

EMPATHY

Curated by Gabriel de Guzman
November 17 - December 30, 2018

Exhibition Checklist



Andrea Arroyo

Flor de Tierra: Homage to the Women of Juarez III, 2018

Acrylic and gouache on cut Tyvek

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

Andrea Arroyo's work, which ranges from paintings to large-scale public art projects, often sheds light on social injustice, relating to women's issues and human rights. Her installation *Flor de Tierra* honors the thousands of women who have been murdered or have disappeared in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, since 1993. Her featherweight paintings on cut Tyvek float in the space while interacting with the natural light entering through the gallery windows. In Arroyo's project, women are depicted in the landscape among the flora, turning the tragic tale of these women, whose bodies

are usually buried in shallow graves, into poignant images. Arroyo's iconography often expresses a duality. Hands, for example, appear frequently in her work; they represent tools of labor, the will to resist, but can also be instruments of violence or assault. Although the artist portrays the female faces in a stylized manner to evoke universality, on long strips of paper she makes sure to include names of those who have perished, in an effort to recognize them as individuals rather than nameless victims.



Corinne May Botz

"Wilton" from *Bedside Manner*, 2013

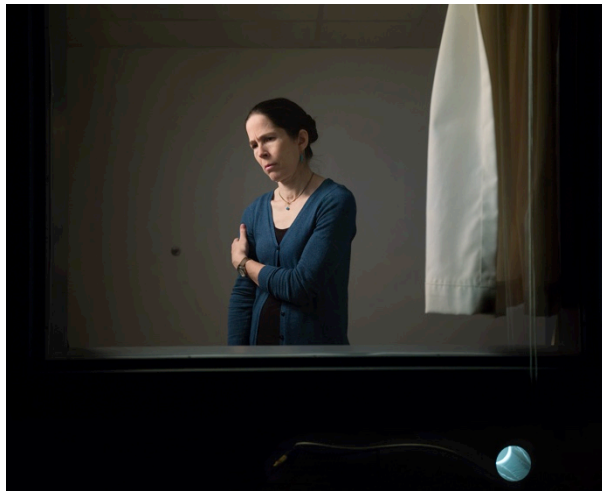
Archival Pigment Print

31" x 41"

Courtesy of the artist and Benrubi Gallery

In *Bedside Manner*, Corinne May Botz's photographs depict standardized patients, professional medical actors who are trained to present particular sets of symptoms in order to help medical students improve their diagnostic skills and bedside manner. Botz's images simultaneously elicit and

circumscribe an emotional response, as viewers must contemplate their reactions not just to sickness, injury, and hospitals, but also to the innumerable images of human suffering with which we are confronted on a daily basis, whether for entertainment or edification. Even though the standardized patient may be performing, this does not mean the encounter is fake; acting and staged representations inform the interaction between patients and doctors, and simulated feelings can mirror and expose the real. Viewers are urged to interrogate which aspects of these scenes are not just true but relevant to their own medical history.



Corinne May Botz
"Alice" from Bedside Manner, 2014
 Archival Pigment Print
 31" x 38"
 Courtesy of the artist and Benrubi Gallery



Life Support from Bedside Manner, 2013
 Archival Pigment Print
 31" x 38"
 Courtesy of the artist and Benrubi Gallery



Hands from Bedside Manner, 2013
 Archival Pigment Print
 25" x 19 1/2"
 Courtesy of the artist and Benrubi Gallery



Sasha Phyers-Burgess

(Gina, Izzy, Walker Evans) Bethlehem, Philadelphia, Ithaca, 2018

Photography
5" x 8"

Courtesy of Sasha Phyers-Burgess and The Library of Congress

Sasha Phyers-Burgess's photo-based work grapples with the experience of her family of Trinidadian heritage and African descent, living in rural-suburban communities in Eastern Pennsylvania. In her recent photo collages, she juxtaposes images of family and friends with those of her white neighbors and friends. For this piece in the exhibition, she has appropriated iconic pictures by Walker Evans taken in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, during the 1930s when he and other photographers were hired by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) to travel all over the country

and document economic hardship and progress in rural America. Evans's picture of boy scouts in Phyers-Burgess's collage is of young children whose families lived in the Bethlehem area. Organizations like the Boy Scouts have helped to homogenize once disparate ethnic white groups, many of whom were recent immigrants from Eastern Europe. The artist contemplates how conceptions of whiteness have developed in this country, as black families attempted to establish homes and communities for themselves in rural America. Phyers-Burgess's photograph of a pregnant woman is that of a friend who grew up in Philadelphia and after extensive travel has returned to raise her child; the artist is thinking about future generations of white children who can use their agency either to perpetuate or to reverse systems of white supremacy. In these charged works, Phyers-Burgess attempts to tease out the complicated history and origins of racism, white privilege, and poverty in working class American towns, and the potential for change.



