

20

TO FIX
THE
OBJECT
IN
MEMORY

SAN
DIEGO
ART
PRIZE

23

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The Library Foundation SD and San Diego Public Library are pleased to host and support this year's San Diego Art Prize. We are excited to highlight the library's role in ensuring broad and equitable access to the arts city-wide through the Library Foundation SD's support. The visual arts—in fact, all art forms—are an important part of library programming. The library provides visible opportunities for local and regional artists and connections to art and culture while encouraging access and dialogue through a cultural lens. Welcome to one of our region's most important cultural connectors and I invite you to explore all the arts and culture programming the library offers.

Patrick Stewart
CEO, Library Foundation SD



Acknowledgements

Lara Bullock, Ph.D.

It is with great pleasure and a profound sense of responsibility that I present the 2023 San Diego Art Prize exhibition and catalogue. This year, as I have stepped into the role of curator, I cannot help but reflect on the three remarkable years that have preceded my tenure.

Under the guidance of our previous curator, Chi Essary, we witnessed a transformative period for the San Diego Art Prize, a journey that has left an indelible mark on the future of the Art Prize. Under her leadership, Chi changed the selection process of the prize, so that it was conducted by national and international curators. This was a boon to artists because it allowed their work to be introduced across the country and world. This is just one of several changes that I absolutely intend to keep. Chi's vision, dedication, and the outstanding exhibitions she curated have set a high standard, one that I humbly aim to build upon.

This transition marks a new chapter in the San Diego Art Prize's history, a chapter filled with exciting possibilities and fresh perspectives. As I embark on this journey, my commitment to preserving the legacy of the San Diego Art Prize while fostering innovation remains unwavering.

Thank you to the following curators for their thoughtful consideration and deliberation in selecting the 2023 San Diego Art Prize recipients and the Seth Sprague Educational & Charitable Foundation for continuing to support this new direction. The impressive list of selectors this year are:

Pedro Alonzo - Adjunct Curator at Dallas Contemporary, Dallas, Texas

Kathryn Kraczon - Director of Exhibitions of the Brown Arts Institute (BAI) and Chief Curator of the David Winton Bell Gallery at Brown University, Providence Rhode Island

Susanna Temkin - Curator at El Museo del Barrio, New York, New York

Thanks also to everyone who made this year's catalog a reality and free to all, once again! It would not be possible without the generous support of Neyenesch Printers, the Library Foundation, the Executive Director of the Commission for Arts and Culture Jonathon Glus, Alexander Kohnke for his visionary design and additional support in producing this catalog, and the generosity of your community members who contributed to our fundraiser.

Each year, four arts professionals from different sectors of San Diego's art ecosystem are invited to write about a finalist for the catalog. The writers and the Art Prize Committee

submit nominations for the following year to ensure the nomination committee is regularly refreshed with new perspectives.

A special thank-you to the 2023 writers for their contributions:

Justin Duyao, Writer, Editor, and Creative Director *HereIn Journal*, San Diego, CA

Melinda Guillén, Ph.D., Writer, Art Historian, Curator, La Mesa, CA

Chris Kraus, Writer and Filmmaker, Los Angeles and Ensenada, Baja California

Elizabeth Rooklidge, Independent Curator, Educator, Director, *HereIn Journal*, San Diego, CA

The San Diego Art Prize celebrates artists in our region who have demonstrated outstanding creativity and added vitality to the arts community through their extraordinary contributions. This region has a wealth of amazing artists, and the San Diego Art Prize endeavors to recognize artists of merit by supporting and promoting those who are working to build their career and contribute to the regional arts scene.

Founded and supported since 2006 by the San Diego Visual Arts Network, the SD Art Prize was conceived to promote visibility and public interest in talented local artists and foster community engagement and critical dialogue about contemporary art in San Diego.

Presented below are the artist eligibility guidelines:

- Outstanding creativity in exhibitions or other public art presentations in the last three years
- Live/work in San Diego County and Baja Norte region (Fallbrook to Ensenada)
- No age restriction
- Previous San Diego Art Prize recipients are ineligible

The San Diego Art Prize is not only a cash prize. It also comes with exhibition opportunities for the four finalists. A special thank you goes to the prodigious Bonnie Domingos and the downtown San Diego Central Library Art Gallery for hosting the San Diego Art Prize a second time for the 2023 exhibition, October 28, 2023 – Jan. 13, 2024, and Redwood Art Group for hosting at Art San Diego 2023, November 3–5, 2023.

