

Process

Karen M. Gutfreund, Curator

Process, curated by Karen M. Gutfreund, showcases artwork created meticulously by hand with alternative mediums by 22 Bay Area self-identified women, non-binary and BIPOC artists. *Process* is a testament to the skill, and passion of each artist—every mark carries the artist's emotions, thoughts, and energy, becoming a tangible representation of the artist's journey. This exhibition is a celebration of human creativity and craftsmanship and embodies the artist's dedication, uniqueness, and connection to their art. Pushing back against the patriarchal canons of art, for what can be considered “women’s work,” these timeless forms of expression inspire and captivate audiences, reminding us of the profound impact that the human touch can have in the world of art.

Process

Essay by Karen M. Gutfreund, Curator

Process is an exhibition showcasing the work of 22 Bay Area, self-identified women, non-binary and BIPOC artists with work that pushes back against the patriarchal canon of art, and elevating what may be considered "women's work" through the creation of art meticulously and beautifully produced through deliberate creative and unique processes.

Historically, the patriarchal canon assigns a hierarchical value to artworks, with certain genres, techniques, and mediums being considered more prestigious and worthy of recognition. Traditionally, works associated with men, such as large-scale paintings and sculpture, have been deemed more significant, while art forms associated as "women's work" refers to artistic practices that have traditionally been associated with or assigned to women. These practices often revolve around work that is created through processes such as textile arts, embroidery, book and paper arts, clay sculpture, installation and other forms of applied arts. This exhibition seeks to elevate and celebrate the contributions these exceptional artists have made to bring beauty and meaning to our lives and the community at large.

The thematic meanings and execution of the works are different for each artist—however, they share synchronicity with the attention to detail, precision, and technical skill involved in its creation. These art forms require significant skill, creativity, and technical expertise. Each piece carries the artist's personal touch and reflects their individual style, skills, and creativity. This uniqueness adds value and authenticity to the artwork, making it stand out from simple 2-D artwork. The process of creating their art involves a direct engagement of the artist's physical

senses. These tactile experiences contribute to a deeper connection between the artist and their work, resulting in an authentic expression of their emotions and ideas. These artists have spent years, if not decades perfecting their craft and mastering the tools and materials they use. The dedication to the mastery of their chosen medium allows artists to create complex and intricate works that showcase their expertise, skill and vision.

This interchange between maker and material promotes the collaborative, inclusive, process-oriented tenets of feminist art, and it places these practices within contemporary critical conversations ranging from identity to social commentary. These artists explore not only their identity through their art, but also their racial, queer, (dis)abled, and other aspects of self that inform who they are in the world.

Artist **Wendy Ackrell** winds and unwinds, spools and unspools hundreds of yards of vibrantly dyed yarn, in a meditative manner—then covers found sticks from hikes on Mt. Tamalpais in Marin County, CA. She is reliving moments in life and thinking of new possibilities, and of the future. She says, "For me, the material and the wrapping motion become both the act of accessing memory and the creation of hope." African American artist **Kristine Mays** seeks to create change with her art, creating socially conscious works of beauty that speak to social justice issues. Her work consists of sculpting heavy steel wire into human form. By looping, hooking and overlapping thousands of pieces of wire, she creates the essence of a body in movement. Japanese American artist **Na Omi Judy Shintani** creates assemblage and sculptural pieces that incorporate traditional Japanese arts

and crafts, creating assemblage and sculptural pieces. Her *Wrapped Stones* are meant to serve as talismans for clarity and peace, as well as earthly touchstones and steppingstones for one's life journey. Shintani's art is a mixture of ritual and innovation created as a meditative practice. Mexican American artist **Pilar Agüero-Esparza** work begins with the materials and processes specific to growing up in the craft tradition of huarache-making (Mexican indigenous sandals), with repetitive gestures such as the weaving of leather, the hammering of nails, and the painting of finishing details that make up her current practice. Agüero-Esparza says, "Through my works, I invoke the viewer to consider the inequities of race, gender, and class by presenting them with specific cultural and aesthetic experiences. I call attention to marginalized cultural and aesthetic experiences to validate them and acknowledge their power."

