

Salutary Sculpture

Dana Turkovic and Lauren Ross

Ursula von Rydingsvard: I'm a sculptor. What it means, it's a kind of disease.

Mark di Suvero: Oh no!

UvR: Yes.

MdS: No, no, no, no. It's health.

UvR: It is health. It is on the side of health. It is there whether you want it or not. It's a way of life. It's not something you do. It's a way of living. It's a way of thinking.¹

The above excerpt of conversation between two great sculptors may reflect the push/pull many artists feel about their own drive to create: it's so entrenched and all-consuming, perhaps it's like a disease. But then again, the innate impulse arguably is the greatest form of emotional vigor and resilience. Di Suvero's artistic practice had to undergo a radical transformation after a traumatic injury in 1960 left his body permanently altered, so his position on art as health may have been swayed by his own experience with recovery and rehabilitation.

Salutary Sculpture gathers eight artists who use their practices to soothe, heal and work through individual and collective trauma. Steeped in requirements of body and mind, their works point toward the human need for integrated and holistic wellness. Addressing a range of individual experiences and research interests that span across scientific and spiritual inquiries, these artworks reinforce the power of art as a therapeutic tool, both for makers and viewers/participants.

Artists have long embraced the possibilities of transformation, change, and adaptation. So, art's role in healing is not new. However, the urgency around these concepts feels intensified in this historic moment. In the midst of a devastating global pandemic and world-wide reckonings around systemic inequality and injustice, human beings arguably are experiencing heightened need for care, coping and recovery. For the current generation of artists, action, activism and art merge into praxis, an ethically-informed progressive synthesis that embodies every aspect of the making and delivery.

Several of the artists in the exhibition came to their current artistic practices through their own personal journeys of healing and recovery. In the aftermath of a traumatic head injury, **James Sterling Pitt** lost access to many of his memories and struggled with language. He underwent intensive physiotherapy, tapping into and engaging with his disorientation. He discovered that by building a new visual vocabulary of forms, he could access the recesses of this mind. He began making drawings and sculptures based on personal systems he developed to recapture forgotten moments in his life; an archiving of memories. While imagery in his artwork appears abstract to viewers, each form has a personal association and memory trigger for the artist. They are organic yet architectural, teetering between tangible and recognizable objects with subtle formal evolutions.

Pitt's installation in this exhibition is comprised of seventeen small ceramic and wood sculptures and a series of related drawings. They bear abstract forms that the artist derived from a visual diary he uses to mark time and document events, a library of images representing how he feels rather than how things look. Experienced as a large grouping, Pitt's sculptures convey the hard-to-articulate aspects of the mind, illustrating his therapeutic process and presenting his experiences through a personal vocabulary of color, line and shape.

Lauryn Youden's performance and installation work are driven by her personal experiences diagnosing and treating chronic illnesses. She explores her own navigation through eastern and western medicine, care practices and survival strategies, looking closely at healing through an extraordinarily candid and intimate perspective, exploring personal sickness, suffering and the tantalizing pursuit of a cure.

To Offer You Something to Bring Relief, 2020 gathers the titular offerings for respite—ranging from medicine to texts encompassing poetry, witchcraft, yoga, and tarot—onto a wall-mounted cabinet-like form that Youden refers to as an altar. Many of the objects that populate the sculpture were gifts from her friends and colleagues, the contents drawn from, or remnants from her own use. For this Canadian-born, Berlin-based artist the word “gift” could constitute a clever Anglo-German pun, as the word means “present” or “poison” in each language, respectively. Youden's wall pieces create a sacred altar for the sick through a story in which sickness/wellness, growth/decay are equalized with each other, embraced and even reified.

In *Rest Soothe My Burning Spine, 2020*, mattresses and textiles form a cushioned and comfortable place to rest. At the center are a bundle of Mugwort, a golden flower-embossed container, and hand-dyed sheets embroidered with poems by C. A. Conrad. The tableaux suggests a space of retreat, rest, education, and protest.

Youden's practice extends beyond object-making into the realm of activism, as she works as an advocate for people with atypical challenges or embodied differences. One of her desires is to give those “considered undesirable, unattractive and unhealthy,”² agency and expression. In her work, Youden ultimately works toward creative conversation about the relationships between personal and collective healing.