I would also like to thank my fellow members of the San Diego Art Prize Committee for their generosity, knowledge, and passion for the arts: Alessandra Moctezuma, Gallery Director and Professor of Fine Arts, Museum Studies at San Diego Mesa College; Debra Poteet, prominent collector; Erika Torri, Director Emeritus of the Athenaeum Music and Arts Library; Patricia Frischer, coordinator and founder San Diego Visual Arts Network; and Felicia Shaw, Executive Director of the Women's Museum of California. And a thank you to our advisory committee Arturo Rodriguez, Director La Caja Gallery, Tijuana, Mexico and Johnny Tran, Owner Thumbprint Gallery, San Diego.

We always extend special thanks to the San Diego Visual Arts Network, which founded and funded the San Diego Art Prize with the generous support of its donors and its visionary stalwart, Patricia Frischer (SDVAN.NET).

In this catalogue, you will find a diverse array of artworks. Each piece has been carefully selected to provoke thought and inspire dialogue. It is my hope that you will find this collection both stimulating and thought-provoking, engendering a new or deeper interest in the work of each artist.

Introduction

To Fix the Object In Memory

Lara Bullock, Ph.D.

I love hearing people's rock stories.

I know a rock collector named Danielle who spends hours beachside searching for heart-shaped rocks. On my travels, I have collected a few with her in mind. I found one in Iceland for example, that I never gave to her. I think the reason is because it feels like a violation of privacy, but also impossible to insert oneself into someone's collection (even though I have assisted her on occasion).

A collection is personal. It can border on the absurd, the sentimental, but rarely the sensible. There is something at once sad and beautiful about collecting heart-shaped rocks, but it is not pragmatic. Objects are funny things in that when we pluck them from their original contexts and especially when we place them with others that we consider alike, they become less about themselves and more about us: our desires, values, tastes, a blueprint of the places we roam, and the class structures we inhabit. Poet and scholar, Susan Stewart's apt assessment of the collection as an ahistorical aestheticization of use value, has stuck with me, though I am not sure of what use rocks have per se.

The title of this exhibition is inspired by Vija Celmins's, *To Fix the Image in Memory* (1977-82), an artwork in which the artist recreated identical replicas of rocks she had collected. It is one of her few sculptural works. According to the artist, the idea of fixing an image in memory comes from, in part, her discovery that in order to create an exact, detailed likeness of the rock she was imitating, she had to master a new way of looking that is counter to how we are programmed to see as humans; we look in gestalts, abstractions, and anthropomorphisms versus literal details of what is in front of us.

I feel that the consideration of a different way of looking is particularly relevant in relation to the work in this exhibition. Like Celmins's piece, with each work, what you initially see is not always what is there. I adapted Celmins's title to read "object" instead of "image," because this year's exhibition features a group of sculptors, but more pointedly, because of the various contextual permutations that this change opens up, allowing deeper introspection into the works on view. "To fix" can mean to secure, to set, to heal, or repair. "Object" can mean to disagree, or refer to a literal object, person, or thing to which a specified action or feeling is directed, such as a love object... Also, incidentally, as with Celmins's piece, each artists' work involves rocks of different sorts.



Janelle Iglesias's *rocks on rocks* (2023) is a playful *mise en abyme* of rocky surfaces, both artificial and natural. At first glance, it acts as sculptural *trompe l'oeil*. It is playful and embodies a sense of wonderment; a "Where's Waldo" of real and fake rocks. However, it is not meant to mimic, but instead to call attention to its artifice. The natural curvature of photorealistic stones on wrapping paper are abruptly cut off by a hard edge of an image of a photograph of stones, which is cut off by the metal backing that "contains" them. "Real" rocks are then attached on top of the entire two-dimensional surface. These rocks are artifacts of a sweet ritual that the artist performs with her young son: collecting rocks during their neighborhood walks. These rocks are more than objects, but represent closeness, teaching, the creation of memories, and also serve as reminders of contextual and conceptual distances between humans and the natural world.

Joe Yorty's relationship to objects is similar to Iglesias's, in that their manner of collection is important. Though instead of collecting from nature, he collects material for his artwork from alleys, roadsides, and thrift shops. Yorty is a master storyteller in that he cleverly concocts new narratives from old stuff. For his works in the exhibition, *Untitled (Heart 1)* and *Untitled (Heart 2)* (both 2023), he salvaged thrown-out "wooden" (MDF) furniture with faux wood and stone surfaces, and reconfigured it into two giant, free-standing hearts. The work is Frankensteinian in that human detritus is given new life in the form of a sweet, schmaltzy, saccharine heart sculpture and its mate, complete with the sappiest touch of all, a Christmas ornament. Yorty's work is not meant to be intentionally judgmental or negatively critical, but rather sweetly scientific meditations on class, consumerism, gender, and relationships.

