

WOMEN TO THE FRONT



RIO GALLERY 300 S. Rio Grande St., Salt Lake City, UT 84101

Front Image: *Wren Ross, The ____ Despite All Odds, 2020*

WOMEN TO THE FRONT

PERSPECTIVES ON EQUALITY, GENDER, AND ACTIVISM

RIO GALLERY | MARCH 16 – MAY 8, 2020

ARTISTS

Erin Coleman
Céline Downen
Annelise Duque
Lindsay Frei
Jamie Harper
Rachel Henriksen
Stephanie Leitch
Kylie Millward
Lis Pardoe
Wren Ross
Denae Shandlin
Fazilat Soukhakian
Marcela Torres
Mary Toscano
Jaclyn Wright

The year 2020 marks two milestone celebrations of women’s suffrage: the 150th anniversary of Utah women becoming the first to vote in the modern nation, and the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment that gave women in the U.S. the right to vote. To commemorate these events, the Department of Heritage & Arts and the Utah Division of Arts & Museums presents the exhibition *Women to the Front: Perspectives on Equality, Gender, and Activism*.

These historic events offer us the opportunity to consider the legacy of the women’s suffrage movement and explore its relevance to the lives of women today. In this exhibition, 15 Utah artists respond to these milestone anniversaries through contemporary approaches, including the mediums of photography, painting, fiber arts, and installation.

The artists featured in this exhibition were invited as the result of a thorough search of local and regional artists. In an effort to foster the art practice of emerging and diverse talent, the selected participants represent two career stages: emerging and newly established. Respectively, the first are recent graduates just beginning their career, and the second are those gaining gallery representation and greater regional and national exposure. While the majority of the artists created pieces specifically for this exhibition, the topics addressed connect to underlying themes of their work.

Utah’s role in women’s suffrage reminds us that women leaders of this state have been longtime supporters of gender equality. Names like Dr. Martha Hughes Cannon, Emmeline B. Wells, and Seraph Young Ford have gained recognition for being among the many Utah women who helped make history and inspire Utah’s leaders to continue the fight for women’s rights.

At a time when women’s issues and equality are front and center, it is important to capture the myriad ways in which they navigate issues that impact them. The richly diverse artistic visions showcased in this exhibition capture challenges that the artists or their subjects continue to experience, both in extreme contexts and the everyday.

This exhibition aims to empower conversations about universal themes of gender and equality, in turn allowing us to reflect on the significance of the suffrage movement and discuss ongoing issues that remain today.

Any exhibition of female-only artists should avoid essentializing artistic practices as decidedly “feminine.” In doing so, we risk overlooking the varied and nuanced contributions of individual artists. To ignore, however, the personal and political significance of womanhood in the artistic process is, itself, problematic.

The past decades have affirmed female artists as among those most successful in challenging the art-historical canon. Women artists have inserted themselves into male-dominated artistic spheres and methods, elevating once-disregarded “feminine” art practices and challenging white culture’s historical supremacy over female and non-Anglo bodies.

The artists in this exhibition are a microcosm of this larger conversation.

In tackling the male-dominated realm of abstraction, Rachel Henriksen and Wren Ross employ formal elements such as shape, color, and line to evoke a sense of curiosity and wonder in the viewer. Jamie Harper challenges the masculine mythos of the American West by subversively peppering softly feminine colors within majestically framed landscapes.

Elsewhere, artists confront the politics of our day, situating art as social activism. Denaë Shanidiin repurposes the symbols and materials of protest as a material art objects. In her series of portraits of LGBTQ+ couples, Iranian-American artist Fazilat Soukhakian brings to focus the very humanity of her subjects in a time of continued discrimination and political unrest. Others, too, force us to reconsider the subjects and methods often disparaged and overlooked as decidedly “feminine” forms of labor. Erin Coleman’s use of fabric connotes an archetypically domestic realm, while Céline Downen’s installations capture acts seemingly relegated to women. The illustrations of Kylie Millward use an innocuous tone to address oppressive beauty standards.

