

F*BoMb

**SARAH GJERTSON:
INFLUENCES AND
LEGACIES**

GALLERY GUIDE

APRIL 4 - MAY 5, 2024



VICKI
MYHREN
GALLERY

F*BOMB

SARAH GJERTSON: INFLUENCES AND LEGACIES

The Vicki Myhren Gallery is pleased to present F*BOMB, featuring the artwork of long-time University of Denver professor Sarah Gjertson alongside a sampling of her influences, mentors, and students. This exhibition stretches beyond the traditional boundaries of a retrospective, instead tracing personal and artistic lineages through generations. This curatorial approach, suggested by Gjertson, parallels a community-centered ethos that grounds her artistic practice and approach as an educator, foregrounding connections across time, space, and people.

Inspired by feminist, anti-authoritarian, punk, and DIY subcultures, Gjertson thoughtfully deploys both humor and tenderness, disruption and community-building, to make visible the stories and voices of women “traversing the complex and conflicting expectations they experience living in American culture.” Gjertson’s work critiques gendered stereotypes, encourages individuals to use their voices, and invites expressions of anger, frustration, activism, and satire to disrupt and reimagine the world.

Gjertson and the artists in this exhibition play with various materials and processes, presenting engaging works that often employ revisionist methods of making. Crossing boundaries between “high” and “low” art forms, and experiences of comfort/discomfort, their art encourages dialogue and challenges societal norms of respectability. *F*BOMB* celebrates the subversive, boisterous, funny, personal, and political. Perhaps most importantly, it locates Gjertson and her work within an extended legacy of transformative and empowering art making practice, acknowledging those who came before and those who come after.

FEATURED ARTISTS:

Sarah Gjertson

Blake Ballard

Lindsay Smith Gustave

Jordan Bigelow

Syd Lee

Alex Blom

Clare Link-Oberstar

Justin Bravo

Wanguí Mania

Kristin Fleischmann Brewer

Katherine Ross

Karen Finley

Hollis Sigler

Daniel Goldstein

Faith Williams

Guerrilla Girls

Anne Wilson

SARAH GJERTSON

Untitled (Inflatable)

2002

Hand and machine sewn military issue fabrics, air blower, timed relay

This work was conceived and constructed in 2002, post 9/11 and before the invasion of Iraq. A queen-size air mattress constructed by hand using military-issue fabrics, the piece references the temporary comfort offered by this object, coupled with the lack of “substance” an inflatable might imply. The piece automatically inflates and deflates at regular intervals like long-protracted breathing. There is a suggestive relationship merging of military material with our national symbol, a questioning of this identity, and how it’s perceived by others globally

Slip

1999

Three 5-gallon pails of Avon liquid make up

The title “Slip” refers to the mixture of clay and water used in ceramics (interestingly, many cosmetics and ceramic materials share the same ingredients), the synonym for a girl who is considered “slight”, as well as an unintended accident. This work examines the transformation that occurs in excess – the difference between small, coveted cosmetic packaging, and the grotesqueness of the raw material itself in excess.

Directions (Waist Series)

2005-2006

Sewing patters, latex rubber, wood embroidery hoops, electrical elements, wood

This series explores sewing patterns as “directions” – both in a practical application to make a garment and also as societal cues and stereotypes. The patterns used in the work are decidedly “feminine” (ballerina outfits, cheerleader uniforms, princess dresses, etc.) and are sealed between layers of latex rubber. The result is a kind of skin-like roadmap that confounds all sense of direction. Printed text on the sewing patterns alludes to “correct” measurements and their corresponding sizes. Implicit, and yet forgiven, are the assumptions inherent in these patterns in terms of “normal” body size when garment sizing systems have been shown to be highly divergent. The diameters and titles of each form correspond to the waist sizes of celebrity women over the last fifty years.

SARAH GJERTSON

Psychoanalyst Trip-Dick

2003-2004

Installation of three portraits (dressmaker, pins, foam dots, styrofoam, shadowbox frames) and three wired antique vibrators from the early 1900s

This piece explores three prominent figures within the history of psychoanalysis (Jean-Martin Charcot, Sigmund Freud, and Josef Breuer) who were instrumental in pathologizing hysteria as it relates to women. Each portrait is assembled on Styrofoam as a grandiose specimen of each man and constructed of thousands of foam dots impaled by dressmaker pins. Each likeness is clearer from a distance than up close; an analogy to the clarity of scientific discovery - what is novel knowledge of the moment - and how accumulated knowledge attained in hindsight becomes clearer over time.