In his teens, **Thomas J. Condon** lost his eyesight for a month and was told he would never regain it. After being diagnosed with a rare illness, Idiopathic Pseudotumor Cerebri, he underwent years of treatment to restore his sight. This therapy involved weekly sessions, spending hours peering into a massive machine that mapped his visual fields. Condon's abstract photographs explore the psychological impact and loosely replicate his experienced vision during his episode. Although Condon regained his eyesight has remained permanently altered.

Condon's embrace of the medium of photography also developed out of an unrelated trauma: he began his undergraduate studies as a painter, but both of his arms were broken in an accident at the very beginning of his first

semester. Rather than delay his studies, he decided to try photography, assuming that it would be easier to navigate physically. While he has been working in photography ever since, the painterly look of his abstractions suggests the influence of the medium he originally intended to explore. Condon's prints are chemigrams, made by pouring chemicals onto light-sensitive paper. Because no camera, film, or digital file is involved in the process, each print is unique and cannot be duplicated. This characteristic is another tie to painting, which is closely associated with individual expression. Condon has a unique “eye”, not only an exclusive artistic style, but a singular way of seeing the world in the most literal sense.

Guadalupe Maravilla's artwork was born from his life experiences. In the 1980s, at the age of eight, he fled the violent civil war in his home country of El Salvador and made a frightening two-month long journey on foot to the U.S., accompanied only by so-called “coyotes,” people who assist others from Latin America to cross the southern U.S. border. Maravilla became a U.S. citizen at 26, but some of his family members remain undocumented, and the fears of legal troubles and possible deportation has been a source of chronic stress. Later, as his professional career was developing, he legally changed his name, to protect the identity of his family. In his mid-30's, the artist was diagnosed with stage three colon cancer and underwent a personal process of discovery and recovery, blending western medicine with ancient, global healing traditions. Today he is cancer-free and makes artwork that not only addresses his own experiences of displacement, fear and illness, but creates resources for others—especially undocumented immigrants and marginalized communities—to embrace on their personal journeys of coping and survival.

Maravilla's *Ancestral Stomachs* are made of dried gourds adorned with other objects including bird talons. While the gourds resemble stomachs, their twisted shapes also refer to Maravilla's own digestive track which was damaged by radiation treatments. There are seven sculptures total in the series, reflecting his belief that it is possible to heal seven generations backward and forward. The title therefore conjures both ancestors and descendants, and references the artist's familial history of cancer.

Similarly, **Basil Kincaid** is concerned with healing and uplifting members of his community with “critical social questioning to cultivate healing towards a remedy for Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.”³ Among the many practices employed by this African-American artist, Kincaid embraces quilting. As a tradition that has been in his family for several generations—he learned the technique from his grandmother—quilting reinforces a bond to his ancestors. In an interview regarding the genesis of his work, Kincaid described his inspiration: “I dreamt that my grandmother was standing in front of this house—it was one of the St. Louis row houses—and the house was wrapped in a quilt...her aura, her golden light, was pouring out over me.”⁴ Quilting also embraces the practical aspects of reusing scarce materials and celebrates their histories of use. Kincaid uses his own quilts as the foundation for both sculpture and performance, expanding the medium and his process as therapy, pushing

viewers to see potential for our transformation as individuals, interconnected and in a constant evolution.

In October 2021, Kincaid carefully wrapped and bound Manuel Neri's sculpture *Aurelia Roma, 1994* with a quilt he made in 2019 entitled *Take Me Home*. Neri's sculpture, part of Laumeier's Collection permanently installed outdoors, is a stylized female figure carved from marble.⁵ Every year in the fall, Laumeier's winterizes *Aurelia Roma* by wrapping it with a canvas material to safeguard its delicate surface; Kincaid added his piece as a second layer. In this sense, his gesture references the nurturing and protective aspects of a quilt wrapped around a human body, as well as the protective efforts of conserving sculpture. Kincaid's wrapping also serves as a gesture of homage to the elder artist Neri, by helping to protect his work. Neri, who personally granted his blessing for Kincaid's intervention, passed away at the age of 91, just eight days before Kincaid installed the piece. With his passing, Kincaid's gesture of honor became one of memorializing Neri's legacy. The black quilt now reads like a shroud, referencing the chill of mortality in the final winding cloth of the tomb.

