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### Go see this show Jennifer Steinkamp: Madam Curie

By Kinsee Morlan

When you walk into the Joan and Irwin Jacobs Building at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego's downtown location during the next few months, you might gasp (in a good way).

I did.

Artist Jennifer Steinkamp's "Madame Curie" installation is overwhelming. The seven-channel projection covers most of the walls surrounding the 4,500-square-foot gallery space and the animation moves just slightly, as if blowing in an ever-present, non-existent wind.

On the surface, Steinkamp's piece looks to be simply an aesthetically pleasing floral pattern—images of plants and flowers in someone named Madame Curie's garden. But it's just the starting point, the pleasant opening to a conversation that eventually leads to a discussion about nuclear power.

I emailed Steinkamp and asked her to explain:

Kinsee Morlan: Jennifer, your installation at MCASD is breathtaking. When you first walked into that huge, blank gallery, did you already have an idea of what you wanted to do in the space or do you let the space dictate the piece?

Jennifer Steinkamp: Two years ago when the museum contacted me I had no idea what I would make. The idea of a subject came to me driving past the frightening nuclear plant in San Onofre on the way to the museum.

KM: You've taken an interest in atomic energy, which is a topic at the top of many people's minds since the tsunami in Japan caused problems at the nuclear power plant. When and where did your interest begin? Has your research and exploration led to any conclusions? How does your installation relate to your research?

JS: I have had a distrust and fear of nuclear power and weapons since grade school when we were taught to duck and cover. We also watched devastating films about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Since then, the Three Mile Island accident, 1979, and the Chernobyl Disaster, 1986, should have put an end to the industry, not to mention many more radiation accidents. My research has found that nuclear power is too costly on all fronts including living beings and monetary. There is no way to dispose of the radioactive waste, unfortunately Fukushima is proving these dangers as we speak.

My research took me on a winding path looking at the connections between nuclear power and weapons. I came across Madame Curie who won two Nobel Prizes in

physics and chemistry for her research. I decided to look at her incredible life for inspiration. Besides being one of the foremost scientific minds in all history, it turns out she was enamored with flowers, her daughter's biography of Madame Curie mentions many throughout the book. I decided to use this little known and perhaps insignificant detail to make a peaceful homage to her brilliance.

KM: Do you plan on doing more work based on Marie Curie? What was it like getting to know her and her work? Any interesting factoids you want to share with our readers?

JS: I have no idea if I will make more Madame Curie work. It was very exciting to read about her life and her uphill struggles with sexist beliefs. It was a miracle she was able to accomplish so much with so much against her. She is an inspiration.

KM: What do you hope people take away from your piece at MCASD?

JS: I hope people enjoy the scale of the space. It really is an incredible gallery. I am so pleased to have had the chance to make work for it.

KM: What was unique about your experience at MCASD? Did the architectural space present any challenges or surprises?

JS: This is the most precise space I have come across. The builders were very skilled in their craft.

One thing that really did not occur to me until after I made the work: there is an incredible scientific community in San Diego. This is truly a happy coincidence for me and Madame Curie.