

## Review: Artpace Artists-in-Residence Fall 2024 Exhibitions

The most memorable art from my San Antonio trip were the three exhibitions of recent Artpace residents that explore the divine feminine, contested history, and ritual. It is rare to see such synergy between artists since they each work for two months toward a solo exhibition. I credit curator Beverly Adams for selecting powerful artists engaging in important socio-political issues from strong feminist perspectives.



Installation view of Celia Eberle's "She"

Celia Eberle's *She* reimagines the biblical creation story of Eve. I've followed her work over the past decade. She is masterful in embracing binary themes and subversive humor to evoke a simultaneous sense of awe, beauty, and horror from viewers. The exhibition's central focus is a large, white, furry animatronic hand complete with long, blood-red lacquered nails. Every 20 minutes, the hand moves, triggering a sound and lightscape in the gallery. In

thinking about this kinetic sculpture as it relates to biblical allegory, I imagine Eve as a furry beast, rather than a submissive helpmate to Adam. The story of Lilith also comes to mind. Lilith's historical portrayal is that of a demon, but what if Lilith and her offspring lived harmoniously with other animals in the kingdom? This thought stems from seeing the movie *Wicked* recently, where animals learn to speak and live amongst humans (until predictably the humans feel threatened, wanting to cage and dominate them.)



Installation view of Celia Eberle's "She"

Cords from the hand lead to a wall of cast paper anatomical hearts embedded with found objects. When the hand moves, red lights illuminate the hearts symbolizing control of the "heartstrings." A close look is required to see the different objects in each heart: castle, child's hand, angel, dagger, globe, etc. referencing both historical and contemporary narratives. The opposite wall features a landscape painting of the Garden of Eden and an oversized cast paper pomegranate with glass seeds. Titled *All Her Seeds*, the pomegranate

is a symbol of fertility and the glass seeds (the offspring) indicate their fragility for the future.



Celia Eberle, "All Her Seeds," 2024

The press release mentioned “marrying themes of artificial intelligence with biblical allegory.” Interested in learning more about the AI component of the work, I asked Eberle to explain her interest/concern with AI. I shared my own experiences using text-to-image generators and my findings on how the data sets are biased toward white western men and how this might affect visual culture in the future. Eberle’s insightful response,

*“I have an idea that the current resurgence of oppressive acts against women and others is a result of an elite belief in the displacement of humans in the workplace by AI. The collision of beliefs in technology and religion has led me to launch a re-examination of the story of Eve. I have envisioned Eve as a monstrous woman, a trope with many precedents, responsible for everything, and a barrier to the Edenic state, the forever golden past or future for which we constantly strive.”*



Installation view of Consuelo Jimenez Underwood's "UNDOCUMENTED TALES OF THE FUTURE: NOW"

Consuelo Jimenez Underwood's installation *UNDOCUMENTED TALES OF THE FUTURE: NOW* explores the historic pursuit and resulting destruction of patriarchal power. As in



Eberle's work, Underwood presents an alternative narrative to historical events in order to consider how we might move forward using human resilience and rebirth to counter the impending extinction of the earth.



Installation view of Consuelo Jimenez Underwood's "UNDOCUMENTED TALES OF THE FUTURE: NOW"

*Divine Homecoming* is a large floor installation depicting the earth. Created from fabric and found objects, the 2D globe is fractured with a rift along the Mexican/U.S. border. Safety pins suture the fault line. The artist uses stitching with metallic thread, leaving loose ends that resemble barbed wire as the delineation of borders. Barbed wire is a powerful symbol of imprisonment, confinement, and contested land wars. However, it also represents strength and resilience. Choosing to display the work on the floor rather than the wall serves to emphasize human dominance over the earth. Visitors view the work as if from space — both macro and micro perspectives to witness the damage inflicted upon the world. Underwood stitches buttons and beads into the tapestry. Both may signify cultural identity and family heritage. The use of buttons shows the global diaspora due to violence and oppression. The beads are more integrated with the safety pins and stitching indicating assimilation.



“UNDOCUMENTED TALES OF THE FUTURE: NOW” (detail)

Spanning two walls, *Hiking Through the Galaxy* is a mural of the Aztec codex, a re-telling of the story of male and female balance. I read it as a journey through history with painted

footprints delineating the mark of human intervention. Underwood weaves barbed wire, wire, nails, and fabric in the chronological timeline showing cosmic imbalance with a potential suggestion for healing. Another tapestry *Planetary Expedition* hangs from the ceiling. The artist uses celestial imagery of Mars and Venus to remind the viewers that our place is small within the larger cosmic universe. Her use of textiles masterfully merges craft and fine art, while the use of found objects speaks to history and cultural memory.



Julianny Ariza Volquez, "We are beings that sculpt, that which is opaque, that which shine," 2024

Honoring female labor, Julianny Ariza Vólquez' *Amas de Leche* is a multimedia installation focusing on the historic and cultural legacy of the Caribbean wet nurse. Of the three exhibitions, Vólquez' is the only one to incorporate the female figure in its entirety. I was drawn immediately to the 3-channel video installation of a performative ritual. The artist/performer repeats acts of gathering, breaking, burying, and cleansing ceramic and terracotta pieces. Shrouded in white lace, the performer's face is hidden, referencing the invisibility of women's labor, as well as the taboo nature of breastfeeding. Filmed on the



beach near the sea, the ritual extends from sun-up to sun-down signifying the cyclical nature of women's work and the connection to the Earth for sustenance and life.



Installation view of Julianny Ariza Vólquez' "Amas de Leche"

In the gallery's center are a series of 3 intricately laser-cut totem figures with lace skirts entitled *We dance with saltpeter and pulverized stone*. The two-dimensionality of the figures' heads/torsos refers to the fact that wet nurses were not recognized as individuals, but only for the service they could provide. Underneath the skirts are offerings of found objects, broken porcelain, and terracotta fragments. I interpreted these as memories of children who were fed and nourished. The long skirts provide shelter and protection for the "children." In decoding the title, I researched the material saltpeter and found it is used not only as a preservative for meat but also as a fertilizer and to produce explosives. This speaks to the delicate balance/imbalance of power and how it can be used to nourish and destroy. Next to the totems are three still lifes with sand and ceramic objects. The title *The object lives in shipwrecks I-III* indicates the legacy of colonialism and enslaved labor.





Julianny Ariza Vólquez, "The object lives in shipwrecks I -III," 2024

In addition to the sculptures and video installation, the exhibition features large-scale paintings that are two-dimensional totems celebrating the wet nurse. Depicting iconography from the Dominican Republic, Indigenous, African as well as the influence of Spanish Catholicism, the paintings illustrate empowerment and liberation despite oppression. As in Underwood's and Eberle's work, Vólquez uses objects to symbolize history and cultural memory. All three exhibitions emphasize the legacy and importance of female resilience as the key to future survival.

Celia Eberle: *She*, Consuelo Jimenez Underwood: *UNDOCUMENTED TALES OF THE FUTURE: NOW*, and Julianny Ariza Vólquez: *Amas de Leche* are on view at *Artpace* through January 19, 2025.

—COLETTE COPELAND