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## Women of Now: Dialogues of Memory, Place, and Identity at The Green Family Art Foundation

*Women of Now: Dialogues of Memory, Place, and Identity*

Curated by Clare Milliken and Bailey Summers  
The Green Family Art Foundation, Dallas TX  
February 12th - May 22nd, 2022

By **JONATHAN GOODMAN** March, 2022

Curated by Clare Milliken and Bailey Summers, “Women of Now: Dialogues of Memory, Place, and Identity” showcases 28 women artists. The exhibition takes place under the auspices of the The Green Family Art Foundation in Dallas. The theme of many of these rising artists tends to locate in a site of memory and place—important attributes that shape their identities. But the work does not turn alone on the awareness of self; often, the suggestions are muted, being dependent on the implications of the imagery, which does not necessarily spell out a literal message. With so many artists participating in the show, it is fair to say that “Women of Now” not only highlights the general themes of a feminist approach to art, it also displays the work of a new generation of female painters.



Hannah Levy, *Untitled*, 2020, Nickel-plated steel, silicone, 44 x 22 x 25 in.

With one exception, all of the works are paintings, and the majority of them are figurative. This kind of presentation makes sense for a show devoted to the representation of human concerns, both private and public. Interestingly, the art in “Women of Now” often begins where identity art ends—in the sense that the nuances of a deliberately portrayed female self do not necessarily suggest a conscious identification of the image with feminist concerns. Instead, the connection between a broad theme—the current place and achievement of women in the arts—and its interpretation by the individuals in the show implies more than it consciously states. The resulting subtleties found in the show consequently handle the loud static of rhetoric remarkably well, being oriented toward the suggestive rather than the literal.

The show is put together under the auspices of the Green Family Art Foundation, a non-profit organization. Founded in 2021, the Foundation wishes to educate the public about the nuances and depth of contemporary art. They present three exhibitions per year, devoted to artists they hope to support for, as they say at their website, “aesthetic, expository and illustrative purposes.” In the exhibition, “Women of Now” the Foundation offers a collection of works whose visual narrative—and many of the pieces do imply stories—demonstrate a strong sense of personal recall, as determined by the location the works

describe. While individually very different from each other, the exhibition incisively shows how women are fashioning personal stories about themselves, in a way that frees them as artists from convention. Often, this is done by the generation of visual suggestions that border on a contemporary mythology, in which the artist's self becomes both a personal assertion and a public display of confidence and fortitude.

Today, contemporary art, painting in particular, is in a quandary. Formal experiment seems outmoded, as artists have been working in innovational ways since modernism, which began in the early part of the last century. Today's art is often directed toward social concern, but there is also a freedom to visualize its terms in any way the painter wants. In the best of the work we come across today, a merger occurs between an original hand and a deep-seated sense of ethical morality. This need not be literal in imagery; in fact, often the work alludes to context rather than conscious statement, giving the art an implied concern. In "Women of Now," the position taken is most often suggested, so that viewers must intimate content not clearly evident on the surface of the composition. The results are often wonderfully elaborate and complex, not only in art generally, but also among the artists chosen for this show. The personal is implied rather than stated, giving both the artist and her audience the freedom to determine issues in ways that keep interpretation open rather than boundaried. "Women of Now" is compelling for that reason.

Thus, the art we see becomes nearly a kaleidoscope of effect, albeit one unified by the specifics of being women. The allusions may be current or historical; for example, Jenny Morgan's mostly green painting, *Reclining Portrait of Simone Gabriel* (2022), relays the artist's affection, emotional and erotic, for what the show's catalogue calls her "confidante and muse." Based on a marble sculpture by Bernini, *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* (1620), the portrait, a reverse odalisque in which we see a profile of the head and a naked body from behind, is covered with a transparent veil. Gabriel rests along the length of a lounge covered with green fabric, while the drapes behind her, creased and a darker green, form a background interesting in its own right. We don't know the details of the relations between the women, but the red and yellow line covering the top of Gabriel's head and body is electric with sensuous longing. Sasha Gordon's *Interloper* (2021) is a self-portrait: a painting of a biracial (Asian and white) woman, whom we are told is involved in a racial and sensual (non-binary) complexity the painting fully details. But the portrait is deliberately unsettling. The artist presents herself beginning just beneath the belly button and then moving up. Her black hair drifts across her face, and her eyes, gazing upward, appear morosely non-expressive. And the title tells us how she feels as someone of a mixed background.