Stephanie Leitch’s *Shot Tower* installation blends the laborious with the mechanical to “invert industrial violence with feminine craft,” and highlights the intriguing power of material in shaping our perception of an abstract work.

Mary Toscano’s drawings highlight the intimacy and choreography of movement in everyday life. Similarly, Lindsay Frei’s paintings place viewers

into candid and voyeuristic view of their subjects, while Lis Pardoe’s female subjects combine the ordinary and the modern with a Baroque-style theatricality.

Building upon performance art’s revolutionary notion of using the body as an artistic medium, Marcela Torres uses the body to interrogate systematic violence against nonwhite persons.

The work of Jaclyn Wright probes the highly charged connotations between the female body and the land using experimental photographic practices. Finally, Annelise Duque’s stylized photographs elaborately frame their female subject, simultaneously investigating the artist’s own biographical and generational identity with the use of the artist herself as a focus. Herein, she evokes the art-historical mythos of Venus.

While feminism’s burgeoning influence has proved beneficial to female artists, America’s current socio-political climate makes clear the pressing need for continued dialogue. Now, with social revolutions like #MeToo once again bringing female voices into sharp focus, *Women to the Front* highlights the undeniable role of women in shaping the narrative around issues of racial equality, voting rights, immigration, and reproductive justice.

