

FRESTONIAN GALLERY

SOFT MONUMENTS

Carolina Aguirre
Gianna Dispenza
Enam Gbewonyo
Maria Positano
Vanessa da Silva
Melania Toma
Jonathan Trayte
Laura White



Scan code to view exhibition works

Private View: Thursday 29th June, 6-8pm
Exhibition dates: 30th June – 5th August 2023

Frestonian Gallery is delighted to present *Soft Monuments*, an exhibition bringing together the work of 8 artists who make work using an alchemy of ambiguous, organic forms drawn from the natural world. Here, traditional notions of monumentality are reimagined. Utilising a spectrum of approaches ranging from directly figurative to nebulous and abstract, the works exhibited celebrate a type of 'softness' that isn't defined by a lack of rigidity, but instead by an attempt to monumentalise something fleeting or temporary; things with a lifespan such as the human body and plant-life. These artworks aim to capture forever this ephemerality, an inherent contradiction in their permanence as art objects.

Carolina Aguirre's mythopoetic sculptures question the experience of belonging as it relates to identity, location, nature, and otherness. They address waste as fertile material through its physical and metaphorical potential. These works incorporate living plants, human hair and ashes, as well as domestic debris which has been compacted into circular time-capsules and sealed with tinted paper pulp, reminiscent of fossils or coals, which can be reimagined (and reused) into different forms. In this way, the past is cared for and welcomed back to interact with the present, creating space for alternative understandings and healing.

Two Charcoal-on-Canvas pieces by **Gianna Dispenza** act as a type of jumping off point for the exhibition. Featuring amorphous reclining female sitters seemingly born from a hybrid of recognisable modernist sculptural practices, they reflect on social constructs and historical narratives, transforming and challenging tropes from the Western canon with raw, textured, brushwork and large, gauzy, charcoal renderings.

Enam Gbewonyo shows the first work in a new series (which sits within Gbewonyo's wider body of work *Nude Me/ Under the Skin*) that was produced while on residency at Black Rock Senegal. Heavily inspired by its landscapes and the reverence afforded the Baobab tree, *Cyclical Vein* turns the symbolism of tree rings on its head - making visual how the growth of black women's identity is stunted when framed by societal constructs that uphold the white feminine ideal. The work is made with recycled tights which are hand knitted, braided, burnt through and stitched into the tree ring form, and as ever, the artist hints at the real fragility of these constructed ideals which are unraveling at the works edges.

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An opulent, human torso-sized 'shield' is part of a series work by **Maria Positano** that stems from an interest in armour and defence strategies. Thinking about embodiment, vulnerability and transnational ecologies allows the artist to restructure ideas of political resilience and resistance. Existing historical references are freely re-contextualised in the weave of the work.

Vanessa da Silva's employs an intuitive approach to making her work, resulting in smooth organic sculptures that make reference to the inner and outer architecture of the body. Although abstract, her work explores elements of figuration via the choreography of human behaviour, in particular the way we travel through the world.

Raw, textured canvases by **Melania Toma** depict a riot of colourful forms made from paint and dyed wool that sit on the edge of representation and abstraction. Toma conceives of these works as trans-morphing, ghost-hybrid creatures whose extrinsic power crosses the boundaries between the individual and the collective. These embodiments are questioning the schisms of biomedicine inside post-human beings that are profoundly linked with the social-environmental context and the unseen realm of spirits.

Jonathan Trayte has created a body of surreal, seductive sculptures in a wide variety of forms and textural compositions, heavily informed by the natural world. Trayte uses castings and facsimiles to examine the many ways in which we perceive and utilise global resources and environments. Glossy synthetic skins of paint give the work a colourful pop status, a chameleon appearance and an almost edible quality.

Laura White's vibrantly coloured sculptures manifest in various scales. The artist is drawn to materials and processes that challenge her physically, materials that are difficult to control, awkward to stabilize and resist being fixed. The sculptures wend and weave in response to both the improvisation of the artists hand and body and the physical qualities of the material of which they are comprised; silicon rubber that is pinched and layered in a way that appears to be continually collapsing, adapting and growing, much like trees or coral, to create impossibly freestanding forest of organic forms.

