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**What every artist should know about string theory** ————— **Continuum**  
Liv Spiers ————— Kate Oakenfold

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*Although physics – like history – does not precisely repeat itself, it does rhyme* —+— Edward Witten

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In quantum physics, the only one-dimensional surfaces are an open string, with unattached ends, or a string closed in a loop. It's hoped examining the operation of independent fundamental forces of the universe on these forms can deliver a single, unified theory to explain the laws of nature.

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————— This theory remains unproven. —————

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Kate Oakenfold has solved the riddle and rhyme of string theory, even if it's not proven yet. In *Continuum*, Kate stitches together the severed ends of tree trunks and branches that grow within, and beyond, the gallery. Crimson strings bind broken timbers anew, healing their dis/connection but accentuating the aching wound. Sanguine woollen threads are a recurring feature in her photographs and sculptures, denoting the unseen, complex bonds between all things.

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These connections are everywhere in nature, shared by living beings and inert matter. They remain largely unseen and unacknowledged. Mycelium tendrils create underground networks in vast, symbiotic forests. A single human brain fires ~100 trillion neurological connections. Celestial bodies embrace in a galactic gravitational dance. Immense forces act on these ties, both large and small. Strings are plucked, pulled, woven, tangled, snapped, then ragged ends are spliced together again.

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At its simplest, a branch is a messy cylinder (an open string) and trees are cyclical in nature (a loop). They reach from deep below the ground to far above it, taking and giving to both worlds in equal measure. Messages are sent, resources shared, sacrifices made. The forces that shape each limb is visible on the skin of the tree. Eucalypt bark bears the wrinkles and marks of age in a way that's all too similar to people. While supple on the surface, it's surprisingly dense and strong underneath.

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All the timber used in Kate's work is sourced from naturally shed branches or decayed stumps. She is gifted them, or discovers them on sojourns through woodland. This part of her practice brings her particular ease and fulfilment. It takes her to places that inspire the forms and provide materials for her work. It keeps her alert to her surroundings. A mindfulness of serendipity. She prefers to leave wood untreated; celebrating its weathered scars. In her final assemblage, the solid, pock-marked timber provides a tactile contrast to the soft warmth of its red woollen scarf.

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While Kate's sculptures appear to be solid, they're actually hollow. The lengths of wool are woven around a light steel frame that holds each piece together. It creates a hidden void at the centre of her work. A secret space known only to the maker. The ritual of weaving thread from end to end along her totem poles has become a form of meditation for Kate. The act of repetition marks time. It occupies external senses to create room for contemplation. It opens paths to inward journeys.

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So, these works reach beyond the gallery walls and connect to emotional or spiritual spaces that are sensed but not seen. In this way, Kate's sculptures are both open strings and closed loops at the same time. They're attached to each other and the universe in an expanding field of material and meaning. They become mobius tunnels from earth to sky and back again. As you wander in Kate's quiet glade, you might glimpse a path to strange, new geographies or the fire of unfamiliar suns.

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