(Re)Work It!

WOMEN ARTISTS ON WOMEN’S LABOR
This booklet has been printed to accompany the exhibition (Re)Work It! Women Artists on Women’s Labor, held at the Mattatuck Museum from January 21 to May 19, 2024.

The Mattatuck Museum is an art and regional history museum on the Green in downtown Waterbury, starting out as a historical society in 1877. The Museum opened its first display hall in 1912 and has been exhibiting art ever since. The museum collects and exhibits American art and cultural history – with a focus on the history of the Naugatuck Valley and the artists of Connecticut.

This exhibition was made possible by loans from the following institutions:

Art Bridges Foundation
New Britain Museum of American Art
William Benton Museum of American Art

Support provided by:

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Always, 2021. Oil on panel, found object, sound, 40 x 60 x 5.5 in. Loan courtesy of Amar Singh, image courtesy of Pilar Corrias Gallery

Back Cover: Robyn Tsinnajinnie (Diné/Navajo, b. 1997)
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Bea Nettles
Alison Saar

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May DeViney
Kate Kretz
Marta María Pérez Bravo
Jessica Somers

Nina Bentley
Lesley Dill
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Linda Stein

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Camille Eskell
Gisela Charfauros McDaniel
Sawyer Rose
Judith Thorpe

Natalie Baxter
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Robyn Tsinnajinnie
Nafis M. White
Alison Saar (American, b. 1956) *Rise*, 2020. 2-pass linoleum print on letterpress. 11 x 8.5 in. Mattatuck Museum; Gift of Leslie Ross Robertson, 2021.15.1
Throughout history and continuing today, biology and society have conspired so that people who identify or are perceived as women are required to perform labor in its many manifestations. Although gender expectations in the United States have changed drastically over the past century, disparities in expected forms of labor continue to persist both within families and society at large.

This exhibition is a reprisal of a smaller show held at the Mattatuck Museum in the fall of 2022 that featured a range of contemporary, female-identifying artists whose work explores the many types of labor that women are often expected to manage. In revisiting the topic, we call this exhibition (Re)Work It!, and this second iteration delves more deeply into the subject by incorporating a wider range of voices and perspectives.

Organized into rough thematic sections, the exhibition explores labors related to the body, the home, and public life. Yet, the intersectional nature of women’s labor results in layered connections and resonances among the works, telling a nuanced story about the work that women do. Many artists engage with western beauty standards and how women navigate these expectations with respect to their ethnic and racial heritage and their changing body over the course of the life cycle. Managing family demands, including caring for the home and loved ones, career demands, and the intersection of the two are recurrent themes. Several artworks contend with the active labor of feminism, and the ways that art can be a platform for that work.

Formal qualities in the artwork themselves contribute to the conversation about women’s labor. Throughout the exhibition scale acts as mode of resistance against gendered expectations, as artists make statements about the power to demand attention, either through large scale or intimate detail. Many of the artworks in this show unapologetically take up space; through their size, they advocate for their right to command attention and be part of the conversation. Conversely, several pieces contain intricate details that require close looking and quiet contemplation. The labor of innovation is evident in several works that incorporate pioneering artistic processes and/or ideas. Labor itself is inherent in many of the pieces, as they were produced through time-consuming and labor-intensive artistic processes.

This brochure contains reflections from five artists who discuss their work and their experiences with respect to the exhibition themes. Sawyer Rose creates artwork that visualizes women’s labor inequity, highlighting this pervasive issue and making it comprehensible. Bhasha Chakrabarti discusses the role of fabric in her work as a metaphor for both physical and emotional mending – work that is often relegated to women. Through the metaphor of women carrying objects on their heads, SoHyun Bae comments on the beauty and burden of caregiving that women give to their families and communities. Kate Kretz reflects on the labor of “having it all” and the strain that overachieving and perfectionism have on the body and spirit. Inspired by her family’s immigrant background, Ruth Rodriguez addresses the exhaustion involved in trying to satisfy all the demands placed on modern women.

