

San Antonio Review

“Artpace fall 2020 international residents ‘respond to the moment’ with new exhibits”

by James Courtney, November 18, 2020



Letitia Huckaby, *And Thy Neighb(our)*. Credit: Courtesy / Artpace

Artpace is in the midst of wrapping up the fall cycle of its [international artist-in-residence program](#), guest-curated this go-round by Fort Worth-based artist, scholar, and curator [Lauren Cross](#).

Residents include [Alisa Yang](#) (Los Angeles/New York/Helsinki), [Elana Mann](#) (Los Angeles), and [Letitia Huckaby](#) (Fort Worth).

The long-running program, which aims to support and encourage connections between local, statewide, national, and international artists, typically hosts three cohorts per year, but the coronavirus pandemic forced the cancellation of the summer iteration this year.

Nevertheless, the fall cycle has gone forward (with some modifications) and now, as usual, the resident artists will each offer up an exhibition of new work made or completed during their residency. Shows will be physically open to the public Nov. 19-Jan. 10 under strict masking and distancing guidelines and can be explored virtually via Artpace's new 3D gallery experience, which uses the same platform that has served at least one other local gallery well over the past seven months.

These exhibitions serve as an occasion for the artists to engage the local community and as a kind of capstone to their experience at Artpace.

In the absence of traditional, in-person studio visits that are typically part of the artist selection process, artists put together virtual studio visits. Cross said the artists "did a really good job of representing themselves and their work that I never felt like I was missing out or that much was lost."

What she was looking for, and what she eventually found in the artists she selected, was engagement with important current issues.

"Does this artist have something specific to say to the moment, to respond to the moment?" was a sort of guiding consideration for Cross in her selections.

Self-care in a pandemic

Yang, for her exhibit, *Wish You Were Here*, focused on the concepts of caring for oneself and one's community. The nomadic interdisciplinary artist and filmmaker described the residency opportunity as a "gift," offering her "the space, the time, [and] the opportunity" to make art.

Yang created two unique, community-focused projects, the first being 300 limited edition community self-care packages that attendees can take home with them. In addition, the gallery space features a video of Yang making the care packages, which contain sleep masks, aromatherapy spray that doubles as a disinfectant, a calming tea, and more.

"There has just been such a lack of care," Yang said. "From people not wearing masks to Black Lives Matter and just the marginalized communities that are deeply affected by this pandemic."

Since, in Yang's estimation, we "are not receiving the care we need from the government," we are often "forced to rely on mutual aid."

Envisioning art as a possible “space for community care” and a locus of mutual aid, she sees the care packages as opportunities to stress the importance of self-care and rest, two things that she has been working to honor in her own life.

“These things,” Yang said, “are made from isolation and made with people in mind who are also suffering in isolation.”

In a similar vein, Yang has also created a billboard that will stand throughout the month of December in Dilley, Texas, near one of the largest family detention centers in the country. The billboard, “another way of expressing care” for Yang, reads: “Jesus was a Brown Child Seeking Asylum.”

Yang hopes that the striking billboard piece will “provide some comfort or, ideally, move people to think about migration in a different way – more centered on human to human.”

Sounds of protest

Mann, whose exhibit is called *Year of Wonders*, has continued working on the folk music-inspired protest instruments that have dominated her work since 2019.

For this exhibit, Mann offers up a massive, six-person protest horn and fifty unique clay rattles with words meant to inspire action or reflection inscribed on them.

The giant protest horn, which was begun before Mann’s residency, has gone through, according to the artist, stages of meaning as our cultural milieu has changed over the past 6-8 months.



Elana Mann, *Year of Wonders*. Credit: Courtesy / Artpace

When the pandemic hit in March, Mann was disturbed by the new implications that the horn (which was made to actually be played by six people), took on in terms of the masking debate and general pandemic protocols.

“I was like ‘oh my god, I made this like super-spreader sculpture,’” Mann laughed.

Then, as Black Lives Matter protests happened over the summer, Mann says her protest horn took on another meaning as a silently looming symbol of the “work that still needs to be done.”

Mann lamented that the horn feels unfinished in a way because people won’t be able to actually play it. Nevertheless, the simple thought of six people playing the horn together can be said to bring up interesting considerations and conversations.

If people were to use this horn, Mann said, “they would have to decide to use it together, then they have to agree on whether to be cacophonous or harmonious.”

Likewise, Mann sees her rattles in the context of the noises they make as distinct voices. As such, the rattles symbolize “civic engagement at all levels of the political process.”

The Black immigrant experience

Huckaby’s exhibit tackles the challenge of representation and human dignity. For her exhibit, *And Thy Neighb(our)*, Huckaby has created 12 large fabric prints from photographs that she took of members of San Antonio’s Black immigrant community.



Letitia Huckaby, *And Thy Neighb(our)*. Credit: Courtesy / Artpace

Taken and printed in silhouette form, the images, according to Huckaby, intentionally erase certain features in order to accentuate “the human form” in general.

Huckaby wanted, she said, to use this exhibit to “shine a light on the Black immigration experience,” which is often left out of a national dialogue that has a habit of focusing on Latinos.

The 72-inch embroidery hoops by which Huckaby’s fabric portraits are framed are meant to be “symbolic of home and place,” she said.

“When a woman is sitting down to embroider a piece, it is usually in the home and for something precious that may be passed down through generations.”

Huckaby liked the idea of couching her subjects in that kind of reverence.

All in all, Huckaby hopes that her work for this exhibit can help change perspectives. “Immigration has become a dirty word,” she said, “but it really is a beautiful thing.”

In Cross’ estimation, the artists have admirably answered the call, even under strange circumstances, and each created their own unique responses to some of the most pressing concerns that face the United States as we near the close of an unprecedented year.