Non-binary artist **Quinn Keck** [they/them] is a multidisciplinary artist working across traditional printmaking, painting, and digital mediums to create dialogues on the human experience. Instead of portraying just the physical form of people, places, and objects, Quinn abstracts layers to discuss identity, memory, perception, and grief—exploring the absurdity of pattern making through their work in a chaotic world. **Christine So** is a printmaker, photographer and painter. Her monochromatic, nature-inspired works on paper are not printed with ink but are a form of photography from the 1800s—the antique process of cyanotypes. She creates the monotypes in shades of the cyanotype blue without photo negatives or stencils, rather letting sunlight etch lines where one shade ends and the next begins. **Rozanne Hermelyn Di Silvestro**, born in South America is British Guyana, Portuguese, Chinese and Dutch. Working in the mediums of both oil painting and monotypes, she is drawn to the energy around her, and also from within the

subjects she paints. She exposes the vulnerable and spirited nature of her subjects with the expressive paint strokes. Her art captures the feeling of confidence of the strong, draped women and the passion of the inner self through these minimalist compositions. Artist **Geralyn Montano** is a multiracial contemporary artist emphasizing her Native American heritage: Dineh (Navajo), French, Spanish and Comanche. Her multi-dimensional, mixed media works are inspired by personal experiences. She juxtaposes her drawings with subversive imagery—telling stories and combines the beautiful aesthetic with thematic and technical skills. Montano states, "My lived experience inspires me to prominently feature women and themes of my cultural heritage."

Artist **Marie Cameron** has created a remarkable body of work by embroidering silk rainbows and more on interesting vintage photographs. She started this series during the isolation of the "shelter in place" during the Covid pandemic. Cameron said, "I was desperate to find my lost connection to hope, awe and even joy...I choose subjects that inspired me with happiness and gratitude." With hand-made paper and embroidery, **Valerie Constantino**, is interested in referencing the subtlety of whitework—an embroidery technique of white stitching on white cloth, often used for christening, bridal and ecclesiastic textiles. Her project evolved to create positive change within an atmosphere of catastrophic political, social and environmental shifts through the beautifully handcrafted works.

Pakistan born, Muslim artist **Bushra Gill** is interested in finding order within the chaos of everyday life through her mixed media, multi-layered art. In the process, dimensions of her subjects are simultaneously revealed and concealed. She mentions, "This enables me to explore ideas of that which is present, but veiled—much like my hair, which I cover with a scarf in public. Using

repeated geometric shapes that fit closely together creates a sense of order through which I understand the natural world and my personal experience.” Israeli born artist **Rinat Goren** works in the ancient technique of encaustic—Greek artists as far back as the 5th century B.C practiced encaustic art. The inspiration for her work comes from people who use their mind and think. The ability to form clear thoughts, make decisions, make choices and act accordingly is a unique attribute to human beings and she encourages us all to use and practice this quality. Goren comments “*The Main Idea* is an attempt to process the flood of information and ideas we encounter relentlessly.” **Roberta Ahrens** has created a proprietary technique of handmade, cracked linen surfaces, and molds it and incorporates it into her large canvases. She then paints the surface and gilds each piece in copper, silver or gold leaf. The *Water Series* reveals the awesome power and force of the primordial element of water. She comments “My water series serves to express my reaction to the critical problem of climate change that is threatening the seas. These are literally the life blood of our planet and the life force for everything that exists on this big blue ball of water drifting along in the vacuum of space.”

Lucky Rapp is an artist with a background in both fashion and art. Her self-taught style that incorporates resin is challenging and requires great technical skill that is highly process-orientated and physically demanding. Her methodology uses multiple layers of resin, paint, and acrylic forms. Combining inquisitive statements play creatively with language and the potency of graphic communication—while the three-dimensional nature of the layered resin fosters a sculptural reflective quality. **Michelle Mansour’s** work is a meditation on the space between science and spirituality. Her process includes layering translucent color

and building up a symmetrical system of intersecting strands of cells. In applying thousands of tiny dots with acrylic, ink, and silicone, she creates an ethereal space where constellations gather and disperse in an endless cycle. Forging a connection between the microcosmic and macrocosmic, the lush paintings push an imaginative space, exploring tensions and relationships between corporeal and mystical, body and mind.

Colombian and Salvadoran artist, **Tessie Barrera-Scharaga**, finds many ideas for her work in the creative tension between private subjective values and social concerns. She is a mixed-media installation and assemblage artist who draws a direct correlation between her artistic process and her experiences growing up in South and Central America. Tessie notes, “My assemblage alludes at how an idea or emotion can take hold of a person, affecting their life and work.” **Priscilla Otani** is an artist whose mixed media works explore the myths, taboos and histories of her Japanese birthplace and her naturalized American culture. As an interdisciplinary artist, she uses readily accessible materials to create visually striking installations that compel the viewer to examine polarizing issues such as class, politics, abortion, immigration, and racial prejudice. Otani says, “It is my desire to draw the viewer into discussion of class, race and gender through this visually pleasing installation.”

