

Imaging the Sacred

BIRDIE HALL
TALIA ROBERTS
DAPHNE SWEET
APRIL WERLE

September 27, 2022–February 18, 2023



▲ April Werle, *Mga Nunal sa Batang Babae*, 2022, acrylic on panel, 30 x 30 inches, copyright the artist.

◀ Birdie Hall, *The Mother of God and Pomegranates*, 2022, triptych in the artist's studio, copyright the artist.



▲ Daphne Sweet, *Grieving Gloves*, 2022, Acrylic, airbrush, pencil on canvas, 48 x 36 inches, copyright the artist.

Four dynamic women artists answered MAM's invitation to create a group exhibition incorporating the aspect of sacred into their visual practice. They responded with engaging and sometimes ironic and humorous moments, intertwining spirituality into their new works through representations of the body, nature, and their own cultural backgrounds.

Birdie Hall lives in Dillon, where she teaches at UM-Western and maintains a studio practice. For this exhibition, she approached the theme by engaging with Christian mysticism. Hall received a BA from MSU-Bozeman in history and philosophy of Science and began making art, then pursued an MFA in printmaking from NYU in New York. Art critic Amanda Fortini writes, "Her work, which often combines visual and textual elements, is born of an interest in a return to bodily experience...as well as with a deep concern for the liberation of all sentient beings from suffering."

Since moving to Missoula, Talia Roberts has participated in MAM's 2021 and 2022 auctions and completed an OpenAIR residency in Moicse, Mont., where she began using pigments made directly from



▲ Talia Roberts in her home studio during a visit with MAM curatorial staff.

the landscape. Born and raised in Miami, Fla., she graduated as the Eleanor Layfield Davis Scholar of Fine Art in Painting with a BA in Studio Art and Psychology from Wake Forest University in North Carolina. MAM's invitation coincided with a shift in Roberts's practice and a move to focus on earth pigments bringing the viewer closer to the natural world. She draws on her Columbian, Indigenous South American, and Jewish cultural heritages to connect spiritually. For these paintings, which refer to a calendar associated with the planetary properties, Roberts collects river stones and crushes them to create pigments with the subtlety of earth tones—an experience “of curiosity, gathering, creating oil paint by hand, and making meaning of the finished work by analyzing one's emotions, drawing from metaphors, and archetypal themes that arise when looking at colors.”

Daphne Sweet was born in California and came to UM to study “where Rudy Autio had taught ceramics,” graduating in 2022 after a seven-year study of every discipline offered at the department. Sweet approached the theme of spirituality characteristically through the body, where her figurative paintings and drawings depict wellness and ease, reclaiming women's bodies as embodiments of health, strength,

and positivity. Obsessed with the Rococo, Greek sculpture, and Henri Matisse, Sweet recycles classical compositions and depictions of the female nude throughout art history, infusing them with her unique visual vocabulary.

April Werle is a mixed Cebuano American artist and daughter of a Pinay immigrant. Werle tells stories rooted in the Filipino diaspora by reimagining memories and oral histories visually. Her artworks contrast depictions of hand gestures with traditional Filipino patterns and abstracted landscapes. Hand gestures play a significant cultural role in her work. She explains, “The gesture of amin, or mano po, is a Filipino practice of paying respects to elders through physical touch. The act of amin involves touching the elder's hand to one's forehead to receive blessings.” Werle recognizes and emphasizes the importance of hands as givers of wisdom.” Werle serves on the Arts Missoula Board of Directors and Global & Cultural Affairs Committee and has founded the Missoula Public County Schools BIPOC Student Mural Program, the BIPOC Arts Advisory Council, and has partnered with Filipino American brands and organizations like Filipina American News and Kuyate.



▲ Talia Roberts's collected river rocks that she crushes to create pigment.