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SWC

Inhale. Exhale.

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We often take for granted the simple act of breathing, until, of course, it becomes difficult. When George Floyd was killed as his breathing was restricted while being held to the ground on May 25, 2020, social justice movements mobilized in an effort to stop and denounce the repeated killing of Black and Brown people at the hands of law enforcement. The simple act of breathing is necessary and unconscious, but only if we are lucky enough to have that breath travel both in and out. As some exhale at this moment when the pandemic is shifting, we are coming to terms that nothing will ever be the same as before. Questions are being drawn about what the future will look like and we wonder, will there be more cultural equity or a forthcoming reckoning? The artists in this issue of *Southwest Contemporary* magazine address our current cultural climate and offer a poetic and political reflection of the times while highlighting artistic practices in the Southwest.

Several artists address possible futures of intimacy, beginning with Kayla Collymore and Donna Crump's performance of bodies interacting. In their work, the dancers' actions are triggered by the events of the last year, embracing each other while covered in veils and face masks, representing both healing and resistance. Apolo Gomez's photographic portraits center around desire, dislocation of the artist's identity, and relationships with male-identified people through a queer lens. Sara Hubbs utilizes what she calls the "shelf-life of the female body" by exploring connections between consumer waste products and her own transgenerational relationships with her daughter and her mother. Her unique approach to sculpture brings together recycled materials with new approaches to glass-making, bringing a fresh perspective to how these objects embody notions of protection, care, and resilience.

The selected artists reflect a desire to help build and connect physical and emotional tolerance during our current time while also questioning our intimate relationships with one another.

—JULIO CÉSAR MORALES

Julio César Morales is an artist, educator, writer, and senior curator at the Arizona State University Art Museum. His curatorial work includes solo exhibitions with Superflex, Suzanne Lacy, Nina Beier, Iván Argote, Tania Candiani, Miguel Calderón, Claudia Peña Salinas, Yoshua Okón, Koki Tanaka, Jennie C. Jones, Miguel Angel Ríos, Pablo Helguera, and Liz Cohen. His own artwork explores labor, migration, and underground economies, and has been shown at the Lyon Biennale, the Istanbul Biennale, the Singapore Biennale, and Prospect 3, among others. The recipient of a 2020 Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant, his art is included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Kadist Foundation, and others.



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Sara Hubbs

by Lauren Tresp

Sara Hubbs is intimately familiar with breath’s capacity to be expressive, communicable, and life-giving—qualities of breath we’ve collectively reckoned with over the course of the last year and a half. Working frequently in blown glass, which uses breath to create various shapes and forms, Hubbs’s sculptural works and installations examine concepts of value, temporality, and care.

Hubbs’s blown-glass sculptures begin with source materials that are deeply embedded with human values while also intrinsically valueless. Children’s toy packaging is at once coded with the love and care involved in gifting and the excess and wastefulness of plastic toys that end up in landfills once they’ve been forgotten. Plastic food packaging provides sustenance with invaluable convenience that is matched by the ease with which it is tossed away. From assemblages of these raw materials, the artist creates plaster molds and then uses breath to inflate molten glass into slouching, bulging, and gleaming forms and vessels. Some of the objects become zombie-like in their glassy refusal to die. Others are voluptuous and effulgent, with shapely lumps and folds of skin.

Each of these sculptures retains an embodied-ness that is drawn out by the artist’s installations in which the objects play off of one another. In *Of The Horizon* (2021), three blown-glass forms are set into a (coffin-like) bed of black sand, like mutant anemones at the bottom of the sea or creatures of an alien desert. In *Las Fashionistas* (2019-21), a vessel (*Body 4 Lyfe*) strides futilely forward on anchored steel legs, while its companion, *Fall Flat On Your Face*, has done just that and lies defeated—but at least it lies on a luxe bed of faux fur.

It comes naturally to speak of these objects as characters. They act as corollaries to the human body, riddled as it is with its own questions of societal value and perishability. “During COVID, both breath and intergenerational care became my focus. Home-bound with my school-aged child while my husband cared for patients at the hospital, I struggled to care for my sick mother from afar, restricting my breath around the people I cared for and guarding them against the breath of others,” she writes in her artist statement. “Blowing glass, sweating through the repetitive movements, learning to handle larger quantities of hot glass on my own, became my way to resist society’s expectations of my use-value and the shelf-life of the female body.” In the face of restriction, helplessness, and new lines drawn around “essential” work, Hubbs developed a more intuitive grasp of her materials and methods. She breathes life into these sculptures and—somewhere between animated and fossilized—they teeter provocatively on the edge of life-giving and laying waste.

The installation *Tending the Garden* (2021) verges toward the former. In it, a gravel bed is dotted with vases—some conventional, some colorful and wonky—each holding a green sprig of Baja spurge. Her title conjures Voltaire’s melancholic *Candide*, who vocalizes the best possible attitude in a world full of trash, pain, and distortion: “we must cultivate our garden” if we are to keep going, keep breathing.

Sara Hubbs, *Tending the Garden*, 2021, mold-blown and hand-blown glass, aquarium rocks, sprigs of Baja Spurge, 38 x 72 x 56 in.

P. 48

Sara Hubbs, *Las Fashionistas, Body 4 Lyfe* (left) *Fall Flat On Your Face* (right), 2019-21, mold-blown glass, re-bar, faux fur rug, 58 x 72 x 30 in.

P. 49

Sara Hubbs, *Tending the Garden*, detail, 2021, mold-blown and hand-blown glass, aquarium rocks, sprigs of Baja spurge, 38 x 72 x 56 in.

Sara Hubbs, *Of The Horizon*, 2021, mold-blown glass, aquarium sand, steel, 16 x 18 x 44 in.

All photos: Cassidy Araiza.