Kincaid's *Beula, 2018* is constructed with chromatic variations of white, sewn with found, donated, and re-purposed blankets and clothing. Carefully formed, with billowy and dramatic draping, the anthropomorphic textile sculpture is at once celebratory like a wedding gown (the title translates to “bride” in Hebrew) and ghostly. With layered references, Kincaid weaves motifs from the fashions and memories of many to create a new cultural fabric.

Marcos Lutyens works across many mediums examining issues linked to human consciousness. His *Symmetries of the Mind* series centers on stroke rehabilitation at a clinic in Germany in collaboration with the clinic director and other artists, pushing the boundaries of both traditional healing therapies and art forms. In his large-scale Dularar drawings, *The Angles of Emotion, 2021*, and *The Weaving of Self, 2021*, sketchbook and field notes are writ large, illustrating his interdisciplinary approach. Lit from behind akin to an X-ray, Lutyens' forensic presentation amplifies the beauty and complexity of neuroscience. His visual map explores neurodiversity, drafting ideas for tools and methods for exploring human perception and the plasticity of the human brain. Luytens also explores cognitive sensations, brain adaptability, and sensory substitution, or the capacity of the brain to swap out functions for ones that have been lost. *Olfactory Haptic Forms, 2021*, are handheld prototypes of interactive and therapeutic forms, built to engage shape, texture, weight, color, and smell. When touched and handled, these tactile and sculptural objects may trigger hearing, vision, or speech, especially for those who are not neurotypical.

Lutyens also exhibits *Rose River Memorial, 2022*, a memorial for the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing broad social experience of loss and traumatic stress. This ongoing project utilizes red roses handmade of eco-felt (made from recycled plastic bottles) to give

visual form to the unfathomable human toll. Each time it is shown, it is updated to reflect the causalities at the place it is exhibited. Laumeier's installation has a goal of 16,000 roses, created by Missouri and Kansas Girl Scouts, reflecting the approximate number of COVID deaths in Missouri (maintaining an accurate representation of the exact number is nearly impossible). Its debut is timed for early March to coincide with the proposed national day of COVID mourning. The roses cascade from the curved façade of the Aronson Fine Art Center, following the building's architecture. The flowers embody and hint at the enormity of loss, embracing community participation, and making the latent therapy in art into a visual experience. For Lutyens, *Rose River Memorial*, in its many iterations since 2020, has worked with emotion as a kind of material, engaging grieving families as a way to process loss.

Dario Robleto has long devoted himself to research-driven blending of history and scientific inquiry to explore the fragility and contradiction of the human experience. With equal emphasis on scholarship and beauty, he blends the realms of love and emotion with health and science. In recent years, he has been focusing on historical attempts to visually represent life functions, including the recording of brain activity and the beating of the heart.

Robleto's two delicate sculptures in elaborate lacquered maple boxes inscribed with gold leaf replicate samples of some of the earliest waveform recordings of blood flow, made between 1876 and 1896. The wave-like representation of a pulse as imaged by technology such as the electrocardiogram is so familiar today, few consider the origins of the form. It is fascinating that these early experiments were not solely clinical in their approach; the studies did not focus on the effects of physical exertion on the heart, but instead on the impact of emotions. One of Robleto's sets gathers recordings made while subjects were listening to particular sounds, from jarring noises to melancholic music. The other set collects heartbeats recorded during sleep, dreaming, and various emotions like shame and guilt. These linear forms literally draw the connection between mind and body.

The exhibition will also present a screening of *The Aorta of an Archivist*, 2021, one of Robleto's first cinematic works. Written, researched and directed by Robleto, this high definition video accompanied by an original score examines the crossover of the cosmos and the human body and questions what can be known. Layering visuals from a wide array of sources, the piece focuses on historic firsts: the first time live music and singing were recorded, the first time brain waves were recorded in a dream state, and the first time a human heartbeat was recorded while listening to music. Once again, Robleto ties together the irrevocable links between the corporeal and the psyche.