Through intimate reflections, these artists reveal the complexities of being a woman in 21st century America, of managing the many roles women are expected to play and the many forms of labor they are required to manage. Overall, the artists in this exhibition articulate a range of perspectives through their diverse age, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and geography. Taken as a whole, the artwork by this collection of female-identifying artists broadens the definition and understanding of women’s labor in 21st century America.
My work on *The Carrying Stones Project* celebrates the strength of working women while shining a light on the systemic inequities that women face in the workplace, at home, and in their communities. Women’s labor inequity is a complicated, systemic problem, and this uneven playing field affects women not just economically, but also physically and emotionally.

I wanted to present my research about this data-dense, academic, and sometimes unwelcome topic, in a fresh, creative way that could excite people—or at least pique their curiosity—to invite learning and hopefully effect real-world change. I use data visualization to translate data provided by a diverse sample of real-world working women into artworks that tell their stories.

I create large-scale, attention-grabbing sculptures that draw people in and ask them to pause. As viewers engage with my artworks, they are educated about how these critical women’s issues—the state of women in the workplace, how women of color are disproportionately affected in the workforce, and women’s unpaid labor burden—affect our society in powerful ways. Ultimately, my sculptures aim to spark connection and conversation, engaging both the mind and the heart.

— Sawyer Rose
The centering of cloth in my work is the centering of embodied touch – both violent and erotic – gesturing to ruptures in society and the possibilities of mending. Mending is primarily associated with clothing, but the concept is also extended to relationships. Unlike many other forms of repair, the slow, quiet, and often collective process of darning, piecing, and stitching damaged clothing is often relegated to women and occurs in domestic spaces. Instead of a mundane and purely utilitarian act, I see mending as a creative gesture that confronts fragility, vulnerability, and impermanence. It embodies hope and continuity in spite of rifts, and foregrounds the feminine and the intimate. By pulling a thread from this private form of repair to suture frays in the public domain, I attempt to rethink societal scars to transport us into new futures without erasing the past.

Even when my artwork is grounded in local materials and symbols, it speaks to broader issues by participating in global conversations on race, gender, and power. I explore how art can function as a mode of public discourse rather than being a self-contained discipline.

– Bhasha Chakrabarti

My work has always been an examination of the human condition through the lens of the female experience. As women, we are caregivers. As daughters, wives, mothers, and grandmothers (and friends), we care for those we love in all kinds of ways. We are the pillars of our families.

“Bearing the Burden” series examines this caregiving cycle with imagery from the distant past – a time and place once occupied by my grandparents who I never met. It contains images of women from the Joseon Era of Korea (1392-1910) who carry objects on their head in paintings that resemble black and white sepia photos from the turn of the century. As a symbolic gesture of what a woman bears in her lifetime, these physical burdens become a metaphor for what women carry. I also left room for mystery and nuance, where great burdens can become great gifts.

In general, I am interested in questioning from the inside. Through other painting series I have given presence to subjugated women in history (An Ode to the Women of Josun Dynasty 1997 - ), explored the Jewish mystical understanding of why there suffering in the world (Wrapped Shards 2002 - ), searched for self-preservation and human dignity (Persimmons and Birds 2007 - 2008), contemplated immortality and the strength in vulnerability (Jasper Lake 2009 - 2014), and examined the precariousness of life (Nature of Water 2015 - ). As a woman, I bring a particular perspective to this work – my desire is to get at the essence of things, the elemental, the essential.

– SoHyun Bae
I had a blueprint for the woman I wanted to be. An academic, an activist, a serious, respected artist, a writer, a magical Mom, unconventionally well-dressed, and a great cook who throws terrific parties. Intellectual, but sensuous and fun, speak French, but hopefully learn one or two other languages before I die. Live abroad several times. Create an unusual, enchanting home. Win grants, present papers, be an inspiring public speaker. Spend 8 hours decorating cakes, master French baking, and all the European butter-creams. Be quintessentially feminine, but ace male skills like changing a tire, rewiring a lamp, playing pool, shooting guns, and flying airplanes. Be continuously innovative with materials, and make some art that no one else can.

