

Artist Texts

Alma Allen

(b. 1970, Heber City, UT, USA)

The first artwork that visitors encounter on arriving at the Luss House is Alma Allen's magisterial *Not Yet Titled*, a five-foot circular slab of veined pink marble set just by the entryway. It offers a remarkable and fitting welcome. For all its apparent simplicity, the sculpture compresses whole worlds into itself: an art historical lineage, extending from Brancusi via Noguchi down to the glass works of Roni Horn, and also a far slower, more implacable geological accumulation of form. Allen, an intense individualist who is self-taught in all he does, made his name in New York City with small hand-sized sculptures, initially selling them to passersby off an ironing board. Those days seem long ago. He's now based in Mexico and achieves his monumental works with the aid of a large studio and robotic carving tools. At The Gerald Luss House, his breathtaking range and inventiveness is on full display, with works at various scales rendered in stone, wood, and bronze. All have the same non-title as the marble disk, which implies a radical open-endedness – anything could still happen. Yet each work is totally resolved, a supremely satisfying response to materiality's affordances.

Lucas Arruda

(b. 1983, São Paulo, SP, Brazil)

For a few centuries, landscape had pride of place as one of the principal modes defining the identity of painting. With the rise of abstraction, that preeminence was permanently eroded — even if the genre's ghost still haunted Abstract Expressionism and Color Field painting. So to engage in painting today is both to re-engage a distant history and, in age of the Anthropocene, a fundamentally new undertaking. To the extent that it was ever coherent to see nature as "wild," fundamentally other from the human, that separateness is now itself past. Lucas Arruda's work is paradigmatic of all these dynamics. In his oil paintings, as well as slide projections and light installations, the Brazilian artist reimagines landscape as an evanescent typology, hovering between apparition and emptiness.

Cecily Brown

(b. 1969, London, UK)

The works of Cecily Brown possess a beguiling and frankly awe-inspiring contradiction. On the one hand, no contemporary painter summons comparable force — recalling Joan Mitchell at the height of her powers. Her canvases seem to explode off the wall. On the other, her works are elusive, subtle, and mercurial; no two minutes spent with them are ever quite the same. For this installation at The Gerald Luss House, Brown contributes a domestically-scaled painting called *Reasons to be Cheerful* (the title alludes to a 1979 song by Ian Dury and the Blockheads). Set above the historic fireplace against a backdrop of interlocking stone, its

lush fleshiness feels all the more palpable. “I think that painting is a kind of alchemy,” she has said. “The paint is transformed into image, and paint and image transform themselves into a third and new thing.”

Matt Connors

(b. 1973, Chicago, IL, USA)

“Flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal.” This is the art historian Rosalind Krauss writing, in her 1979 essay “Grids” — an influential description of modernist painting as an autonomous idiom, premised on withdrawal from the world and interrogation of its own concerns. The grid, Krauss wrote, “is what art looks like when it turns its back to nature.” Four decades later, that description still holds – until it doesn’t. Witness *Short Tom (Tuned)* by Matt Connors. Though loosely structured on a grid, it fairly teems with exceptions to any discernible rule. Even where the vertical and horizontal lines are evident, they are wonky, willful, charting their own unique course. Together with the vibrant polychrome palette and pinwheeling arrangement of intuitive, playful forms, it all amounts to an exhilarating release from constrained modernist logic. The positioning of the work in *The Gerald Luss House* — itself an immaculately planned and executed, grid-like composition – only highlights its bracing freedom.

Green River Project LLC

(founded 2017, New York, NY, USA)

Aaron Aujla

(b. 1986, Victoria, Canada)

Benjamin Bloomstein

(b. 1988, Hillsdale, NY, USA)

Green River Project LLC — the ever-inventive design and making studio of Aaron Aujla and Ben Bloomstein — is a frequent exhibitor with *Object & Thing*, bringing their bespoke approach to each presentation. For this installation, they met with Gerald Luss at his New York City home and studio, and created a response to his inspirational life and work. One rectangular table in aluminum — 122 pounds of it — is a response to the architecture of the *Time-Life Building* (1959), where Luss completed his most well-known interiors. The choice of aluminum, a commonality that ties all of Green River Project’s contributions to the exhibition, evokes the modernist yet lavish atmosphere of mid-century Manhattan (and it’s worth noting that it was only in those years that monumental construction in aluminum became commonplace). The pair of sconces included at Luss House were designed for the restaurant *Dr. Clark* in New York City.

