

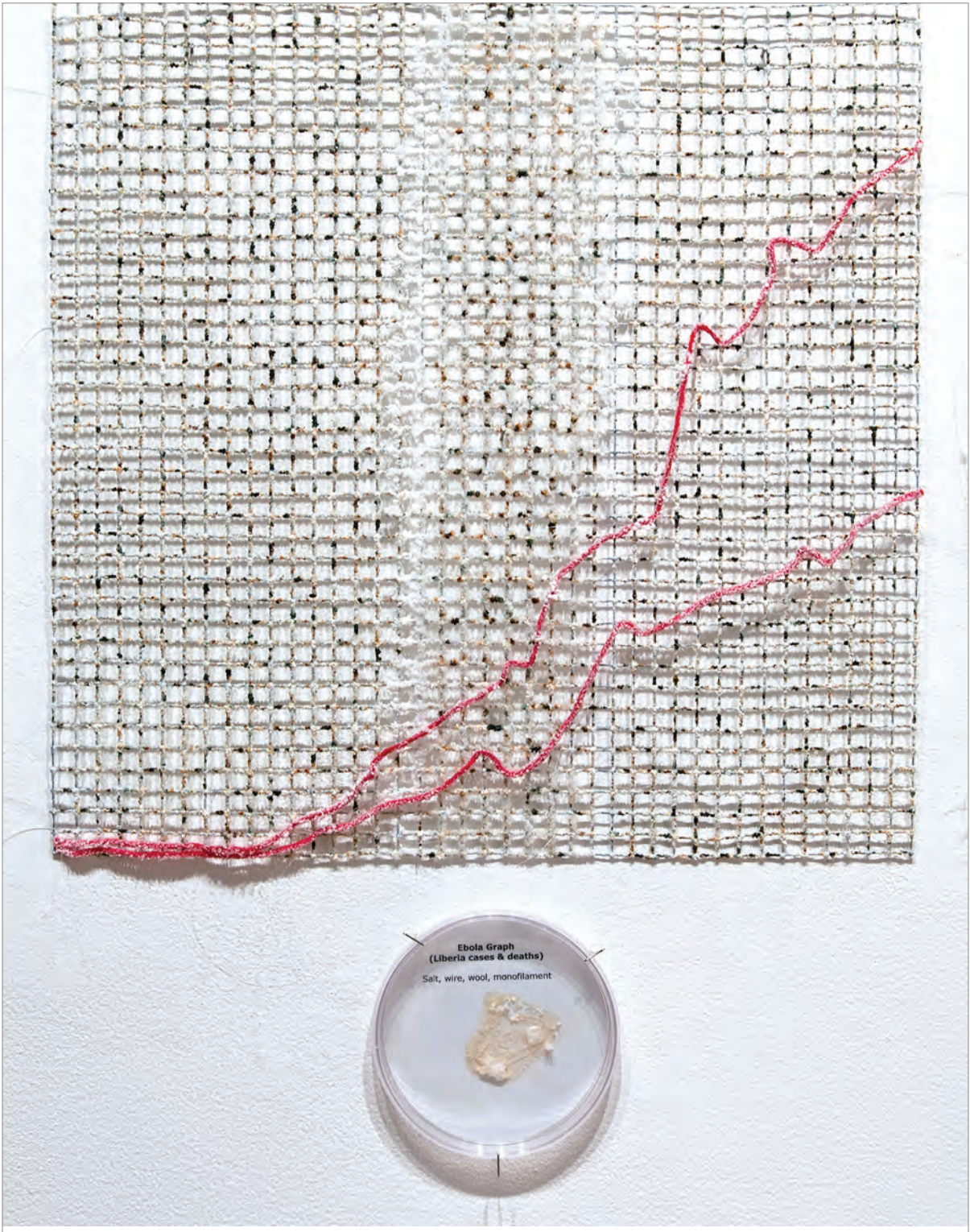
E-SQUARED MAGAZINE

A R T + S C I E N C E



ELAINE WHITTAKER

“Fear and beauty reside in an uncomfortable dialectic in this precarious time of contagions, epidemics, and bioterrors.”



Canadian visual artist Elaine Whittaker considers biology as contemporary art practice. Her artworks are an intersection of art, science, medicine, and ecology. In her work, she explores the forces that make us human – from the foundational processes and materials needed to form an organism to the microscopic world of cellular ecologies. Whittaker’s practice is principally based in installation and includes sculpture, painting, drawing, digital imagery, and sound.

Elaine Whittaker’s most recent work centers on the aesthetics of disaster, the fear of pandemics, and on the body as a site of infection, reflecting narratives and elements of anxiety that are found in popular culture, scientific research, and personal experience. Whittaker examines how cultural and social ecologies are being transformed in unexpected, and often uncontrollable, ways. Shimmering like a chandelier, *Shiver* is an “organism” that hangs from the ceiling. It is composed of over 2,300 Petri dishes and pipette tips that capture prisms of light through crystals of salt, turning fear of the viral and the microbial into a work of beauty. Other works include salt-encrusted grids based on Ebola statistics from Western Africa, United States, and Canada and the artist herself wearing protective masks painted with an array of microbial infectious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, SARS, and West Nile virus.

Elaine Whittaker’s work ultimately asks viewers to address some very critical questions – are the devices we employ to protect ourselves providing the safety we need when faced with the rampant spread of infections and disease? What constitutes true protection? Can disease be truly beautiful? Whittaker has been the recipient of numerous awards and research/creation grants through Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, and the Toronto Arts Council. Her work has been published in various magazines like *SciArt*, *CLOT*, and *Interalia*, among others.

Left: *Ebola Graph - Liberia*. 2015. 20 x 20 in.
Above: Detail of *Shiver*. 2015. 2,300 petri dishes, grown salt crystals, wool, fishing wire, vinyl print, pipette tips, wire. 8.5 x 5 x 5 ft.
Next Spread: *Screened For (Cholera, West Nile Virus, Plague, Tuberculosis, Malaria, SARS, Rotavirus, HIV/AIDS, Rabies, Influenza)*. 2015. Digital prints, halobacteria, agar, petri dishes. 89 x 35 in.

