

SUNDAY

ARTS & STYLE



Carolina Yrarrázaval's handwoven pieces hang in the front hall at browngrotta arts.

Tom Grotta / Contributed photos

EXPLORING CHANGE

BROWNGROTTA ARTS HOSTS ART SHOW ON ADAPTATION

By Andrea Valluzzo

Even though art-making is mostly a solitary pursuit involving artists ensconced in their studios — naturally socially distanced — the past year has had a significant impact on artists. The gallerists at browngrotta arts in Wilton decided to look at changes across the board, not just the pandemic, as a sweeping theme in their annual spring “Art in the Barn” exhibition. This year’s show, “Adaptation: Artists Respond to Change,” will open on Saturday, May 8 and will run through May 16. The exhibition surveys how the nearly 50 fiber artists represented were affected by changes in their personal lives and work practices or because of changed circumstances. In some cases, artists have moved to a new country, have endured health challenges or have even lost a kiln in a mudslide. Gallerists Tom Grotta and Rhonda Brown said even though they have been working with these artists for some time, they were surprised by what they

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“Pangaea” by Blair Tate

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Art

GALLERY HOSTS SHOW ON ADAPTATION



"Sea Play" by Pat Campbell.

Tom Grotta / Contributed photos

CHANGE

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learned. With a strong online presence, the gallery's audience is mostly global, as is its stable of artists (only a few are based in the U.S.).

"We started thinking about how many of our artists had over time different changes in their lives that have resulted in a change in their work," Brown said.

Noting that one thing they like about the artists they represent is that they don't tend to do the same kind of work, Grotta said artists surprised them when submitting work for this exhibition. "We got different bodies of work that we did not expect," he said. Some did not have access to their studios "so they made different works than if they had been in their studios."

The contrast in art styles, even by the same artist, is apparent in the work of Korean-Swedish artist Jin-Sook So, whose two pieces here are from stainless-steel mesh material sewn inside vividly colored cloth. They are on view in the front hall of the barn (and on the catalog's title page). Resembling a folded square and rectangle respectively, the works are quite dramatic and reminded the artist, during their creation, of her childhood and playing with bojagi, a traditional Korean wrapping cloth. "The pieces are clearly the same artist but they do seem to be coming from different places," Brown said.

Pennsylvania artist Lewis Knauss poignantly noted he found it difficult to focus on his work in the early months of the pandemic, so he tackled a project he had been procrastinating for about two decades.

"As the pandemic went on into months and then a year, I was trying to do some work - and my work is very time involved - and I just could not sit there and do it, so I started cleaning out the studio," he said. "The first thing that I dealt with was 40 years' worth of slides, which was thousands and thousands of them."

Over the years, Knauss kept reference slides of landscapes he's photographed as texture inspiration for his art. In this recent clean-out, he transformed them into a new work of art he



"Old Technology Landscape" by Lewis Knauss. The piece consists of the artist's old photo slides.

calls "Old Technology Landscape," made from woven and knotted linen, paper twine and Ektachrome slides. The slides are random but woven together in a manner where they create a landscape made out of images of landscapes. "I could remember all those travel experiences so it was like sitting and seeing my entire life pass before me as I constructed that piece," he said. Given that digital imaging has subsumed slides as a technology, this artwork in particular references change and evolution. It also is the first time he has incorporated slides in his art.

The evolution of artmaking can also be seen in Blair Tate's work, which is represented with two pieces here. "Small Gemelli," the earlier of the two dating to

the 1970s, is one of her first works to focus on weaving and can be likened to words making up sentences the way the woven strips make up the artwork. Tate created "Pangaea," which is being exhibited side by side with "Small Gemelli," during the pandemic; it shares that same realization, and is a continuation of her weaving technique.

While the pandemic is but one of several examples of change the exhibition explores, Brown noted several artists commented on how their mental state was impacted by the pandemic.

Japanese artist Hisako Sekijima said she had to change her work process in order to overcome the stress. Some also made art differently, relieved of keeping a certain level of inventory or

meeting gallery deadlines.

American artist Mary Merkel-Hess did a very minimalist piece for this exhibit that was much more time consuming than normal but it is a piece that she did more for herself than meeting a normal gallery deadline, Grotta explained. "I have wanted to be more minimal for some time now," the artist is quoted in the catalog. "The pandemic lockdown provided the time to focus on that."

Hours are 10 to 5 daily with a max of 15 guests at any given time, timed reservation tickets are being sold. For more information about the exhibition, visit browngrotta.com.

Andrea Valluzzo is a freelance writer.