iliana emilia garcía

Eternal Vision- Series Formation/ Structures of Survival, 2018

China Ink, charcoal, acrylic on canvas

67" x 116"

Courtesy of the artist

A secondary definition of empathy, from which the concept actually originated, is the imaginative ascribing to an object feelings or attributes present in oneself. Artists have often explored this quality of empathy through depictions of aesthetic objects. In this way, personal belongings and furniture can become conduits for inward reflection. In iliana emilia garcía's work, the chair has become a signature icon, embodying memory, heritage, community, and diversity, as well as qualities such as resilience, purpose, tolerance, and kindness. Stacked and clustered together, the chairs in garcía's expressive drawings represent a pile of personal stories moving along similar paths, which at times branch out

in a thousand directions, but other times intersect. Individuals form groups that share the same landscapes and bond through mutual understanding.



When the sky is the limit Series Formation/ Structures of survival, 2018

China ink, charcoal, acrylic on canvas

67" x 116"

Courtesy of the artist



Zac Hacmon
Gateway, 2018
 Steel
 487 x 82 x 55.25
 Courtesy of Hacmon Studio

Israeli artist Zac Hacmon's *Gateway* is an interactive sculptural intervention at the front of the gallery. Visitors must decide to enter the space by passing through the structure or walking around it. *Gateway* is a reconstruction of a section of the Kalandia checkpoint, located at the border crossing between the northern West Bank and Jerusalem. It is used

by the Israeli military to control Palestinian access to Israel. As a structure, *Gateway* conveys the heavy physicality of border crossings, while relocating the checkpoint passage in a space with no border to cross. As an immersive piece of architecture, it nonetheless shifts meaning from forum to prison, and from watching to being watched. Although the visitors moving through Hacmon's *Gateway* may never know the harrowing experience of Palestinians crossing Israeli checkpoints, they might become more aware of barriers to access that we encounter in our everyday lives. By shifting their perspective, some might even relate to those affected by increasingly stricter immigration and border policies. In this way, Hacmon's sculpture transitions from cage to empathy bridge.



Georgia Lale
#OrangeVest Performance
Documentation, 10/2015 - 10/2016
 9 digital prints and video
 Prints: 18" x 16" each, Video: 30 min.
 Courtesy of the artist

Georgia Lale's *#OrangeVest*, 2015–16, is a commentary on the journey of Syrian refugees between Turkey and Greece while they try to cross the Aegean Sea. It is a participatory performance, a sculpture, and a protest. A Greek artist of Turkish

descent, Lale describes the purpose of the project as bringing the tough reality of the refugee experience into the everyday routine of New York City. She launched *#OrangeVest* in October 2015 with a performance at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Wearing the orange life vest, she walked from the museum's Syrian art collection to the Greek art galleries. Her symbolic trek in the museum connects the current refugees' route with the critical narrative of history, the movement of cultural artifacts, and the migration of people. Since this first iteration, Lale

brought the performance to public spaces all over the city, from Times Square to the United Nations Secretariat Building, Central Park, the High Line, the New York City Subway, Washington Square Park, the Brooklyn Bridge, and the Brooklyn Museum. Along the way, the project developed into a protest march that gathered a diverse group of fellow activists who also wished to raise awareness of the Syrian refugee crisis. Eventually, the social justice performance traveled outside of New York, to Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and then to Brussels, Belgium, where thirty protesters organized by the art group Refugees Got Talent, marched in front of the European Parliament, the Greek Embassy, and the European Commission.



Bundith Phunsombatlert
*Sunny Garden in Blue:
 The Stories from the
 Caribbean to Brooklyn,*
 2018

12 archival pigment prints
 14 1/4" x 20" inches (each)
 Courtesy of the artist

Bundith Phunsombatlert collaborated with seniors at Rosetta Gatson Neighborhood Senior Center through a series of workshops, inviting residents to share their stories while teaching

them the cyanotype photographic printing process. Phunsombatlert began this participatory project in January 2018 as a SU-CASA Artist in Residence, and the initial body of work resulted in a public exhibition at the senior center and at the Brooklyn Arts Council in summer 2018. The participants with whom the artist collaborated are mostly immigrants of Caribbean descent; he became fascinated to learn about their backgrounds and decided to further the project into another phase. As an immigrant himself (originally from Thailand), he elected to work more closely with several of the seniors, collecting their migration narratives and publishing them as an artist book, illustrated with Phunsombatlert's portraits of each individual along with the cyanotype images created by the participants.



