

A SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION

NAWAMA EXPANDS ITS MESSAGE TO THE BERKSHIRES



The collaboration between the Berkshire Art Museum and NAWAMA (The National Association of Women Artists, Massachusetts Chapter) is a natural one; the director of the BAM, Eric Rudd, bore witness to the issue of the inclusion of women in the art world, having been involved through his years of teaching at the Corcoran College of Art in Washington, D.C. in the 1970s. A visual artist as well, Rudd reflects on the fact that Washington in the 1960s was an exception to the rule of the male-dominated landscape of museum and gallery directors in the area. When he was out of the gate beginning his long exhibition history, he cites many galleries or museums that were run by women.

Rudd's experience is in line with the manifesto of NAWAMA, through the eyes and leadership of its Massachusetts Chapter's president, Jennifer Jean Okumura. In her catalog entry, Okumura reflects on the changes that have occurred in the 134 years of the NAWAMA's existence but maintains that the original mission of the group remains — to keep the visibility and awareness of current female artists, and to ensure the nurturing of the group and women artists in general, going forward. Rudd and

Okumura have taken advantage of the museum's generous, light-filled exhibition rooms, installing a carefully curated representation of NAWAMA members' works in the forms of paintings, sculpture, textiles, prints and more.

On the first floor of the museum is a small, intimate gallery space with an abundance of light streaming from plentiful windows. On view in this space is "Sanctuary: A Feminine Palette," an intimate exhibition of the watercolors of Anita Helen Cohen. Brightly hued, yet intense and mysterious, these works are a strong compliment to the adjoining "Female" main exhibition. The artist works with watercolor on Yupo paper, which takes the paint to an entirely different spatial and textural place had it been done on traditional watercolor paper. The paint pools and finds pockets to settle in, mimicking the methods of a stream meandering through rocks and finally finding a place to become a pond.

There is sweetness in Cohen's observations of nature; however, within the compositions is a strong, dynamic tension despite the overall-ness of the mark making. Resting places are found in the expansiveness of skies, and the slightly wink-

FEATURED MUSEUM

**NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
WOMEN ARTISTS,
MASSACHUSETTS
CHAPTER: FEMALE**

**ANITA HELEN COHEN:
SANCTUARY: A
FEMININE PALETTE**

**BERKSHIRE ART
MUSEUM**

**159 EAST MAIN STREET
NORTH ADAMS,
MASSACHUSETTS**

THROUGH OCTOBER 7

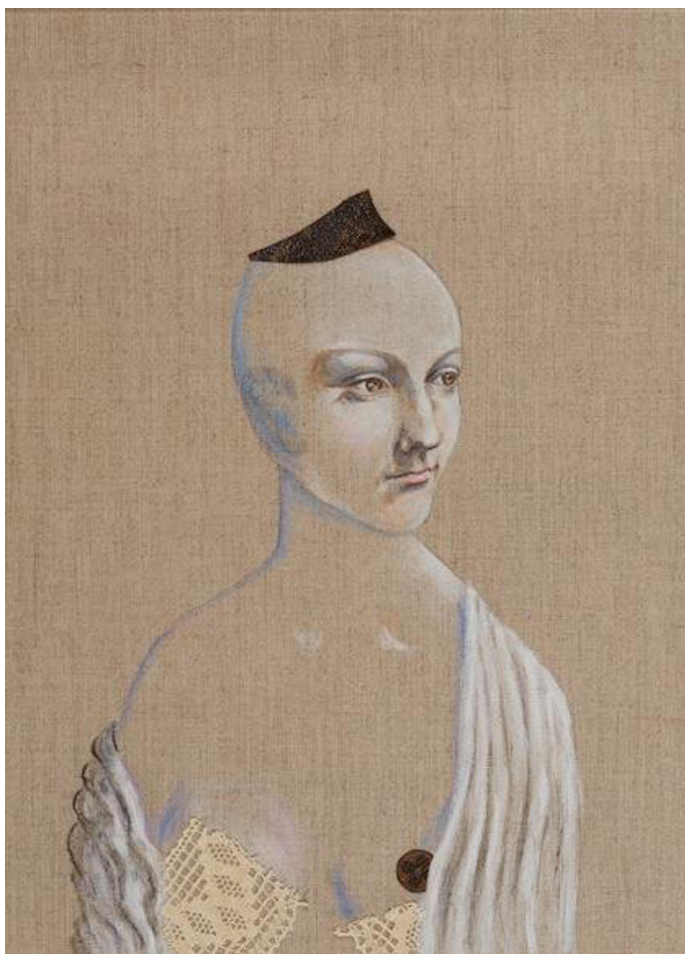
ing pencil marks that are found from time to time, mapping form and dividing the space. As one wanders from painting to painting, one becomes aware of what it is that propels the artist. The exhibition in its entirety is akin to a gentle hike along changing landscapes, each step becomes a taking in of the natural beauty of the deep forest, the breeze through a meadow, or a distant mountain. The Berkshires is a likely place for the work to have found itself.