Mely Barragan's work is about her experience as a Mexican living in the San Diego/Tijuana cross-border region and its intricacies. Barragan's objects are weighty. *Shallow Water Emerges Til Dawn* (2023) is a cascade of bodily, cloth appendages rushing down from ceiling onto the gallery floor. Hard, illuminated, bulbous, rocky sculptures, are interspersed amidst these appendages and seem like they could have come from Mars. Text in English can be discerned in some of them, a comment on how there is an expectation for Mexicans to speak English, but not for Americans to speak Spanish. These *Post Human Accumulations* provide a stark contrast to the softness of the tendrils. However, though it is tempting to focus on dialogical elements of the work, close looking complicates any sort of binary that one tries to construct. The tendrils that make up *Shallow Water* seem monochrome, but closer looking reveals they are in actuality a variegated collage of vinyl and fabric scraps from her grandmother's tablecloth, etc. Though they bear contracting qualities, in effect, the tendrils are as much accumulations as the *Post Human Accumulations* themselves; assemblage critiques of complexities of border-life and identity. Barragan's *Family Legacy* (2023) speaks to her grandfather's experience as a Bracero living in the border region. The softness of the flag which the artist stitched by hand, featuring his ID card portrait speaks to the blurriness between the delicate and the hard parts of life.

Anya Gallaccio's works are more about the absence of objects. With *Black square* (2023) and *No longer, no longer* (2023), we are confronted with empty boxes (art crates), *Palette 4* (2015), a stone palette, and with *First there was a Mountain* (2022), fired, clay fragments of a former colossal artwork. The presentation of empty vessels and fragments, the perceived absence of art objects, flips the cult of the art object on its head by preventing and also calling attention to its idolatry. In a wry critique of the artworld itself, Gallaccio has the viewer wondering if they are supposed to revere these objects as they would the original art that was inside the crates or that was made up of these fragments. However, each object does possess its own, unique beauty. In fact, *Palette 4*, though it alludes to a wooden palette, is a beautiful marble sculpture in its own right. *Black square* and *No longer, no longer's* surfaces have been scorched into a sumptuous black color that, when standing in front of them, suggests black holes, vortexes, or potential portals. They assume identities of their own, more interesting and separate from their use-value as containers.

It is my hope that you will delve into the essays that follow in this catalogue, that you will look fixedly and closely at the collection of artworks in this exhibition, take note of things that make you see in a different way, and remember them always.



FIGURE 1

Figure 1
Anya Gallaccio
Palette 4
 2015
 Marble
 11 x 48 x 48 inches

NOTES

1. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993.



MELY BARRAGAN

Chris Kraus

Born in the mid-1970s, Mely Barragan is part of a dynamic cohort of contemporary Mexican artists who began their careers in the Baja California border cities of Tijuana and Mexicali in the 1990s. At that time, there were no formal art schools in northern Mexico. They learned by looking to the work of their predecessors, and to each other. Nevertheless, equally influenced by international contemporary art, Mexican art history and border culture, they chose to remain. As Barragan told Frieze magazine in 2019, “The outside world didn’t know what to make of us. We were neither Chicano nor Mexican enough.”

Since her first exhibition, *Mi Gente*, in 2002, Barragan has worked across media – from collage and painting to sculpture and installation – to explore and enact urgent ideas. Like the late American artists David Wojnarowicz and Dash Snow, Barragan is a *total* artist, responding to the experiences she’s witnessed and passed through. She begins by selecting materials she believes will best describe her ideas, although often she finds that the materials take on a life of their own.

The physical and internal dialogue with materials manifested in the four recent works in this show has become increasingly complex and devious over the years.

The collages and paintings created in the series *Mi Gente* (2002) depicted the imaginary characters Barragan invented as a small child. Her earliest memories involved a search for identity and a desire for justice. In *Los Guerreros* (2006) she assembled a series of metal sculptures from roadside muffler shops: human figures welded from mufflers as DIY signage by the owner-mechanics. At the time, international curators were trawling Tijuana in search of the new, so Barragan decided to create an installation that captured the visual reality of this border mecca’s cheap auto repair and medical care. She thought - *Why don’t I bring all the mufflers together?* She named each piece for the mechanic who made it. The work brilliantly depicted the chaos and warmth of urban life.

But Barragan’s work isn’t always created in Tijuana. Since the early 2000’s, she has traveled to residencies from Russia to China, to Morocco and the American mid-west. Such residencies are essential to any contemporary artist living outside an international center. Like the equally nomadic, New Zealand-born sculptor Kate Newby, Barragan has accepted and cap-

itized upon this enforced nomadic state. She travels light, carrying only ideas, using the materials she finds in these strange new environments to bring them to life.

The sculptural works in this exhibition, all created in Barragan's Tijuana studio during the past year, explore themes of personal and geopolitical history. Evading any easy description, they probe the undertow of psychic distress.

