

PAULA WILSON

Entangled



516 ARTS

June 22 – August 31, 2019
Albuquerque, New Mexico

PAULA WILSON

Born 1975 Chicago, IL; Lives in Carrizozo, NM

EDUCATION

2005 MFA, Columbia University, New York, NY
1998 BFA, Washington University, summa cum laude, St. Louis, MO

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2019 *Paula Wilson: Entangled*, 516 ARTS, Albuquerque, NM
2018 *The Light Becomes You*, Denny Dimin Gallery, New York, NY
Spread Wild: Pleasures of the Yucca, Smack Mellon, Brooklyn, NY
PIECESCAPE, Visitor Welcome Center, Los Angeles, CA
FLOORED, Williamson I Knight, Portland, OR
2017 *Salty & Fresh*, Emerson Dorsch Gallery, Miami, FL
Paula Wilson: The Backward Glance, Bemis Center for Contemporary Art, Omaha, NE
2014 *Undress*, Center for Contemporary Arts, Spector Ripps Project Space, Santa Fe, NM
2010 *First Story*, The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, PA
2008 *The Stained Glass Ceiling*, Bellwether Gallery, New York, NY
2006 *Paintings and Drawings from the Hanno Valley*, Galleria Suzy Shammah, Milan, Italy

AWARDS & RESIDENCES

2019 Award of Distinction, Washington University, Sax Fox School of Design and Visual Art, St. Louis, MO
2017 Joan Mitchell Center Artist-in-Residence, New Orleans, LA
2014 Cannonball Visiting Artist Residency, Miami, FL
BAZAAR, P3 Studio Residency, The Cosmopolitan Hotel, Curated by the Art Production Fund, Las Vegas, NV
2009 Fabric Workshop and Museum Residency Grant, Philadelphia, PA
2009 Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant
Happy and Bob Doran Artist-in-Residence, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT
2006 Giverny Residency, Art Production Fund, Giverny, France

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2019 "Studio Visit: Paula Wilson and Mike Lagg," Angie Rizzo, *The Magazine*, Santa Fe, NM
2018 "Paula Wilson: Floored at Williamson Knight," James Knowlton, *Art Practical*
2017 "Salty/Fresh: Paula Wilson's House of Art," Rhonda Garelick, *The Brooklyn Rail*
"A Stained-Glass World Where Women Are Worshipped," Monica Uszerowicz, *Hyperallergic*,
2013 "I Am The Magic Hand," Ryan Steadman, *Critics' Pick*, ARTFORUM
"I Am The Magic Hand' and Antony: 'The Cut,'" Roberta Smith, *New York Times*
2010 "Peeling back a building's layers, At the Fabric Workshop, murals of urban facades, and a celebration of monochrome." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*
2009 "Paula Wilson," Barry Schwabsky, ARTFORUM

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

The Studio Museum Harlem, New York, NY
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT
The New York Public Library, New York, NY
Rubell Family Collection, Miami, FL
Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, St. Louis, MO
The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, PA
The Tang Museum, Saratoga Springs, NY
Art in Public Places | New Mexico Arts, Albuquerque & Santa Fe, NM
Saatchi Gallery, London, UK

ORGANIZATIONS / PROJECTS

2010-present MoMAZoZo
2014-present Carrizozo Artist-in-Residence



516 Central Avenue SW, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102
Open Tue – Sat, 12-5pm
505-242-1445 • 516arts.org

516 ARTS is a non-collecting contemporary art museum in the center of Downtown Albuquerque that celebrates thought-provoking art in the here and now. Our mission is to connect contemporary artists and diverse audiences. 516 ARTS presents relevant exhibitions and public programs, which feature a mix of local, national and international artists from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

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ABOVE: Paula Wilson & Mike Lagg, *Yucca Moth*, 2019, ash, pine, black walnut wood, acrylic, oil, on muslin, bronze, motor, fishing line, photo by Madeline Cass • COVER: Paula Wilson, *Seed*, 2018, screenprint, monotype, woodblock print, acrylic, oil on muslin, elements made in public program with Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts & The Union for Contemporary Art, UNO Weber Fine Arts, & Creighton University, Omaha, NE, photo by Etienne Frossard

THE NATURALIST

By Alicia Inez Guzmán

When the wind kicks up, which apparently is a lot, Carrizozo looks like a smudge on the horizon. The Sacramento Mountains to the southeast and nearly everything in the greater Tularosa Basin turns gauzy with fine dust. Come closer and there lies another landscape—the Valley of Fires—lava fields that look like bulging hunks of charcoal ground interspersed with spiny desert fauna, agaves and cacti, and, I daresay, the most ubiquitous grove of yucca plants in all of New Mexico rising from the surroundings.

