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NEWS

Uncharted: Mira Burack

MAY 12, 2020

"Uncharted" is a new interview series created in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. We're talking to people in the New Mexico arts world and beyond to see how the community is navigating this unprecedented health crisis. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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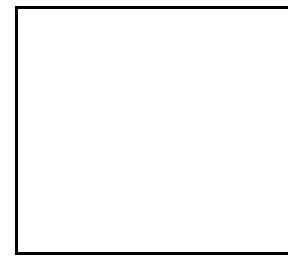


Mira Burack. Photo: Eric Swanson.

Mira Burack is an artist living in the mountains of New Mexico.

Daisy Geoffrey: Your work has a lot to do with the relationship between ourselves and our environments. Now that we're all spending more time at home, do you have any advice for people who are developing that relationship for the first time?

Mira Burack: We're sort of reevaluating our relationship to time and space right now, and each other. Time was our currency before this, and still is, so it's an opportunity to reclaim our time even amidst our concerns. I certainly don't want to romanticize this at all, because we have very basic needs we're trying to care for. The emotional and intellectual energy that we are all putting towards trying to care of ourselves and those around us is at a maximum. That is a beautiful thing. If I imagine all of our hearts



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caring so much together at one time, that is such a powerful force. I don't want that to be underestimated, all the energy that we're putting towards each other in that way, and towards our own basic needs.

There is one phrase that's been in my work that feels like a powerful mantra I'm focusing on: it's the idea that the earth is our first bed. I'm going to be doing a rest workshop with CCA [the Center for Contemporary Arts, Santa Fe] with that title. I also found that this idea of us being held by the earth, and when we're trying to take care of those basic physiological needs—they're all connected to the earth.

We surrender when we lay down and rest. Because there's so much uncertainty right now, you kind of throw your hands up and say you have to be here now in this present moment. And that is a form of surrendering that we're used to doing at the end of the day when we lay down. So it's about connecting that bed/earth, the earth being our bed, and being able to handle that unknown and that surrender.

The earth can hold us, I find a lot of comfort in that right now.

Can you tell me about the performance you did recently with NMSU in relation to their exhibition *Labor: Motherhood & Art in 2020*?

I formed an artist-mother group about a year ago, and we have about 33 women across the state of New Mexico. We've been supporting each other at this time, and I came up with the idea for us all to do a writing project. Out of that, twelve of us ended up doing short essays that we performed on Zoom in collaboration with NMSU Art Museum. It was called *Alone Together*.

Mothers understand the negotiating of alone-togetherness every day. Especially artist-mothers that are trying to carve out time for

their work and families at the same time. So I thought we might have some wisdom to share with others who aren't as necessarily always negotiating that territory. I was bowled over by the writings that came out of it.

Were there any lessons or messages that particularly resonated with you?

There was a rawness to the writing that really embodied a range of feelings—sadness, gratefulness, anger, fear, love, and humor. It's comforting that our culture is more open to sharing our emotional lives at this time. To know how we're all really feeling rather than getting heady and rational, and honoring the intensity of what we're feeling.

Were there any delights or surprises to doing this online that you experienced?

One of the obvious beautiful things is the ability for people all over the world to watch live. The whole world is also our audience right now, and if we had been in the museum doing these readings, sure they could see a recording, but it wouldn't be a live experience in the same way. Our ability to share more broadly is an outcome of that. Also, performing it was a very different thing. A lot of these women, including me, may not have done this in public, in a museum. But because there was a safety net in being able to do it from your domestic space, in a way maybe some of the more introverted people who aren't celebrated as much in our culture—we praise extroverts a lot more—maybe we can hear more of these softer, quieter voices that have just as much to say.

What is the role of art in the time of crisis?

In the time of crisis, I think all of those physiological things that we need at a basic level are the most important thing. Any sort of outer activity should just be nurturing and healing, either to you individually, to those that you love, or to your community if you can extend that far. Each person has to ask themselves, "What is

going to be most nurturing and comforting to me?” Everyone can respond to that in different ways.

The arts can fit into any aspect of that, just like any other creative endeavor. Creative endeavors have no limits to them, and they can permeate the most practical of situations.



Mira Burack, *The Earth is Our First Bed*, 2020, photography collage (photographs of bedding) installation, paint, 96 x 96 in. Photo: Eric Swanson.

What do you hope for your children as you come out of this—to learn, feel, or experience?

This will sound clichéd, but I just want them to feel love and not worry or fear. I want them to feel their basic needs are taken care of. I do hope for the days when they can hug, kiss, hold hands, and dance with their friends because I think social isolation for children in some ways may be even harder than for adults. Just the ability to play together.

How is this pandemic affecting the way you see the world, and how will that translate into your art?

Something I wrote in my essay was about getting in touch with this unseen world, or the things that are invisible to us but are permeating our lives. Viruses are invisible, economies are invisible... and yet invisible things are real. So I feel like there's a unique opportunity to use that as a jumping-off point to get in touch with our intrinsic, intuitive nature that tells us that we are all interconnected and inseparable. That's a very powerful place and something that isn't always talked about.

What aspect of going to see art in person again are you most looking forward to?

I'm looking forward to all the basic senses being satisfied, all at once. Where we don't feel like we're relegated to a few senses, so we can feel fully alive again in that way.

Where are you finding joy at this time?

I'm finding joy in all of the moments when I can be right here in the present. That is where joy exists. Oftentimes it might be my children's laughter that will bring me there. Or just laying down on the ground. When we don't know so much about the future, then the here and now is our joy.



Mira Burack, *From the bed to the mountain*, 2015, photography collage wall installation (of bedding photographs), found wood table, paint, botanical sculptures and corresponding photography collages of botanicals, dimensions variable.

DAISY GEOFFREY

Daisy Geoffrey is an editorial assistant and the marketing manager at Southwest Contemporary.

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