In front of each portrait is an antique vibrator, wired and activated by touching a button located inside a tube in front of the pedestal. The vibrators, used to treat hysteria at the turn of the 19th century, are presented museum style, as relics of their time. There is a satirical link to women's pleasure implicit in these antique devices, particularly as viewers are invited to engage in their operation. While acknowledging lineages of the medicalization of female bodies and the pathologizing of women's sexuality, this piece invites the possibility of alternative narratives of pleasure, agency, and humor

Mourning Series: States of Restraint, Release, In Knots, Parting

2022

Ink on paper, antique tiger wood bubble frame

This selection of four drawings hails from a larger series of works on paper begun during the Covid pandemic of 2020. The drawings reference mourning hair, a Victorian practice of weaving the human hair of deceased loved ones into objects (watch fobs, bracelets, necklaces, wreaths and larger framed works) to honor their memory. The drawings are contained within antique tiger wood/bubble glass frames, which are of the same era (late 19th-early 20th century).

Mortality and loss were at the forefront at this time for many - personally and globally. Here the meticulousness and care of the line drawings became a meditation - not unlike the meticulousness of weaving physical strands of hair. This series acknowledges my own loved ones lost during this time, an empathetic gesture to the many who also lost loved ones around the world. The series aims to connect historically across time to acknowledge loss and grieving as a universal human experience.

SARAH GJERTSON

Married with Children... Or Not

The series *Married with Children...Or Not* considers American cultural expectations around heterosexual marriage and procreation. These works utilize aesthetics and humor to highlight our often-contentious relationship with our own (sometimes conflicting) desires.

Relics

2010-2011

Ten solid bronze rings (“old single cut”)

“Relics” considers wedding rings as loaded symbols of commitment, love, and promise in American culture. In a mainstream context, the size of the “rock” is often seen as a measure of the intensity of that commitment, the worthiness of the bride, and/or the status of the groom.

This interactive sculpture has weight – the literal physical weight of cast solid bronze, but also the figurative and burdensome weight that we place on this symbol. At 18 pounds each a person can easily pick one up, but having to hold or carry it quickly becomes tiring and inconvenient. Rather than being buffed to a shiny brilliance, the surface of each ring has a patina that renders the bronze to appear old and discarded, a relic of the past.

Running Bride

2010-2011

Digital scan of Super 8 film - 21:32 run time

“Running Bride” presents one character - a bride - running across and through various American geographies wearing a traditional white wedding dress. What is she running from? Or is she running to something? Without cars, architecture, or other contextual markers, the film floats in time – it could have occurred yesterday, or 50 years ago.

Without apparent beginning or end, the effort expended far outweighs any particular goal or destination. The point invariably becomes the act of running itself, which becomes magnified and exaggerated as absurd and without a determinate end. The film was shot with a handheld Super 8 camera, an additional reference to the nostalgia connected with ideas of matrimony.

SARAH GJERTSON

Human Imprint

The *Human Imprint* series recovers the presence of women in historic mining communities, the evidence of ingenuity and resilience.

From Touch I Learned

2017

Handmade velvet book, antique desk and chair

The interactive work, "From Touch I Learned", offers a seat to viewers, inviting them to page through a handmade velvet book - a visual story of printed images sourced from the Isaac S. Smith collection at the Park County Local History Archives in Fairplay, Colorado. Through touch, image, and sentiments of hardship and loss, the book tells part of the story of the Smith family, particularly the youngest daughter, Ruth. Knowledge gained through touch creates space for empathy, for both the Smith family's unique story, but also for our own familial histories - some unknown or lost, but hopefully later found.

Embedded (for Eula)

2017

Oil-based solar plate monoprint

This work presents images of five of the fifteen women researched for the *Human Imprint* project, with Eula Smith as a central figure. All lived and/or worked for part of their lives in Park County, Colorado, and their images are layered over topographical landscapes of nearby areas with historic mining sites. Often erased from histories of mining towns, this work recenters the presence of women. The text "she was here" can be seen on close inspection. Here the women are embedded back into the landscapes their lives had impacted. (Top left: Rosanna Peart; top right: Lillian Hall; center: Eula Smith; lower left: Cornelia Burns; lower right: Ada Richards)

Icon of the West

2017

Mining artifacts, antique hair piece

This work references the iconic livestock skull that is so often employed as an icon of the pioneer West, either as a gesture of conquest or as a totem of hardship or survival. Here, objects and artifacts are arranged to resemble the image of this icon, but with purposeful reinterpretation. The hair piece suggests the presence of women as central to this part of this history and iconic status, integrated with mining artifacts.

