

Bodies, woven myths focus of UAlbany art exhibits

By Katherine Kiessling | Feb 2, 2024



Left: Keltie Ferris, using his own body covered in oils and pigments, explores the phrase “body of work” in “To the Left,” “Rider” and “Company.” The trio is featured in “Body Maps,” running through April 3 at the University at Albany’s art museum. Right: “Times Square Crawl a.k.a. Meditation Square Pieces,” part of the late performance and visual artist Pope.L’s “eRacism” series,” hangs in “Body Maps.” Katherine Kiessling/Times Union

In the light of an afternoon snowstorm, rays of blue, red and yellow peek through the downstairs window of the University Art Museum, transforming the simple vinyl pixels into something spiritual. One floor up, the simple act of crawling reveals complex systems of oppression through the work of Pope.L, overwhelming a college student encountering the late performance artist’s work for the first time.

Both works are featured in the concurrent, sometimes interweaving shows “Barrow Parke: Systems and Mythologies” and “Body Maps,” running through April 3 at the University at Albany.

Upstairs, eight contemporary artists, all past guests for solo or group shows at UAlbany’s two-story art space, join works pulled from the museum’s collections for “Body Maps.” The show’s impetus was exploring connections between an untitled series of bodies outlined in progressively intensifying hues akin to a heat map by Marisol and “Autobiography” by Robert Rauschenberg, both from the museum’s collections, said Corinna Ripps Schaming, director and chief curator.

“There was this kind of thread in terms of the body — body becomes medium, use of the body and how the body maps territory or movement — that related to quite a few of the artists that we had exhibited in the past here,” Schaming said.

Among the returning artists is Rirkrit Tiravanija whose “Untitled I (the map of the land of feeling)” stretches along the back wall of the Nancy Hyatt Liddle Gallery with a collection of passports, visas, letters, maps and hand-drawn inky arrows forming an autobiographical timeline.

Just outside this wing are works that draw attention to, question and subvert everyday ideas of language, race and gender. In a trio by Keltie Ferris, he plays with the idea of a “body of work” and the physical body by using his own as a stamp. Kate Gilmore pushes woven baskets filled with green paint up a ramp in a 30-minute looped video titled “A Tisket, A Tasket,” playing with ideas of women’s work. A series of photographs of Pope.L, who died Dec. 23, 2023, captures “Times Square Crawl a.k.a. Meditation Square Pieces,” one of the artist’s 40 endurance crawls for his series “eRacism,” which he began in the late 1970s to magnify systems of inequity.

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“Pope.L was one of the first artists we were thinking about for the exhibition” said Robert Shane, associate director. “(This series) is a disruption of how one normally moves or behaves in this space ... There’s a political impetus to the work.”

Downstairs, “Systems and Mythologies” marks the University Art Museum debut of Barrow Parke, the moniker for the married duo Mark Barrow and Sarah Parke. The show features canvases intricately woven by Parke and painted by Barrow to create layered explorations of craft as art, oral traditions, creation myths, gender and science, as well as earlier works and process notes.

“I’ve always been interested in weaving,” said Parke in a 2023 interview with the Times Union. “I like the idea of making something tactile and making it from nothing, (from) just a thread. Using this system, you can make all these different structures (and) patterns.”

The museum had kept tabs on Barrow Parke for several years, waiting for the right time to showcase their work, Schaming said. “Systems and Mythologies” marks the duo’s first solo exhibition in a museum; a catalog edited by Shane is available now.

Also included in a collection are a selection of works commissioned by the museum. Custom wallpapers wrap the L-shaped freestanding wall in various pastel-hued patterns pulled from the myth-inspired pieces. Sheets of vinyl printed and installed by No Name Graphics were carefully designed and trimmed to look as though each half-inch square was individually placed, transforming one of the arched downstairs windows into a pixelated stained glass window.

“Systems and Mythologies,” which opened on Aug. 7, 2023, will be the focus of two upcoming events. On March 9, Barrow Parke will lead a walkthrough of their exhibit followed by a signing of their catalog. On March 12, curator, art historian and author Glenn Adamson, who is renowned for his scholarship on the intersections of craft and contemporary art, will lead a gallery talk responding to the exhibit.