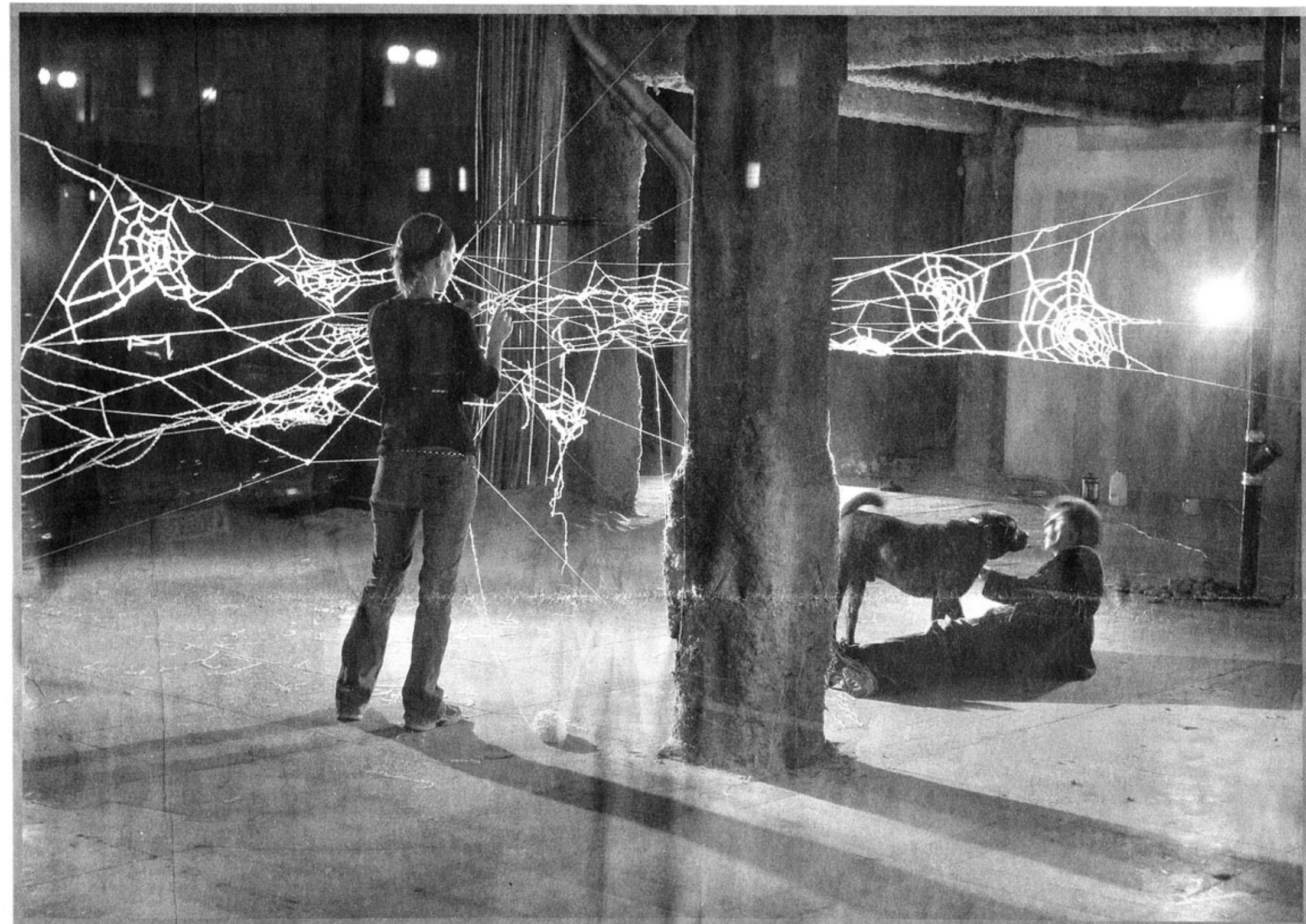


'It's a matter of beautifying the world one little corner at a time.'