SARAH GJERTSON

Parlor Project

Parlor Project reveals the intimate interactions that occur within small neighborhood beauty parlors. Warmth, tenderness, and nostalgia are woven into the spaces of these parlors, which are so often located within aged storefronts, tucked into neighborhoods, or hidden in strip malls. This series turns attention to the life inside these spaces – the colors, objects, and people who inhabit them and the unique intimacy that is framed by curlers, hairdryers, graying hair and the beauty of wrinkled hands. Within the seemingly simple act of the weekly routine of getting a roller set is a much larger impact of the interaction and relationships fostered here. The “Parlor Project Short” aims to show these lovely women as they are, in their own voices, in a space where they are simultaneously vulnerable, yet comfortable.

Lela, Ronnie, Holly Street Hair Dryer, and Sixth Avenue Dryer
2007

Ink jet prints from 35mm negatives

“Lela” and “Ronnie” are part of a series of photographs focusing on the hands as portraits of individuals, rather than their head or face. These hands carry a lifetime of stories, with great beauty to be found in the wrinkles, spots, veins, and other elements of aging - the same aspects that are often resisted, with societal standards of beauty being equated with retaining a youthful appearance. Here aging is honored and celebrated.

Another series of photographs from the *Parlor Project* focused on hair dryer chairs, a foundational part of beauty parlors that offered roller sets. In this series of dryers, there are suggestions of presence and absence, referring to the generation of women who sought the intimacy and community of beauty parlors who are themselves disappearing as a demographic.

Curlers

2006

Vellum, acrylic, wood

“Curlers” honors the handmade vellum curlers and to the weekly practice of getting a “roller set”, a once common hair styling practice that involved a carefully ordered series of steps and weekly re-do's. Implicit in the roller set is the opportunity for touch, personal care, and intimacy - enabling relationships between women that often lasted decades. As the prevalence of roller sets and the small beauty parlors where they occurred disappears, these curlers hold space - even as ghostly patterned surrogates - for the women who enjoyed this practice for most of their lives, and often even at the end.

BLAKE BALLARD

Who Sets the Ground Rules?

2024

Vintage crochet pattern, chalk marker

Installed by Juliana Jobin and Syd Lee

Inspired by hopscotch games and chalk doodles on the playground, this installation is comprised of a large chalk drawing of a vintage crochet pattern pulled from my family's pattern library

Crochet Patterns, especially in rural America, were used to bind communities together through recurring symbols and motifs, oftentimes reinforcing the systems of power. "Who sets the ground rules?" asks us to negotiate with those everyday patterns and norms that have an unseen influence on how we interact with society, even if they are as innocuous as a crochet doily.

Through the chalk pattern, the ground becomes a contested location where walkers are negotiating their role in a larger socio-cultural-political space. Each step smudges, smears, and changes the ground rules. Located on the University of Denver campus, students, staff, and visitors are rewriting the pattern set into American soil.

JORDAN BIGELOW

MONEYMAKER

2021

Perler beads, resin, cloth

University of Denver Art Collections (2021.18)

"MONEYMAKER" was created out of the strength of survival. This artwork symbolized the importance of reclaiming autonomy, resonating with many whose images have been shared without content, their agency stripped away. With an estimated 6.5 million individuals having faced this violation, "MONEYMAKER" stands as a testament. Crafted from nearly 130,000 Perler Beads, each resembling a pixel in our tangible world, the artwork provides a distinctive viewpoint on the repercussions of digital intrusion.

ALEX BLOM

Oculus (Indoctrination)

2024

mixed media installation featuring screenprint and acrylic on plexiglass

Exploring sentiments of indoctrination and cult ideology, “Oculus (Indoctrination)” invites purveyors to partake in the ritual and immerse themselves in a small, simulated sacred space. By capitalizing on compositions from Andrea Mantegna’s *Oculus* (Venice, 1465-74) and combining it with self-portraiture and florals heavily associated with queer history and myth, I have created a contemporary stained-glass window that celebrates the self and invites others into the cult of self I have synthesized over the past several years. As a pink glow shines onto the below altar and perspective patrons as they partake in a ritual similar to the holy eucharist, I both physically and figuratively look down as my audience devotes themselves to one another, spirituality centered in confidence, compassion, and connection.