I did those things (with more or less success), and was also constantly told that I did not know how to relax. Indeed, as women we are often driven to “have it all” and ensure that we are doing it all perfectly along the way. However, I was recently diagnosed as 2E (gifted with autism), and I realize that I have labored compulsively, as a form of self-regulation, often to the point of injury. I now understand that I have been a workaholic my entire adult life. That’s a popular term, but few understand that it is a serious addiction like any other, and it can actually break you. Your body and brain just say “no” one day, stop, and you cannot go back to the way things were. I am renegotiating my relationship to labor.

– Kate Kretz

Kate Kretz (American, b. 1963) Une Femme D’Un Certain âge, 2014. Grey hair of many women embroidered on black cotton. 33 x 22 in. From the collection of James Swope and Scott Robertson
The traditional expectation is that a woman will be feminine, cook, clean, have a career, and maintain the home, but there is little support for her to achieve this without complete exhaustion. The “Exhausted Women” series touches on the legacy of colonialism, inequities among socioeconomic classes, the value of labor, what labor has value, and what art doesn’t have value. In particular, this series is inspired by modern and traditional expectations for women of Dominican American heritage, and by the experiences of women who inspire me.

My mother and grandmother immigrated to the United States from the Dominican Republic and labored for 30 years in garment factories. Inspired by the materials and emotions of their experience, I create intimate and vibrant spaces and paintings that comment on the labor of being an immigrant woman in America. This series is about how all women struggle with the complex demands placed on them, but emphasizes the extreme difficulty faced by immigrants and women of color.

– Ruth Rodriguez
**EXHIBITION CHECKLIST**

**SoHyun Bae** (American, b. 1967)

*Water Girls*, 2017
Rice paper and pure pigment on canvas
48 x 36 in.
Private Collection, New York

**Natalie Baxter** (American, b. 1985)

*Housecoat VI*, 2021
Found quilts, graphic t-shirt, fabric, jeans, bed sheets, hospital receiving blanket, cotton batting, plastic zipper
66 x 36 x 4 in.

*Selections from “Ribbons” series*, 2020-2023
Fabric, cotton batting, and thread
Variable
Collection of the artist

**Linda Behar** (American, b. Venezuela 1970)

*Kylix*, 2022
Woodcut print
24 x 36 in.

*Warrior*, 2022
Woodcut print and watercolor
20 x 28 in.
Collection of the artist

**Bhasha Chakrabarti** (American, b. 1991)

*Scars of Labor*, 2018
Fabric, embroidery thread, metal and wooden embroidery hoops
Varied, 4-7” diameter
Courtesy of the Artist

**Judy Chicago** (American, b. 1939)

*Big Blue Pink*, 1971
Sprayed acrylic lacquer on acrylic
96 x 96 in.
Art Bridges

**Liz Cohen** (American, b. 1973)

*Untitled (Instant Photograph: Self Portrait with Firefighters, Dalmatian, and San Francisco Fire Department)*, 2002
C-print on paper
4 x 5 in.
Mattatuck Museum, Gift of Donald Tagliatella and Leslie Kruse, Middlebury, CT, 2022 2023.11.1

**May DeViney** (American, b. 1948)

*Madonna of Eternal Drudgery*, 2012
Acrylic on canvas over wood
19.5 x 12 in.
Collection of the artist

**Nina Bentley** (American, b. 1939)

*Corporate Executive Wife’s Service Award Bracelet*, 1999
Plated silver assemblage
42 x 42 x 24 in.
New Britain Museum of American Art
Gift of Jennifer Bentley, 2001.32

**Lesley Dill** (American, b. 1950)

*A Word Made Flesh, Front*, 1994
Photolithograph with intaglio and thread
32 x 24 in.
Benton Museum of Art, Museum Purchase, 1995.7.c
Camille Eskell (American, b. 1954)

*Dis-Miss: Let me Entertain YOU*, 2022
Silk, Digital image, embellished trims, mixed media
24 x 20 x 8 in.
Collection of the Artist

Guerrilla Girls (b. 1985)

*The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist*, 1988
Ink on paper
25 x 31 x 2 in.
Benton Museum of Art, Purchase from the Contemporary World Art Fund, 2016.2.18

Women in America Earn Only 1/3 of What Men Do, 1985
Ink on paper
25 x 31 x 2 in.
Benton Museum of Art, Purchase from the Contemporary World Art Fund, 2016.2.6

Jennifer Knaus (American, b. 1962)

*Legs*, 2000
Oil on linen
12 x 16 in.

