

THE BODY POLITIC

In *Full and Pure*, Green Family Art Foundation takes a powerful view of gender fluidity.

BY EVE HILL-AGNUS

In *Blueprints*, Linus Borgo offers a moving self-portrait. Nothing deviates from the classical painting genre save the gender presented. The figure stands reflected in a hotel bathroom mirror, and the objects on the sink are both mundane and intimate: toothbrush, shaving cream, bottles of medication. But the transgender artist bears breasts and also the shadow of a mustache. Thumb tucked into the band of sweatpants, he gazes out, caught in transition, calmly, deliberately visible, vulnerable. This is the new frontier of intimacy, as explored in *Full and Pure: Body, Materiality, Gender*, the exhibition currently on view at the Green Family Art Foundation.

The Greens find themselves with the leeway to tackle a subject meagerly covered in museums that can prove polarizing. In planning the exhibition, they tapped guest curator Mara Hassan, who is completing a dissertation at Stanford University that explores conceptual portraiture and transgender abstractions. Beautifully, thoughtfully, philosophically orchestrated, hers is “a show on the mutability of form and the corporeal,” one “that questions gender, that questions the stasis of forms,” according to Hassan. The result is breathtaking and polyvalent, quiet at times, and also clamorous. It does far more than challenge the idea that fixity is a mark of selfhood.

The sculpture *Pecadoras Series III* by Manuel Neri showcases an Olympian body, and yet with a total omission of identity markers. Where there might be breasts are chisel marks; a smooth surface where



Above: Miller Robinson, *Pillow Talking with a Compass During an Apocalypse*, 2023, silicone rubber and Pearl Ex pigments on silk; cotton gauze, debris, invasive plants, tars, sand, concrete, ocean water, and river water; glass, feather, syringe, and testosterone, 24 x 26 x 16 in. approx. Courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Paasha Motamedi. Above right: Manuel Neri, *Pecadoras Series III (A/P II)*, 2001, bronze, 31.25 x 6.25 x 5.50 in. Below: Breyer P-Orridge, *Alchemical Wedding (Study)*, 1997-2012, hot-rolled steel frame, hand-blown glass, cork, hair, nails, skin, 11.50 x 14 x 11.50 in.

there might be a gendered pubis or face. “It’s almost akin to a tabula rasa,” Hassan says. A site of pain or a place where creation can start.

Erasure of a different sort is the subject of the transfeminine multimedia artist and activist Mark Aguhar’s 2011 wall projections that spell out “JUST BECAUSE I WANT TO DESTROY YOUR SENSE OF BODILY SELF DOESN’T MEAN I DON’T VALUE YOU AS A PERSON” or “TAKING CONTROL OF MY PHYSICAL BODY IS THE ONLY WAY FOR ME TO EXERT AGENCY IN A WORLD DESIGNED TO DEMOLISH MY PERSONHOOD.”

The show brings out from the Green’s collection—and from loans—Patricia Ayers’ pneumatic-looking, body-evoking sculpture made of padding and foam; Joan Semmel, disorienting the viewer’s perspective on the body; and Ana Mendieta, in photographs, pressing her skin against panes of glass—her belly and breasts and buttocks. There is painter Nash Glynn’s *Sunset*: an idyllic, Edenic scene, with a transgender figure half reclining on a grassy knoll like a latter-day Eve, nude and looking over her shoulder at the viewer.

These are stellar works that on their own could anchor a show. But not all the works are figurative by any means. And that is part of the point.

The abstraction takes the form of Helen Frankenthaler’s *Red Outline*, with its willfully wayward pours of paint that drip and smear. Or the pinks of Maja Ruznic’s *The Poet, the Search and the Mother*, like dematerialized flesh tones that take on their own shapes. Daisy Parris’ tactile paint on faux fur. Or Dallas artist Leslie Martinez’s exquisite and vast *Latent and Supine*, whose materiality and structural laboriousness are stunning. Something ineffable about the cosmos rises from these abstractions; or as Hassan puts it, they function as “microcosms for a very universal reality.”

They are all about the same becoming, the same transformation. In each, paint asserts its materiality, as though the paintings are, as Hassan says, “unfurling in [their] own skin.” Or even more broadly: “The materiality of paint will bloom just as people will bloom, just as nature will bloom.”

The exhibition leads to questions: What is a body? What is skin? What is this envelope in which we dwell? Miller Robinson, in a commissioned piece, mimics endangered species’ skins as silk pillows. A transdisciplinary artist, their work points out that the degradation of the body and degradation of nature go hand in hand. The terrain for abstract connections is rich.

Up to half of the artists are not transgender. The show was never meant to be about merely trans figuration, although foundation director Adam Green notes that one goal is “supporting artists that haven’t been exhibited as widely or had as many opportunities as they deserve.” Rather, the show puts forward a sensibility that one could deem a trans-X sensibility. It is not merely about visibility politics or optics, but a philosophical exploration of something broader and universal.

Ultimately, the show deals with the liquidity of self, the ever-shifting nature of the body, and the ubiquity of change, the impossibility of stasis. It makes a claim for and champions beauty, and what Hassan calls “a capacious and generous understanding of the world.” To see that way is the one great challenge the exhibition asks us to take up. That, merely. **P**

From top: Maja Ruznic, *The Poet, the Search and the Mother*, 2017, oil on canvas, 96 x 72 in. ©Maja Ruznic.; Leslie Martinez, *Latent and Supine*, 2022, fabric, paper scraps, charcoal, fine ballast, pumice, and acrylic on canvas, 96 x 144 x 5 in. Courtesy of the artist and AND NOW, Dallas, TX.; Daisy Parris, *Poem For it All*, 2022, oil, acrylic, and canvas on faux fur, 70.87 x 59 in. Courtesy of the artist and Sim Smith, London.

