

Frag- mented

SCULPTURE MONTH HOUSTON

Figure

BY JOHN BERNHARD

Sculpture Month Houston (SMH) hosted its 2023 exhibition titled 'The Sleep of Reason: The Fragmented Figure' from October through December 2023.

Sculpture Month Houston (SMH) emerged in 2016 as an arts initiative founded by Volker Eisele and Antarctica Black, along with Tommy Gregory. This annual citywide festival serves as a platform to exhibit three-dimensional artworks and installations.

Over the past six years, SMH has curated a series of engaging celebrations, highlighting the diverse talents within the art community. The focal point for SMH's main exhibition space is SITE Gallery Houston, a former storage facility for Mahatma rice situated within the Sawyer Yard creative campus. Comprising 34 cylindrical silos, this unique venue offers individual artists the opportunity to create site-specific works that interact with the distinct spatial qualities of the setting. While the silos present an extraordinary backdrop for art, they also pose a challenge as a site-specific arena for exhibition.

Last year's exhibition delved into the contemporary portrayal of the human figure by artists from Houston and Texas, exploring how Cubism fundamentally reshaped perceptions of human anatomy. Peter Selz, a prominent mid-century curator at MOMA, once remarked that 'Picasso re-invented anatomy,' raising the pertinent question of whether the fragmentation and subsequent reconstruction of the figure stand as the most compelling symbols of the modern human condition, and if so, why it became such a widespread symbol.

Volker Eisele, the visionary behind this successful event, expressed, "It was quite challenging to find artists who have focused their primary vision on figurative work."

The roster of selected artists for this year included Frances Bagley, Rabea Ballin, Jimmy Canales, Elizabeth Chapin, Colette Copeland, Jeff Gibbons, Suguru Hiraide, Allison Hunter, Jessica Kreutter, Yuliya Lanina, Nadin Nassar, Steve Parker, Kris Pierce, Hugo Santana, Sarah Sudhoff, and James Sullivan.









Above clockwise:
 Hugo Santana, *Subject of Functional Replication*.
 Jeff Gibbons, *Ladder Nipples (Nipocchio)*.
 Kris Pierce, *The Reality Show*.

Opposite:
 Mark McCain and Nathan Wheeler, "Roz" (Sonic Resonance)
 All photos by Volker Eisele

"In addition to some of the more "classical" figurative artists like Frances Bagley or James Sullivan, I encountered several younger artists whose works offer a refreshing new perspective on the figure, primarily within social contexts. This unexpected discovery brings me immense satisfaction," remarked Volker.

During the 'Fragmented Figure' project, two guest artists, Mark McCain and Nathan Wheeler, introduced 'Roz' (Robotic Resonance) through several captivating performances. 'Roz' represents a groundbreaking audio-visual hybrid instrument capable of generating novel and unexpected soundscapes. Integrating an interactive robotic system into this project underscores the vast potential of exponential human creativity through a mind/machine interface. It reflects the rapidly advancing research that aims to link human brain activity with Artificial Intelligence. Recent AI roll-out events have highlighted the unpredictable and potentially threatening nature of AI, even under tightly controlled parameters.

'Roz' stands as an interactive and durational sonic art piece comprising a metal harp and piano strings, two robotic arms manipulating spinning felt, and an interactive computer control system. Tuned strings resonate with the frequencies of the exhibition venue, creating a remarkable soundscape rich with contrapuntal harmonic relationships. The unique acoustic surroundings of the Silos provided an ideal setting for this sonic delivery.





Sarah Sudhoff, *SHIFT Line of Gravity*. Photo by John Bernhard

Houston-based artist Sarah Sudhoff showcased 'SHIFT,' a new durational participatory sound and video performance, as an extension of her 'Line of Gravity' series. Sudhoff's work delves into the sensitive subject of domestic violence through photography, performance, and video. 'SHIFT' draws from personal experiences, aiming to poetically depict both the internal and external struggles faced in reclaiming a self that has been lost to abuse.

Sudhoff invites the audience to partake in these experiences by contributing their voices to the artist's narrative. By transforming the story from a singular account into a collective conversation,

she creates an opportunity for empathy, understanding, and ultimately, the reclaiming of personal empowerment.

Through captivating artistry and interactive experiences, this exhibition celebrated the boundless creativity of artists and sparked meaningful conversations, leaving an indelible mark on all who participated. The immersive exhibits, where visitors entered separate spaces to interact directly with art, combined with guided tours and artist talks, helped people, including students, better grasp the art and provided educational opportunities for everyone. ■