Kate Kretz (American, b. 1963)

*Hag*, 2013
Cotton embroidery on grey hair, velvet, convex glass
3 x 3 in.

Simone Leigh (American, b. 1967)

*Untitled*, no date
Ceramic and raffia
24 x 24 x 18 in.
On loan to the Mattatuck Museum from the Powe Family in honor of Andre Ricardo

Gisela Charfauros McDaniel

(American, b. 1995)

*Always*, 2021
Oil on panel, found object, sound
40 x 60 x 5.5 in.
Loan courtesy of Amar Singh

Bea Nettles (American, b. 1946)

*Hatched*, 1979
Gum bichromate on vinyl substrate
20 x 24 in.
Mattatuck Museum, Gift of the Artist, 2022, 2023.4.1
EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Judith O’Rourke (American, b. 1960)

*Puberty*, 1996
Vitreograph print from glass plates
30 x 40 in.
Gift of Judith O’Rourke, New Britain Museum of American Art, 2014.10.78

Marta María Pérez Bravo (Cuban, b. 1959)

*Viven del cariño (Living with my loved ones)*, 1995
Photogravure
37 x 29 in.
The William Benton Museum of Art Membership Fund, 2000.60

Ruth Rodriguez (American, b. 1985)

*Yellow Exhausted Woman Reclining on Couch*, 2018
Acrylic, flashe and fabric on linen
35 x 54 in.
Collection of the artist

Sawyer Rose (American, b. 1974)

*Tracy (from ‘Carrying Stones Project’)*, 2017
Mortar, brass tubes, silver solder, and wood
Archival pigment print, edition of 3
Variable dimensions
Courtesy of the Artist

Alison Saar (American, b. 1956)

*Rise*, 2020
2-pass linoleum print on letterpress
11 x 8.5 in.
Mattatuck Museum; Gift of Leslie Ross Robertson, 2021.15.1

Lorna Simpson (American, b. 1960)

*Corridor (Stairs)*, 2003
Digital C-Print
27 x 72
Collection of Raymond Learsy

Jessica Somers (American, b. 1976)

*Nesting (from the series “Becoming We”),* 2010
20 x 24 in.

*Paper House 12*, 2012
24 x 20 in.

*Caregiver (from the series “My Trinity is a Fortress”)*, 2022
20 x 24 in.

*My Trinity is a Fortress*, 2022
24 x 20 in.
Hand-made ziatypes on salted gelatin paper
Courtesy of the artist

Linda Stein (American, b. 1943)

*Knight of the Book 526*, 2006-2007
Wood, stone, metal, and paint
50 x 18 x 8 in.
Mattatuck Museum, Gift of Raymond Learsy under the auspices of Have Art: Will Travel! Inc., 2023; 2024.7.1

Judith Thorpe (American, b. 1951)

*Aphrodite #1*, 2012
Inkjet print on Epson exhibition fiber paper
27 x 20 in.
Robyn Tsinnajinnie (Diné/Navajo, b. 1997)
*Spick and Span*, 2022
Acrylic on canvas
34 x 44 in.
Mattatuck Museum Purchase, Acquisitions Fund, 2022, 2023.1.1

Nafis M. White (American, b. 1977)
*A Burst of Light (Black)*, 2018
Hair, Embodied Knowledge, Ancestral Recall, Audacity of Survival, Bobby Pins
94 x 48 x 11 in.
Collection of Cade Tompkins Projects

Jessica Somers (American, b. 1976)
*My Trinity is a Fortress*, 2022. 24 x 20 in.
Hand-made ziatypes on salted gelatin paper. Courtesy of the Artist