Mimi Lauter

(b. 1982, San Francisco, CA, USA)

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a group of artists known as the Nabis established themselves as the latest Parisian avant-garde. These painters, among them Pierre Bonnard, Édouard Vuillard and Félix Vallotton, borrowed from earlier movements — the esoteric iconography of the Symbolists, the loose

brushwork and high color of the Impressionists – developing these traits in individualistic ways. Ravishing, introverted and spiritual, their works remain the ultimate painter’s paintings. They exert a powerful influence on many contemporary artists today, but few channel the magic as effectively as the Los Angeles painter Mimi Lauter. Her works in oil and soft pastel have the same glancing narrative implication, psychological suggestiveness and seductive tactility as the Nabis at their best. For all that Lauter reaches back into art history, though, her work also projects a vivid contemporaneity, evoking as it does the turbulent flux of the 21st century.

Tony Lewis

(b. 1986, Los Angeles, CA, USA)

Tony Lewis contributes examples from two bodies of work to *The Gerald Luss House*, and at first glance, they could not be more different. One features attenuated totemic forms, staked out against a seemingly vast negative space. The other consists of densities of gray graphite pigment, worked and worked into a solid, glinting field. In the first case, the image takes center stage; in the second, the viewer experiences pure materiality. Yet these somewhat hermetic works draw from the same deep well of meaning: Lewis’s ongoing exploration of the fundamental language of mark-making, which he conceives both as a communicative channel and the raw fact of labor. The linear forms are drawn from Gregg shorthand (the most popular form of stenography), decontextualized and disassembled so as to become a free-floating signature. The monochrome works are a response to Lewis’s own studio, which he describes vividly: “The whole room has been taken over by piles of graphite powder I bring in. It has basically gotten to the point where the walls, the floor and every object in that room is completely covered in it.” In both bodies of work, Lewis engages in a process-driven, non-hierarchical exploration of signification — part of his wide-ranging critical engagement of Blackness and the way it is positioned in public discourse.

Eddie Martinez

(b. 1977, New London, CT, USA)

Lately, a 1986 essay by the sci fi author Ursula LeGuin has found new currency. Entitled “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction,” it articulates an approach to narrative that is capacious, all-encompassing, without the formulaic structures so common in genre fiction. LeGuin said that she wanted to write stories “full of beginnings without ends, of initiations, of losses, of transformations and translations, and far more tricks than conflicts, far fewer triumphs than snares and delusions.” Looking at Eddie Martinez’s work, you see the same principle played out: the Carrier Bag Theory of Painting. His images are populated by cartoon figures and equally characterful abstract shapes, which seem to have dropped into the image and just decided to hang around for a while. This permissive, elastic approach to composition is enhanced by Martinez’s wide palette, which includes street art materials like spray paint and markers. (He also makes sculpture, collaging together seemingly random everyday objects into novel expressive configurations.) Never insistent, always multivalent, Martinez’s paintings are — like LeGuin’s stories — a lot like life itself.

Ritsue Mishima

(b. 1962, Kyoto, Kyoto Prefecture Japan)

The Jōmon pots of ancient Japan are thought to be the oldest of all ceramics; and in some respects, over the course of millennia, they have never been surpassed. They are often crowned by complex structures that scholars liken to flames – though in fact, we have no idea what they are meant to convey. For the Japanese artist Ritsue Mishima, who works between Kyoto and the historic glass center of Murano, near Venice, the mysterious Jōmon wares are an unendingly rich source of inspiration. She inverts the material polarity of the historic pots, rendering the forms transparent, while retaining their muscular gestural quality and evocative abstraction. Her practice involves collaborating with the glassmiths of Murano and always working with clear glass. At The Gerald Luss House, the sculptures land with the impact of meteors. Yet they also find subtle resonances with the expansive glass walls of the house, and the natural environment beyond. Her assured and formally precise vessels for *chanoyu* (tea ceremony), rarely exhibited outside of Japan, are also placed throughout the house.

