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# ART NEW ENGLAND

CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE



MARCH/APRIL  
2021

\$5.95 US  
\$7.00 Canada



The Emerging Artists Issue

## UNMASKED: ARTFUL RESPONSES TO THE PANDEMIC

Southern Vermont Arts Center • Manchester, VT • [svac.org](http://svac.org) • Through March 28, 2021

The exhibition, *Unmasked: Artful Responses to the Pandemic*, is ambitious and exceptionally successful in its depth and reach. Forty-two local, national, and international artists were chosen by curator, Alison Crites—their works as diverse as the parts of the world from which they are drawn.

A number of painters provide intense, personal expressions. Renée Bouchard, who is studying for her MFA while homeschooling a young son, incorporates him as an artistic partner. *My Son's Tracing of Me (Homage to Ana Mendieta)* is particularly striking. The outline of the artist's body is drawn with a thick black line, and a paw-like hand surrounding a center of brilliant orange and mixed media collage.

Barbara Ishikura paints personal, bold portraits that reveal nuanced relationships. In

*Kaira Quarantined*, a woman sits in an armchair, staring into space with unseeing eyes, directed more inward than outwards. Her right hand, larger than life, rests powerless at her side as if indicating that there is nothing she can do. *Journey*, by Irene Cole, uses Japanese brushwork to create a haunting, isolated figure. Elizabeth Fram's letter-sized portraits are drawn from "selfies" sent to her by friends.

The Shelter in Place Gallery, conceived by Eben Haines and Delaney Dameron, is a brilliant accommodation to the times. Artists create miniature works that are "installed" in a model of a gallery, then posted on Instagram and Facebook. Here, a full-scale work is displayed along with a photo of the installation. Barry Hazard's stunning sculpture, *Ice Calving*, is an iconic land-seascape that projects from the wall.

As part of the Denver-based Mask Project, Trey Duvall created *Incalculable Loss*, made of dozens of hospital wristbands. Each band has the name of someone who died of COVID-19, their age, and place of death. *Mask Against Hate*

*Virus* in the form of a pig's snout, by Sammy Lee, brings attention to the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes during the pandemic. The pig, an auspicious animal in Korean culture, functions as an antidote to the derogatory phrases that ring the animal's neck.

The *Tiny Pricks Project*, initiated by Diana Weymar from British Columbia, presents an entire roomful of hand-stitched pieces that depict statements about the pandemic, some political, others personal. The project now encompasses more than 4,000 global contributions.

Carrying on the tradition of needlework, Susan White's *Soul Passage*, is embroidered on her grandmother's curtain. Hanging before a window, the white thread, on white fabric, against the winter landscape beyond, shares the poem, "Lodestar," by Alice Walker. The effect is thought provoking and transcendent, suggesting the fragile division between the present and the afterlife.

Artist books figure prominently. Dana Walrath displays massive folios from the *Book of Genocides* project. The more than three-foot-tall books have two distinct sides: one featuring text, the other drawings. Each page is divided in thirds. Visitors are encouraged to flip the pages, mixing stories, exposing the repetitions and commonalities. *My Endless Numbered Days* is the result of Helen Ellis' meditative practice during the pandemic, of making a minia-

ture book each day out of found materials.

A Vermont-based collective, Photographers' Workroom, encourages visual conversations through "call and response." One image elicits a response by another artist. The paired images are intuitively related, often by color or theme. Susan Weiss, an independent photographer based in Vermont and San Francisco, photographs ubiquitous toilet paper rolls, and cogently manipulates the images in the manner of Warhol, Sally Mann, and James Turrell.

*Delineations*, Ross Sheehan's cartography-inspired painting, incorporates the names of streets, political comments, and random thoughts. He states that his daily walks around Vergennes, VT, are a metaphor for the pandemic. Not knowing what awaits is much like living in a virus-infused world.

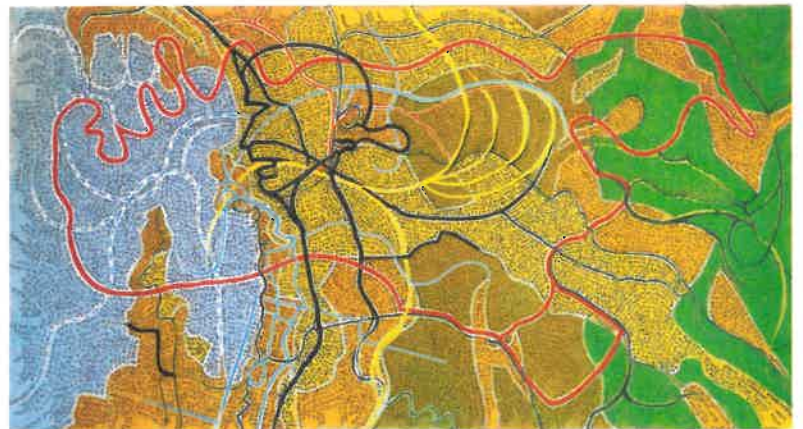
Patty Hudak is a portraitist of the inner landscape of the pandemic's effects. Her black-and-white paintings are mood pieces, with nature becoming a metaphor for a state of mind. *Imagined Forest*, an eleven-foot-wide installation in the main stairwell, is a multi-layered environment of Japanese paper in shades of blue, black, and white. The magnificent, light infused piece alludes to the complexity and beauty of life itself.

*Unmasked: Artful Responses to the Pandemic* is expertly curated and presented. *Quarantine Stories*, its Response Station, offers visitors an interactive opportunity to draw, write, and share their own experiences. The exhibit is a ray of light in this dark pandemic winter. Witnessing the visual results of the art-making process allows us to explore our own states of being even more deeply, fostering healing and hope.

—B. Amore



Renée Bouchard, *My Son's Tracing of Me (Homage to Ana Mendieta)*, 2020, watercolor, acrylic, and hay on paper. Photo courtesy of the artist and Southern Vermont Arts Center.



Ross Sheehan, *Delineations*, 2020, oil, oil pastel, acrylic, and pencil on canvas. Photo courtesy of the artist and Southern Vermont Arts Center.