Walk into artist Paula Wilson’s studio and two 20-foot-high yucca tapestries hang, dark silhouetted contours she printed with woodblocks on muslin fabric. The old Ford garage where they seem to float is connected to two near-century-old buildings in Carrizozo, El Cibola Hotel (where her partner, Mike Lagg, has his woodworking studio) and the Lyric Theater. The trifecta makes up a good chunk of Twelfth Street’s historic district.

Moving to Carrizozo from Brooklyn ten years ago was what Wilson calls political, a break from an art world center where the way in which she wanted to be an artist wasn’t possible.

In Carrizozo, Wilson has made art a life practice, her creations enveloping her home and studio much like the landscape. She sews her own clothing, paints nearly every surface, including the rugs that unfurl on the floor, and wears a wooden tool belt fashioned by Lagg. Here, the slowness and expansiveness of place lends to close observation.

For instance, there are tiny holes inside the blossom of Wilson’s yucca to show where the yucca moth has burrowed. The yucca’s sole pollinator, the tiny insect only does its work at night, taking pollen from the stamen of one flower, then visiting another flower where it lays an egg in the seed box and places the pollen in the pistil. Wilson’s monumental moth hangs from the high A-frame ceiling, wings made of painted muslin, and mechanized to connote flight.

Recently, conversations around maintaining biodiversity have become more urgent. Wild



Paula Wilson, *Yucca (interlocking)*, 2018, woodblock print on muslin, 87 x 161 inches



Caroline Finney, which describes why, “Black people have a different relationship to the environment,” because, in part, of the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow.” Environmentalism excluded African Americans from its purvey over the course of the 20th and even 21st centuries. Where that movement created gatekeepers to police bodies of color, Wilson responded by turning toward the yucca and yucca moth—looking to nature for a beneficial relationship.

There are parallels, Wilson goes on to explain, “between the entanglement with my artistic and love partner and the way the yucca moth and yucca are entangled. There’s potential in the word *entangled* for both negative and positive connotations.”

In one monumental figure, a woman’s arms are out-stretched, her body a patchwork of tapestries—black, white, and red printed abstract patterns. Only her core and face are painted with thick, gestural strokes. Curly salt-and-pepper hair frames her head, as she looks straight forward, a dormant yucca rising up from her center. Below, a red vessel with two figures kissing, sharing one contour between them, lies amongst tiny debris. It symbolizes the yucca moth larvae burrowed and hibernating in the ground waiting for summer. Altogether, it’s a self-portrait—Wilson as herself and as a towering yucca plant. In one scene of her film *Spread Wild: Pleasures of the Yucca*, she is also a yucca moth, sensually flapping her wings under the ambient light of the Lyric Theater’s stage. Lagg is her only audience.

To Wilson, making self-portraits is a way of inserting herself into art history, of becoming monumental. In her 2014 film, *Salty and Fresh* she is again a towering, almost religious figure, rising up from the ocean and wielding an oversized paintbrush and palette. As in the painting, *The Birth of Venus*, Wilson too comes out of the water, a kind of birth, but instead with a tool of creation in hand. Cut to another scene and she is painting—inscribing three faces on three different bare butts. At once the subject of the film, she is also the creator of the paintings within.

Paula Wilson, *Salty & Fresh* (video still), 2014, video, 8 mins 30 secs

pollinators, in particular, are rapidly endangered by climate change and industrial agriculture. Bees receive the lion’s share of the attention, but what of other pollinators, those like the yucca moth? In this body of work, Wilson calls our attention to the moth and the flower, symbols of the desert, on the one hand, and examples of biological mutualism, on the other. Having evolved together, the yucca and the yucca moth are entangled to the point that one would not survive without the other. Wilson puts a microscope on this relationship, making her art a call to ponder the poetics of the natural world in tandem with her own.

To help explain the “naturalist tendency” in this body of work, Wilson says she read *Black Spaces, White Faces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*, by

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There, as in real life, her clothing is handmade—sewn and printed herself—another work of art. The film is a mirror of her life, one spent creating worlds within worlds and artworks within artworks. In this space, motifs recur as do figures (self-portraits), together forging an entire visual mythos where Wilson not only makes art, but also different versions of herself within it.

Entangled, as she says with Lagg, Wilson is also entangled with herself, with place—Carrizozo—and with making narratives that capture that life. Her monumental figures as a larger-than-life yucca plant or where she doubles as a yucca moth show this mutualism, a meditation on how what surrounds Wilson gives her life, and, in turn, entangles us.

Alicia Inez Guzmán grew up in the northern New Mexico village of Truchas where she first began hearing stories around the land. With a PhD in visual and cultural studies from the University of Rochester, NY, she now writes for local, national, and international publications on histories of land use, culture, and contemporary Chicana and Indigenous art. She is the author of *Georgia O’Keeffe at Home* and was a 2017 Creative Capital Foundation Arts Writers Grant recipient. She is currently Senior Editor of *New Mexico Magazine*.

Paula Wilson, *Spread Wild: Pleasures of the Yucca* (video still), 2018, video, 2:04 minutes