

VISUAL ART

Four local sculpture and mixed media artists honored with San Diego Art Prize



Detail of "Rêvons D'or" by Anya Gallaccio (Courtesy of Quint Gallery)

For more than 15 years, the San Diego Visual Arts Network has presented the San Diego Art Prize to bring greater awareness to the quality of visual arts in the region

BY CAMERON FOZI

JULY 26, 2023 10:55 AM PT

Soon after her arrival in San Diego in the late 1990s, Patricia Frischer made her way to the Museum of Contemporary Art. There, Frischer asked for a visual arts directory — an authoritative almanac of art classes, services and professionals in the region.

She was laughed at for her request, Frischer said. At the time, she added, there was no such directory in San Diego.

Frischer went on to found and coordinate the San Diego Visual Arts Network (SDVAN), an online directory and calendar of visual arts events. For more than 15 years, SDVAN has also presented the San Diego Art Prize; inspired by the British Turner Prize, the award aims to bring greater awareness to the quality of visual arts in San Diego.

“It was (made) to escalate — in the same way as the Turner Prize did — the distinction and the excellence of work by artists in San Diego,” Frischer said.

For 2023, the San Diego Art Prize has been awarded to four sculpture and mixed media artists: Anya Gallaccio, Janelle Iglesias, Joe Yorty and Mely Barragán. In the past, the prize has awarded artists between \$500 and \$2000, Frischer said.

From Oct. 28, 2023, through Jan. 13, 2024, the four artists’ works will be showcased at the San Diego Central Library Gallery in an exhibition, curated by Lara Bullock, senior civic art manager for the city of San Diego.

Anya Gallaccio



“Rêvons D'or” by Anya Gallaccio (Courtesy of Quint Gallery)

Much of the Turner Prize-nominated artist’s work is of an ephemeral nature — relying on organic materials to construct site-specific installations. The result is a body of work that often has its own lifetime within an exhibition period, Bullock said.

At the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego in 2015, [Gallaccio showcased a 3-D printer](#) she and her students programmed to incrementally layer tubes of clay to form a nine-foot-tall miniature version of Devils Tower in Wyoming. Illustrative of Gallaccio’s protean variety of work, the clay slumped over the course of the exhibition, refusing to adhere to the intended shape. In a similar vein, the artist’s installation “preserve

'beauty'" featured 2,000 flowers tacked to panels on a wall; as is expected of cut plants, they dried and sometimes fell onto the floor of the gallery.

Gallaccio is a professor of visual arts at UC San Diego.

Janelle Iglesias



"PALM READING" by Janelle Iglesias (Courtesy of Janelle Iglesias)

Also a sculptor and installation artist, Iglesias has constructed works using a variety of media: from terra cotta pots and palm husks to plastic leaves and styrofoam coolers.

For the “Being Here With You/ Estando aquí contigo” exhibition at Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego in 2018, the artist piled pots, coolers, branches and other materials on top of each other to cast a 17-foot-tall pillar-shaped sculpture.

Born to Norwegian and Dominican parents, themes from both cultures inspire her work, she has said. She — with her sister Lisa Iglesias — also maintains a collaborative project by the name of Las Hermanas Iglesias.

Iglesias is an assistant professor of visual arts at UC San Diego.

Mely Barragán



"POST HUMAN ACCUMULATION I" by Mely Barragán (Courtesy of Mely Barragán)

Barragán's work, in her words, explores "the role of identity and of women within the power schemes of society." In the past, the artist's work has consisted of collages, glass, textiles and soft sculptures of fabric and stuffing. Often, her work features mixed media and methods: pigment on metals, compositions of suit ties and text superimposed onto collages and images.

The artist's work has been in collections at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and, along with fellow artist Daniel Ruanova, she co-founded TJ in China, a gallery in Tijuana.

Joe Yorty



"their father's house" by Joe Yorty (Courtesy of Philipp Scholz Rittermann)

Over the years, Yorty's media have included found VHS tapes, bathroom contour rugs, used towels, Quikrete, spent Amazon gift cards and photographs of used bean bags from Craigslist. Using discrete and often humorous curios of Americana, the artist's oeuvre examines what he has called "American domestic culture."

“I’m also drawn to objects made of materials that simulate more expensive or authentic materials: marble, granite, fine wood,” Yorty said in a [2021 interview with the Union-Tribune](#). “Those objects, for me, embody a longing for the authentic — a sort of meager attempt at fancy, which, to me, is a little sad and a little funny.”

Yorty is the co-founder of BEST PRACTICE, a not-for-profit art gallery in Logan Heights.



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