*Long Shower Lady* (2020), by Aubrey Levinthal, consists of a slightly distorted head, neck, and shoulder of a woman taking a shower. Her dark, wet hair drapes to her shoulders; her left hand is raised to her left cheek in a gesture of resignation; and the look on her face suggests exhaustion, physical and emotional. White drips of water cascade onto the top of her head, while the green tile joined by white grout presents a neutral grid against which the difficulties seen in the woman's demeanor are exercised. Adding to the realism of the piece are genuine shampoo bottles standing on top of the painting. This work, in its distorted portrayal of a middle-aged woman's face, suggests a discomfort whose cause remains outside our knowledge. It is an excellent psychological study.

Danielle Roberts grew up in Canada, living on Gabriola Island near Vancouver. The island supported neither a school nor a grocery, so Roberts had to travel by ferry for her education and food. *Two Sailing Wait* (2021), presents a ferry's waiting room, eccentrically colored with luminescent hues: the wall on the left is a muddy gray, and the one in the back is a neon green. It is night, and four figures occur in the composition, two sitting and two standing. The foremost figure, a man with shaggy black hair and a dark gray and red striped shirt, looks toward a view we can't see. Two figures sit on an electric blue bench, while on the right, a person is choosing a snack from a vending machine. The painting's garishness adds to a sense of distance, even alienation. Although this is hardly a site of horror, the atmosphere is dense, nearly claustrophobic.

Lily Wong's *Into the Thick of it* (2021), painted during the Covid virus quarantine, shows a woman

wearing a lime green sweater thoughtfully gazing upward, away from the viewer. Her hands cradle her face and neck. Behind her is another figure, presumably Asian, with dark hair and a reddish yellow skin. Without clothes, the front of the person's body is hidden by a tree trunk. She exists in a forest whose depths reveal more trees and a light blue atmosphere enveloping them. The meditative expression of the first woman's face; the mysterious, half-revealed figure behind her; and the symbolic aspect of the forest all point to a situation in which discomfort reigns, as the painting's title suggests. No one seems to find an escape in the midst of the low-level plague we have endured for three years now.

Ania Hobson presents a self-portrait entitled *Red Jacket* (2020), a garment she purchased; according to the note accompanying the image, the article of the clothing is meant to attract the interest and interaction of others, an exchange she is usually uncomfortable with. Her black hair is combed into a bun in the back, and her left hand supports her head, which leans forward. The tannish pink tones of her upper chest, her neck and face, contrast with the jacket and black pants she wears. Hobson's eyes are closed, and her face's expression is withdrawn and melancholic. This study of a detached temperament is a way for the artist to convey her distance from the world—even with the help of an attractive, bright red jacket.

The only sculpture in the show, an untitled 2020 work, is by Hannah Levy. Consisting of a thin, silicone, light tan tank dress, its form is stretched by a continuous tube of nickel-plated steel ending in clawed feet. Given its seat-like curves, the work could also be seen as a chair. A bit surreal, and meant to address the difficult task of minimally representing a woman's body, the piece evokes humor in its curving outline, lacking a body to fill the dress. This is a representation of a woman by a woman, not without a bit of allure. Yet it is also partially abstract, in the sense that the form is merely suggested, not closely drawn. In general, the images I describe, only a fraction of the work in a well-curated show, indicate the figurative drive of new women painters. Their energies are committed to examining the place and role of woman in the first part of the 21st century. The mood of the work is assertive more than accusatory. "Women of Now" indicates that figurative art holds a strong future in the portrayal of the female gender. Figuration has been regularly neglected, but that is changing. The works stand on their own, producing quiet epiphanies and an ongoing pride. The show, then, quite successfully engages in a depiction of women that is very much of the moment, as their title demonstrates. WM



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