



Light My Candle

Wax intrigued Petah Coyne as she watched it melt, drip, congeal, and harden throughout churches in Europe during a trip in the early 1990s. A gift of candles blessed by the Pope inspired the artist's first wax sculpture and ignited her interest in the medium.



Untitled #781, 1994

Take a closer look

Untitled #781, like many sculptures by **Petah Coyne (b. 1953)**, hangs from the ceiling by shrouded chains, an unconventional approach that captures viewers' attention. Suspending the work ensures that the encrusted metal armature won't crush the delicate wax accretions.

Something to talk about

Coyne experiments with a range of mediums besides wax—sand, taxidermied animals, and dead fish, for example. What do you imagine might be the benefits of using non-traditional materials for sculpture? Challenges?

In her own words

"They look fragile, but they're not. Like women, they're really tough inside."

Who knew?

Coyne originally struggled to work with wax due to its fragility and low melting point. To stabilize future sculptures, she worked with a chemist who developed a formula for a wax that can survive temperatures from 40 to 180 degrees.

Petah Coyne, *Untitled #781*, 1994; Specially formulated wax, pigment, candles, silk/rayon ribbon, steel, chicken-wire fencing, cable, cable nuts, quick-link shackles, jaw-to-jaw swivel, chain, silk Duchesse satin, Velcro, thread, paper towels, and plastic, 62 x 35 x 44 inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Steven Scott, Baltimore, in honor of the artist; © Petah Coyne, courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York; Photograph by Lee Stalsworth

