

GALLERIES

Artist and weightlifter Kledia Spiro lifts up young voices

‘Drawing in Air,’ now at Kingston Gallery, looks at the weight we carry

By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, Updated January 10, 2024, 12:10 p.m.



Kledia Spiro, "Drawing in Air," 2023, gloss enamel on wood, ultrasonic speakers and sensors, wood, momentary switch, 5V fan, cheesecloth, essential oil. ALONSO NICHOLS

What does weight mean to you?

Artist and weightlifter [Kledia Spiro](#) posed that question to middle schoolers at [Groton School](#), a private school in Groton, in 2018, and to Boston Public High Schools students in Northeastern University's [Bridge to Calculus](#) program in 2023.

She prompted the middle school kids to answer in one or two words: “Stress,” they said, and “social pressure.” The high school students had more leeway for reflection. One said, “One day I hope to earn enough to financially support everyone I love.”



Kledia Spiro, "Light Paintbrush (detail)," 2015-24, cast iron, stainless steel, black oxide, Cerakote, zinc, steel core and thick rubber protective coating, quick-release barbell clamps, wax, duct tape, paper. ALONSO NICHOLS

Their replies — and the weights they hefted in Spiro’s weightlifting class — became the seedbed for her poetic show “Drawing in Air” at Kingston Gallery. “Light Paintbrush,” a barbell encrusted with art materials, anchors the exhibit. Spiro will use it in a [live performance](#) on Jan. 19.

Audio of the students’ responses plays with a two-channel video of them hoisting barbells. Spiro used a [bar path analysis](#) app, which helps lifters improve their technique, producing a digital line of light following their movement.

Every student traced a whole-body signature in the air. Spiro made large, vertical calligraphic paintings documenting those lines, and here she invites viewers into sensory,

whole-body experiences with them.



Kledia Spiro, "Learning How to Draw (detail)," 2017-23, two-channel video, stereo audio by students at Groton School and Boston Public School High Schools. ALONSO NICHOLS

Each painting has an aroma box. Press a button, and an essential oil scent wafts out. Inspired by the students' thoughts, composers [Lianna "Oly" Hauoli Sylvan](#) and [Kevin Baldwin](#) crafted music, and each painting has its own track triggered by a motion detector. Step in front of a painting, and the music begins; step back, and it stops. Sylvan's song is harmonious; Baldwin's instrumental is at times jarring.

This creates a dance between viewer and painting like the one we do with people we're just getting to know: Am I drawn in or pushed away? One standalone painting features all the luminous bar paths, all the sounds and scents. [It smells like teen spirit](#), and if it's overwhelming, so is the weight of adolescence.

Our bodies, our gestures, the weights we hold even unconsciously shape the energy we express in ways our words may not convey. There's a truth-telling to that. "Drawing in

Air” captures that energy in these young people — the struggle, the hope, and the light that comes with learning to carry the weight they’re given.

KLEDIA SPIRO: DRAWING IN AIR

At Kingston Gallery, 450 Harrison Ave., through Jan. 28. 617-423-4113,
www.kingstongallery.com

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