



Exhibition Brochure

a way to mend

curated by Doug Welsh

Blaffer Art Museum

June 7—September 27, 2025

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Director's Note

Laura Augusta, PhD

To mend is also to document moments of the present as they unfold, and to propose new ways of moving forward—of surviving—into the future.

I took a workshop once on how to darn a sock. It was at a craft conference, and the presenter spoke about the delicate art of repair, not only as a methodology, but as a way of being in the world. She selected contrasting threads, running them through the fibers of the wool sock's heel. Too much tension and the work would pucker and contract; instead, the mend required loose and gentle repetition of the threads. The threads remained brightly visible, a reminder of the focused attention required by repair-work. Its cheerful insertion celebrated the object's use over time, offering an emotional closeness to the daily walks and works of its wearer. That closeness, visible in the care with which the mender approached the extended life of the object, structures Doug Welsh's curatorial proposal in *a way to mend*.

Developed over several years, *a way to mend* centers affective attention and repair as a mode with which Gulf Coast artists engage the world. The intimacy of introspection, the attention of care, the framing of loss, the imaginative worlds of memory and philosophy:

within a series of thematic frameworks, Welsh invites the metaphorical mend into view. The curation is deeply personal, structured by an ecosystem of creative exchange that sustains Houston and the Gulf Coast's vibrant artistic communities.

To mend is to engage with the torn, broken, exhausted, and hurt; indeed, in the darning workshop, the tear remains always visible, even centered in the refreshed garment's design. Those of us with a long relationship to the Gulf Coast know that rebuilding and repair are ongoing experiences in a landscape marked by the wide-ranging impacts of major storms. The scar lines of past storms—climatic and experiential—might be understood as a regional consciousness, visible on structures as much as on communities. What Welsh proposes, I would suggest, is a way in which artists working in this region harness an ethos of repair. To mend is also to document moments of the present as they unfold, and to propose new ways of moving forward—of surviving—into the future.

Curator's Introduction

Doug Welsh

In some ways, this project started five years ago. After a harrowing manic episode, I felt determined to use every tool available to manage my symptoms and prevent future events. This included reshaping my painting practice into a sustainable and nurturing mechanism, one that would help me find balance and stability with the inevitable ups and downs of bipolar. Around this time I learned about Forrest Bess, and quickly fell in love with his spirit and his work. It is no exaggeration to say that his paintings saved my life. It felt as though I was building a raft in the middle of the ocean, and it gave me hope to learn that Forrest Bess had done something similar. Bess painted his psychic visions to face them, to learn from them, and to heal within.

a way to mend is a love letter to Forrest Bess and the contemporary Gulf Coast artists in this show, each committed to the healing nature of the work they create and the ideas they explore. These artists live life on their own terms and in their own ways, a very Texan propensity, and arguably its best expression. To live and work along the Gulf Coast, we weather storms, endure endless heat, and contend with others' assumptions of who we are and where we are from. These conditions invariably induce a particular kind of resilience, which is central to this group of artists and the spirit of the show.

Material, formal, and conceptual intersections abound between the 19 visual artists and 5 writers in the exhibition. There are so many overlapping systems of making that I could have organised the show in any

number of ways. I settled on a series of sub themes – Psychology, Identity, Memory, The Environment, Politics, Spirituality, and Philosophy – and grouped the artists and writers accordingly, to explore various facets of the healing capacity of art. Much of the work in this show embraces ideas of and processes relating to repurposing, adaptation, and transformation.

There are a few reasons I wanted to include texts by guest writers. First, Forrest Bess was a prolific writer, and corresponded with Carl Jung, Meyer Shapiro, and Betty Parsons, among others. I thought of involving multiple writer voices in this show as a nod to the vast collection of letters Bess wrote. And as a writer, I find the practice to be a healing endeavor in and of itself. Most of all, I believe in the work of these guest writers. In different ways, Adam Marnie and Emma Timbers express both doubt of and conviction in the healing capacity of art. Sarah Fisher and Liz Gates share glimmers of the healing nature of their visual art practices through poetic texts. Clare Elliott, who curated *Forrest Bess: Seeing Things Invisible* at The Menil Collection, Houston in 2013, offers insights into the artist's life and work in her essay.

Through the multifaceted perspectives of the visual artists and writers in this exhibition, *a way to mend* illuminates the healing potential of art, for the maker and viewer alike. From crises large or small, external or within, the making and sharing of art is one way to catalyze or encourage the process of healing. Art cannot remove pain, loss, or suffering, but creating and experiencing it is one way to be present with these feelings.

Psychology

We tend to romanticize tortured artists – think of the popular representations of Vincent Van Gogh, Edvard Munch, Yayoi Kusama, Sylvia Plath, Whitney Houston, and Amy Winehouse. Such lurid fascination often leads to one of two assumptions. The first registers disbelief that they could have created such transcendent work, given their states of mind. The second implies that mental illness defines their brilliant creativity. These assumptions could be reframed slightly. What if we understood making as a means to cope, adapt, and heal? Within this framework, creative practices might be reactions to—but not born of—the artist’s psychology. This subtle shift could help explain the urgency these artists feel to cool or satisfy something deep within.



Emily Peacock *Flower Field*, 2022, Archival inkjet print 31 x 40 inches, framed. Courtesy of the artist and Seven Sisters Gallery.

Emily Peacock

Emily Peacock has this way of balancing humor and darkness in her work, creating raw images that captivate and challenge the viewer. For anyone who knows her work, *Flower Field* might come as a surprise. The same artist who sunburned “Middle Class” on her stomach, snorted her mother’s ashes, and was kicked out of The Menil for roller-skating in the Dan Flavin exhibition, created this understated, forlorn photograph. Peacock captured this image on her commute between Houston

and Sam Houston State University, where she serves as a tenured professor. Photographed during the Covid-19 pandemic, the artist describes a collective reconnection with nature as we congregated outdoors; here, the natural world offers a panacea for isolation and depression. This stylistic break in Peacock’s work represents a time when the pandemic disrupted normal habits and ways of being, and documents a shared moment of adaptation and survival.



Emily Peacock *Cardinal Red*, 2019, Archival inkjet print 12 x 18 inches, framed. Courtesy of the artist and Seven Sisters Gallery.

In some belief systems, finding a dead cardinal is understood as a spiritual or symbolic event centered around grief and loss; such an encounter might even signify a message from a lost loved one. When Emily Peacock found a dead cardinal outside her home, she took it as a sign from her mother, who had recently passed away. The artist was dealing with postpartum depression (of which she has spoken publicly), and

the presence of this striking and pristine creature was soothing. Peacock photographed the cardinal to honor this moment. The image evokes ideas of preservation, love, and loss, further emphasised by its red frame. In fact, this event marks a shift in the artist's practice, where she now often extends the image to the frame itself, making each work more of a sculptural object, than a stand-alone image.



Alexis Pye *Lost II*, 2023-2024, Oil, oil pastel on burlap 76 x 60 inches.
Courtesy of the artist, Greg Shannon, and Inman Gallery.

Alexis Pye

Since childhood, Alexis Pye has used her artwork to find joy in solitude, process life transitions, and to heal internally. A companion piece to *Lost*, a collage work from 2023, *Lost II* is a self portrait of the artist immersed in a landscape. The figure is both fully present in the space, rooted and grounded, while simultaneously shrouded by her Afro as she turns away, and camouflaged by the pattern on her sweater. The work explores that feeling of being somewhere in between, at a mental crossroads. Specifically, Pye examines this moment in time, when she was going through a breakup, moving, and growing as an adult. There is a sense of familiarity

and nourishment the artist gleans from losing herself in her work. In this painting, Pye experimented by adding cold wax medium to her paint for a pastel and chalky quality, reminiscent of Édouard Vuillard's distemper technique, which combined rabbit skin glue and dry pigments. Pye contends with loving Vuillard, Manet and other modernists, while also criticising the canon, as it historically would have left artists such as herself out. In terms of identity, art history, and personal experience, this image holds many liminal complexities all at once.



Forrest Bess *Bodies of Little Dead Children*, 1949, Oil on canvas in artist-made frame 7 9/16 x 9 3/16 x 1 5/8 inches, framed 21 x 22 3/4 x 3 1/2 inches. Courtesy of The Menil Collection, Houston.

Forrest Bess

It isn't always clear from where the titles of Forrest Bess's visionary paintings came. Often they related directly to his psychic visions. Other times, the titles were more poetic or elusive. The title of this painting may allude to the painful nature of the visions Bess experienced throughout his life, many of which the artist described as being so haunting and painful that they lingered until he painted them out. It was through the practice of making paintings from and about his visions that Bess was able to process, heal, and decipher symbolic meaning.

