Media Contact:
Antonie Evans, Design & Digital Resources | Blaffer Art Museum
Phone: (713) 743-9635
Email: acevans5@central.uh.edu

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Los Angeles-based artist Susan Silton opens career retrospective at the Blaffer Art Museum

Opening Reception with the Artist
Susan Silton: Diving into the Wreck
Saturday, January 9, 2027, 1 pm – 4 pm
Blaffer Art Museum

HOUSTON, TX — The University of Houston's Blaffer Art Museum proudly announces the first career retrospective of Los Angeles-based artist and designer Susan Silton, opening Saturday, January 9, 2027, with a public reception from 1pm – 4 pm. Curated by Andy Campbell, PhD, *Susan Silton: Diving into the Wreck* is a rare full-building exhibition, accompanied by a 288-page monographic catalog published by Blaffer Art Museum with Inventory Press. The exhibition will be on view through March 20, 2027.

Including more than 100 works, *Diving into the Wreck* situates Silton as a key figure in West Coast conceptual, feminist, and queer genealogies of art and design. Her work ranges from participatory and multi-media installations to photography, video, performance, audio, graphic design, print, and textual interventions.

"It is a particular delight to serve as the first museum venue for *Susan Silton: Diving into the Wreck*," said Blaffer Art Museum Director Laura Augusta. "Silton's unique approach to questions of *how* and *what* we see, and her study of control, intimacy, and embodied experience offer fruitful paths for re-considering knowledge, language, and agency. Her formal studies of color are entangled with critiques of power, making a resonant blur of politics, affection, and self-reflection, all of which is brilliantly curated and contextualized by art historian Andy Campbell."

"This survey of Silton's work is long overdue," said exhibition curator Andy Campbell. "Whether Silton is addressing grief, politics, or language, she always invites her audience to look honestly at the world and to be changed by the encounter."

Diving into the Wreck takes its title from a 1973 poem written by Adrienne Rich (1929-2012). In it, Rich narrates the experiences of a diver who plumbs oceanic depths to explore an unnamed "wreck." It is unclear whether the "wreck" the diver seeks might be that of her own life, her coming to consciousness within the feminist movement, or a fruitful relationship long after its end. Even amidst such ambiguity, the diver points out the power of language to guide her actions and orientation to the world, stating:

"I came to explore the wreck.
The words are purposes. The words are maps."

Rich's poem is a touchstone for assessing Silton's multifaceted practice—one that pressurizes the limits and possibilities of text, vision, perception, and participation in the process of becoming part of the social and political world. She first expressed many of these interests in the 1980s and 90s, through her design practice. The work of her design studio, cleverly stylized as SoS (and sometimes appearing with the tagline: "design help is on the way") combined the playful language of postmodern experimentalism with the savvy, political imperatives of feminist and lesbian political organizing. While many designers—then and now—worked to fix meaning, Silton understood that the message is never settled; it is always twisting and mutating.

Focusing upon the themes of body and voice, perspective and vision, graphics and multiples, and the production of public memory, Silton's practice insists upon both contemplation and participation. From some of the earliest work in the exhibition–such as *broken Water* (1993), which considers the personal grief of mothers/caretakers mourning the lives of their gay sons in the earliest years of the HIV/AIDS pandemic–to *The stain of _____. A stain on _____*. (2018-), a series of crumpled photographs of stains appearing on the streets of Los Angeles–Silton's work asks viewers to examine the "wreck" of their internal and external worlds in the hopes that newer, better paths might be imagined for the future.

This exhibition, publication, and programs are supported by the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Arts, The Aurora-Viburnum Foundation, and The Shifting Foundation.

About Susan Silton:

Susan Silton's interdisciplinary projects respond to the complexities of subjectivity—often through poetic combinations of humor, discomfort, subterfuge and unabashed beauty. Moving across performance, participatory projects, photography, video, installation, text/audio and print-based works, Silton's work has been presented at MoCA, Los Angeles; SFMOMA, San Francisco; LAXART, Los Angeles; Hammer Museum, UCLA; and ICA/Philadelphia, among

numerous other venues. She has received fellowships and awards from the Getty/California Community Foundation, Art Matters, Center for Cultural Innovation, Cultural Affairs Department of the City of Los Angeles, the MacDowell Colony, and Banff Centre for the Arts, among others.