Within the 31 artists represented in “Female,” there is an adamant pulse of the divine feminine taking place, iconography building on an experience of an ancient culture of femininity, beginning with the many mysteries associated with the very act of being and reproduction. Earth centered, forms of elementals, communicative spirits, and almost primitive stylizations are present.

Marsha Nouritza Odabashian’s enormous wall piece, “Altimira,” resembles cave paintings, forms arriving to the surface from a seemingly endless repository of potential. The artist works with

onionskin dyes, amorously and generously applied to the paper. She then finds symbols, animals, even individuals that arise from the miasma of paint into the solidity of the recognizable. A horse galloping through the haze of the mind’s eye followed by a conquistador; a large crocodile-like creature opening its great mouth; shoes, fish, little octopi, ancestral figures; these are the little flotsam and jetsam the eyes make when they are tired and shut, when all the mind’s criticisms are shut down and the subconscious juices are allowed to flow. Odabashian’s works are an umbilical cord to the timelessness of human experience.

“Agnes Out of Africa”, a stately bronze sculpture by Josie Campbell Dellenbaugh, depicts a young woman holding a lamb. The countenance is one of serenity and grace, eternal adoration reflected on the face of a tribal angel. Deeply mysterious, overwhelmingly universal, the woman is unmaimed by calculation. She eludes the angular borders of time’s restrictions on every aspect of existence, simply being in this moment of perfection.



OPPOSITE PAGE LEFT: Jennifer Jean Okumura, *Amen, So Be It!*, 2023, oil, 48” x 48”.

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP RIGHT: Josie Campbell Dellenbaugh, *Agnes Out of Africa*, 2016, bronze, 28” x 12” x 12”.

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM RIGHT: Kate Wilson, *Meet Me Halfway*, 2022, acrylic, 20” x 40”.

TOP: Dorothy Pilla, *Power*, 2023, digital image on aluminum by sub sublimation process, 20” x 20”.

MIDDLE: Heather Stivison, *We Are All Exploding Stars*, 2023, acrylic, 36” x 36”.

BOTTOM LEFT: Anne Plaisance, *Born to be a Subject*, 2015, mixed media, 18” x 15”.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Marsha Nouritza Odabashian, *Altimira*, 2017, onionskin dye and mixed media, 84” x 126”.



Kate Wilson has several acrylic paintings in this exhibition, all of which seize upon the careful juxtaposition of forms, seemingly arising from a bardo-like flat background. Most notable is "Meet Me Halfway", two earthy olive-green forms sharing a yellow mist of a meeting point. They are blithe energies magnetized to one another. Described as mother and child by the artist, the shapes induce the emotive dependence on one entity by the other, in a cryptic language of non-representative shapes.

Heather Stivison's "We Are All Exploding Stars" creates its own internal cosmology, manifesting personal constellations of



the artist's own making. Within this cosmology arise organic building blocks, and the Creator is the Mother — humanity takes responsibility for the well-being of the universe in this painting — the Creator is none other than ourselves, a bit of the divine carried as a seed within the depth of the womb. The artist assures us that within our universal memory, is the key to the beginning, and that these seeds of awareness are ours to sow.