Artist Biographies

Carolina Aguirre (b.1990, Chile) is an Argentinean interdisciplinary artist based in London. Having lived in Chile, South Africa, and Egypt, she graduated with a BA (Hons) Graphic Design (1st) from UAL: Central Saint Martins and worked in the film industry before transitioning into an interdisciplinary art practice. She is currently on the two-year Painting Masters at the Royal College of Art (2021-2023), where she is a recipient of the Ali H. Alkazzi Scholarship Award (2021-2023) and was awarded the Kyoto City University of the Arts exchange programme (2022). Aguirre has exhibited internationally.

Gianna Dispenza (b.1990, Washington State, USA) studied sculpture at the San Francisco Art Institute in California and painting at the Royal College of Art in London. Since finishing her BFA in 2014 and MA in 2020, Dispenza's work has been exhibited at galleries and institutions in London, New York, Vienna, Como, Beirut, Saint Moritz, Daejeon, San Francisco and Étretat. Recent solo shows include Soft Blots Beneath the Sun, Charles Moffett Gallery, NY (2022), The Sitter, Natasha Arselan Gallery, London (2022), Residency One, Galleria Ramo, IT (2021) and Overcome by Joy, Charles Moffett Gallery, NY (2021). She is currently preparing for group shows in Greece and London and a public sculpture for the city of Ede, NL.

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Enam Gbewonyo (b. 1980, London, UK) is a British-Ghanaian textile and performance artist who lives and works in London. Her work has been included in exhibitions at GIANT, Bournemouth, England (2023); Black Cultural Archives, London (2023); MOSTYN, Llandudno, Wales (2022); New Art Exchange, Nottingham, England (2022); Gallerie delle Prigioni, Treviso, Italy (2022); and Royal Academy of Arts, London (2021), amongst others. She is a recipient of the Henry Moore Foundation Artist Award (2022), Dentons Art Prize (2021/22), New Art Exchange Future Exhibition Prize (2022) and is also a Black Rock Senegal Artist in Residence Fellow (2022). Gbewonyo's debut performance film, *Nude Me/Under the Skin: A Resurrection of Black Women's Visibility*, was selected for Portland Dance Film Festival (2021), Aesthetica Short Film Festival (2021), Alchemy Film Festival (2022), and AVIFF Cannes (2022). She is the founder of the Collective of Black British Female Artists (BBFA).

Vanessa da Silva (b. 1976, Sao Paulo, Brazil) lives and works in London. She holds an MA Painting from the Royal College of Art, London, and a BFA in Product Design from FAAP, São Paulo. In 2020 she was the recipient of both The Hopper Prize Award and the Gilbert Bayes Award, given by the Royal Society of Sculptors. She has participated in residencies including FAAP, São Paulo (2020); Pivô Research, São Paulo (2019); and Ox-Bow, USA (2017). Da Silva has exhibited in the UK and internationally with her most recent projects including *The Box* at Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London (2023), Duarte Sequeira Gallery, Seoul (2023), Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, UK (2023), MK Gallery, Milton Keynes, UK (2023), La Casa Encendida, Madrid, ES (2022), 019 Ghent, Ghent, BE (2022), Frieze Sculpture, London, UK (2021).