COLERIN

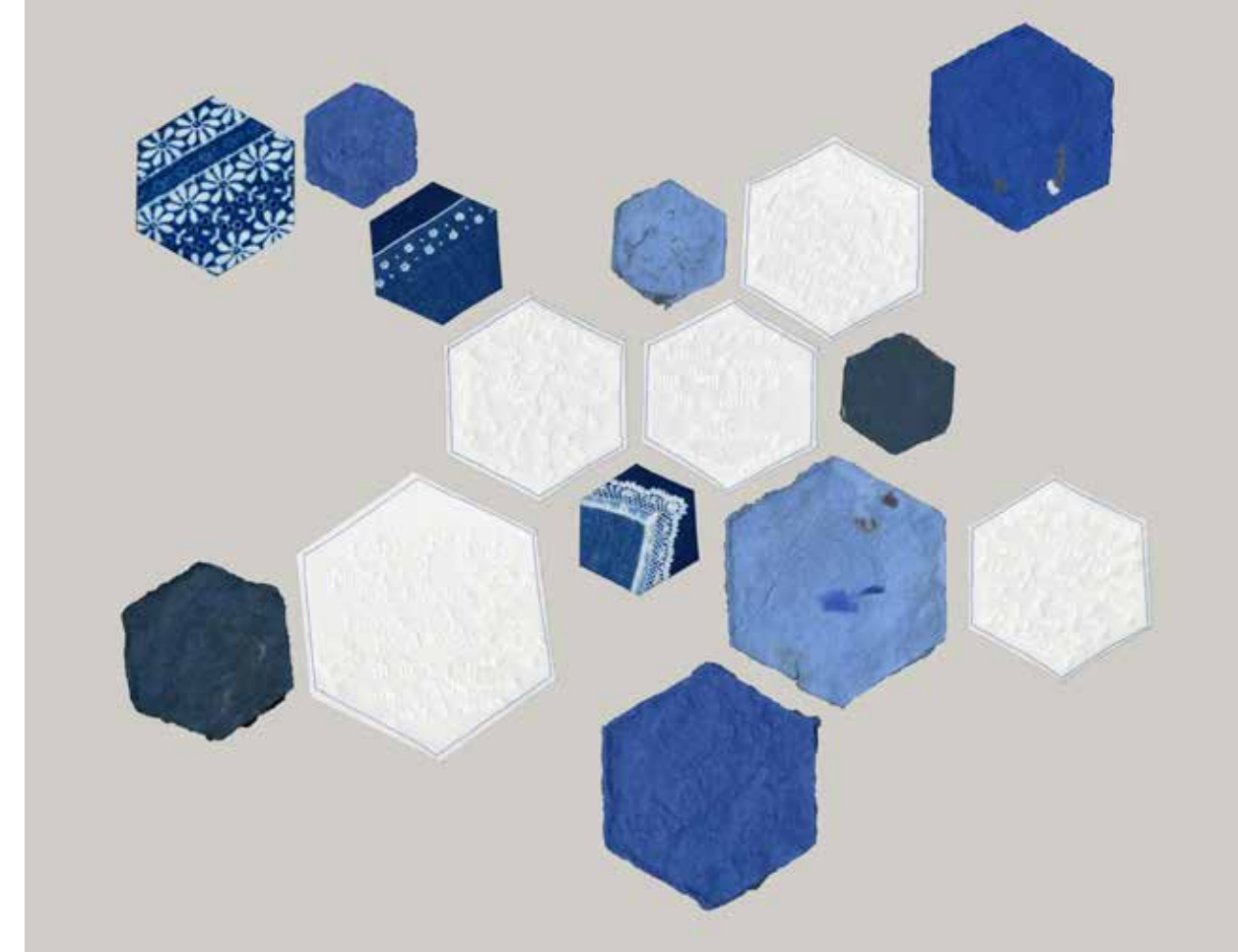


I've Got Out at Last, 2016

The emotional and physical body is symbolically presented through fabric—a stand-in for the body, stitched hair, and thread. Layers of pigment are built up on a gelatin printing plate and transferred onto muslin fabric, a humble material used for undergarments, or as a drafting material for patterning garments of high fashion. The threads in the hand-embroidery tie us to domestic space, repetitive women's work, and the connection of the hand to material experience.

My series of embroidered monoprints are inspired by, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, a short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman published in 1892 and written from the perspective of a postpartum mother recently removed to a house in the countryside to rest and heal her depression. In the room that she stays in is a dreadful patterned yellow wallpaper and her words simultaneously present her descent into madness and her perceived release from a domestic prison.

DOVINE



Homage to Carrie Catt's Ratification Dress, 2020

Carrie Chapman Catt, one of the key figures in the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, wore the same sapphire blue dress each time a state ratified the amendment. Inspired by the long use of textiles throughout history, especially women's history, this piece pays homage to Carrie Chapman Catt as well as the many suffragettes who fought for the right to vote. Embroidered handkerchiefs document the names of the suffragettes who went to prison for the cause, and laundry lint symbolizes materials traditionally associated with women's work.

At the center of my work is a longing for belonging: a longing which I believe is ever present within the multiracial experience. As a Filipino-American woman, I feel I occupy a space between—between white and brown, between one family and another, between belonging and other. In my photographs I explore themes of identity and heritage through personal relationships, specifically my relationships with my grandmothers. In my experience, grandmothers represent the gateway to familial culture, and as I have lost both of mine, my photographs become a place where I can learn from them beyond the grave. My photographs then become as in-between as I am myself: between this world and the next, between the different parts of my own heritage.

ANNE LISE DUQUE

In his book *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger confronts the convention of how women have often been portrayed in art. He simplifies this idea stating that in the tradition of European oil painting “Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This describes not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. Thus turning herself into an object and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. This has been at the cost of a woman’s self being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself.” Though Berger’s book was written over forty years ago, it is more relevant than ever. With the advent of social media, constructed images are bombarded upon us daily. I am interested in making work that addresses the conflict of a split sense of self that happens when one becomes more invested in the image they are creating than who they are when they stop looking in the mirror.



To Be Close to You No. 11, 2018
Image courtesy of the artist

Internal Dichotomy, 2020



Land has been explored, claimed, developed, and predominantly photographed by men. Artists continue this tradition of claiming or of temporary ownership by way of photograph. Landscapes visually represent domination, or the instinctual idea that open and expanding landscapes exist to be captured. My images are created from a softended standpoint. Advocating the pleasure and enjoyment of women and to further establish women's place and challenging the idea of ownership.

