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By SCOTT INDRISEK | PHOTOGRAPHS BY KRISTINE LARSEN

**Tara Donovan**, maestra of the ordinary, presides over a multi-roomed Long Island City studio where absolutely everything - including the welding of custom-built storage units - is handled in-house.

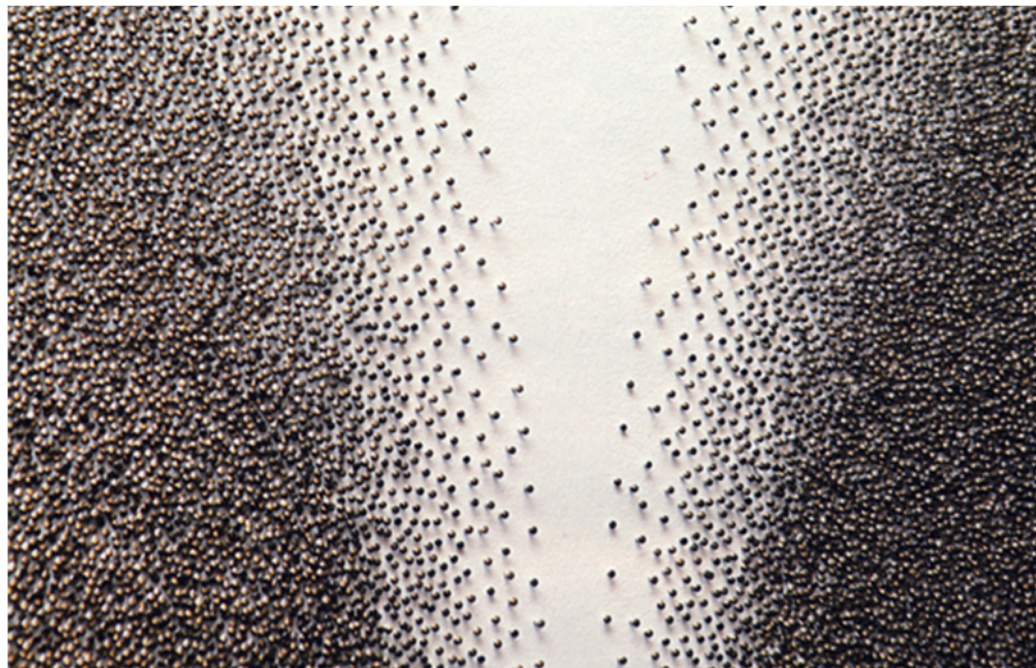
When I visited last week, the space was surprisingly well organized; I had admittedly been expecting enormous mountains of plastic cups and buttons, waiting to be turned into levitating jellyfish-blobs or maritime growths. A team of assistants were busy at various tasks: Positioning and pounding pins into gatorboard for a series of new works destined for a show opening May 9th at Pace Gallery in New York; dissecting and soldering the rings of hundreds of metal Slinkies for a series of sculptures headed to two shows - at the Parrish Art Museum in Long Island, opening July 4, and at Jupiter Art Land, in Edinburgh, Scotland, opening August 1. In typical Donovan fashion, the large-scale Slinky sculpture in her studio looms like a biological mutant

fashioned from the simplest means. In this case, that means nothing more than the deconstructed-and-recomposed children's toys, held up by an armature hewn from segments of cut-and-welded pipe. (Don't bother asking her the obvious, i.e. how many Slinkies did that take? "I don't keep track of numbers, ever," she said, blunt but friendly.)

"This has been the year of the Slinky around here," Donovan said. Another dumb question you shouldn't bother asking would be one that tries to plumb for any deep, psychological significance re: her attachment to this stair-flopping bauble. "I don't really have personal connections to the materials I choose," she shrugged, when I do just that. "It's more about their physical properties and what possibilities I can exploit out of them. I don't feel *akin* to Slinkies." What she does respond to, though, is the medium's potential for creating a "drawing in space." Like many of Donovan's works, this series began as a way to simultaneously



An in-progress Slinky sculpture in the artist's studio. Its shape is supported by a hidden armature composed of rings of cut pipe.  
OPPOSITE: Donovan in her Long Island City studio, 2015.



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TOP: Detail of a new pin-in Gatorboard drawing.