In *Family Legacy* (2023), Barragan transforms her late grandfather's old Bracero ID card into a magnificent banner or flag ringed by a fringe of chemical green. The ID card is a powerful totem, carrying both pride and shame. For twenty-two years, between 1942 and 1964, the Bracero program brought more than two million men to the US on short-term labor contracts and visas. The program defined a rich portion of Mexican cultural history that's only recently begun to be rediscovered and claimed by projects like Ignacio Ornelas Rodriguez and Daniel Ruanova's Bracero Legacy Project.

To be a bracero was to become 'one who swings his arms,' working amidst toxic agricultural pesticides and hunched over all day with a short-handled hoe that ruins your back. The program also enabled her grandfather, Jose Barragan, to support his wife and twelve children in their home of Nuevo Ideal. "Among Mexican families," Barragan recalls, "it's a stigma to have been a bracero. It was so delicate and hard to talk about." Over the years, Barragan came to realize that the Bracero program also helped to enforce a system of patriarchy, imposed upon families by historical circumstance and the culture itself. In *Family Legacy*, Barragan gently feminizes her grandfather's experience, appropriating an heirloom that symbolized a man's work and softening it with a granddaughter's touch; sewing thread through the fabric that sustained her family. On the banner, Jose Barragan's young face floats like a ghost. The card was issued to him by the US Department of Justice. By screen-printing the word 'Justice' in an almost imperceptibly bolder typeface, Barragan subtly, powerfully, evokes the unjust economic colonialism at the program's heart.

Shallow Water Emerges Til Dawn (2023), a stunning and monstrous assemblage, hangs from the gallery ceiling by hooks and aluminum chains. Shiny black latex tubes, given weight by embedded chain, cascade to the gallery floor in a menacing flood. The piece is one of the most ambiguous, troubling works by the artist to date. In it, Barragan alludes to a time of chronic illness when she was forced to inhabit a medicalized version of her own life. But the trauma conveyed by the work extends far beyond her own body. *Shallow Water* evokes a larger, shared illness: a literal toxicity that spreads across landscape, affecting all human relations. The black latex shimmers seductively, weighted by chains. Bodies, the work implies, have become wholly disposable, like medical waste. The work is a dream and a talisman for confronting fear.

Installed alongside *Shallow Water*, *Post Human Accumulations* (2023) - four small-scale sculptures made out of electrical components, polyurethane foam, wood and glass - rest on the floor like small tumors. The sculptures are beautiful hazards, abstracting the biological waste and visual chaos across the US/Tijuana border into seductive and troubling form.



FIGURE 1

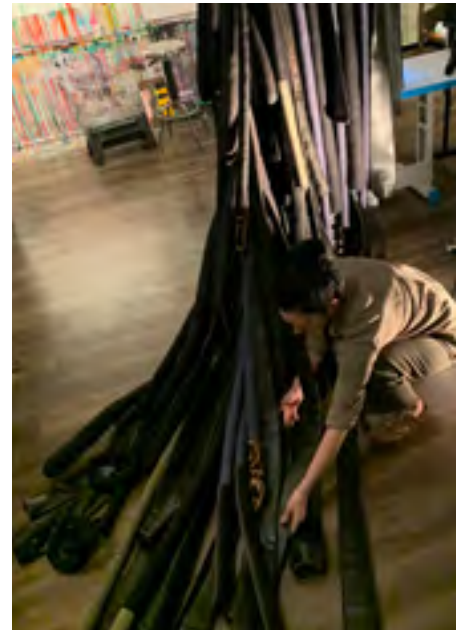


FIGURE 2

Figure 1

Family Legacy

2023

inkjet print on polyester and hand stitching applications with a flag pole
55 x 83 x 1¼ inches

Figure 2

Shallow Water Emerges Til Dawn

(studio)

2023

mixed media (soft sculpture and metal chains hanging from the ceiling)
10 x 12 x 4 feet

Figure 3

Shallow Water Emerges Til Dawn

(detail)

2023

mixed media (soft sculpture and metal chains hanging from the ceiling)
10 x 12 x 4 feet



FIGURE 3



FIGURE 4



FIGURE 5

Figures 4-6
Post Human Accumulations
2023
mixed media, glass, and electrical
components (colored light)
3 small scale floor sculptures of
plastiglomerate, light and wood
dimensions variable



FIGURE 6

ANYA GALLACCIO

Under the Imperfect Sun: Anya Gallaccio's *Beautiful Minds*

Melinda Guillén, Ph.D.