Sawyer Rose uses her beautifully soldered metal artwork to shine a spotlight on contemporary social and ecological issues. She says of her process, “Both sculptural and painterly, the botanical forms in my work are clad in layers of silver solder and copper, as if their delicate bodies are growing the armor they need to flourish in the environment humans are leaving for them. Using the texture of the metal as my primary mark-making medium, the liquefied silver morphs into bark, or feathers,

or scales. There is eloquence and beauty in the act of self-protection." Argentinian artist **ZaHaVa Sherez** is a spiritual activist who has been using her art to give voice to social justice, human rights, immigrants, and refugees. *InBodied Light* is a large sculptural project which is a visual representation of the message *We Are One!* The sculptures are made from resin, pigments, mixed media, bronze, and light. Sherez notes, "I chose resin as it interacts well with light allowing it to flow through and bounce off the textured surface of each piece connecting the pieces to each other and to the viewer." Black artist **Lorraine Bonner** began practicing art and was self-taught in learning clay and mixed media sculpture. A retired medical doctor, she works with health care providers and other artists, many of whom also had traumatic histories such as her own. Bonner mentions "We were hurt people but we were not hurting anyone, and the clay was a voice I was beginning to trust. *Wounded World Healer* started out as a simple figure mending a broken world."

Demetra Theofanous is a Greek American artist. Of her stunning, intricate works she says, "My signature is a technique I developed for weaving glass, which allows me to create large scale sculptures by melting glass in the flame at a table top torch. Technique merges with narratives in my work, to express metaphorical bridges between nature and human beings. Inspired by the storytelling tradition of woven tapestry and basketry, I see myself as weaving with glass to connect the viewer with the story of the natural world." **Dianne Hoffman**, native Californian, living in San Francisco, is a self-taught artist creating intricate assemblages with a focus in found objects and recycled materials. Her work delights the senses, the creations both whimsical and dark simultaneously, making one want to submerge yourself into the story behind it. She says of her work, "Each piece

inherently conveys a narrative facet derived from a lyric, phrase or sentiment that beckons for visual context...They are not only a mirror of ourselves, but a focusing lens on the gifts we have to provide each other."

Through the exquisite, beautiful works and lyrical story-telling, these artists have created art that reflects their experiences and highlights women's stories, struggles, and achievements. These eloquent and expressive art practices will gradually reshape the art world, and create more opportunities, visibility, and recognition for other women, nonbinary and BIPOC artists. *Process* seeks to bring awareness and elevate the work of these artists and to celebrate their contributions. These exhibitions provide a platform for their voices, perspectives and their lived experiences to be seen and heard. This will lead to a more inclusive and diverse representation within the art world and the world at large by showcasing their artwork.

I hope you enjoy the beauty of these works and their powerful, healing messages as much as I do. I am indebted to the artists for sharing their individual stories with me and also very grateful for the support of the staff and opportunity to showcase these works at **Art Works Downtown**. It is truly a special place that amplifies the voices of our creative community.

Karen M. Gutfreund
Curator

About Karen M. Gutfreund, Curator

Karen M. Gutfreund is an independent curator and artist with a focus on feminist and social justice art. She has worked in the Painting & Sculpture Department for MoMA, the Andre Emmerick Gallery, The Knoll Group, the John Berggruen Gallery and the Pacific Art League, and is an art consultant to both corporations and individuals. She served on the board of the Women's Caucus for Art, the Pacific Art League and the Petaluma Arts Council. She was the National Exhibitions Director for the Women's Caucus for Art, is a member of ArtTable, the Northern California Representative for The Feminist Art Project, and Curator for UniteWomen.org.

To date Gutfreund has created over forty national exhibitions—recent exhibitions include: *Process*, *The Space Between*, *Agency: Feminist Art and Power*, *Deadlocked and Loaded:*

Disarming America, *Not Normal: Art in the Age of Trump*, and *Embedded Message*, *Debating the Dream: Truth, Justice and the American Way*. She co-curated *F213*, *F*ck U! In the Most Loving Way*, and *Man as Object: Reversing the Gaze*. She has been an exhibition director for dozens of exhibitions.

Karen is partner in Gutfreund Cornett Art, with curator Sherri Cornett, a curatorial partnership that creates art as activism exhibitions, with the motto “changing the world through art” with national touring exhibitions. GCA exhibitions included: *Beyond Borders: Stories of im/Migration*, *Social Justice: It Happens to One, Happens to All*, *Rise: Empower, Change and Action*, *Vision: An Artist's Perspective*, *What's Right, What's Left: Democracy in America*, *Visural: Sight, Sound and Action*. Gutfreund is a consultant to artists and documents and creates art catalogs for galleries and individual artists around the country, and frequently juries exhibitions, participates in panels and gives lectures and classes. Lastly, she is an artist and has exhibited extensively around the country. She has a BFA in Photographic Design and a BA in Art History, and studies towards a MA from New York University. Gutfreund has lived in all four corners of the United States and now lives on a ranch in the Sierra Foothills.



KarenGutfreund.com, GutfreundCornettArt.com
@karengutfreundart
karenmgutfreund@gmail.com