Paulo Monteiro

(b. 1961, São Paulo, Brazil)

São Paulo-based artist Paulo Monteiro began his practice in the 1980's by precariously assembling found wood into compositions that simultaneously suggest motion and collapse. In more recent years, he has turned to pieces of rope, scraps of wood, cardboard, aluminum strips and clay for the foundations of his sculptures in bronze and cast iron. He also generates form using clay, in a very primal way: splaying his slabs open and squeezing them with his hands until an animated interior reveals itself. The same conceptual unfolding process is applied to his painting technique, with inversions and constructions operating from the center. At The Gerald Luss House, he shows a large number of works, positioned both inside and outside the building. They serve as the exhibition's rhythm section, providing an irregular but ever-present reminder of the possibilities of material experimentation.

Kiva Motnyk

(b. 1977, New York, NY, USA)

Since 2014, Kiva Motnyk has been the head of Thompson Street Studio, drawing on a background in high fashion to create textiles infused with natural dyes derived from foraged plants. Her pieces incorporate naturally dyed fabrics from her own dyes as well as collected antique linens, silks and mud cloths from around the world. (She has a particular love for textiles that already include collage elements, like Korean *pojagi* and Japanese *boro*.) Motnyk has created five new works for the presentation at The Gerald Luss House, including three tapestries placed over each of the bedrooms beds, a patchwork piece folded as a hand towel in the bathroom, and — most spectacular of all — the aptly titled *Afternoon Light – Multi*, a hand-pieced fabric panel stretched within a wooden frame that fills the main bedroom window. It infuses the space with the transcendent polychrome of medieval stained glass, while also establishing a sympathetic conversation with Gerald Luss's gloriously externalized modernist architecture.

Paulo Nazareth

(b. 1977, Governador Valadares, MG, Brazil)

As visitors circulate in and around The Gerald Luss House, they may well fall into a reverie — so many beautiful things to look at, in such elevated surroundings. They'll likely be pulled up short by Paulo Nazareth's *Várzea*, which is composed of seven spheres cast in cement, each of which is punctured by a large knife. This raw and striking image is based on a memory of Nazareth's from childhood — of an old man in his neighborhood who would pierce leather soccer balls with a knife if they mistakenly landed on his property (the title *Várzea* refers to a marshland, the flat banks near a river which floods, but is also a slang word for an informal soccer game.). The work can be read as a commentary on the commercialization of global sport — as distinct from its vernacular register — but also evokes a broader set of issues concerning trauma, violence and the politics of public space.

Johnny Ortiz

(b. 1991, Taos, NM, USA)

Artist and chef Johnny Ortiz digs deep in his work — literally. His primary ceramic material is micaceous “wild clay,” harvested in his home state of New Mexico. The micaceous clay he uses is from the same terrain his ancestors, Taos pueblo, have dug for hundreds if not thousands of years. When he first re-discovered this resource, his first instinct was to leave it in the ground: it seemed, he says, “too stunning to do anything with.” But he gradually came to grips with it, seeing in the clay a means of connecting to his own ancestral past, as well as to present-day aesthetic possibilities. He makes the material his own through an elaborate series of procedures, first sanding the pots with rough sandstone and then burnishing with smoother river stone, pit firing them with red mountain cedar he gathered from the mountains he inhabits, and finally, “curing” them with elk marrow and beeswax. This presentation at The Gerald Luss House, undertaken on the heels of Ortiz's stint as a guest chef in the nearby Stone Barns Center and Blue Hill residency program, includes vessels fired during the 2021 Snow Moon.

Frances Palmer

(b. 1956, Morristown, NJ, USA)

Oxblood and oribe glaze; porcelain; wood and fire. These are the principle ingredients that combine in Frances Palmer's two large-scale vases at The Gerald Luss House. Bigger than her usual scale, these noble pots fairly burst with life, even without the quince blossoms that she has brought from her Connecticut garden to put into them. Give yourself the exquisite pleasure of attending closely to their surfaces: the slip-sliding color of Chinese glazes moving into one another, the roseate glow of the wood-fired white porcelain where it's exposed at the base. Don't miss, either, the other smaller works that Palmer has brought to the proceedings — among them triple-spouted vases reminiscent of 17th century Delftware tulipières. There could be no more satisfying juxtaposition than these earthy objects and the modernist rigor of the house: like Gerald Luss, Frances Palmer really, really knows how to live. It's a joy to behold.