On a late summer day in August, Anya Gallaccio is spending the afternoon in the bountiful garden of her hillside home just to the east of San Diego. The yard possesses a maze of stone steps and pathways, alongside beds of seasonal vegetables and an ample variety of California native plants, succulents, flora, and fruit trees. I send her a text message asking what she's doing, and she replies, as she's done many times before, "I'm outside digging holes." As a friend of hers, I know such routine excavations into the dirt are, in part, an active method of her process, thinking through concepts and materials, akin to how others may sketch or create an outline, except Gallaccio is covered in dirt and under the warm rays and timekeeping of the California sun—though she'll be the first to tell you that she's simply "mucking about." But do not take her word for it. Gallaccio is an accomplished British sculptor of the famed Young British Artist (YBA) group, with a distinct penchant for gardens and earthen matter and a sustained interest in how such natural and organic materials are transformed by post-industrial processes. She 'mucked about' the contemporary art world for quite some time before moving from London to southern California in 2008 to join the Department of Visual Arts at the University of California, San Diego, where she is currently a Professor of Art.

While the semi-arid climate and generally slowed or *sleepy town* pace of San Diego was a major change of scenery from the mild and frequently rainy maritime conditions of London, it's San Diego's peculiar urban sprawl that Gallaccio finds most puzzling. As the late urban theorist and beloved San Diego native Mike Davis expressed in *Under the Perfect Sun: The San Diego Tourists Never See* (2003), the region "sacrificed landscape for industry." The sacrificial cuts by way of rapid development in favor of its leading industries – the military, tourism, and international trade – mark the natural landscape in strange and palpable ways. From the spiraling highway system that coils through the valley mountains adorned by densely packed homes and churches atop, to the almost absurd level of maintenance afforded to golf courses and resort properties, as though frequent drought conditions and civic calls for water conservation are somehow precluded by vacation packages and tech conventions. One of the most jarring examples of industry versus environment lies just north of San Diego—the San Onofre Nuclear

Generating Station (SONGS) which was shut down in 2013 for defective steam generators but the remaining twin dome structures, standing nearly two-hundred feet tall each are impossible to miss as they sit on highly surveilled and patrolled military land, and are flanked on each side by Interstate 5 and the Pacific Ocean. Over the years, Gallaccio and I have driven by SONGS on various car trips between Los Angeles and San Diego and although the domes are like monuments to patriarchal and colonial conquest and industry, we are both amused at how the reactors are referred to by locals and roadside tourist guides as the “nuclear boobs”—a much needed reminder that sometimes all you can or should do is laugh.

Among the pieces on view for the 2023 San Diego Art Prize exhibition, *To Fix the Object in Memory*, are a selection of ceramic fragments, the remnants of a project initiated in 2015 entitled *Beautiful Minds*, a solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego. The goal? To 3D-print a clay mountain. The project was an extension of Gallaccio’s longstanding interests in how natural and organic materials are used in industrial and commercial processes including advancements in automation. In some ways, *Beautiful Minds* was also a response to the contemporary art world and art academia’s questionable fascination with 3D printing technologies at the time. Collaborating and consulting with a team of assistants, former students, and engineers, Gallaccio set out on her experiment.

It is important to note that the formal inspiration for *Beautiful Minds* is Devil’s Tower, the Wyoming national monument. The exact geological formation of the massive igneous rock monolith was subject to debate for many years; however, many geologists believe that it formed underground as molten rock but cannot explain how it cooled into its enormous vertical tower form nor can they explain how exactly the sedimentary rock, specifically *phonolite porphyry*, cracked and settled into its imperfect but recurring hexagonal shapes. Taking a cue from the mythos of Devil’s Tower, Gallaccio’s clay mountain reminds us of how some natural occurrences cannot be reproduced and more saliently, cannot be controlled.

The actual printing process was exhaustive and involved much trial and error, testing the clay and sculptural logic against the technology itself and programming software. The first iteration was built at the Visual Arts Facility at UCSD where Gallaccio and the team built a massive, customized 3D clay printer comprised of aluminum beams, hose and track attached to a pump ran by a makeshift printing software stack. Beyond expected troubleshooting, the clay itself was capricious. Unlike the common plastics, resin, or metals used in conventional 3D printing today, clay is dependent on both its mixture ratio, which is subject to variations in viscosity as well as its immediate surroundings, with consideration to temperature and humidity. In some tests, a wet ball of clay would plop out of the hose’s end and at other times, when the mixture was too thick, no extrusions were possible. However, once a basic ratio was established, the clay came out in set intervals each day, loosely printing in the programmed honeycomb-like pattern before pausing overnight to permit for drying between sessions. For about an hour or so each day, during the duration of the MCASD exhibition, Gallaccio would tend to her automated sculpture not unlike how she tends to her garden at home.

