

Stephanie Syjuco

Activism is in the air with four Houston art shows led by women Activism is in the air and women are leading the charge this fall in galleries and museums.

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Molly Glentzer October 21, 2020 Updated: October 22, 2020, 10:21 am

Is it a coincidence that some of this season's most powerful art exhibitions feature the work of women who are flexing their muscles as agents of change? Maybe not. Activism is in the air. Here are four strong shows to catch now, either online or in person.

“Our work swells like dawn, when the sun licks the water”

Angela Fraleigh sees passive female characters in old paintings as time travelers, and she gives them new agency. Three of this show's six large paintings reimagine pre-Raphaelite figures from paintings at the Delaware Art Museum, releasing them into a feminist, utopian space of eye-popping psychedelic colors. The original models often had tragic lives; Fraleigh replaces some of the faces, inserting strong contemporary women she knows.

Two monumental triptychs that anchor the gallery are especially visceral, with a hallucinatory witch's brew effect. “There's a notion that when women gather, subversive things can happen,” the artist says. “This is a mega-version of that.” In two works made this year, figures emerge out of gorgeously hand-marbled backgrounds inspired by the covers of antique books. Fraleigh says one was a copy of Mary Wollstonecraft's “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” that was given to a female anti-suffragist by a male supporter of the suffragist movement. Fraleigh also draws her titles from texts by women, pointing viewers toward a deeper dive.

Even with a small series of watercolor portraits of women reading, she wants it to be apparent that minds are clicking. With all of her work, she says, she wants to change the way we look at things, “so the things we look at change.”

11 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, by appointment, through Oct. 31; Inman Gallery, 3901 Main; 713-526-7800, inmangallery.com

“The Visible Invisible”

Artists and designers often think of gray, white, black and green as benign, neutral colors. Stephanie Syjuco, who was born in the Philippines and lives in San Francisco, brings another perspective with a show that uses those colors and patterns to examine questions about citizenry, immigration and identity. The stars are her 2019 installation “Dodge and Burn (Visible Storage)” (a room-size “still life” that examines printers’ color calibration charts as coded narratives) and the new, participatory artwork “Public_Public_Address,” an evolving collaboration with Jason Lazarus and Siebren Versteeg that features an endless livestream of virtual “marching” protesters in a moving collage built of images viewers can submit from anywhere.

Noon-5 p.m. Wednesday-Sunday, through Jan. 9; Blaffer Art Museum, University of Houston, 4173 Elgin; free; 713-743-9521; blafferartmuseum.org

“Isolation”

Photographer Cara Barer has shifted into a dramatic new mode this year, abandoning the pretty, mandalalike imagery of her signature book sculpture images to create a series of mixed-media portraits that capture raw emotion.

They feature close-up faces of women in shadowy tones layered with encaustic wax, making them look like long-lost film-noir stills. With eyes open or closed, no one looks at ease. Barer’s subjects were runners during a Houston Marathon, but here, “marathon” becomes a metaphor for things more troubling and universal.

11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, by appointment, Oct. 23-Dec. 31; Nicole Longnecker Gallery, 3233 W. 11th; 346-800-2780, longneckergallery.com

“Going Through a Phrase”

Words become physical — and strong thought disrupters — in this group show of text-based works by Alicia Eggert, Candace Hicks, Stephanie Patton, Andrea Tosten and Rachelle Vasquez. With neon signage, calligraphy and textiles, they use familiar fonts and shapes to communicate ideas, warnings, personal reflections and social commentary.

Noon-5 p.m. Wednesday-Sunday, through Jan. 3; Galveston Arts Center, 2127 Strand; free; 409-76302403, galvestonartscenter.org
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