Valley, 2019
Image courtesy of the artist

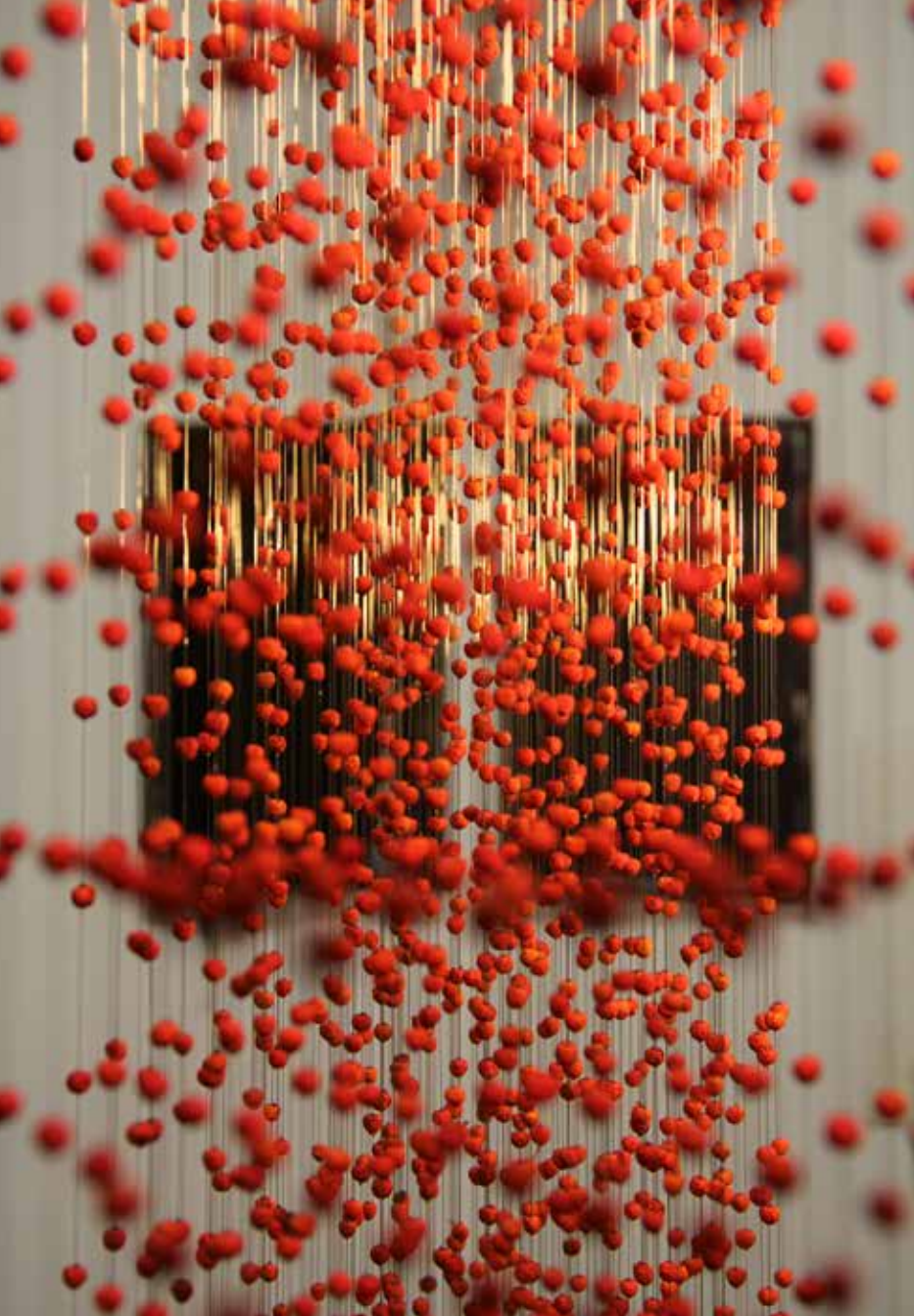


My work builds visual narratives that grow from an engagement with patterns and shapes from a range of sources and experiences. Patterns intersect and overlap with the fluid, organic shapes referencing nature and the human form, acting as access points to alternate realities. The work establishes systems and hierarchies, which are then ruptured and interrupted to generate new forms for navigating visual experience.