The project has since continued in different contexts including installation at Thomas Dane Gallery, London in 2017, where the clay mixture was changed from industrial gray to a deep burnt sienna terracotta and ceramic fragments were exhibited in 2018. Gallaccio saved a selection of fragments from each of her mountains and more recently, the clay pieces underwent another material transformation—glazing and firing. The clay fragments are shaped by their process of 3D printing and the material’s inevitable resistance to programmed and perfected lines while the ceramic fragments on view are glazed and fired, resulting in variations of patina and texture. I find myself most interested in the pieces with clean cut edges and think of them as incisions across each piece’s desire lines. In a way, the cuts are not unlike sharply delineated incisions into the environment such as elevated highway systems through the mountain valleys of San Diego or even the nuclear twins up in north county. However, in Gallaccio’s continued collision between industrial processes and natural materials or sculpture against automation; undoubtedly, the clay wins.



FIGURE 1

Figure 1
Beautiful Minds
2015-2017
aluminium, clay, pump, software
196 7/8 x 196 7/8 x 196 7/8 inches
© Anya Gallaccio
Courtesy the artist and Thomas Dane
Gallery
Photo: Luke A. Walker



FIGURE 2

Figure 2
Untitled
2016-2018
ceramic, white slip, avery slip, shino
glaze, pacific ocean sludge
8 1/4 x 11 3/8 x 10 5/8 inches
© Anya Gallaccio
Courtesy the artist and Thomas Dane
Gallery
Photo: Ben Westoby





Figure 3

Beautiful Minds

2015–2017

aluminium, clay, pump, software

196 7/8 x 196 7/8 x 196 7/8 inches

© Anya Gallaccio

Courtesy the artist and Thomas Dane
Gallery

Photo: Luke A. Walker

FIGURE 3

JANELLE IGLESIAS

Elizabeth Rooklidge

Janelle Iglesias's art practice is heavily invested in ridiculousness. How it shows up in the cultural imaginary, in socio-political systems, in institutions, and in our daily lives. How ridiculousness arises when we construct unnatural systems around natural things.

While these investigations function powerfully in the white-cube gallery space— the rarefied realm of art— Iglesias draws much inspiration from what is happening in her life outside of the studio. In 2020, she had a child—Gus, a sweet boy with big brown eyes and an air of wonder about him. They often go on small journeys through their neighborhood, Iglesias on foot and Gus on his tricycle. Gus loves to grab rocks from neighbors' landscaping, accumulating more and more as they move, piling them in his tricycle's cupholder and trunk (surely a slightly ridiculous sight). He brings them home, where many of them end up in the family's backyard. Some of them have even found their way to Iglesias's studio.

Iglesias tells me that Gus's rock-picking reminds her of the thing we do as adults, too: collecting. The Southern California rocks gathered on Gus's treks spark a recent memory from the years when Iglesias lived near the beach in Provincetown, Massachusetts and would pick up rocks as she walked the shore. Once home, she would arrange them on her front steps, or carefully stack them in a miniature tower. When she moved, she very responsibly brought the rocks back to the beach, leaving them in their original home. "There is," Iglesias says, "an innate deliciousness in collecting things." There is also, perhaps, a ridiculousness in it. Or at least in what we do with our collections. She was reminded of this when she came across a piece of wrapping paper in a thrift store, the surface of which bore a photograph of rocks. A field of rocks, in all its stoney detail. How ridiculous, she thought.

What is the relationship between this wrapping paper and real rocks? Iglesias probes this question in her new series, *rocks on rocks* (2023). To make these works, she collected additional mass-market photographs of rocks, laid them on a ground of landscaping rocks—held the paper down with some of those same rocks—and then photographed all of it. Iglesias printed this composition and mounted it on aluminum. On top of the mounted print, she affixed some of Gus's rocks, into which she drilled and inserted magnets. The final result is rocks upon rocks upon rocks— real rocks layered with fake rocks, with more real rocks on top. It all be-

comes fake when photographed and printed, while real rocks decorate the surface of those fake rocks.

This series serves as a kind of followup to another from 2019, when Iglesias began casually collecting the barcode stickers and price tags from grocery store produce, absentmindedly sticking them to pieces of scrap paper. As they accumulated, she contemplated their ridiculousness—the assigning of data to track and construct value around a naturally occurring thing. She had also been acquiring faux plants, the plastic kind we keep in our homes and businesses. Maybe we have a brown thumb, or don't want our pets shredding the foliage. The faux plant stays green, seemingly alive, whether or not we forget to tend to it (those leaves need dusting). Iglesias attached to the plants the produce stickers she had been collecting, a simple move that speaks volumes about how we interact with organic material in everyday life.