L.J. Roberts

Theodore Kerr at the 25th anniversary Act up march on Wall Street, 2012

Embroidery on cotton

6" x 4"

Courtesy of the artist

Begun in 2011, L.J. Roberts’s ongoing embroidered portrait series documents members of their intersectional, LGBTQ+, creative, activist community in New York to which they feel a sense of belonging. In these two portraits, Roberts depicts Theodore “Ted” Kerr and Chaplain Christopher Jones, both activists who work holistically to address and provide care in the ongoing AIDS epidemic. Jones is a writer, visual activist, theorist and spiritual leader who founded Griot Community Care. His current work centers the lives of queer and transgender elders.

Kerr is a writer, artist, and longtime activist who was a co-founder of What Would an HIV Doula Do? Tackling the question of how to hold space and provide support for those living with HIV, the collective is composed of nurses, artists, death doulas, dancers, HIV service organization employees and activists. Jones and Kerr often collaborate, and together they created the poster project *Inflamed: A Litany for Burning Condoms* for poster/VIRUS, a Canadian-based group that produces agitprop media, which is wheat-pasted in cities to amplify critical issues regarding HIV and AIDS. As children of the 1980s, Jones, Kerr, and Roberts have grown up with the ongoing AIDS epidemic as a traumatic, constant presence in their lives, although it has affected each one in different ways. In 2015, the three activists were motivated to work together and, along with Niknaz, an Iranian feminist experimental filmmaker, transformed *Inflamed: A Litany for Burning Condoms* into a short film, which was released in 2016 and has screened in Asia, Europe, and the United States.



Chaplain Christopher Jones at Home in Harlem, 2017

Embroidery on cotton

6" x 4"

Courtesy of the artist



Iván Sikic

Amor Humano, 2017

Video, 4 capes, 5 masks

Dimensions variable, video: 27 min.

Courtesy of the artist

Astonished by the staggering reports of femicide in his homeland of Peru, Iván Sikic created *Amor Humano*, a body of work that explores the issue of violence against women. In August 2017, Sikic staged a collaborative action in the Nueva Esperanza (New

Hope) Cemetery located in Villa Maria del Triunfo, in Lima, Peru. Recorded in video and photography, the performance was inspired by the sounds, rituals, and aesthetics of Huayno culture, a genre of music from the Andean region of Peru and Bolivia. Also known as Sierra, this area is where the commonly used saying, “Amor Serrano, the more I hit you, the more I love you” is believed to have originated and is an example of the normalization of domestic violence in the local culture. Sikic’s *Amor Humano* performance was carried out by five female dancers, a local Huayno orchestra, and a Master of Ceremony who walked alongside the musicians and dancers while they made their way through the cemetery to the tune of the “Tunantada.” Dancers wore traditional outfits that were complemented by embossed, hand embroidered capes designed by the artist, in collaboration with a local artisan. Sewn onto the capes were the dates, towns, and names of women (taken from local newspaper clippings) who were murdered at the hands of their lovers. As part of the procession, the Master of Ceremony, read aloud the names of 150 women from all over the world who had been victims of femicide.



Elisabeth Smolarz

Ntianu 3:30h New York, 2016

Photograph

52" x 42"

Courtesy of the artist

For her photography series *Encyclopedia of Things*, Elisabeth Smolarz invites individuals to make a collaborative still life image that reveals a sense of identity and selfhood. Through engaged dialogue and active listening, the artist and participant arrange objects of unique significance into an installation for the camera. The resulting photograph becomes a non-concrete portrait that tells an enigmatic, yet personal story of the individual. In this group of photos, Smolarz has worked with a wide range of people, including those of various cultural heritage, refugees of political

conflict, war veterans, and victims of sexual assault. Despite differences in particular aspects of their backgrounds, the intimate experience of the project creates resonance and mutual connection between collaborators. In conjunction with this exhibition, Smolarz will be available every Sunday afternoon by appointment to work with Smack Mellon visitors on creating their own collaborative photographs. Speak to a staff member for more information.



Elisabeth Smolarz

Larry 2:30h Guttenberg, 2016

Photograph

42" x 34"

Courtesy of the artist



Mirelinda 3:00h Stuttgart, 2016

Photograph

31" x 25"

Courtesy of the artist



Amelia 4:00h New York, 2017

Photograph

21" x 17"

Courtesy of the artist



Rosary Solimanto

Weight, 2015

forged steel, suede, rivets

15" x 14" 15"

Courtesy of the artist

Rosary Solimanto's *Weight* is an interactive artwork that was inspired by the visual aesthetic of orthopedic braces, work boots, and Frankenstein's shoes. It

portrays legs and feet as heavy loads, simulating the adversities that people with imperceptible health conditions experience. Having suffered multiple sclerosis, Solimanto created the wearable sculpture to encourage conversations surrounding disability identity through social engagement. While this sculpture was originally meant to be worn, it is exhibited here as an art object, and we ask viewers not to touch. However, Solimanto will participate in the exhibition tour on Sunday, December 2nd, at 3PM, and will bring another version of *Weight* that visitors can try on. Please join us then to learn more about the artist and to experience Solimanto's work.