Encased in driftwood the artist collected near his home in Bay City, this monochromatic painting has a relatively simple composition. Two angled forms side up next to each other, reminiscent of bodies or something biological. Their particular differences are subtle. One is thicker than the other, with two small half moon shapes along the edge. Both have an etched or cutout quality, as if the artist used a sharp tool to dig back to the canvas beneath the surface of the paint, creating a halo effect. The two forms hover over a bark-like background, rough and textured. For all of its strangeness and intensity, this painting has an undeniable presence, something primal and urgent.

Clare Elliott

Forrest Bess— a Way to Mend

According to Forrest Bess, it was an army psychiatrist who urged him to record the abstract visions that he had experienced since childhood. At the time, Bess was recovering from a mental health crisis and a physical trauma, both the results of a homophobic attack by a fellow soldier. Presumably, the doctor was prescribing for Bess art therapy, a formal psychotherapeutic practice, then in its infancy. In the mid-20th century, it had been observed that providing patients with creative outlets helped to ease those suffering from stress, anxiety, PTSD, and grief. For Bess, however, the creative act of painting was only a first step. The more important stage was discovering the meaning that he believed lay behind the mysterious forms and colors, which appeared to him in the stages between wakefulness and sleep.

Bess, who had long wanted to pursue his interest in art, left the army with the conviction to fully apply himself to recording, studying, and decoding the truths revealed by these visions. In addition to painting, Bess integrated information from a variety of sources. He read widely in several disciplines, including mythology, poetry, anthropology, psychology, and medicine. Though he lived a mostly isolated life, he shared his ongoing investigations with knowledgeable authorities—doctors, art historians, journalists, and even the pioneering

Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, whose theories of symbolism and dream imagery arising from an ancient, shared source of knowledge would be pivotal in Bess's understanding of himself and his paintings.

Bess's self-directed course of study was something both broader and more specific than traditional art therapy. Broader in the sense that, because Bess believed they were rooted in the collective unconscious, his discoveries could mend not just his own aging body, but all of society, bringing regeneration and even immortality for all mankind. His quest was more specific in that this everlasting wellbeing was achieved through a highly unconventional practice, i.e. the literal unification of the male and the female within the human body. To this end, Bess underwent a series of surgical procedures in an attempt to transform himself into a "pseudo-hermaphrodite."

Bess's experiments show him not merely as a believer in the healing potential of art, but in the words of Robert Thurman, a scholar of Tibetan Buddhism, as a "devotee." Thurman observed that Bess, "was someone who would give his life for something, give his body for something. And so he wanted to practice his ideas on his own body. He was a Yogi in that sense — 'yogi' means to yoke your body and being to your view of life."¹

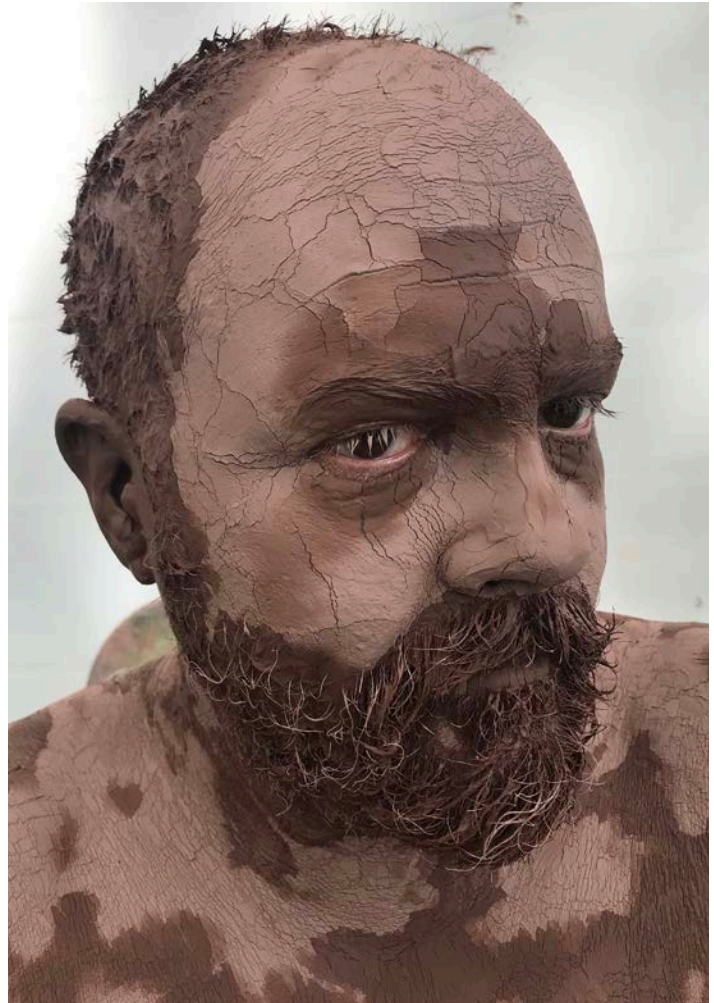
¹Robert Thurman, "Forward," in Chuck Smith. *Forrest Bess: Key to the Riddle* (Brooklyn: PowerHouse Books, 2013), 5.

Identity

The practice of making art is one way to understand, express, and celebrate the parts of oneself that are murky or unresolved. Artists deconstruct and illuminate aspects of their identity and the world around them to cultivate self care, pride, and conviction on the path towards self actualization. This introspective healing practice is about agency, power, and purpose. In sharing multifaceted parts of one's self, these artists call for a more vibrant and equitable future.

Mitch Pengra

For more than forty years, Mitch Pengra has been coating his body in mud and paint. What started as a primal and soothing activity has become a lifelong art practice about ritual, healing, and self expression. For the artist, the experience of being fully coated is grounding and empowering, a nurturing way to access and celebrate sacredness, sensuality, and queerness. Both of these images reveal stages of transformation. In *Dip*, the artist erupts from under the surface of the clay, fully coated, otherworldly almost, yet deeply human. It has the same metamorphic quality of Michelangelo's unfinished sculpture, as if a human form is in a state of becoming, emerging from its earthly confines. The drying and cracking quality of *Crust* reveals a slower kind of transformation, underscoring the length of time the artist prefers to be coated. Overall, Pengra's practice is about embracing who he is and living life unapologetically, sharing his love of intense sensory experiences.



Mitch Pengra *Crust*, 2019, archival inkjet print, framed 17 x 22 inches.



Mitch Pengra *Dip*, 2021, Video still, archival inkjet print, framed 17 x 22 inches.



Shang-Yi Hua *Between*, 2020, Driftwood, deer horn 22 x 10 x 8 inches.

Shang-Yi Hua

Often embracing simple gestures, an economy of material, and poetic precision, Shang-Yi Hua conveys the complexity of belonging both to Taiwan and the United States, regions of the world that are vastly different culturally, philosophically, and spirituality. For Hua, merging disparate materials in her work, for example a piece of driftwood and a deerhorn, becomes

metaphorical of her ongoing healing process as she contends with different aspects of her identity, culture, and beliefs. In some ways, the two materials used in this sculpture are very different. One is of a tree, and the other from a deer. Yet both are naturally discarded and weathered by the elements. Each is a bone or a relic from a past life.