— LAUNA BACON,
On her urban life and artwork



Photographs by PERRY C. RIDDLE Los Angeles Times

URBAN ART: Bacon weaves her creations of epoxy and yarn in the Continental Building as resident John Lindauer watches.

Spinning her L.A. yarn

Artist Launa Bacon weaves a spell by turning vacant space on a downtown street corner into a lacy fantasy of spider webs.

By DIANE HAITHMAN
Times Staff Writer

SWAGGERING up 4th Street near Spring is an angry young man in a brightly striped sweater, offering his unfavorable performance review of Police Chief "Billy Bratton" to the air. Walking briskly on that same street are a uniformed police officer and a man in crisp business attire, discussing "reality television." Others include a man begging for change, two laughing women unloading athletic shoe boxes from a Volkswagen and a weary crowd waiting for the bus.

This eclectic downtown L.A. corner is a perfect place for artist Launa Bacon to spin her web.

With a combination of yarn and epoxy glue, Bacon, 29, has been turning the vacant first floor of the Continental Building at the corner of 4th and Main streets into a lacy fantasy of spider webs. On yarn "webs" stretched between unfinished concrete beams, Bacon has applied the dripping glue to create the effect of early-morning dew.

"You have all of the extremes on this street," muses the Nebraska native — who should know, because her loft apartment-

studio is across the street. Bacon supports her art habit with secretarial work in a nearby office and a waitress job at the Banquette coffee shop, also on 4th. "I think downtown has a vitality to it; every day is a kind of wonderful experience of street wisdom," she says.

The piece, she adds, is site-specific. "This space, this industrial, organic landscape, has definitely become part of it," she says of her, er, web site. Bacon says the installation is best viewed at night, when the interior lights make the epoxy glisten. The piece will have an official opening 7-10 p.m. Saturday but otherwise can be seen only through the space's picture windows.

The installation also may open briefly as part of a planned May 15 "unveiling ceremony" for downtown's developing Gallery Row. At 1 p.m., the Gallery Row Windows Display Project, showcasing installations by Los Angeles contemporary artists, will be open to the public along Main and Spring streets between 2nd and 9th streets, officially designated Gallery Row in July by the Los Angeles City Council.

Bacon pays no rent on the cavernous art space beneath floors of occupied lofts owned by developer Tom Gilmore who owns six other loft buildings in the area. Gilmore first saw Bacon's "strangely compelling" work in her loft home, and was thrilled when she approached him about utilizing empty spaces in his buildings for temporary installations. This is Bacon's second piece in a Gilmore space.



DARK SIDE: Bacon says the lacy installation is best viewed at night, when interior lights make the epoxy glisten.

"It really does turn these sort of lonesome, vacant spaces into spaces where your mind can rest or be challenged," Gilmore says. "This was really her idea. She goes to what she thinks the source is and says: 'I've got an idea, I can do it.' I respond to that real well; I'm not a big bureaucracy guy."

Gilmore said the space will become a restaurant, but not for at least six months. "So she can just go crazy in there, as far as I'm concerned," he says.

Bacon's artwork was inspired by a recent self-guided road trip through Mexico, where she was mesmerized at dawn by the otherworldly sight of spider webs spun through waist-high fields of grass. Along with her "web matrix," Bacon also has painted black-and-white web murals on the interior walls, with "shadow paintings" of the faces of friends and spectators who have watched the work develop woven into the webs.

Another aspect of the work was inspired by curious children who had peered through the windows — where, they wanted to know, was the spider? So Bacon painted into one mural the face of the Greek goddess Arachne, who was turned into a spider and cursed to spin ephemeral webs forever by Athena, jealous of Arachne's rare skill in weaving.

Bacon, a graduate of New York's Skidmore College, grew up on a farm in North Bend, Neb., where she used an empty barn as her studio. After college she spent several years in San Francisco before finding a home in downtown L.A. "Ever since I was young, I would do paintings and sculpture in the barn. Now I just have a loft instead of a studio," she says with a laugh.

"It's a matter of beautifying the world one little corner at a time," says the former farm girl of her decidedly urban life and work. "People don't expect it, and it's accessible to everyone. That's important."