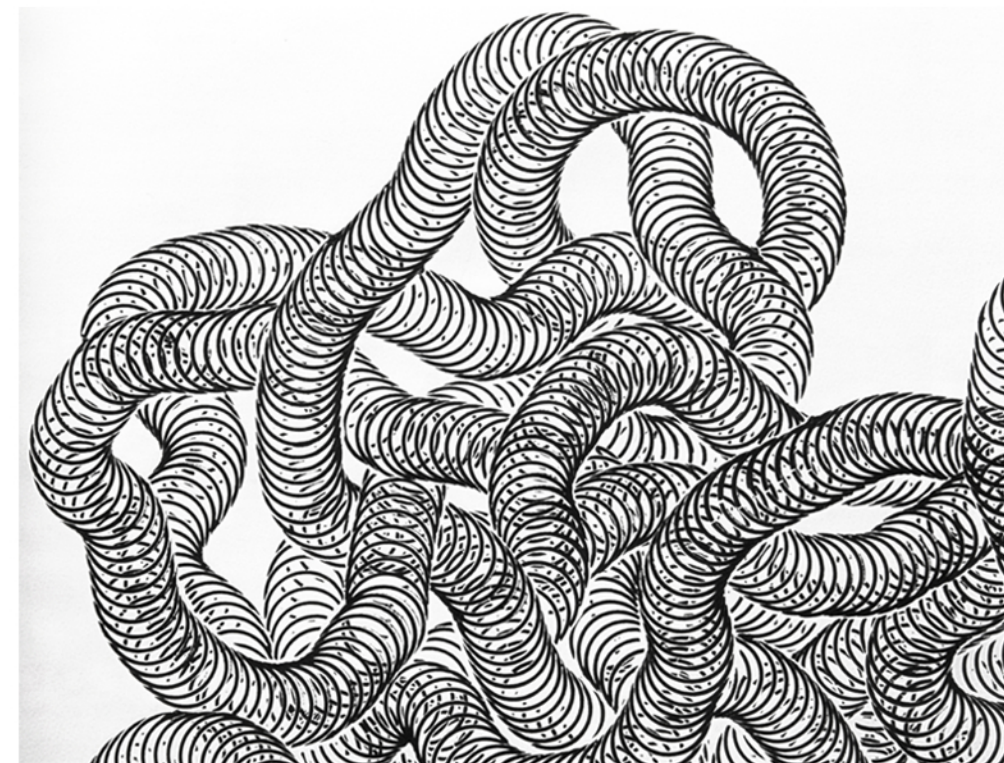
BOTTOM: A Slinky wall sculpture that crawls its way into a corner

think about the two- and three-dimensional. She had the Slinkies cut and flattened in order to make prints on paper, some of which will be included upstairs in her forthcoming Pace show - the sinuous assemblages, one sprayed with ink, are then loaded into the bed of a hydraulic press. Afterward, she realized that they worked quite well as sculptures: One of them at Jupiter Artland this summer will edge its way into a corner and sprawl across two walls. She has also made monoprints using a similar setup, placing the flattened Slinky structures on a steel plate and then spraying them. These, she says admiringly, look a bit like X-rays. Also “a poisonous snake with a cool pattern on its back.” The freestanding Slinky sculpture nearby reminds her of billowing smoke. Donovan’s reference points are refreshingly bullshit-free.

This Slinky experiment has gone through other permutations. Donovan traces it back to a series of graphite-on-Mylar drawings she made some 15 years ago, an examination of “overlapping circles that looked very much like a dispersed Slinky.” Recently, she has made work with traditional Slinkys, as well as smaller-diameter Slinky Juniors. In an attempt to replicate a similar aesthetic in the form of an outdoor sculpture, Donovan also had a good number of giant Slinkys fabricated out of stainless steel. The end result was underwhelming. A stack of them sat in a corner of the studio (“I have a lot. Crates,” she says. “You have to admit your failure sometimes and walk away”).

For her Jupiter Artland exhibition, Donovan will take over several interior spaces at the complex, which also includes permanent outdoor installations from the likes of Anish Kapoor and Anya Gallaccio. The estate’s ballroom, originally built in the 17th century, will debut as an exhibition space, hosting a massive Donovan floor piece: a rolling topology of plastic cups. To make things easier, the studio is sourcing cups from Scotland; Donovan was expecting a shipment of samples any day, for quality-control testing. Two other Slinky sculptures will join it, along with a large Mylar work.

“We have systems for everything,” Donovan says, strolling through the studio’s back rooms, which seems like an understatement: Even the ingenious structure to store uncut Slinkys was fabricated and built on-site. The artist’s assistants charged with pin pounding are working off a matrix sketched out by a digital projection on



on Gatorfoam board. The pins themselves, if you’re curious, are Royal Ruth models, “thicker than a dress pin—they don’t bend.” While her finished pieces are often intricate—appearing quasi-mathematical, as if generated by fractal equations or other things I’d be hard-pressed to comprehend with recourse to Wikipedia—Donovan’s practice seems conversely freehand.

“The form? It’s pretty random,” she says of the half-finished mass of Slinkys in the studio, resembling a many-legged, headless beast. Likewise, discussing another in-process sculpture that looks like a translucent-tentacled cousin of a sea anemone: “That whole piece is hot glue and acrylic rods. The first ones, I bought at Canal Plastics,” in New York. In Donovan’s practice, a certain gee-whiz, seemingly high-tech veneer is achieved with the most unglamorous of materials. Whether she’s making abstract prints of rubber bands on Japanese rice paper or organic masses of buttons and glue, the artist conjures genuine drama with DIY spirit. In an age of endless outsourcing, fabrication, and 3-D printing, Donovan’s

plucky, no-nonsense ingenuity is something to celebrate.

Detail of an editioned print made using disassembled and soldered Slinky Junior placed in a hydraulic press.