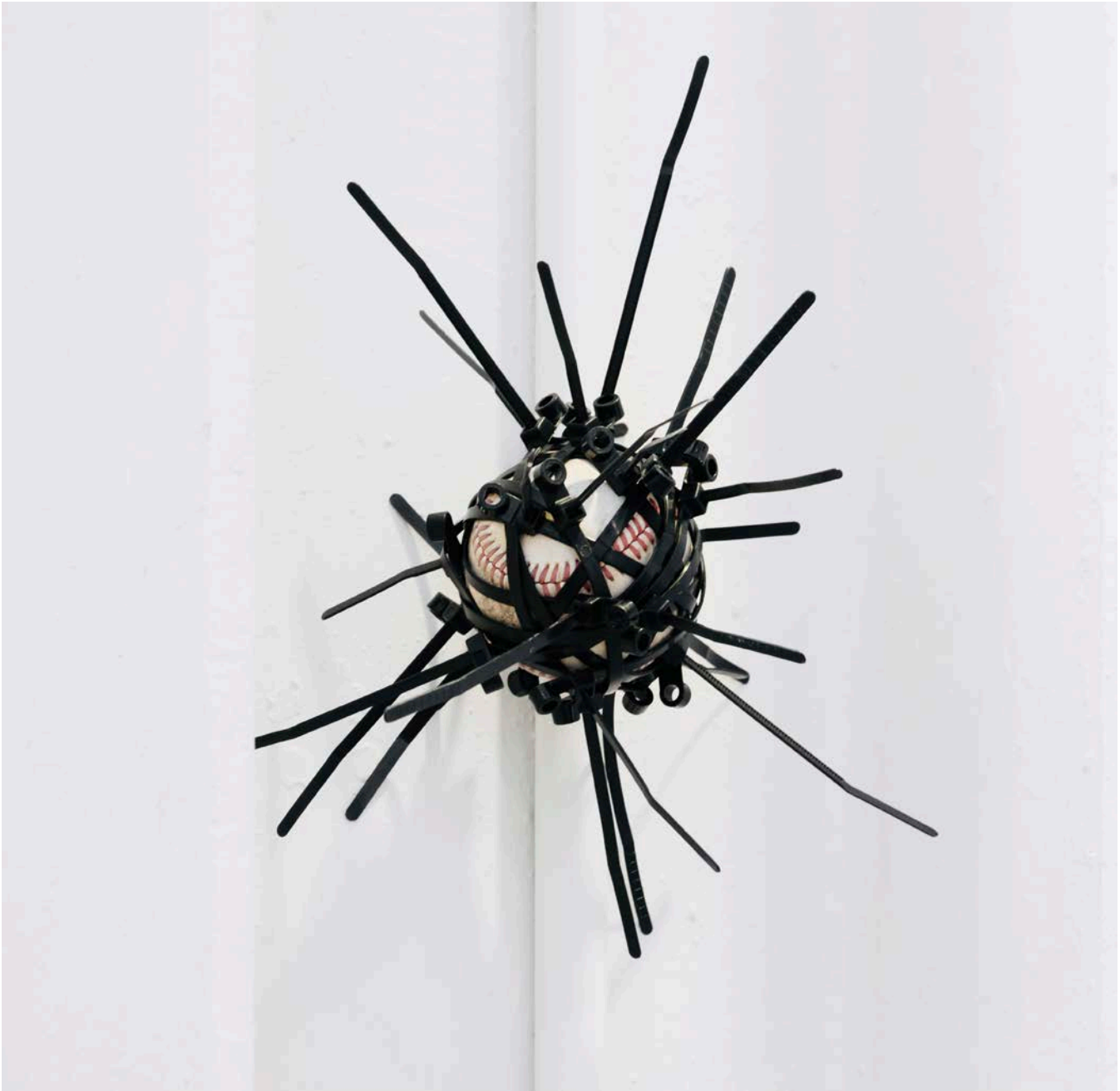


Benji Stiles *Keys*, 2024, Found piano keys, zip ties, and piano wire 10 x 5 x 5 inches.

Benji Stiles

Precariously strung together, a group of keys anchor to the wall like a barnacle on a boat or a wasp nest in a tree. If just one key was missing, the cluster would slip through its delicate zip tie and clatter to the ground. A poetic gesture, this work explores our shared need for collectivity and harmony. We persevere not for our

strength or individuality, but because we adapt and come together to face adversity, like penguins in an arctic storm, or birds on a powerline in the cold. This work is gentle, unassuming, and quietly moving. It speaks directly to the times we are in and our need for collectivism.



Benji Stiles *ball function*, 2024, Zip ties, baseball from play 10 x 10 x 10 inches.

A ball can be used for play in sports as much as a ball can be used for play in the arts. In this work, Benji Stiles lashes together a web of zip ties surrounding a baseball. For the artist, gestures like this are about seeing objects and identities expansively. It's a way for tropes like baseball and masculinity to represent more than their stereotypical limitations, enabling

them to be forces of care and creativity as much as aggression and competition. It becomes metaphorical of the self reflection and introspection many men are experiencing in this moment, as they reexamine their purpose and place in the world, how they want to show up, participate, and play.

Sarah Fisher
Let Her Speak

because she was young and raw
and fresh
because she tore up that hill
and fast
Let her speak—

because she was raised to trust no one
because she dared to dis and
not obey
because that got her nil
then nor today
Let her speak—

because she bent her dread in half
two lives came and grew and fled
dearly beloved
fiercely led
Let her speak —

because she was fast and ripped and quick
they call it explosiveness now
I think
because she ran
because now
she can
Let her speak—

because she has kept her pow(d)er dry
because this can't be how it ends
because this here is how she mends
borne of an invitation from a friend
now,
right now
she speaks

Memory

Our memories are fickle. They are malleable distortions that we bend toward our bias. They can be shaped and reshaped, sculpted over time to preserve our perceptions of ourselves, others, and the world around us. Memories can protect us. They can be teachable moments that we learn and grow from. They can heal, or they can be a place from which we heal. Memory is a medium that these artists mold to preserve, unearth, or forge histories.



Garrett Griffin *D. F. Tower*, 2024, Adobe (sand and straw), wood, foam, PVC pipe, found PVC fragments, epoxy, Flashe, spray paint, oil paint 39 x 9 x 9 inches.

Garrett Griffin

Moulding memory and location as a practice of healing, the material and formal qualities of Garrett Griffin's forms emerge from and relate to places the artist has visited, occupied, or lived. *D. F. Tower* is constructed with adobe (a reference to Arizona, where the artist grew up) and PVC pipe (which he extracted from a work site in Montrose, where the artist currently lives), among other materials. The form itself and its composite

shapes are derived from Olmec and Maya vessels, and the Jade Mask of Pakal at the Museo Nacional de Antropología, during a recent trip the artist made to Mexico City. Through the accumulation of time, memory, place, and experience, Griffin's work serves as autotopography, a visual mapping of daily life. It's a way for the artist to excavate memories of people and places, and to make sense of the world around him.



Adrienne Simmons Detail of *Postcards to Nowhere*, 2022, Found paper, borax, thread, transparency, Dimensions variable.

Adrienne Simmons

For Adrienne Simmons, spending time alone in nature is deeply healing, and she often references the environment in her multidisciplinary work. In *Postcards to Nowhere*, a series of crystallized fragmented paper collages, the artist explores nostalgia, memory, and place. Simmons suspends these collages in a highly saturated solution of Borax and boiling water, left to

cool for up to two days as the crystals form. These works are inspired by childhood road trips from which the artist and her family would send postcards to friends and family members. With the crystallization process acting as an attempt at preservation, Simmons explores the way a postcard can represent a shared landscape and the futility of capturing a memory.

Liz Qates

Darn the Hole

Worn and torn, harvest from the hem and push the fray
aside.

You'll need a strong anchor, so link on for support and
let surrounding loops guide you.

Down then up, down then up
two and two and two
pull through.

Keep an eye on your tension.

Down then up, down then up
two and two and two
pull through.

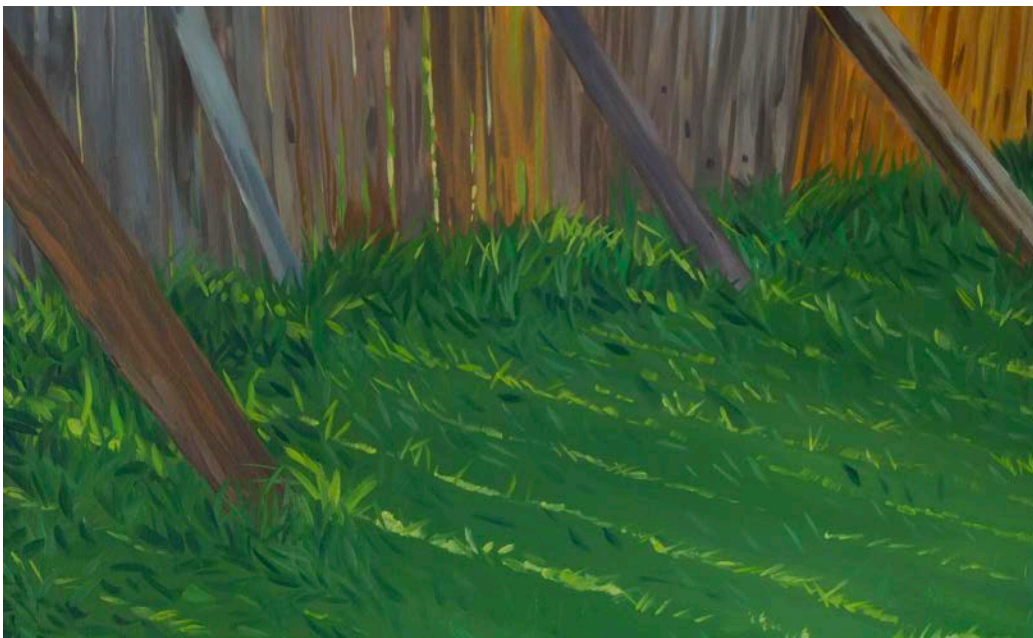
Turn and weave until you resolve the whole, then wear
and tear again.