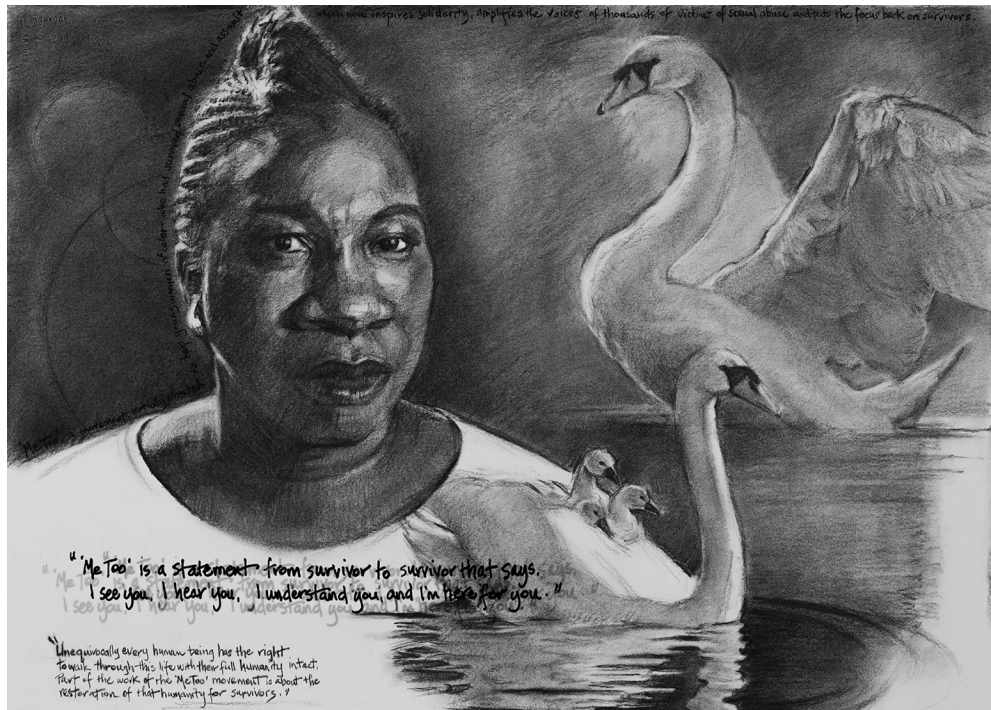
Dorothy Pilla utilizes technological wisdom to delve into ancient rites and rituals. In her digital image "Power," a young woman in contemporary dress visits an altar encased in a pyramid. A beam of light emerges from the center. The imagery draws upon the meeting of modern speculative fiction with ancient iconography, a scenario visited upon by our industries of film, fiction and even scientific research. The ancients attempted to decipher their experiences through

TOP LEFT: Joanna Biondolillo, *What is Female*, 2023, photograph, 32" x 32" x 1 1/2".

TOP RIGHT: Madeleine Lord, *Prete a Porter*, 2023, found steel with pain on the scrap, found steel with paint on the scrap, 59" x 29" x 7".

BOTTOM LEFT: Anita Helen Cohen, *Summer Untamed*, watercolor on Yupo, 30" x 28".

BOTTOM RIGHT: Linda Pearlman Karlsberg, *She Spoke Up VIII - Tarana Burke*, 2020, charcoal, 28" x 36".



symbols and ritual. Technology is one path of this knowledge crystallizing into realization. The combination is a powerful one.

Madeleine Lord offers a transition from the past to the present with her humorous sculpture “Prete a Porter.” Here is a figure seemingly honed from ancient cave dwellings, stylized and cryptic, donning a pair of high heels. This woman is just barely beginning a journey of sentient thought and upright posture; one wonders if she was destined for domination or if the collective potentials were free of the impurity of inequality. This figure has made her own decisions.

There are several pieces in the show that question the present, as if this time is transitory, slippery, without substance. To quote Steve Miller, “Time is slipping into the future.” The present acts as a repository of the past and a potentiality of the future. Anne Plaisance’s “Born to be a Subject” transports a medieval sensibility into the present. The figure stares out, expression muted, eyes diverted. Her very being is one of subjugation. The figure seems to be asking, “This again?” The answer is embodied in Linda Pearlman Karlsberg’s “She Spoke Up VIII — Tarana Burke” approaching the tsunami of the “Me Too” movement. No matter that, like everything, “Me Too” became a huge subject of controversy. The message was never lost. Sometimes it takes a good swift kick to go forward, and it can take many forms, through intricate passages. In a parallel light, Joanna Biondolillo’s “What is Female” documents her non-apologetic and thoroughly present gender-fluid subject as one brimming with empowerment. They know exactly who they are: beautiful, creative, with clear destiny.

Finally, curator Jennifer Jean Okumura’s “Amen, so be it!” reflects a countenance of uncertainty; the face looks out from the miasma of a possible future. Is it one of complacency? She could be an artificial intelligence, or a hybrid or incredibly human. There is a pathos, a questioning not reserved for only one gender, but for the prismatic, multi-layered existence of all beings. The physical, emotional, and spiritual evolution that is possible right now, right here, is the very definition of intelligence. NAWAMA’s “Female” exhibition journeys from many steps on an experiential staircase to many divergent realities.

Marjorie Kaye