

ARTS&SCIENCES

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A Crack in the Moon



ALETTE SIMMONS-JIMÉNEZ, "A CRACK IN THE MOON," (SUNSET OVER THE HALIFAX), 2021, 30" X 24", MIXED MEDIA COLLAGE ON CANVAS WITH ARCHIVAL PHOTO, PRESSED ORGANIC MATTER, ACRYLIC, CORRUGATED PAPER, NAILS, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

RUTH: You've been a practicing artist in Miami for many years now but tell us how you came to Miami and what caused you to become an artist.

ALETTE: I grew up as a military kid in a somewhat creative family. I was used to coming and going and living abroad. My parents and siblings all had artistic talents of some sort, but I seemed to be the one with the matching personality for a life as an artist. I enjoyed culturally enriching communities, learning and connecting with people unlike myself. It was very natural for me to live outside the US and when I received my BFA from Newcomb College of Tulane University in New Orleans, I relocated to the Dominican Republic. I adapted easily to the small but vibrant art community, began my studio practice there, and stayed for seventeen years. Then suddenly there was a moment when life just pushed me to a new direction, and I ended up in Miami. The adjustment to living in Miami and repositioning my practice was quite difficult. But, as it turned out, the art scene in Miami soon began to flourish and it became an exciting place to be.

RUTH: You've made a name for yourself as an installation artist but have you always worked in this art form? Can you describe how and why you came to be interested in installation art?

ALETTE: I went to college to study painting and discovered sculpture. I could not and did not want to pick between them, so I did both. That opened a door to engage with endless options. Over the years the distinction between works became blurred and today I work in multiple media - objects are more painterly, and paintings are more sculptural. I don't distinguish between one or the other. The concept dictates what needs to be employed to articulate the idea. My first installation piece was created in 1992. It grew out of a concept I had been imagining for years. I wanted to recreate a painting of mine in 3D. A work that could be walked into. That work became the first in a series called "Walk-Ins". "Walk-In #6" had fantastical motorized parts, a video running on a reconstructed TV, furniture, and lights. Then came "Walk-In #5", and Walk-In #88". For an artist, most of the time it seems that life and the art world make no sense. I numbered the "Walk-Ins" randomly, making no sense. When I'm planning a solo show it's an opportunity to bring my works together creating a sort of expanded installation and an immersive experience. There is a sort of magic when you bring



ALETTE SIMMONS-JIMÉNEZ, "A STICK, A STONE, A TREE," 84" X 60", MIXED MEDIA COLLAGE CANVAS TAPESTRY WITH JAPANESE PAPERS, OIL, ACRYLIC, BAMBOO PAPER, CHINA MARKER, GROMMETS, 2020. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

work together that were created in different media and they are suddenly in concert, singing with one another. That's when my world seems to suddenly make much more sense.

RUTH: You have gravitated towards including weaving, beading, textile arts - the type of art associated with women's handicrafts -- in your pieces. Can you address that a bit?

ALETTE: When I was a young girl, my grandmother oversaw the family childcare. She was German and had an enormous amount of skill in baking, sewing, quilting, knitting and such, and had been a seamstress for high society women in Chicago. As young kids, we were not allowed TV watching until nighttime, if at all, and we were always outside running wild, or inside watching



ALETTE SIMMONS-JIMÉNEZ, "CATHEDRAL," 84" X 65", MIXED MEDIA COLLAGE CANVAS TAPESTRY WITH PRESSED ORGANIC MATTER, OIL, ACRYLIC, CHINA MARKER, GROMMETS, 2021. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

her make quilts for our beds or dumplings for dinner. When we got older, she taught us all to sew our own clothes. When I began as an artist, I wanted to throw the past away and explore everything outside familiar boundaries. It took many years of being in the studio, working, exploring, and searching for my own identity before I re-connected to my past, letting it come to the surface in my work. My collaged canvas tapestries,

suspended sculptures, and video works are all tied directly to my mother, my grandmother, and even to my father, who in the 50s filmed our every move, and who on weekends would escape to our basement and his woodturning workshop. I still love pushing boundaries and exploring how far I can push beading, pressing flowers, weaving fibers, and drawing patterns.

RUTH: And, also, recently you have started to include more video in your works. Can you talk a bit about that?

ALETTE: I'm so excited to present my latest new work in video at the show in MOAS. Creating works for the exhibit was a long and difficult struggle that I blame on the pandemic. Just how to articulate life at this moment has been a challenge, but I am so very happy with the outcome. While I revere beautiful tactile elements, and I celebrate traditional women's handicrafts, I also have a side that pushes into the future and loves exploring imagery and creativity produced through new media and technology. It has been said that I am a maximalist artist... using anything in hands reach, layering and mixing styles and techniques within one work. This extends to outside the studio as well, directing an artist-run space, volunteering time and directing a local chapter of a national non-profit arts organization as well, then also producing and editing an arts podcast! I admit, even before the pandemic, it was hard to find the time to dedicate to so many different outputs. And now, maybe because of the pandemic, I've realized it's time to focus on producing my own best work. I've given up most community work and gained time to return to exploring more creatively, such as in video art. I love the fluidity in recording moving images. You are offered

all the tools in the paint box: light, motion, color, sound, and space. "Slipping Through Your Fingers" was produced just for my show at MOAS and is my first work in video art in 9 years. I'm just getting started.

RUTH: You have indicated that you created the piece we are exhibiting in response to the Native American and ecological history of our area. Can you tell us where the inspiration for the piece came from and how it affected what you created?

ALETTE: Accepting an invitation to exhibit my work at MOAS occasioned a couple of logistics trips to Daytona. On one trip I slept in a home where the currents of the Halifax River nearly wash over the steps of the back door. I have a long history of living in waterfront cities, but this river imparted a special magic, and I was hooked like a tarpon. I became increasingly interested in the area. I explored the inlets, the dirt roads, old sugar mills. I read the histories of the Timucuan Tribes and learned a few Timucuan words. I studied about other people and cultures in the area from 11,000 years ago up until modern times. I imagined villages, shell mounds, and Spanish galleons sailing up the Halifax River, possibly right where the house I slept in was built. It made me wonder how it is possible that humanity, after all the trials, tribulations, and injustices done, can still prevail. And for me, the only answer could be "because of the sheltering trees,

the sweetness of the waters, and the brightness of the moon". Nature most certainly has saved humanity. I made another trip up just to photograph and shoot video, on location, capturing a true essence of the land, river, and sky. All the pieces on exhibit continue my fascination with the natural world and how nature offers the connective tissue holding all of us, and each one of us, together.

An interesting note: I also just learned that cracks in the Moon were recently discovered by NASA scientists. An expansive survey of more than 12,000 lunar images proves the surface of the

Moon is constantly cracking and shifting under stress. Just as the Moon's gravitational pull causes seas and lakes to rise and fall as tides on Earth, the Earth exerts tidal forces on the Moon. Scientists have known this for a while, but now they've found that Earth's pull also actually opens up faults on the Moon... – more connective tissues.

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