The Environment

For decades scientists and environmental justice activists have been raising the alarm bell about our rapidly changing climate. People in positions of power who work for governments and major corporations have not been taking the necessary steps to reverse the human impact on the climate. These artists remind us of the devastation of climate change, and the collective resilience of communities affected. They express the profound grief of loving and losing natural habitats and environments as they slip away from us, because of us.



Julie DeVries *Uprooted Tree* (Houston Derecho), 2024, Oil on canvas 18 x 24 inches. Courtesy of Hunter Dunbar Projects.



Julie DeVries *Make Do*, 2024, Oil on canvas 16 x 20 inches. Courtesy of Hunter Dunbar Projects.

Julie DeVries

In these two paintings, Julie DeVries documents the effect of climate change and natural disasters on the communities and environments we inhabit. Referencing Houston Derecho and Hurricane Beryl in these images, DeVries reveals both the utter devastation of major

storms, as well as our capacity for strength and resilience in their wake. The poetic gesture of wooden planks supporting a fallen fence is symbolic of the life-sustaining support and care we afford each other, especially during times of crisis. We adapt and survive together.



Crisis *Altarpiece (Gulf)*, 2024, Projected video on aquaresin, wood, metal. Altar: 40 x 66 inches Shelf: 24 x 32 x 26 inches Video: 10 min, loop.

Crisis

Crisis is a transdisciplinary collaborative art duo composed of Andy P. Davis and Anne Lukins. Based in Philadelphia, Crisis were 2023-2024 resident artists at Galveston Artist Residency, where they created *Altarpiece (Gulf)*. Combining sculpture and a projection mapped video of the Gulf Coast, this work takes the form of a medieval altar, alluding to worship, devotion, sacred offerings, and spiritual functions. The work

evokes a sense of solemn reverence for the beauty and precarity of nature. This window into the Gulf can also be seen as a kind of relic for the future, where some sacred memory of a once beautiful coast is held, as the effects of humanity have completely ravaged our environment, climate, and ecosystems. The loss and grief of something not yet gone, but slipping through our fingers, is visceral.



Jonathan Paul Jackson, *Untitled Botanical #562*, 2020, Oil pastel, spray paint, and acrylic on paper 72 x 90 inches.
Courtesy of Foltz Fine Art.

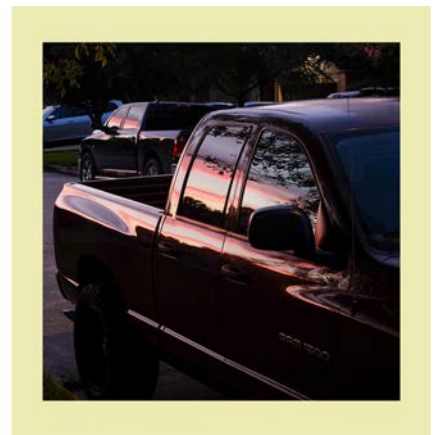
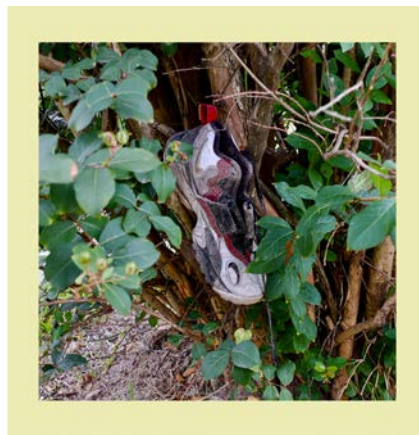
Jonathan Paul Jackson

Working across painting, drawing, photography, and multidisciplinary processes, often on non-traditional and recycled surfaces, Jonathan Paul Jackson is influenced by the natural environment. From the flora and fauna of his backyard, to major geological events, Jackson is drawn to nature for its beauty, power, and resilience. The vibrant colors and organic shapes in

Untitled Botanical #562 conveys a reverence for the natural world, as well as a sense of sorrow for humanity's impact on animals and their ecosystems. The painting morphs between abstraction and representation, becoming something dreamlike, futuristic, and fantastical, holding space for love and loss, and the possibility of a new world.

Politics

We need art. Especially as the most vulnerable among us lose our rights, freedoms, and privileges. Especially as funding for the arts is being slashed. Now more than ever, we need the work of artists, those who are adaptive and dexterous, who consider our collective survival, and who remind us to resist and fight back. The act of creating and transforming are antithetical to destruction, devastation, and violence. The work of an artist is to see, to care, and to mend.



Sebastien Boncy *Bubbles (abridged)*, 2024, Inkjet prints, Dimensions variable.

Sebastien Boncy

The Covid-19 pandemic was a rare moment in time where people around the world were collectively experiencing many of the same things, all at once. Shared feelings of loss, isolation, anxiety and dread were pervasive. For Sebastien Boncy, the pandemic “invaded our sleep, and our memories, and the totality of the future.” It felt like the sun would never rise, that we would never return to normal life. It was from this seemingly endless time, and from these shared feelings and experiences, that Boncy created this series of

photos, documenting glimmers of hope amidst precariousness. Within this body of work, Boncy engaged light, color, and the abundance of nature as symbols for adversity. Although no figure appears in the photographs, a human spirit endures through the objects and spaces that Boncy documents. An abandoned shoe, an orange dropped on the pavement, laundry left on a clothesline; each moment suggests the recent or imminent presence of someone.



Gerardo Rosales *Hombre Tree* (from the series *Coyote mon amour*), 2023, Acrylic on acrylic sheet cutout 33 1/2 x 19 inches.

Gerardo Rosales

In this series, Gerardo Rosales highlights the dangerous journey Venezuelan migrants take to flee their authoritarian dictatorship and resettle in the United States. Merging humanoid deities with plantlike forms, Rosales explores the burdens of a physically and emotionally exhausting journey, and its resulting

transformation. Each of the figures is hindered in some capacity – in this case, the spiritual being has no legs. This becomes a metaphor of the perils facing Venezuelan migrants as they elude death and capture on their path to a new home. Seen in the light of current events, this series is all the more pressing.

Philosophy

There are many ways to nurture ourselves and the world around us. Gardening, cooking, composting, meditating, and listening to music are a few examples of daily rituals that heal individuals and their communities. For many artists, the act of creating art is about processing and navigating their experiences of the world. They weather, demarcate, and chart the unpredictable and precarious nature of our existence. Through their work, these artists dream and discover possibilities for new worlds and ways of being. The adaptability, creativity, conviction, devotion, and symbolism required of art and art making can be a model for what we need in this moment, when so much of our world is in search of healing.



Eric Schnell Detail of *The day expanding poem. (a story from The Island of the Umbellifers)*, 2024-2025, Paper, wood, cardboard, watercolor 9 x 72 x 36 inches.

Eric Schnell

Eric Schnell's installation is part of an ongoing project, *The Island of The Umbellifers*, in which he explores care, collectivism, and the utopian possibility of a harmonious coexistence. Umbellifers (or Apiaceae) belong to a family of flowering plants, including caraway, carrot, celery, coriander, cumin, dill, fennel, parsley, and parsnip. They attract parasitic and predatory insects which benefit the umbellifer, as well as all surrounding plants.

Where previous iterations of this project were more hopeful, taking the form of a boat and maps or a series of islands sprawling across numerous gallery spaces,

this installation is more insular, guarded, and contained. The main form coils in and around itself, like a serpent protecting its eggs. Within the painted imagery and text, there are several references to snakes, including the Speckled Kingsnake. Native to Galveston, where the artist lives and works, this serpent is known to hunt rattlesnakes and other venomous species, immune to their venom while remaining harmless to humans. Cultivating nourishment from venom in defense of the vulnerable is a powerful metaphor of the times we are in. Schnell believes that we must all exist simultaneously within sadness and joy, now more than ever, in order to make sense of and move through the world.

