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Meet the San Diego
Art Prize Finalists



ONES TO WATCH

Meet the rising stars who are being awarded the 2019 San Diego Art Prize.

By Keri Bridgwater

From striking portrait photography that explores race and identity to visually translating ideas about space and the universe, this year's shortlisted San Diego Art Prize finalists focus on a diverse range of narratives and themes. Established in 2006 to promote public interest in contemporary art, the San Diego Art Prize is a prestigious annual award, and being named a finalist is a significant honor for local artists. Nominated by prominent community members and selected for outstanding creativity over three years, this year's finalists have exhibited at local galleries, including Bread & Salt and the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, and as far afield as Miami, Italy and Copenhagen. After showing at Art San Diego in October, Alanna Airtram, Griselda Rosas, Kaori Fukuyama and Melissa Walter are preparing for the final San Diego Art Prize exhibition at

the Athenaeum Music & Arts Library next May. In the meantime, allow us to introduce you to these four very talented women.

Influenced by painters' use of chiaroscuro (contrasting light and shadow), portrait photographer Alanna Airtram explores narratives surrounding the representation of black culture and identity in fine art. Flowers play an especially significant role in Airtram's *The Golden Age*—photographs of African American men and women reimagined in the style of 17th century Dutch Renaissance paintings. "I've always been interested in people, their stories and how we relate to each other. My use of flowers symbolizes life, beauty, abundance, growth and potential—a testament to how something so fragile can also be strong."

Accustomed to "color, chaos, movement and culture of constant



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—GRISELDA ROSAS »

From top: Alanna Airtram’s “Queen Mary” (2017) from The Golden Age; Melissa Walter, “Of All Things” (2019), site-specific installation at ICE Gallery; Griselda Rosas, “Untitled” (stitching-painting over textile and paper). Opposite page: Kaori Fukuyama, “Wave of Change” (2019, polycarbonate panels and paint), site-specific installation at North Park Target.

migration between the U.S. and Mexico,” Griselda Rosas is another finalist whose work addresses issues of identity and ethnicity. Perhaps best known for her colorful stitch-paintings, Rosas—who embroiders over watercolor and acrylic paintings using handmade thread from Mexico—learned textile techniques and handweaving during graduate school in Oaxaca. The Tijuana native, who now works full time from her Seaport Village studio, was excited to see an all-women lineup of San Diego Art Prize finalists. “We create contemporary artworks that communicate in an entirely different way; it’s beautiful to see so many talented women represented this year.”

Originally from Kumamoto, Japan, Kaori Fukuyama explores interactions of color, light and shadow through her paintings, sculptures and site-specific installations—the most recent of which is “Wave of Change” in North Park. Created to honor the spirit of community evolution, the multicolored display changes dynamically depending on the time of day or season. Fukuyama, who also teaches teen art classes at the Athenaeum Music & Arts Library, describes her process as playful and experimental. “The pursuit of art is a lifetime journey with continual growth. The more I chase it, the more interesting and challenging the process becomes.”

Former graphic designer and science illustrator for NASA’s Chandra X-ray Observatory and team member of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, Melissa Walters also creates visually striking sculptural drawings (often layered paper with ink) comprised of detailed yet minimalist geometric patterns. Supernovas and neutron stars have all been visually depicted by the artist, who constructed more than 3,000 paper pyramids for her most recent large-scale installation, “Of All Things at Ice Gallery.” “I enjoy how the viewer engages with my work as they move around it. Even the smaller drawings force intimacy; they need to get close up to see and understand the different perspectives.” *San Diego Art Prize Exhibition, May 9-July 4, 2020, Athenaeum Music & Arts Library, La Jolla, lathenaeum.org* ■