Hope Ginsburg's practice defies easy categorization. Embracing social, participatory, and collaborative practices with emphases on ecology, the environment, and

health, she creates scenarios in which participants can learn, reflect and be inspired.

Since 2014, Ginsburg blends the gear and techniques of deep sea scuba diving with meditation practice, inspired by their shared emphasis on the act of breathing. She choreographs solo and group "dives," both in and out of water. *Solo Land Dive: Dukan Desert*, 2015 shows her meditating in scuba gear in the sands of the Qatari desert, while *Land Dive Team: Rice Rivers Center Wetlands*, 2015 was shot in the mud of Virginia wetlands. A series of photographic *Breath Portraits*, 2016, captures surfacing air bubbles from submerged members of her dive team.

Embracing equal parts humor and absurdity with the dire seriousness of the global climate crisis, Ginsburg's ongoing project links the calming of the human mind and body with the healing of the planet. Part of this artist's captivation with the natural world is the capacity for living things to change and adapt. In this sense, her work evokes both grave concern and optimistic hope.

In the midst of a global pandemic, climate crisis, overdue reckoning and extreme divisiveness, artists have their own unique takes on the current need for bio-security. In a multitude of ways, they ask themselves—and each of us—what ought to be done and how. The artists in *Salutary Sculpture* point towards art's potential to meet this moment of crisis with catharsis and ethical transcendence.

1. "Ursula von Rydingsvard and Mark di Suvero in Conversation" July 18, 2014, in *Mark di Suvero*, ed. David R. Collens, Nora R. Lawrence, and Theresa Choi (Storm King Art Center and Prestel Verlag, Munich, London, New York, 2015), p. 64.
2. "When the Sick Rule the World at Gr_und", *Art Viewer*, March 16, 2019, https://art-viewer.org/when-the-sick-rule-the-world-at-gr_und/, accessed 1/27/2022.
3. Basil Kincaid artist statement, <https://basilkincaid.art/about>, accessed 1/7/22.
4. Philip Barcio, "Basil Kincaid Discusses Meaning and Symbolism in his New Quilts", Kavi Gupta Blog, June 29, 2021, kavigupta.com/press/630-basil-kincaid-discusses-meaning-and-symbolism-in-his/, accessed 1/18/22.
5. Neri often omitted heads and limbs from figures. Although this absence is interpreted in various ways, one reading is traumatic injury. Interestingly, Neri made a work about di Suvero's wounds in *Marcos Dolorosa*, 1970 where he recreated di Suvero's spinal injury.

Laumeier Sculpture Park's ongoing operations and programs are generously supported by St. Louis County Parks; Regional Arts Commission; Missouri Arts Council; Arts and Education Council; among other corporations, foundations, individual donors and members.

Additional funding related to COVID-19 relief has been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Windgate Foundation, the U.S. Small Business Administration, and the St. Louis County Small Business Relief Program. *Salutary Sculpture* is supported by the Whitaker Foundation.

2022 Exhibitions are supported by Ken and Nancy Kranzberg, Joan and Mitchell Markow and Two Sister's Foundation, Emily Rauh Pulitzer, Mary Ann and Andy Srenco. *Salutary Sculpture* is supported by the Whitaker Foundation. Basil Kincaid is one of two 2022 Kranzberg Artists. This fund, generously provided by Ken and Nancy Kranzberg, supports the presentation of new work by one or more St. Louis area artists per year.

LAUMEIER / 12580 Rott Road
SCULPTURE PARK Saint Louis, Missouri 63127
314.615.5278 www.laumeier.org



Cover: James Sterling Pitt, *Untitled*, 2021. Acrylic on Ceramic and Wood, 6 1/2 x 6 x 4 inches. Courtesy of the artist, Eli Ridgway Gallery, Bozeman, MT, and Ratio3, San Francisco, CA.



**SALUTARY
SCULPTURE**

FEBRUARY 12 - MAY 15, 2022

LAUMEIER
SCULPTURE PARK