The Day Expanding Poem

(A story from The Island of The Umbellifers)

1. Build The Day Expanding Poem
2. Walk past the shipyards
3. The county south of here
4. The Shipbuilding Sea
5. A first glimpse of the Island
6. Traveling with friends
7. Crawl this new planet
8. The Screen under the earth
9. A Platform for Holding On
10. It came from the dunes, but it was not us,
it was not a Lettered Olive Snail, it was
not a Speckled King Snake

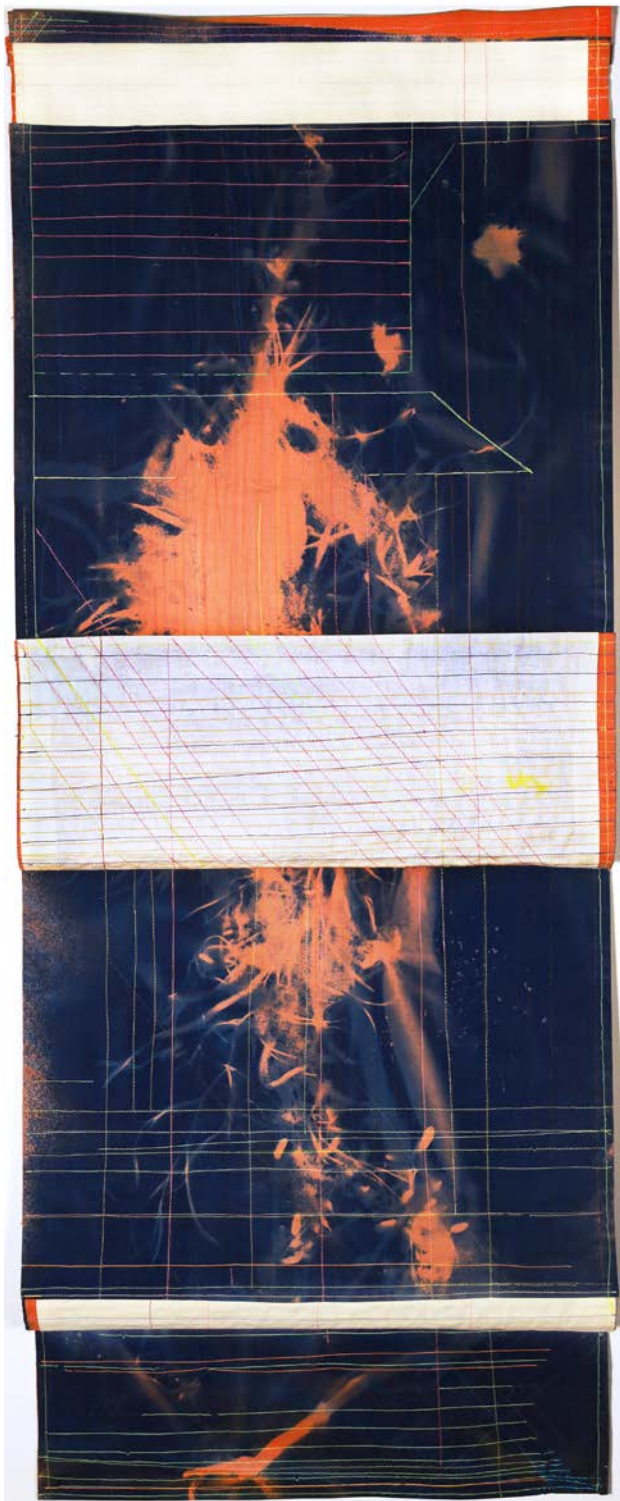


Terrell James *Tide*, 2024, Oil on linen 40 x 50 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Josh Pazda Hiram Butler Gallery.

Terrell James

Terrell James is drawn to painting and nature for their transformative qualities. Both are nurturing and life affirming, following cycles of creation and destruction, order and chaos, predetermination and improvisation. In *Tide*, James references the ocean, a healing force that supports and takes life, conceals and unearths, much like the act of creating a painting, which involves layers of doing and undoing. The painting pushes coral

pink and rusted copper forms to the edges of the canvas, lapping gently against aquarian-like forms reminiscent of shells, kelp strands, or other marine life. In this and other paintings, James was influenced by Munch's seascapes. Where his compositions look out across the water, with their signature "i" shaped moon reflections that dance across the surface of the water, James looks down and within instead.



Isela Aguirre *Two Summers*, 2024, Cyanotype on cotton, thread 43 x 8 1/2 x 3 inches.

Isela Aguirre

Isela Aguirre creates multidisciplinary assemblages, combining elements of painting, photography, and textiles. Her works often take the shapes of flags or banners, installed in ways that activate space and engage light. The process of creating these works is intuitive, meditative, and ritualistic, a way for Aguirre to find joy and purpose amidst the unsettledness of our world. Just as a flag is used to demarcate, signal, or align, the artist creates these forms in order to illuminate and move through challenging experiences that have shaped her life. Aguirre's banner-like forms symbolize joy, transformation, and self-actualization.

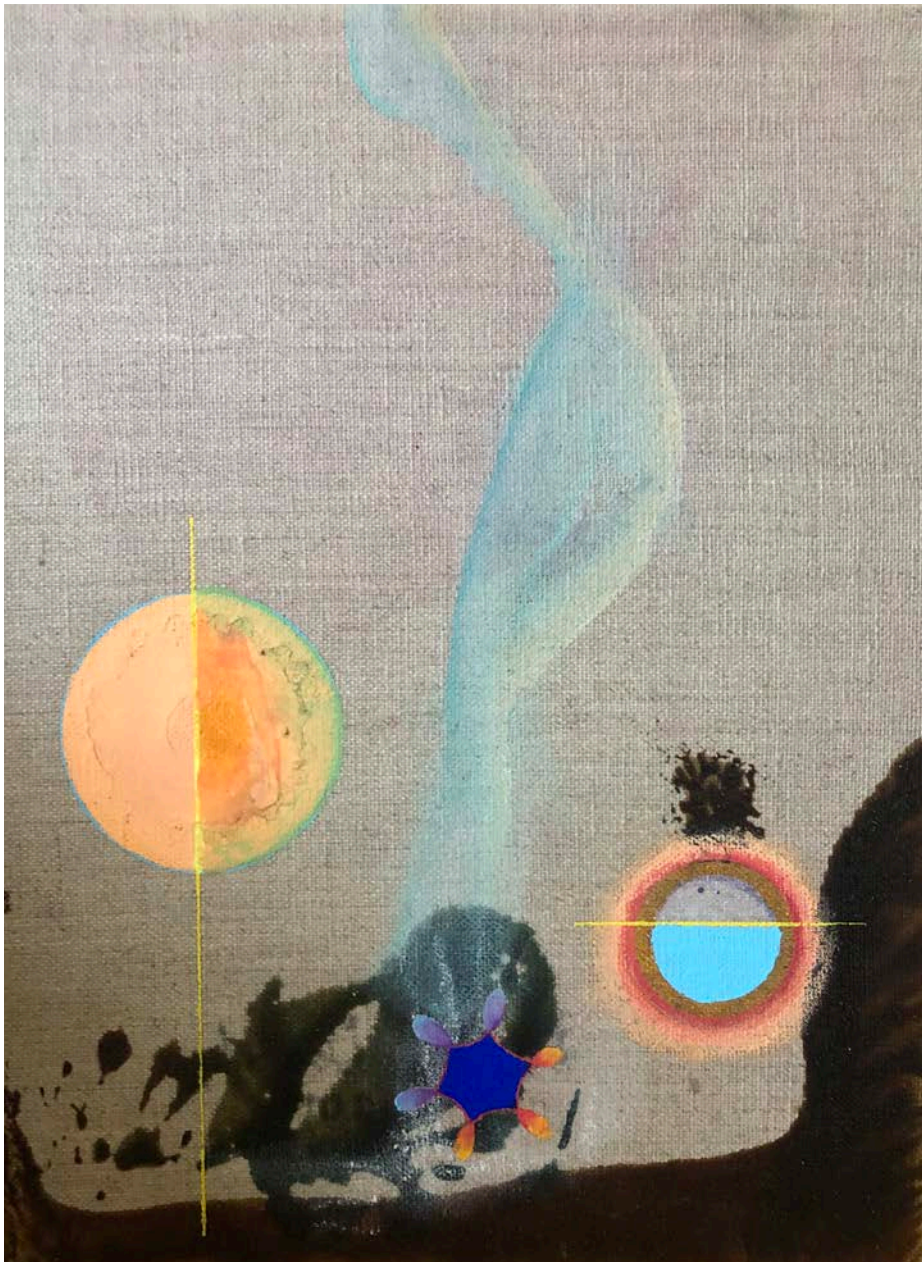
Adam Marnie

No Job

The utility of art is its uselessness. Art exists adjacently, on top of, inside and outside of, but can also be food. Art can nourish but thank god it doesn't have to. Art doesn't have to do anything. It can also do everything. It can provoke, it can be profound, it can be entirely banal and overlooked. In making, art is for the maker. In sharing, art can provide an offer, an olive branch, a destabilizing slap. At its best, it offers a difference, a new way of seeing, but it can also take the form of the familiar, a comfort, a like minded solidarity, a quiet whisper of connection, shared maybe only once, with just one other. If only one other feels or thinks or is moved then it has "worked." If art reaches no one at all, moves no one, is lost in a cipher of silence and unrecognition, a latent dead move or gesture or word, if a tremendous amount of work has gone into the thing and there is nothing, no one to hear, to see, to feel, the work is saved, the work lives, uncorrupted by language, by reception, by misunderstanding, by co-optation. Art is another world, next to, built of, comes from, born from. Reception transforms, tethers, pollutes, corrupts... I am skeptical of popular things. I feel rewarded by detail, by small human touches, small moves and ideas left like notes for me, the edges of paintings, a single nail, clues to the way things are made. I love when things are made badly, cracks in the foundation. I also love when the thing is so utterly well-conceived that there is nothing but the thing for me to see, where I can hold the entirety of the thing in my mind, all at once, in a complete comprehension, when the thing is so separate from everything around it that there is nothing but the work and me. Art has a job to do, and it is no job at all.