Much of Iglesias's past work has been about collecting, the natural environment, and the structures of power that shape their point of intersection. In her practice, we encounter the tension between, or conflation of, the natural and the humanmade. Iglesias's work reminds us that we crave nature, a connection increasingly difficult to find amidst the ever-more voracious capitalist system in which we live. Thus we try to insert nature back into our lives through ridiculous capitalist means: rocks on wrapping paper, faux plants, the sound of waves on a white noise machine. Something very fake in the guise of the very real. This strategy is, Iglesias suggests, a bandaid on the problem, rather than what we actually need—to reflect on our own complicity in the very system that makes us require those bandaids.

rocks on rocks raises innumerable questions. How does nature provide for us? How does our capitalist consumption affect those provisions? What, ultimately, is our relationality to nature at this point in history? The answers to this series of questions are not encouraging, and it would be easy to settle into the current state of affairs, leaning into the ridiculousness by which we find ourselves surrounded. But think of Gus, collecting his rocks. Seeing the natural world with unadulterated wonder. How, we must ask on Gus's behalf, can we shift our relationality to the natural environment from one of devouring greed to one of interconnection, of cultivation? How can we prepare our children for a future of caring for the world?

Figure 1
Snake Plant
2019
Faux plastic plant, bar code stickers and
price tags, adhesive
24 x 10 x 10 inches







FIGURE 2

Figure 2
rocks on rocks (studio)
2023
rocks on wrapping paper

Figure 3
rocks on rocks
2023
Aluminum print, magnets, rocks
30 x 30 inches



FIGURE 3

Justin Duyao

You can tell a lot about a person by going through their trash. *Do they prefer skim or whole milk?*, for example. *Do they rinse the milk carton before they recycle it? Do they recycle at all?*

When I was in grad school, I was lucky enough to live in an affordable-housing unit in a highrise apartment complex in a very nice area. To get in and out of the building, I'd take a shortcut through the trash room—as I never quite felt comfortable walking through the lobby—and you would not believe the kinds of things residents of that complex threw away.

I found the monitor on which I am typing this essay in that trash room; an Eames chair in decent condition; an espresso maker; a stack of *Architectural Digest* magazines, which, for months, sat proudly atop my toilet tank—suffice to say, that trash room was a gold mine.

San Diego-based artist Joe Yorty once told me that everything you consume—which also includes, by necessity, everything you throw away—is a barometer of social class, from the kind of milk you buy to the clothes that fill your closet and the art you hang on your walls. In short, your taste is a direct reflection of your place in the world.

In the final year of his MFA in Visual Arts program at UCSD, Yorty created the series *Untitled collages* (2013), which teased out the ways gender, sexuality, and class politics are woven into the kinds of things we surround ourselves with. In each installment of the series, a plank (or planks) of wood hovers over a background of floral wallpaper. Sitting with me at a pub in Normal Heights, Yorty scrolled through photos of the series on his phone and described the series as contrasting the stereotypical hardness of wood (à la masculinity) and the softness of wallpapering (à la femininity). He also pointed out the homoerotic innuendo hidden behind two phallic-looking wooden joints waiting to be joined together.

“My dad was a carpenter,” he told me, “so I’ve worked with wood for a long time. But I’ve always been interested in these kinds of associations with certain materials.”



FIGURE 1

Throughout his career, which Yorty says began in earnest in 2008—the year he realized what it was he wanted to make work about—the interdisciplinary artist would return to wood several times. For an exhibition in 2011, for example, Yorty re-configured a collection of wooden drawers every morning before the doors opened—sometimes on their side, so they looked like a jagged, geometric cityscape, other times face down—in an evolving study of formalism titled *Oak's nice* (2011). While every drawer was made from the same material—faux wood, to be exact—the variation in size, grain patterning, and color between each of them created a dizzying rainbow of artificial wood.

Across his career, Yorty has incorporated many more materials—or collected many kinds of trash, I should say—to expand his study of “the ceaseless search for fulfillment in the accumulation of things that, to a large extent, defines the American experience in the 21st century,” as he describes it.

To emphasize the sheer scope of accumulation in the U.S., an early project of his, *Free Couch Archive* (2008), established a single item—free couch advertisements on Craigslist—as the series’ constant to focus on the variation to that constant over time. In the year Yorty dedicated to this project, he downloaded more than 50,000 photographs of couches advertised in more than 300 cities across the U.S. and compiled them in a library of 12 volumes containing 3,000 images each. To understate, the vastness of the project is breathtaking.

Ten years later, Yorty’s study of accumulation shifted slightly to account for the ways objects themselves accumulate things. His *Stain Master series* (2018), for example, followed all the same rules as his early experiments in accumulation but exchanged broken-in couch cushions for collaged scraps of found carpet as the constant. Mounted on plywood in gloriously disgusting portraits of the dirt, grime, and body fluids that discolored the material over time, each wall-mounted work is a testament to the ways objects remember the imprint of our bodies long after we’ve thrown them away.