About Andy Campbell:
Andy Campbell is an art historian, critic, and curator whose work foregrounds LGBTQ communities and their archives as wellsprings for histories of art and design. He serves as Associate Professor of Critical Studies at University of Southern California and is the author of *Bound Together: Leather, Sex, Archives, and Contemporary Art* (Manchester University Press, 2020) and *Queer X Design: 50 Years of Signs, Symbols, Banners, Logos, and Graphic Art of LGBTQ* (Black Dog and Leventhal, 2019). Together with Amelia Jones he co-edited the catalog *Queer Communion: Ron Athey* (Intellect 2020), named one of the "Best Art Books of 2020" by The New York Times. He has curated numerous exhibitions, across the U.S., and is the Editor-in-Chief of *Art Journal Open* (AJO), the open-access digital visual arts journal published by the College Art Association (CAA).

Public Programs:

6 pm, Thursday, February 11 at the Menil Collection
Susan Silton: She Had a Laugh Like a Beefsteak

She Had a Laugh Like a Beefsteak is a multilayered performative lecture about voice that artist Susan Silton has been presenting in evolving iterations since 2005, most recently at The Getty Museum in 2026. The work draws from diverse artistic, theoretical, and anatomical sources not simply to contextualize the artist's interdisciplinary practice but as a structure for a piece unto itself. The title of the work refers to a 1935 description of Gertrude Stein's laugh by biographer M.D. Luhan. Co-presented by the Menil Collection with Blaffer Art Museum.

Activation of Participatory Artwork:
January 9 & 27 at 2 pm; February 4 & 10 at 2 pm; February 18 at 6 pm; February 24 at 1 pm; March 4 at 2:30 pm; March 11 at 6 pm

In everything there is the trace (2013) is a participatory artwork by Susan Silton that invites visitors to become part of the work itself. During scheduled one-hour sessions, participants gather around a circular table to collectively retype Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) on manual typewriters using stencil mode, in other words without ink. Like the installation's interconnected three-legged tables, the work depends on collaboration, transforming reading and writing into both an individual and a shared physical experience.

Thursday, February 25 (4:00-5:30 pm)
Susan Silton's Voice: On Building Community Through Aural/Oral Practices
In this engaging exploration of Susan Silton's interdisciplinary practice, art historian and critic Natilee Harren, PhD, illuminates the central role that voice plays across the artist's diverse projects. Manifesting through ensemble performances, participatory group actions, collaboratively produced texts, and reactivations of historical or archival materials, Silton's voice rarely appears solo. Across decades, the artist's research-driven practice has puzzled through questions of politics, gender, and the voice while cultivating generous, community-building polyphony.

Wednesday, March 17 at 6:00 pm
Glassell School of Art at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston
In this conversation between artist Susan Silton, curator Andy Campbell, and Blaffer Director Laura Augusta, the development of the exhibition and catalogue *Susan Silton: Diving into the Wreck* will be put into coordination with the larger themes of Silton's work and contemporary exhibition-making.

About the Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston

Founded in 1973, the Blaffer Art Museum endeavors to further the understanding of contemporary art through exhibitions, publications, and public programs, supporting local, national, and international artists in long-term and research-driven projects. As the gateway between the University of Houston's Central campus and the City of Houston, Blaffer Art Museum is a catalyst for creative innovation, experimentation, and scholarship.

About the University of Houston

The University of Houston is a Carnegie-designated Tier One public research university recognized with a Phi Beta Kappa chapter for excellence in undergraduate education. UH serves the globally competitive Houston and Gulf Coast Region by providing world-class faculty, experiential learning and strategic industry partnerships. Located in the nation's fourth-largest city and one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse regions in the country, UH is a federally designated Hispanic- and Asian-American-Serving institution with enrollment of more than 47,000 students.

About Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts

The University of Houston's Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts is a premier institution for education, scholarship, and innovation in the arts, where every day we are cultivating the next generation of creative professionals and unlocking the potential of the arts to impact society and change the world. Our students are forging new frontiers and advancing the arts through academic excellence, innovative programming, and—together with our world-renowned faculty—ascending to the highest level of contemporary professional practice. Houston is a first choice for the arts. Houston is a city of culture and diversity, a quintessential arts destination, and a gateway to the international arts community. Steeped in the richness of diverse cultures, Houston and its engaging community network provide a citywide laboratory for research, education, and practice in the performing and visual arts.

www.blafferartmuseum.org
120 Fine Arts Building
University of Houston
Houston, TX 77204

infoblaffer@uh.edu
713-743-9521

Museum Hours
Tues-Sat, 12:00pm-5:00pm
Sun & Mon, Closed