My interests lay in the porousness of culture, perception, and identity, and my current body of work provides a way to explore and process my background and experience. I aim to challenge the notion that identities and cultures, and our individual perceptions of the two, are unalterable, fixed. As I confront, break down, and build upon my ideals, I feel a freedom to construct hybridized and evolving forms. This process, and the corresponding forms that emerge, relate to the way my awareness shifts and evolves as I seek for greater empathic connection and navigate the world visually, emotionally, and culturally.



Thinking About Origins, 2020



Shot Tower, 2020
Image courtesy of the artist

LEITCH
STEPHANIE

Reared within a utopian idea of the West, I've been imprinted with the grid as an essential restraint. In this environment, structural ideals are subject to entropic forces, and the tension between these elements is where I strike form. My work ranges from site-specific installation to intimate systems and performance. The work is made to transform over time. Forces such as gravity, atmospheric conditions, accumulation and erosion become the manifestation of nuance which push the parameters of the original construct. Viscosity, surface tension, and drip factor in my work as a means of referencing body and the permeable boundary between self and environment. The performance work is about hand processes and materials, referencing feminine craft through dextrous repetition, along with encoded mysticism. In larger installations, I play with the physically impenetrable field. In re-appropriating visual relics from my upbringing and surroundings I am re-contextualizing them as abstraction —making them accessible to anyone. I'm influenced by the rigidly defined landscape and the dominant culture in Utah, semi-surreptitiously working to both extol and subvert it.

The high heel restricts movement. Who among us can run a marathon, climb a mountain, or plow a field wearing high heels? One can infer that the purpose of the heel is to hinder ambition.

Although the invention of the high heel was functional over fashionable, in the mid-1900s, the stiletto was invented with the purpose of accentuating the sexual attributes of women for the male gaze. Though the heel can represent power and other positive notions, wearing high heels for a prolonged period can have permanent and painful health impacts. With the use of humor and the playful and accessible nature of animation, this piece explores the expectations placed upon women and our power to overcome.

Our society is in need of a positive narrative that will empower females to know of their endless strength and capacity, which will inherently improve the quality of life for future generations of women.

MILLWARD
KYLIE



Grating Conventions, 2020. Image courtesy of the artist

I paint to inspire reflection of our inner world and awe amidst our surroundings. By painting from life, a unique relationship is built between myself and my subject. I intend for this to develop a circular connection between artist, subject, and viewer.

In a fast-paced global economy, we often become distracted and disconnected. I'm interested in how being present psychologically can slow us down. To illustrate this meditative quality in my work, I often use botanical elements symbolically for peace, change, and growth. As our irreplaceable landscapes and resources continue to be threatened, I feel an intense pull to document them. I believe in the grounding effect of nature to be universal. Thus, I intend for this element in my work to speak across borders. Painting a slower-paced version of humanity moves me toward stillness and connection. I hope that by portraying it, my viewers may have a similar experience.

LIS
PARDOE

ROSS
WREN

These drawings make themselves using me, and I employ storytelling, myth and disguise. These ciphers are necessary because commenting on current events is difficult. My work helps unpack broader questions about human beings. We are always forgetting what we are. It takes an effort of will to see ourselves in the cracks in the sidewalks or in broken bottles along the highway. But I'm certain we're there even if right now we are trying very hard to be invisible to one another. Everywhere there is being, both the moving doing kind, and the still watching kind. I am an advocate of stillness and observation, particularly of the mundane things we walk by every day. If I look hard enough I can reach back into some failed memory or myth about being disguised as a bottle or a crack, and then I'm invested in those things, I become a steward of my beingness everywhere. Then my drawings can be beacons.



