. The final form is a suspended 25-by-32-foot hand-pieced and hand-stitched sheet of household waxed paper. It shelters—or perhaps confines—an inner silent chamber, sound-dampened with billowing quilts of salvaged cotton fibers, punctuated with hand-knotted hair. The household wax paper embodies a rich duality: Like our concepts, it is used to hold, protect and preserve, yet is itself fragile and ephemeral.

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