Marina Perez Simão

(b. in 1981, Vitória, Brazil)

Marina Perez Simão is one of those artists whose work seems to require little explanation: gorgeously colored and freely rendered, her paintings may seem like simple pleasures. There is more going on here than meets the eye, however (a reminder that clarity, in art, is almost always hard won). Simão's compositions often look like cross-sections of a geological stratigraphy, and this reflects her overall process, which involves a self-conscious accumulation and juxtaposition of memories and images, which she then abstracts and layers. Her broad life experience of philosophy, literature and journalism affords her plenty to work with — ultimately arriving at a marriage of interior subjectivity and objective exteriority.

Yoichi Shiraishi

(b. 1981, Fukuoka Prefecture, Japan)

To make ceramics in Japan is on the one hand entirely natural — it is after all one of the nation's great artistic traditions — but also, for the same reason, an almost unimaginable challenge. With a legacy of so much beauty, depth and invention, what more is there to contribute? Every generation, every new potter, must answer this question. Many today find their path by going the long way around, finding a totally new way to give shape to clay. Case in point: Yoichi Shiraishi. Still young by the standards of the discipline (he turns forty this year), he makes his objects by first pulverizing blocks of clay-rich soil, then reconstituting them in molds, leaving the organic grain of the material intact. This process involves almost no direct contact with the clay, a striking departure from the medium's usual investment in tactility. It does however connect to another vaunted Japanese ceramic ideal, the embrace of irregularity and accident. Shiraishi brings this out further through firing at a high temperature, purposefully destroying the integrity of the molded form, and allowing the soil to express different colors based on its impurities, and form a rich texture of wrinkles and cracks. The final effect is ruinous, as in a dilapidated or collapsed building, but also has the resolution of an instinct followed to its ultimate conclusion. This is Shiraishi's first presentation of work in the United States.

Daniel Steegmann Mangrané

(b. 1977, Barcelona, Spain)

For Daniel Steegmann Mangrané, a Spanish artist based in Brazil, every threshold is an opportunity. As in the presentation at the Noyes House in New Canaan, Connecticut, he has articulated the landscape of The Gerald Luss House with his sculpture — forms that seem to realize an underlying, latent potentiality. The work in question, *Systemic Grid 124 (Window)*, responds to both the materiality and the syntax of Gerald Luss's modernist masterpiece. It belongs to a larger series of Mangrané's works, which are created by motifs that self-generate, departing from a very simple geometric drawing (a cell) that multiplies itself until patterns emerge, mimicking the process of organic reproduction. In this case, the modular permuting unit is a polygon of sheet glass, joined together into a quilt-like pattern and then mounted on a brutalist base. In addition to its immediate perceptual qualities, the work also alludes to the celebrated Brazilian designer and architect Lina Bo Bardi — specifically, her display of the permanent collection of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo.

While Bo Bardi's elements had the function of supporting paintings on a glass surface allowing viewers to see the back of the canvases, in *Systemic Grid 124 (Window)* Steegmann Mangrané makes transparency and distortion the pivot around which the work revolves, transforming the artwork from something to look at to something to look through.

Kishio Suga

(b. 1944, Morioka, Iwate Prefecture, Japan)

Kishio Suga was a leading figure in the short-lived but influential movement known as Mono-ha (literally, "School of Things") which was active in and around Tokyo in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Composed of natural and industrial materials such as stone, wood, sand, rope, and metal arranged into ephemeral, site-specific "situations," Suga's work investigates what he calls the "activation of existence," allowing the properties of a material to be revealed when put in dialogue with others. While continuing to create new works, Suga also frequently remakes his earlier installations, each time adapting its scale and constituent parts to the characteristics of the new site. *Conjoined Bodies* was first conceived for Kaneko Art Gallery, Tokyo, in 1985, where it consisted of a freestanding aluminum loop weighted down by blocks of stone. When Suga remade it outdoors for the Biennale of Middelheim in 1989, adapting the constituent parts to fit the space between two trees, it became an icon of his uniquely site specific and adaptive approach to art making. Inspired by the woods surrounding The Gerald Luss House, Suga has recreated this installation using locally sourced materials. The arcing rods of *Dispersed Spaces*, tethered to the ground by slabs of rock and concrete draw the viewer's attention to the invisible phenomena of air, weight, mass and gravity. Suga first conceived this work for the terrace at Blum & Poe, New York, on the occasion of his first New York solo exhibition in 2015, and has expanded it to fit the scale of grounds at Luss House.