JUSTIN BRAVO

Rescue

2023- 2024

Acrylic, photo transfer on canvas, metal bracket, polyurethane rope, silicone Pop-It

“Rescue” is the result of an additive, evolving process. The painting, created last year, addresses the otherness felt by immigrant communities; being called an “Alien” or “Illegal” resonated with my own interest in space and aliens, and I crafted a spacecraft beaming up and delivering migrants.

Thinking to our current moment in 2024, the genocide in Palestine has been at the front of my mind. Palestinians have been unable to display their own flag for years, and resorted to displaying images of watermelons, that share the same colors as the flag, in that way, were able to still show national pride in a covert way. Even at the University of Denver, fear of showing support for Palestine art is relevant. I revisited the painting and incorporated a watermelon Pop It toy, creating a multi-layered artwork that considers ideas of rescue, American obsession, and infantilization of crisis.

KRISTIN FLEISCHMANN BREWER

Webbing (army green)

2018

cotton webbing, thread

“Webbing (army green)” is part of a series of works made with industrial webbing tenuously threaded together with string. The work retains the traces of physical labor with material and reflects on ideas of entrapment and escape. The color ties back to the political but also landscape, holding tensions between masculine/ feminine, violent/ serene, fear/ safety.

KAREN FINLEY

It's My Body

2020

Silk, acrylic, ink

Finley chose the banner format as a public announcement. “It's My Body” refers to body agency and is a way of saying "It's NOT Your Body." It can be considered for reproductive rights, feminism, racism, identity, and LGBTQ equality. It has a particular resonance and yet is open to interpretation for the viewer.

Finley chose silk for it is a luxurious fabric that is worn, often close to the body and intimate. Finley hand-painted the work to show the human quality, touch, and imprint. The silk moves with the air and is not static. The banner was made to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of 19th Amendment at the Park Armory in New York.

Dont ask me to Smile, Just like Woman, Hot Piece of Ass

2020-24

Archival pigment giclee print

These three artworks are painted text on vintage encyclopedia pages. The handwritten text in cursive shows the visual quality over the machine print. Writing over the encyclopedic text, is an act of resistance, to reclaim. By writing these misogynist musings within a book of knowledge exposes and documents microaggressions historically.

DANIEL GOLDSTEIN

Kishinev, 1904

2024

Charcoal and chalk pastel on paper

The pervasive stress and anxiety in the world recently about the global rise of fascism has increasingly led me back to questions about social responsibility, both the responsibility to make art and to have something to say about the delicate precipice we sit upon right now. In thinking about these concepts, I feel the desire to turn to moments in history, the impacts of which very literally run through my veins. My recent work looks at the history of my family and how their experiences as Jews in Europe at the turn of the 20th century drove small, yet essential acts of resistance and survival in the face of autocratic violence. In "Kishinev, 1904", I visualize one of these moments described by my great-grandfather, Julius, speaking of his parents, Aaron and Rose.

GUERRILLA GIRLS

Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into the Met. Museum?

2012 reprint (original 1989)

Signed poster

Collection of Sarah Gjertson

The Guerrilla Girls are anonymous artist activists who use disruptive headlines, outrageous visuals, and killer statistics to expose gender and ethnic bias and corruption in art, film, politics, and pop culture. The artists amended Ingres' infamous *La Grande Odalisque* (1814), adding their signature gorilla mask. This now-iconic poster loudly draws attention to gender inequality in the art world, specifically the sexualization of women as objects and exclusion of women artists.

LINDSAY SMITH GUSTAVE

Meditations on patriarchy (ouroboros)

2024

Ceramic with inherited, vintage glass beads

In my current body of work, I explore the persistence of ancient mythologies in connection to contemporary political agendas and societal perspectives on gender dynamics. The roots of democracy, as embraced by some, lie in the stories of Greece and the Roman Empire. The appropriation of these foundational narratives not only laid the groundwork for the shaping of modern Western nations, notably the United States, but also entrenched gender dynamics that, although outdated, persist today.

I draw upon art historical imagery and tropes depicting these myths to explore their relevance in our current era. My work questions how these age-old myths can be applied to present-day contexts and how they perpetuate these destructive narratives. Through themes of death, grief, rebirth, and reinterpretation, I seek to challenge accepted norms of dominance and the narratives that continue to define us while I encourage the creation of new mythologies better suited to our contemporary reality.