Spirituality

There is a degree of magic, intuition, and mystery at the core of art making. As an artist develops their craft and the meaning of their work, they learn and know more about what they create. For some artists, it is important that a degree of doubt, uncertainty, and unknowing remains. To know a thing completely is to lose it. There is a sacredness in the murky, untranslatable, indecipherable nature of art, especially within abstraction. It is in this space of openness and interpretation that the maker and viewer experience a kind of healing, as they intuit and interpret.

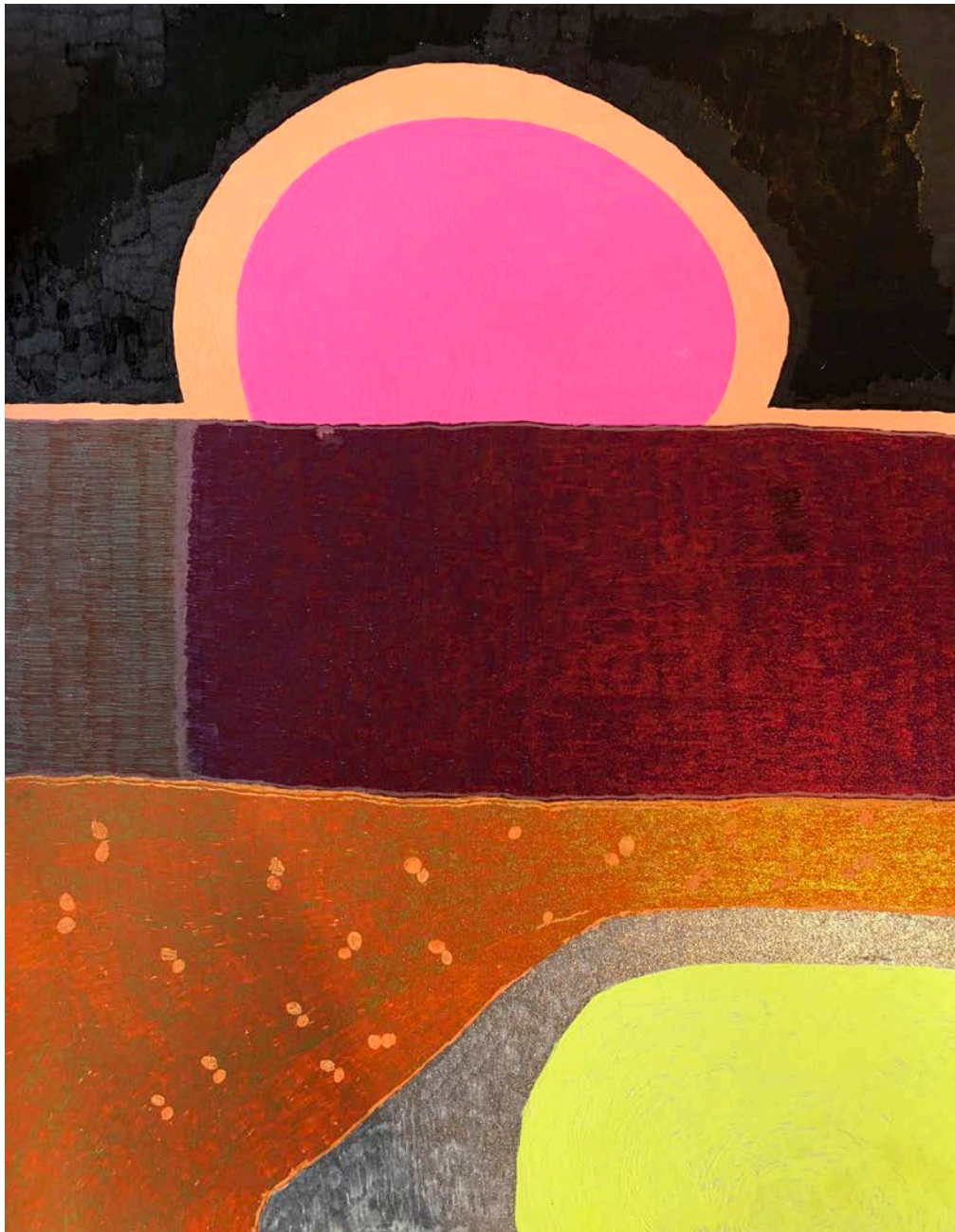


Stephanie Gonzalez *Faces*, 2019, Dye, gold leaf, acrylic, and gouache on linen 12 x 9 inches. In the collection of Doug Welsh.

Stephanie Gonzalez

Part of an ongoing body of work exploring metaphysical, quantum, and spiritual realms, this painting combines recognizable landscape motifs with gestural abstraction and sacred geometry. The combination of these elements signifies a meditation on control and release, order and chaos, finding balance between these dichotomies.

There is an aural presence in this painting. It's as if a rift has been opened in the sky, revealing a glimmer of sacred energy from a distant realm. For Stephanie Gonzalez, solitude, self reflection, and meditation are key aspects of her life and work, embracing the ritualistic nature and healing capacity of painting.



JR Roykovich *Galveston Drawing*, 2022-1, 2022 Gel pen and acrylic on bristol 14 x 11 inches. In the collection of Doug Welsh.

JR Roykovich

JR Roykovich is best known for their immersive and site-specific installations, combining elements of photography, projection, film, sound, and light. Although rarely exhibited, drawing is a foundational aspect of the artist's practice as well. Drawing is a way the artist accesses intuitive and automatic abstraction. These drawings evolve through automatic mark making and

stream of consciousness, where marks intuit other marks, until the image is resolved. For Roykovich, there is a striking similarity between the way we interpret abstraction, and the way we interpret the supernatural and extraterrestrial, core ideas the artist explores throughout their work.

Emma Timbers

Windows

I'm not sure what it means to heal. I know that it doesn't happen all at once, but in glimpses. And perhaps those glimpses accumulate, stay a little longer each time. A rift in the air that widens, becomes a window. And through that window you can see... everything exactly as it is—painful, beautiful, horrific, tender, absurd, holy.

Art offers me these glimpses. Through the frame of a poem or film or painting, every so often I am given a vision of wholeness. A flash of recognition: life is devastating and cruel and strange, and also infinitely precious, worth all of it.

A few months after I graduated from college and had my heart broken for the first time, I remember seeing Richard Linklater's *Boyhood*—a film that speeds up time, shows the actors aging 12 years in 3 hours—and afterwards just lying in my parents' driveway, looking at the sky sobbing and laughing. Everything is tragic, everything is ridiculous. Art can help us feel this—the complex, freaky joy of being alive. It can stir up the multiplicities within us, soften the doubt and longing that has calcified into certainty, indifference. It can't fix anything, can't erase pain, but it can help us be present to it. Even just for a moment, it lets us glimpse a world where we could hold it all and say yes.

Contributor's Biographies

Isela Aguirre is a multi-disciplinary artist based in Houston, Texas. She uses photography, camera-less photography processes, collage, fiber, painting, and installation in her work. Her work is bold, colorful, and playful with an air of the ephemeral and non-precious. Isela Aguirre is a native Houstonian. She received her BFA in Studio Photography and her MFA in Painting from the University of Houston. She has received grants to create public installations and has shown her work in solo and group shows in Houston and Austin.

Forrest Bess (1911-1977), was born in Bay City, TX, where he lived and worked for much of his life, as both an artist and a bait fisherman. Bess attended Texas A&M and later University of Texas where he studied architecture, before dropping out. In 1914, Bess enlisted in the military. Several years later, Bess survived a hate crime while in military service and was discharged. In the aftermath of this event, an army psychiatrist encouraged Bess to record the visions he experienced since childhood in his paintings. Although Bess had painted since childhood, this advice prompted him to use his practice to cope with the visions.