The works Yorty compiled for this year’s San Diego Art Prize exhibition call back to each of these studies in accumulation. Returning, once again, to wood, Yorty drove up and down alleyways in his neighborhood throughout the pandemic and gathered heaps of faux wood as his source material. To pay homage to each object’s former life as functional furniture, he did not wash or polish them—instead, he deconstructed them, using their composite-wood parts to piece together wonderfully geometric monuments to the cult of ready-made furniture. Titled *Untitled (Heart #1)* and *Untitled (Heart #2)* (both 2023), each sculpture’s plywood and medium-density fibreboard (MDF) parts form two upright hearts, which shimmer with the familiar plastic sheen of faux wood furniture.

In a way, this project represents a culmination of the artist’s exploration into the ways and reasons humans collect objects, as well as the manner in which objects themselves collect stains over time.

“I have a complicated relationship with most objects and materials I collect to use in my work—they hold very little value and are actually kind of awful,” Yorty said. “But I also collect objects that I love—pottery, furniture, art. The hunt for all of it seems to fill the same urge to search for something. I get just as excited finding a worthless Avon cologne bottle as I do a rare print or record.”

For Yorty, accumulation is as much an impulse driven by a culture of consumerism as it is the nature of objects’ relationship with use over time. As Yorty’s career-spanning meditation on the colorful remnants of America’s search for fulfillment has proven, you can tell a lot about a culture by going through their trash—but you can also tell a lot about the life of an object by examining the stains and scars it carries with it.



FIGURE 2



FIGURE 3

Figure 1
Untitled collage
2013
vintage wallpaper and vinyl contact paper on cotton rag and aluminum
20 x 24 inches

Figure 2
Oak's Nice
2011
found objects
dimensions variable
Photo: Brian C. Janes

Figure 3
Free Couch Archive
2010
hand-made books and slipcases,
custom shelf
each book ¼ x 5 ½ x 8 ½ inches



FIGURE 4

Figure 4
Untitled collage
2013
vintage wallpaper and vinyl contact
paper on cotton rag and aluminum
20 x 24 inches

Figure 5
Stain Master series
2018
found carpet on plywood, galvanized
steel
46 x 46 inches





FIGURE 6



FIGURE 7

Figure 6
Untitled (Heart 2) (detail)
2023
found materials, plywood, MDF, steel,
concrete, found Christmas ornament
52 x 72 inches

Figure 7
Untitled (Heart 1) (detail)
2023
found materials, plywood, MDF, steel,
concrete, found Christmas ornament
60 x 83 inches

Figure 8
Untitled (Heart 1)
2023
found materials, plywood, MDF, steel,
concrete, found Christmas ornament
52 x 72 inches

Untitled (Heart 2)
2023
found materials, plywood, MDF, steel,
concrete, found Christmas ornament
60 x 83 inches



FIGURE 8

SD Art Prize Recipients

2022

Alida Cervantes, Angelica Escoto
Carlos Castro Arias, Cog*nate Collective

2021

Beliz Iristay, Hugo Crosthwaite,
PANCA and Perry Vasquez

2019/2020

Alanna Airitam, Griselda Rosas,
Kaori Fukuyama and Melissa Walter

2018

Anne Mudge with Erin Dace Behling
Robert Matheny with Max Robert Daily

2017

Cy Kuchenbaker with Rizzhel Mae Javier
Fu/Rich with Alexander Kohnke

2016

Irma Sofia Poeter with Shinpei Takeda
Richard Keely with William Feeney

2015

Wendy Maruyama with Peter Scheidt
Roy McMakin with Kevin Inman

2014

Marianela de la Hoz with Bhavna Mehta
Philipp Scholz Rittermann with Joseph Huppert

2013

James Hubbell with Brennan Hubbell
Debby and Larry Kline with James Enos

2012

Arline Fisch with Vincent Robles
Jeffery Laudenslager with Deanne Sabeck

2011

Rubén Ortiz-Torres with Tristan Shone
Jay S. Johnson with Adam Belt

2010

Gail Roberts with David Adey
Einar and Jamex de la Torre with Julio Orozco

2009

Kim MacConnel with Brian Dick
Richard Allen Morris with Tom Driscoll

2008

Marcos Ramirez ERRE with Allison Wiese
Roman De Salvo with Lael Corbin
Eleanor Antin with Pamela Jaeger

2007

Ernest Silva with May-ling Martinez
Jean Lowe with Iana Quesnell
Raul Guerrero with Yvonne Venegas