Maria Positano (b 1995, London, UK) completed their BA (Hons) in Sculpture at The City and Guilds of London Art School in 2018 with a First Class Degree, where they were awarded the Madame Tussauds Project Fund and the C&G Sculpture Prize. Recent and upcoming exhibitions include: *2for1* ThorpStavri&Haze X [Hyphastudios](#), London, UK; *Soft Monuments* [Frestonian Gallery](#), London, UK; *A Perfect Place* [M74](#), Mexico City, MX; *Karusiall* [Lothringer13 Halle](#), Munich, DE; *Feria CLAVO*, Presented by Galeria 54, Mexico City, MX. They are currently working on major projects and private commissions in collaboration with [BBK](#), Munich, DE; [Arusha Gallery](#), London, UK; [Fold Gallery](#), London, UK and [Nashira Gallery](#), Milano, IT. They were awarded the STC x RCA Air 2023, a 1 year artist in residence award at South Thames College London and have been invited to take part in international artist in residency programs, including Mason&Fifth x Hyphastudios, London UK and [ViaFarini.org](#) in Milan, IT. Their work has been shown internationally and acquired in private collections in the UK and Italy.

Melania Toma (b. 1996, Padova, Italy) is an Italian multi-disciplinary artist living and working in London. After completing her BA in Art History and Curatorial Studies at Ca' Foscari University in Venice, she moved to London. In 2021 she graduated from Chelsea College with an MA in Fine Art. Selected upcoming and recent exhibitions include: London Design Biennale 2023, Pavilion by Triennale Milano Jun 2023; *2 for 1: a dialogue with the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals* by Thorp Stavri - HAZE, London, UK 15th June - 08 Jul 2023; *Kinda human yet not quite*, Bloom Gallery, Saint Tropez, FR (June 2023); AiR, Casa Wabi, Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca, Mexico (Feb- March 2023); *From the Rattle*, FOLD Gallery, London (Jan- Feb 2023); *In the Garden*, San Mei Gallery, London (Dec 2023); *Cabin UTROBA*, Sarieva Gallery, Plovdiv, Bulgaria (Oct 2022); *Pigeon Park*, Pigeon Park Project, Manor Place, London Sept – Oct (2022); *SZN: Summer, SEASON*, for Nocturnal Creatures, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK (Jul – Sept 2022)

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Jonathan Trayte (b. 1980, Huddersfield, UK) lives and works in Margate, UK. His work has been included in numerous international exhibitions including: *Objects of Desire: Surrealism & Design*, Design Museum, London (2022); *You Met Me at a Very Strange Time in My Life*, L21 LAB, Mallorca (2022); *Nilufar X MODES*, Modes, Paris (2022); *Roaring Twenties*, Museum Kranenburgh, Netherlands (2022); *MelonMelonTangerine*, Friedman Benda, New York (2021); *Psychotropics*, The New Art Centre, Wiltshire, UK (2020); *The Spectacle*, Sculpture in the City, London (2019); *Salone del Mobile*, Nilufar, Milan (2019); *Dream Works*, Kate MacGarry, London (2018); *The London Open*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2018); *Tropicana*, Christies, London (2017), *Milk*, Christies, London (2016), *Polyculture*, The Tetley, Leeds, UK (2016) and *The Shoppers Guide*, Royal Academy of Arts, London (2015). Trayte was selected by Sculpture in the City to create a large-scale site-specific installation entitled *The Spectacle* (2019) in London

Laura White (b. 1968, Worcestershire, UK) Lives and works in London. Laura is an Ampersand Foundation Fellow at the British School at Rome. Recent exhibitions in Rome: *Rome, a portrait. Festival of Foreign Academies and Cultural Institutes 2023*, Pallazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome. 9/5 - 30/7. 2023. *Spazi Aperti*, Academy di Romania in Roma, 6 - 20 June, 2023. *On the meaning of Gossip*, British School at Rome, 31 May – 23 June 2023. Other Exhibitions include: *Pollute Volute, Laura White*. HS Projects, 5 Howick Place, Victoria, London. 2022. *MASS*. Saatchi Gallery, London, 2021, *The Clever Girl Painter*. Tintype, London. 2019, *The Precious Clay: Porcelain in Contemporary Art*. Museum of Royal Worcester. 2018-19. *As Much About Forgetting*. Viborg Kunsthall, Denmark, 2018 and *Double agents and great refusers*. The Agency Gallery London, 2017.

For further information on the exhibition & featured artists please contact:
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Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Friday 11am-6pm / Saturdays – 12-4pm