SYD LEE

U.N.I.T.Y (Let's Change the Conversation)

2022-2024

Wood panel and acrylic paint

April is sexual assault awareness month, and the audience is strongly encouraged to take a photo with this artwork to promote awareness.

The title, "U.N.I.T.Y" references a song by Queen Latifah, which discusses the unifying sense of community amongst women that is a result of shared experiences with sexual abuse and harassment. The open heads of the silhouettes prompt viewers to put themselves into the shoes of an SA survivor of their support system. This work aims to evoke empathy and provide a platform to address these difficult subjects. The back side of the artwork is interactive and features experiences of SA, creating a real space for these personal conversations to be shared and heard.

CLARE LINK-OSBERSTAR

Grid

2021

Plaster, acrylic paint

My work draws on my growing awareness and research about how my own experiences and belief in gender equality, racial justice, and human rights have broader impacts. I call out issues of injustice and attempt to bring to the forefront of people's minds how they might be playing a role in these issues and how they can affect change on a personal level. I use some of my own experiences within the intersections of race and gender and social justice as a starting point, hoping that the work will take those further by engaging my audience with their own experiences, resulting in an opening for greater dialogues. The ultimate goal of this work is to seek common solutions as a society.

Working from a feminist consciousness, I've been engaging with my personal stake in these issues. It has sparked my interest in how employing specific materials like cast multiples, symbolic found objects, and printmaking processes can lead to works of art that conceptually ask these questions of the viewer.

WANGUI MAINA

Keepsake

2024

Wall drawing with hand-dyed merkin frontal

Imagine this, it's 2012 and you're on "Feminist Tumblr", viewing our bodies in new ways and from different angles that throw off shame and shyness. Ideas of beauty and what it can be morph and stretch with the creation of every new account. Creativity in self-expression is currency. A cross-over between laid and slayed black femmes and colorful alternative cuties. Hair dye is the new norm, no matter what scene you're in. Amateur experts share their advice, earned from trial and error, with never-ending recommendations for product junkies. Why stop at your head? Pits and pubes are fair game. What will it be this time? Green? Purple? Atomic Turquoise® - Amplified™? It's your avatar, do whatever the hell you want with it. Just make sure you have the right technique. Tutorial coming soon!

KATHERINE ROSS

Biotic Earth-Honey dripper

2024

Local clay, beeswax, honey, pine resin/propolis

The rural site of my home and studio consists largely of clay deposited by the receding glaciers that define the Great Lakes region. For over 150 years, through colonization and settlement, the land has been altered, degraded and remediated. “Honeydripper” represents the biotic community of living organisms I interact with on this site. Clay from the land I live on is infused with beeswax produced by my hives and “glazed” with honey and propolis from the resin the bees collected from the trees on this land.

HOLLIS SIGLER

Where Daughters Fear Becoming Thier Mothers

1985

Color lithograph on arches paper

Collections of the CU Art Museum (S.2019.674)

This artwork combines a pop-up, storybook, with a stage-like diorama, creating a distorted, abstracted portrait of the home. Throughout her career, Sigler strategically deployed this a childlike style, as a critique of patriarchal culture and the infantilization of women. This accessible and understandable style also allowed her to engage with difficult emotional content in an approachable way.

FAITH WILLIAMS

Inner Worlds

2024

Cyano type and wood-burning on reclaimed wood, varnish, tubing, hardware, aspen shavings, dried moss

My experiences collaborating with scientists and observing the behavior of bumblebees in the mountain environment helped me better understand the complexity of these interconnected systems – how insects and plants are shifting and responding to change. To me, the imagery on the outside of these bumblebee habits feels like a metaphor for how the one-year cycle of a bumblebee's life seems to mirror the rotations of the sun and the patterns found in geometry. I often think about my place within all these natural systems and how art might serve as a tool for starting conversations. One of my goals with these functional artworks is to elevate the idea of a pollinator habitat and to encourage more people to create spaces for vulnerable creatures.

ANNE WILSON

Dispersions (nos. 17, 1, and 26)

2013

Thread, hair, cloth, white steel frames

Courtesy of the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery

The three works on display here are part of a series of twenty-six fabric pieces. Taking heirloom white damask cloth with holes or tears caused by use, Wilson sewed open the flaw with thread and hair to form a perfect, sculptural circle in the fabric. Piercing the decorative, time-worn cloth with the precision of a gunshot, the circles' edges softly disperse with a haloed effect, stopped again by the white metal frame.

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