

Empowering Voices: Artist statements



Ashwini Bhat

"During shelter-in-place, I turned both inward and toward the world. This has been an intense time for self-reflection, for questioning my own identity as well as my identification with others and with nature, the world. These new sculptures reveal that focus on the alliance of inscapes and landscapes."



Paul S. Briggs (excerpt, full essay on exhibition page)

"This work is neither gendered nor is it about race, it does not respect person. Formally, it is using metaphor and metonymy. To be doubled up inside, tied in knots, feeling tight all over, is how many describe the everyday tension of existence in a society seized by pandemic and strivings to wake up from history and create a more just and loving society, the beloved community. The wounded, broken, pierced and knotted vessels have a presence of dignity and a certitude."



Renata Cassiano-Alvarez

"As a bi-cultural artist (Mexico/Italy), I have been preoccupied with the effects language has on the body and how to translate this phenomenon to process. This delving has led me to seek the transformation of the historical role ceramic materials have in the ceramic process. When this role is changed, it is possible to realize a physical metamorphosis of the elements. At the center, I am teaching ceramic glaze a new language. A material that historically has been relegated to surface decoration

is able to become the structure of the sculpture itself by ways of casting. The result is a material with a new sentence, an outcome that does not resemble glaze as we traditionally know it, but rather a new vision with an expanded concept of possibility. My sculptures reference the body and its contents and seek to give the transformation itself a physicality. In a way, I act as an archeologist to my own practice. I cut, excavate and carve the sculptures until I find what they are trying to tell me. Although the tactile nature of clay was what first drew me to it, it's the capability of transformation, the demand of time and labor, and the attention the process requires that have made me surrender to it. Clay speaks many languages and keeps infinite possibilities. What I look for is for my sculptures to embody, become icons of freedom and force, endless curiosity and risk taking."



Gerald Brown: Sacred Objects

"The sacred objects' primary spiritual function is to demarcate space for ancestral as well as descendants of Strange Fruit, an expansive lineage of African Diasporic people in America. The forms possess the power to communicate ancestral blessings such as energy, memory, forgiveness and love, providing an opportunity for multi-layered healing personally as well as environmentally. These abstract portraits of Strange Fruit

are a commemoration of a range of subjects and their unique, complicated behaviors developed through resisting Anti-Blackness. In the midst of survival, deadly environmental effects plague these inhabitants, causing a long-term development of various Anti-Black tendencies. However, by creating these intimate moments to honestly learn from our past selves as well as provide guidance for moving forward, these forms become a beacon of solace in the face of violence.

The spiritual function of the sacred objects are activated through the choice of material and approach to construction. Action and touch carry energy, while clay records movement and memory. The way the marks are made deeply affect the commemoration as well as the overall spiritual tactility function. The Fruits are primarily handbuilt because this method provides a careful, diligent approach to constructing ideals about Blackness. Pinching has a meditative, warm loving nature that slowly builds up the image of the subject. In addition, when working hollow, the form looks as abstract on the outside as it looks on the inside. There are a few adornments or appendages that are added to accentuate the form, but the work is primarily mirrored externally as internally to deliberately communicate the continuity between the spaces. Similarly, the improvisational, voluptuous contours also forge a sense of harmony between the observer and the Fruit, reflecting the natural duality between tumultuous chaos and intrinsic beauty, a core pillar of the Black experience. These dual energies flow like water through the sacred objects, are transmitted through touch and absorbed by the recipient, rejuvenating inherited ancestral traumas and internalized anguish."



Aaron Caldwell

"As an artist, I am interested in looking at Black and queer identity with a lens of interiority. My work is primarily inspired by Black folks' history with moisturizing products for the hair and body, and my being conditioned to hold value in my hair, skin color and the necessary tools for care. Being considered physically ashy (white and dry skin) or socially ashy (wack, lame, ignorant) are lingo among Black folk. As a result, products like lotion or coconut oil have become a staple in the Black

community, so I create objects that concretely elevate and highlight this relationship unique to Black culture. I also employ zoomorphic forms inspired by folktales and west and central african sculpture. The buffalo represents masculinity and manhood, the sheep represents queerness and the rabbit represents Blackness. My art narrates how I engage with my Blackness and queerness in private, through culture, and how these identities inform how I engage with the world."



Anthony Kascak

“The work that I am exhibiting in *Empowering Voices* includes two wall pieces from my MFA thesis show, as well as another wall piece that I made shortly after. I am interested in exploring how I can incorporate photography into my ceramics practice; I have done this directly through photographic decals as well as with physical touch and visual perception through ceramic frames and fragments. These ceramic frames contain

images and actions: fingerprints preserved and highlighted with glaze, photographic ceramic decals of my body, as well as adorned shards and cracks of ceramic pieces that highlight the fragility of the ceramic process and specific details of photographs. The physical touch involved in the ceramic process not only emphasizes the marks made to reference the literal act of touching, but also the vulnerability and potential of the material itself. The third piece I have included in the exhibition is a wall piece that mimics the silhouette of my fingerprint. The enlarged silhouette is adorned with glazed indentations from my fingers that create movement, similar to brushstrokes in a painting, within the interior space.”



Sydnie Jimenez

“These figures were made during the peak of quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic at the same time as protests by black and brown youth that were sparked by police brutality and the deaths of black people by police including the murder of Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, and George Floyd to name a few. These figures are referencing protestors, protest, and a feeling of discontent, disorientation, and unease left in the wake of these deaths whose murderers were not brought to justice.”