Weight on Streets, 2016

Archival print

24" x 18"

Courtesy of the artist



Susan Stainman

Poised for Intimacy, 2018

Fabric, wood, foam, paper

36" x 36" x 30"

Courtesy of Susan Stainman

In her recent interactive works, Susan Stainman has been exploring the concept of utopia, countering the disempowering idea that utopia is an unfathomable place or time of perfection. Instead, Stainman asks participants to contemplate the possibility that utopia can be experienced in moments of ideal interpersonal interaction, as well as finding an ideal relationship with oneself. Active listening is not only a necessary skill for meaningful interaction, but it is also crucial for fostering empathy. Stainman's social sculpture, *Poised for*

Intimacy, invites visitors to sit and have a conversation in order to develop this technique. Resembling two conjoined chairs, the sculpture is a restful place for strangers or familiars to create a moment of contact and to experience both the uncertainty and connection that can arise when we truly listen and speak from the heart. Interview questions in the side pockets of the piece encourage a dialogue about personal concepts of utopia. Participants take turns asking questions; while the respondent speaks, the interviewer must listen and thoughtfully consider the speaker's remarks.



Patricia Thornley

THIS IS US: The Western, 2018

Video Installation

20 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

In Patricia Thornley's video installation *THIS IS US: The Western*, archetypal characters from Civil War Era Westerns are used as a framework for interpreting the American psyche. The work is comprised of two components—a "movie" and a wall of interviews with the seven characters that appear in it—and was shot in Wyoming, Montana, Colorado, New York, and Nova Scotia. The two elements play simultaneously on opposing walls, and the viewer moves between them, as one side of the darkened room answers the shortfalls and gratifications of the other. The participants are adapted, to varying degrees, to reflect their "character." The roles in which they have been cast are: Indian Scout, Beast of Burden, Frontiersman, Savage, Deserter, Justice, and Drifter. The artist as "director" often eclipses the participants in the service of cultural consensus and order—mirroring our culture's inability to shed old mythologies—and in recurring theme music her voice enters and exits, embodying the role of music in controlling perception.

Time-honored media industry conventions are altered in this project, and empathy works on multiple levels, with director, actors, and viewers being challenged to consider the unique circumstances of each participant. "While my work does achieve [empathy] in places, it more often acts out the intense desire for, and difficulty of, true understanding." *THIS IS US: The Western* muses on how media representations of the Old West, reinforced over generations, have defined characteristics that the world recognizes as American: confidence, crudeness, individuality, self-reliance, aggression—characteristics that continue to shape our national identity and impact a new international landscape.

S m a c k M e l l o n



Michael Kelly Williams

Samta, 2017

Mixed media sculpture

50" x 19" x 12"

Courtesy of the artist

Working in sculpture and fine art prints, Michael Kelly Williams's art is inspired by music, poetry, literature, nature, and mythology. He draws heavily from world cultures, the art of the ancients, folk art, and African art and is interested in enduring topics such as the spiritual in art, environmental concerns, equality and justice, hierarchies collapsing, irony, and surrealism. His three-dimensional works incorporate found objects, bringing together seemingly unrelated pieces to produce unexpected connections. *Samta* addresses the plight of Dalits, often called "untouchables," in India. The Dalits represent the lowest caste in that country and still encounter widespread discrimination. The

main form of this sculpture is the body of a sitar, a stringed instrument used in North Indian classical music, which for Williams embodies spiritual, transcendent music. However, Williams, an African American artist, has cut the resonator off of the instrument and replaced it with a watermelon, a symbol of an African American stereotype that has endured since the Civil War era. Here Williams reappropriates this icon of prejudice to stand in solidarity with Dalits and their struggle against oppression.



Resist, 2018

Drypoint

15" x 13"

Courtesy of the artist

Appalled by news reports of children being separated from their families at the U.S.-Mexico border, Michael Kelly Williams was moved to create this new graphic work. The image shows a young girl confined in a cage, without her parents or guardians, addressing the immigration crisis in the United States. With the word "Resist" above her head, the work implores the viewer to oppose the current administration's unjust tactics, which include the imprisonment of young migrants and refugees.