Spotlight, 2017
Image Courtesy of the Artist

The ____ Despite All Odds, 2020



**MAY WE CONTINUE TO
MAKE SOCIAL JUSTICE
OUR LIFE PURPOSE,
UNTIL AN INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES HISTORY IS
AT THE FOREFRONT OF
EDUCATION AND TRUE
RECONCILIATION IS
AN AMERICAN VALUE.**

Public Statement, 2020

With reference to broad social movements, I use the sign as an accessible means of expanding the collective and silenced voice. As an indigenous womxn, my existence is connected to the 500 year + colonial induced rapture of missing and murdered indigenous people, a violence that continues to thrive today. The inherited and active trauma of missing and murdered indigenous people is a reality that delves deep into the heart of a legacy predominated by colonial madness, white supremacy, genocide, patriarchy and a raped landscape. It is one that has taken the life of my Auntie, Priscilla Lee. And it is one that continues to take from my communities, in which I am called upon to be a voice of the missing and murdered.

As an Iranian female, artist, and photographer, politics have defined my life. Fascinated by human interest stories and what they tell us about society, I started my career as a photojournalist in Iran. By witnessing the struggles of people around me, my work started evolving from an observer to an active participant in trying to highlight and deal with the political and social issues of my surroundings. Back in Iran, my focus lied extensively within the issues of gender inequality and segregation as well as the loss of identity within Iranian culture. After coming to the United States, I consistently observed similar social struggles, which enforced my feelings to continue raising awareness of social and political issues both domestically and across the borders. My photography is a combination of a theoretical and historical understanding of space combined with the creation of human interest stories which results out of my own observations and experiences.



Queer in Utah, 2019
Image courtesy of the artist

TORRES

MARCELA

I bring performance, objects, workshops, organizing, and sound installations into an experiential interrogation of American social structures. To demonstrate how we are interpellated by governmental, racial, and socio-economic dynamics, causing disenfranchised ways of living. In recent work I have employed martial arts technical training to speak towards the nature of violence, as a systematic phenomenon that creates constant experiences of aggression with heightened affects on non-white bodies. Effects felt in the body through economic and emotional levels that create a contemporary situation of inter-racial, inter-community competition. I use my Latinx body in the position of a fighter—putting myself at risk to represent and create real and not performed precarity. In creating durational experiences that ask audiences to commit their own energy and time—a commitment that if sustained would bring actual social change—with an interest in doing something that forges a sticky, intensive, more honest representation of survival.



Agentic Mode: Orange Excerpt, 2019
Image courtesy of the artist

Women are people, and like most people, when they are alone or with someone close to them, they do not think of their gender first. My work often includes women or girls, but the people in my work are moving and interacting with their environment, and their actions have very little to do with their gender and more to do with their humanness. I don't sit at my drawing table thinking, "I, a woman, am drawing. This is how a woman draws. This is how a woman reads. This is how a woman laughs with her friends." When we're alone, we are not our qualifiers, or at least we are not only our qualifiers. I decided to create several portraits of people in this fashion—they aren't posed for a portrait, and we don't get to stare into their eyes as they stare at us. They are allowed to exist without our input.

Michelle, 2020





Untitled (2), 2019
Image courtesy of the artist

Marked combines traditional photographic techniques with contemporary digital processes, performance, and sculpture. The title refers to a prominent birthmark on my neck, which has drawn verbal and physical abuse from strangers. Reproductions of the birthmark's shape and color appear throughout the work. In Marked, I consider ways we are marked from birth, specifically through gender. Birthmarks are like political boundaries on a map, expressing the concomitant desire to include and exclude, to mark belonging through exclusion and differentiation. The work explores the parallels between human attempts to control, shape, and extract from the land and the body. This is visualized through the demarcation of the birthmark as a means to represent what is through what isn't.

WRIGHT
JACLYN

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Please be advised that color may not be true to the original artwork.



