

Meet Anna Elise Johnson: Artist



We had the good fortune of connecting with Anna Elise Johnson and we've shared our conversation below.

Hi Anna Elise, we'd love to hear about how you approach risk and risk-taking

As an artist, I admit that I rarely risk life or limb, but risk taking is an essential part of my work. My creative modus operandi is the invention and establishment of conceptual and physical processes that are immediately subject to revision, restructuring, and possibly subsequent reconstruction. I work in a continuous cycle of creation and destruction. I destroy to create and create only to destroy. For me, being risk averse or "playing it safe" by relying upon obvious, old, or borrowed solutions to the problems that I set for myself is the antithesis of art making.



Can you open up a bit about your work and career? We're big fans and we'd love for our community to learn more about your work.

My most recent work begins with a drive or hike to the desert, the mountains, the shore, or even an empty city lot. I look for a patch of exposed ground with a story to tell – a story told in earth, sand, stones, charcoal, and plant debris – anything that makes this particular small section of the surface of the earth different than any other. Next, in a plastic tray, I soak a large piece of canvas in plaster. I stretch the canvas across the ground and cover it with earth and any nearby surface ephemera. As the plaster hardens, it captures and preserves the topography and other unique characteristics of the patch. I fold up the canvas (which creates a grid pattern in the finished piece), pack up all my gear, and return to my studio in L.A. There each piece evolves through an extensive and constantly changing series of manipulations and experiments using both typical art materials and unexpected materials and procedures. Most recently I've been flooding the earth-covered canvases in a layer of plaster and very lightly staining the plaster with watercolor in a process similar to fresco painting. Ideally, I want to create in my art making a balance between the recording of the unique character of a small piece of the world and partially obliterating or destroying it.



If you had a friend visiting you, what are some of the local spots you'd want to take them around to?

If a friend of mine came to visit now, we would go on hikes in Griffith Park, go to the beach in Malibu, visit my studio in the Fashion District, and most likely take a drive out to the desert. In pre-pandemic times, we would have gone to a movie at Arclight Hollywood, walked up and down Vermont Ave. in Los Feliz and gone to Skylight Books, and we would have driven all around town to visit galleries. We would have had breakfast at the 101 Coffee Shop, dinner in a small booth at Jones on Santa Monica, and we would have had drinks in some of my favorite dive bars like Akbar, The Dresden, or Taix.





The Shoutout series is all about recognizing that our success and where we are in life is at least somewhat thanks to the efforts, support, mentorship, love and encouragement of others. So is there someone that you want to dedicate your shoutout to?

I met one of my most important mentors by taking the risk to move to Berlin from Colorado when I was 24 years old. I didn't know anyone there, but I had heard the art scene in Berlin was exciting. I stayed in a hostel at first and then found an apartment, and through a series of coincidences I got hired as a studio assistant to Julie Mehretu, one of the most important artists working today. (I applied after a friend in New York told me about the job posting, and a roommate I found through Craigslist happened to know the project manager.) Julie was preparing works for her show at the



Deutsche Guggenheim and working on a 80 foot x 23 foot painting called "Mural." Working for Julie on such an ambitious project and having lunch with her and the other assistants everyday and discussing art, politics, and art's role in global capitalism was a big influence on me. Julie loves to debate, so lunches were a good opportunity to form and defend my own viewpoints. Seeing Julie live her life with her wife and kids was also an important model for me as a young, queer artist.

Photos by Rosita Lama Muvdi and Anna Elise Johnson