There has been a swell of interest in Forrest Bess over the past several decades, and the artist's work has been shown around the world posthumously. Since the beginning of his career, Bess found a great deal of support in Houston, not far from his home town in Bay City, with early group shows at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas Southern University, and Contemporary Art Museum Houston. Early collectors and longtime supporters include Jean and Dominique De Menil (to whom Bess introduced himself to in a letter), and Bob Richter and Howard Barnstone, architect for The Menil Collection, Houston. It was through Richter and Barnstone's collection that long-time Houston gallerist Hiram Butler discovered Forrest Bess, and curated a 1986 exhibition of the artist's work at his gallery, which Terrell James helped organize. James also cataloged Bess' correspondence for the Archives of American Art for 5 years. In 2013, Clare Elliott curated the 2013 exhibition, *Forrest Bess: Seeing Things Invisible*, at The Menil Collection, Houston.

Sebastien Boncy, born in Haiti and shipwrecked in Texas, is all six members of the Pugilist Press collective. In the last decade, he's maintained a hyperlocal practice centered around an online photographic archive of the city: Purple Time Space Swamp. His photographs have been exhibited at Art League Houston, Visible Records, The Mystic Lyon, Galveston Art Center, among others. His reviews and essays have been published by Glasstire, Not That But This, Sugar and Rice, Found Me Mag, Art + Culture, Flat Files, Common Field, Fotodok, and Fototazo.

Crisis (/krey-sis/ from the Greek Κρᾶσις "mixing", "blending") is a transdisciplinary collaborative duo made up of Andy P. Davis and Anne Lukins. Crisis uses writing, sculpture, and video to offer observations about a changing world. Collaborating since 2020, the duo has held residencies at Galveston Artist Residency, and Stove Works Artist Residency in Chattanooga, TN. Crisis has performed and exhibited at venues in the US and abroad including A Leste Studio in Portugal, Vox Populi Gallery and Icebox Project Space, Philadelphia, PA, The Orange Show in Houston, TX, and Yes We Cannibal in Baton Rouge, LA.

Working in painting, sculpture, and digital media, **Julie DeVries** mines poignant memories and observations of nature in the urban and suburban environment, illustrating our impact on the natural world. She was born and raised in Houston, TX and still currently lives and works there with her husband, photographer Sebastien Boncy, and their daughter Louise. She received her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago focusing on painting and Latin American art history and spent a semester studying abroad with family in Argentina. She then received her MFA in painting and drawing from the University of Houston and currently serves as a Visual Arts faculty member at Lone Star College North Harris. Her work has been exhibited and collected locally and nationally and has been included in the prestigious Houston Endowment permanent collection. Her most current solo exhibition at Hunter Dunbar Projects Gallery in New York was also reviewed in the September issue of *The Brooklyn Rail*.

Clare Elliott is Associate Research Curator at the Menil Collection, Houston, where she has organized exhibitions

and contributed to publications since 2003. In 2013 she curated Forrest Bess: Seeing Things Invisible, the first museum exhibition focused on the artist in more than 20 years, and authored the accompanying catalogue of the same name. Elliott received her M.A. in the history of art from Williams College in Massachusetts.

Sarah Fisher is a visual artist who explores portraiture through the lens of painting, collage, printmaking, installation, sculpture, poetry and film. Solo exhibitions include: It's All About Separation, Hardy & Nance Studios, Houston TX (2024), DISASSOCIATION V, Jung Center of Houston, Houston, TX (2024); It's OK To Feel This, Lanecia Rouse Tinsley Gallery, Houston, TX (2024), When I Walk I See Things, landSPACE: a kunsthalle, Austin, TX (2023), You Won't See It Coming, Museum of East Texas, Lufkin, TX (2022); Decisions, Michelson Museum of Art, Marshall, TX (2022); It's No Small Thing, Louise Hopkins Underwood Center for the Arts, Lubbock, TX (2021); The Second Yes, Front Gallery, Houston, TX (2019); and Seen, Art Palace Gallery, Houston, TX (2017).

Liz Gates is a fiber artist and printmaker whose work centers around questions of gendered labor, feminist mother identity, and self-manifestation. Her work has been exhibited at venues including The Museum of Southeast Texas, Beaumont; The Blaffer Art Museum, Houston; The Printing Museum, Houston; The Jung Center Houston, Foltz Fine Art, Houston; Lawndale Center for the Arts, Houston; Monterroso Gallery, Houston; The Louise Hopkins Underwood Center for the Arts, Lubbock; The Mary Matteson Parrish Art Gallery, the Woodlands; and Hardy and Nance Studios, Houston, among others. She is the founder of Cascina Ruscello, an artist residency in Umbria, Italy.

Garrett Griffin was born into a military family and moved constantly to several places internationally and within the United States. These experiences in various cultures and environments gave him a strong interest in how societies and the natural world mesh together. By using natural forms such as pupae and nests, he creates bodily sculptures that fit succinctly into the architecture of gallery spaces. Using site specific installation, Griffin is commenting on our bodies,

architecture and the natural world. He received his BA in Studio Arts from the University of Texas at Arlington in 2013 and his MFA at University of Houston in 2024. He has had solo shows at Front Gallery and LAR gallery and has participated in group exhibitions at Site Gallery, Barbara Davis Gallery, and the Painting Center. Griffin has also attended residencies at the Vermont Studio Center, Marfa Dust and will attend ChaNorth this summer. He also has an upcoming group show at Presa House.

Stephanie Gonzalez fuses Mexican and American influences in her work. The artist draws from her experiences as a lesbian Mexican woman, channeling her emotions into mixed media works. After earning a Bachelor's in Interior Design from the Art Institute of Houston, she received a Master's in Fine Art at Houston Christian University. Gonzalez has numerous works in international collections, including Starwood Hotels and the CICA Museum in South Korea. Her work has been shown in The Masur Museum of Art in Louisiana and the Holocaust Museum in Houston, and she has participated in group exhibitions at various galleries around the U.S. She has received awards from the Glassell School of Art, Brownsville Museum of Fine Art, and Rising Eyes of Texas.

Shang-Yi Hua was born in Taiwan and moved to the United States as a college student. Always a creative thinker, Hua never considered becoming a full-time artist due to her conservative cultural background. It was a chance project at her sons' elementary school that awakened her interest in art-making. Hua considers her work to be a sacred part of her own spiritual practice, and she often utilizes contrast to express her personal journey. Hua studied in Glassell's renowned BLOCK program and has exhibited widely throughout Houston and beyond. She was represented by the Cindy Lisica Gallery, where her work gained pride of place in the Texas Contemporary Art Fair in both 2016 and 2018. Her work has been exhibited and collected widely, and in 2020 she received Honorable Mention in Artspace 111's annual Texas-wide juried exhibition.

Jonathan Paul Jackson grew up in West Texas before moving to Houston, where he currently lives and works. While Jackson has some formal art education and served as a studio assistant to several Houston based artists, he is largely self-taught. Jackson continues his work with nature-inspired imagery on non-traditional surfaces. His arcadian imagery flutters somewhere between optimism and sorrow; optimism that even during times of great distress that nature can be a source of renewal, and sorrow for the animals negatively impacted by modern human's ideas of progress.

Terrell James has worked internationally including time spent in Berlin, Germany; different regions throughout Mexico; Beijing, China; Soho, Harlem, and Queens in New York; and Marfa, Texas. In Houston she is an active member of the city's rich artist community. James has worked as a researcher, curator, and a longtime professor of painting at the Houston's Glassell School, where she served as chair of the Painting Department. Her work in public collections includes those of the Boston Museum of Art, Menil Collection, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Adam Marnie is an artist and writer living in Houston, Texas, where he runs the publishing press F Magazine and the exhibition space F. His extensive exhibition history includes national and international venues such as Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, Night Gallery, Los Angeles, Almine Rech, Paris, and Basket Books & Art, Houston. His book *The Origin of Mark Flood*, chronicling Houston-based artist Flood's early years from 1987-1992, was published by Karma, New York, in 2022.

Emily Peacock is a Houston-based artist. She received her MFA in Photography/Digital Media from the University of Houston and is a Professor of Art at Sam Houston State University. Peacock was a 2013-2014 Lawndale Artist Studio Program participant. In 2016, she received the Houston Arts Alliance Individual Artist Grant; in 2019, the New Faculty Research Grant and has had solo exhibitions at Lawndale Art Center, Houston and

the Art Museum of Southeast Texas, Beaumont. She has exhibited her work throughout the United States, in Vienna, Austria, and the United Kingdom. Peacock's work is in the permanent collections of the Art Museum of Southeast Texas and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Mitch Pengra is a multidisciplinary artist, musician, and teacher living in Houston. He holds a BFA from the University of North Texas and a MA in Human Ecology from Our Lady of the Lake University. Since the 1980s, Mitch has developed methods for coating and modifying his body with clay, paint, and mold rubber to access different aspects of his identity. Through photography, Mitch documents the extreme temporary coverings, preserving a life-long journey of heightened tactile sensation, physical transformation, and self-actualization.

Alexis Pye is a Houston-based artist whose practice explores the tradition of portraiture to express the Black body outside of its social constructs. Placing her subjects in leisurely, luscious, nature-rich and even fantastical settings, her works evoke playfulness, wonder and Blackness, as well as the joys amidst adversity. Her formal strategies include an integration of mixed media within painting, including embroidery and punch-stitch needlework. Pye received her BFA in Painting from the University of Houston in 2018. She has been included in group exhibitions at Inman Gallery, Community Artists Collective, Martha's Contemporary, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, and Women & Their Work. Solo exhibitions include *Visions Via Riding High*, Art League Houston, and *The Melancholic Girls Brigade: The Lovers, The Dreamers, and Me*, Inman Gallery. Pye has completed residencies with Project Row Houses, Lawndale Art Center, Asia Society, and Skowhegan.

Gerardo Rosales is a multimedia artist based in Houston, Texas. Originally self-taught, he later earned a Bachelor's degree in fine art from the Armando Reverón Art School in Caracas, Venezuela, and a Master's in fine art from Chelsea College of Art and Design in London, UK. For 23 years, Rosales also taught art in Houston. His work

explores themes of class, race, gender, and sexuality, blending humor with storytelling to provoke conversation and delve into culture, identity, and place.

JR Roykovich (JRR) is a conceptual and research-based artist who investigates the spaces created by the intersections of Mystery, Queerness, and The Sublime. JRR holds a MFA in Visual Art from the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University (2014), and a BFA in Art and Visual Technology from George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia (2011). JRR has further been an artist in residence at the Galveston Artist Residency, The Solar Studios at Rice University, The Chautauqua Institution, The Woodstock Byrdcliffe Colony, The Torpedo Factory in Alexandria, Virginia, among others. JRR is currently in residence at Lawndale Art Center's Artist Studio Program in Houston, Texas and was a 2024 Houston Artadia finalist. JRR has shown nationally, internationally, and has work in various public and private collections.

Over several decades, Galveston, Texas-based artist **Eric Schnell** has made intuitive drawings that often develop into extensive installations. One small drawing will suggest the next, and then another, methodically creating sequential images that eventually make up a larger work. For the artist, this linear progression of images creates a narrative as well as a map. Schnell sees the creations as exploratory and never finished, with narratives that undercut themselves and maps that are similar to the complexity of human consciousness. He recognizes an installation of works may become “a visual map of human consciousness or a visual poem that embraces the complexity of human experience—both beautiful and sad.”

Adrienne Simmons is a multi-disciplinary artist currently based in Houston, TX. She explores ideas of cartography and memory with found materials to untangle the relationship between people and their environments. Drawn to real and imagined landscapes, she uses printmaking, cyanotype, found objects, textiles, and abstract imagery in an attempt to understand how memories are embedded into spaces and places. She received her MFA from the University of Houston. Her

work has been collected by UTMB and MD Anderson, and she has shown at the Houston Center for Photography, Lawndale Art Center, the Print Museum, and the Blaffer Art Museum. This summer Simmons will be a resident artist at Vermont Studio Center.

Born in New Orleans, **Robert Benjamin Stiles (Benji)** is an interdisciplinary artist and educator who lives and works in Houston. He holds a B.A. in art history from the University of St. Thomas, and is an MFA candidate (studio art) at Maryland Institute College of Art. His work ranges from non-representational painting focusing on diverse mark making and color theory to conceptual installation and assemblage using historical and found objects. Since 2019, Stiles has established a successful art practice at Hardy and Nance studios exhibiting work nationally including three solo shows (LoneStar College 2021, G-Contemporary 2022, Reeves Gallery 2023).

Emma Timbers is a poet and teacher. Originally from the DC area, Emma has lived in Maine, Oregon, New York, and most recently, Massachusetts. Emma earned a BA in English from Bates College and an MFA in Creative Writing from Syracuse University. She is currently pursuing an MDiv at Harvard Divinity School, where she is studying religion and literature and training to become a chaplain. In addition to writing, Emma plays the cello and has been experimenting with performance and video art.

Doug Welsh is an artist and writer based in Houston. Welsh has curated several exhibitions, most recently including – leftovers, landSPACE: a kunsthalle, Austin, 2024, It's OK to Feel This, LAR Gallery, Houston, 2024, and orbit, ESS Gallery 1, Houston, 2024. He received a BFA from Bates College and an MFA from the University of Houston. Welsh teaches at Lone Star College North Harris and is co-founder of the Elgin Street Summer Intensive, a program for MFA candidates at the University of Houston.

Further Reading

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For facilitating the Forrest Bess loan and supporting my research.

Guest Writers

Clare Elliott, Sarah Fisher, Liz Gates, Adam Marnie, and Emma Timbers

For sharing your varied and essential texts on the healing capacity of art.

Visual Artists

Isela Aguirre, Forrest Bess, Sebastien Boncy, Crasis (Andy P. Davis and Anne Lukins), Julie DeVries, Garrett Griffin, Stephanie Gonzalez, Shangyi Hua, Jonathan Paul Jackson, Terrell James, Emily Peacock, Mitch Pengra, Alexis Pye, Gerardo Rosales, JR Roykovich, Eric Schnell, Adrienne Simmons and Benji Stiles

For trusting in this project and sharing your incredible artwork.

Seven Sisters Gallery – Erin Dorn, Tom Raith

Inman Gallery – Kerry Inman, Annalisa Palmieri Briscoe

Pazda Butler Gallery – Josh Pazda, Meg Estopinal

For facilitating the inclusion of works by represented artists.

a way to mend **curated by Doug Welsh**

June 7—September 27

a way to mend presents recent work by 19 Gulf Coast artists whose work engages relationships between abstraction and landscape, and whose practices connect art with processes of healing. Accompanied with texts commissioned from five writers, *a way to mend* studies emotional wayfinding, personal and communal protection, solitude, spirituality, and transformation.

Curated by Houston-based artist and writer Doug Welsh, the exhibition is anchored by an enigmatic 1949 painting by Forrest Bess (Bay City, TX, 1911-1977). A self-taught artist, Bess's paintings were connected to his experiences of "visions," and his close study of psychology, gender, and dream worlds. Several recurring motifs in Bess's visions appear in his paintings, including ovoid forms and wishbone shapes. As Bess scholar Clare Elliott has observed, by studying these symbols, Bess hoped to reveal a "collective unconscious," and to illuminate universal truths. Similarly, the artists included in *a way to mend* engage with patterns and structures that bridge human and non-human natures; they share an insistence upon the entanglement of healing practices with larger philosophical and formal abstractions. In particular, *a way to mend* considers a Gulf Coast attention to resilience, transformation, and repair.

The exhibition features artwork by Isela Aguirre, Forrest Bess, Sebastien Boncy, Crasis (Andy P. Davis and Anne Lukins), Julie DeVries, Garrett Griffin, Stephanie Gonzalez, Shangyi Hua, Jonathan Paul Jackson, Terrell James, Emily Peacock, Mitch Pengra, Alexis Pye, Gerardo Rosales, JR Roykovich, Eric Schnell, Adrienne Simmons and Benji Stiles, and analytic and poetic texts by writers Clare Elliott, Sarah Fisher, Liz Gates, Adam Marnie, and Emma Timbers.

a way to mend was guest curated by Doug Welsh, an artist and writer based in Houston. Welsh has curated several exhibitions, including most recently *leftovers*, *landSPACE: a kunsthalle* (Austin, TX, 2024); *It's OK to Feel This LAR* Gallery (Houston, TX, 2024); and *orbit*, ESS Gallery 1 (Houston, TX, 2024). The exhibition is supported by the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts at the University of Houston, several anonymous donors, and the Blaffer Art Museum Advisory Board. The following endowments sustain Blaffer Art Museum in perpetuity: Cecil Amelia Blaffer von Furstenberg Endowment for Exhibitions and Programs, Jane Dale Owen Endowment in the Blaffer Art Museum, Jo and Jim Furr Exhibition Endowment in the Blaffer Art Museum, Sarah C. Morian Endowment, and the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation Blaffer Gallery Endowment.

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Front Cover: Terrell James *Tide*, 2024, Oil on linen 40 x 50 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Josh Pazda Hiram Butler Gallery.

Back Cover: Sebastien Boncy, *Bubbles* (abridged), 2024, Inkjet prints, Dimensions variable.

