

sculpture

"Rose B. Simpson"

By Lauren Levato Coyne

March 16, 2023



Rose B. Simpson, installation view of "Road Less Traveled," 2023. Photo: Elisabeth Bernstein, © Rose B. Simpson, Courtesy the artist, Jessica Silverman, San Francisco, and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

New York

[Jack Shainman Gallery](#)

There is a significant difference between taking space and holding it. Rose B. Simpson's new figures are holding space—not necessarily for the viewer but for each other. In "Road Less Traveled" ([on view](#) through April 8, 2023), Simpson's figures are arranged toward each other; entering their presence feels like interrupting a conversation between old friends. Most of the exhibition's dozen sculptures are life-size or larger, which adds to the sense of stepping through or meeting their gaze.

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

The clay and mixed-media figures hold an internal space, too. Essentially vessels topped with heads, their core forms are hollow vases and jugs, some with and others without handles. Simpson hints at openings by wrapping natural break points in the clay with twine, lava beads, and a timing belt (her formal education was in automobile science as well as ceramics and creative writing). The inclusion of the mechanics harkens back to the seminal *Maria* (2014), a 1985 Chevy El Camino with bodywork and customization by Simpson, including designs inspired by traditional Tewa black-on-black pottery. Simpson named her lowrider after the artist Maria Martinez of San Ildefonso Pueblo.

Simpson, who lives and works in Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico, is from a multigenerational family of clay artists. In her many media interviews, she has detailed an initial reluctance to work in clay, citing a youthful desire to break free from any kind of tradition and to forge her own path. Early on, this led her into comics, graphic design, and building and designing her iconic lowrider. In a *PBS NewsHour* interview, Simpson said her car "took up a lot of space, because she's a queen." Nearly a decade later, it's clear that space has shifted from the external to the internal.

The exhibition's namesake piece, *Road Less Traveled* (2022), is the only work of the group that pushes beyond the vessel to become a full-fledged figure in its own right. It is also the only sculpture with arms, and those limbs press tight against the body, with hands reaching up in a self-embrace at the neck. Black marks adorn one side of the figure, and white marks the other—a clear reference to common human dualities of light/dark, past/future, self/other. These marks, which resemble footprints in sand, also recall two walked paths. The neck and chest—or voice and heart—are protected by a necklace of thick volcanic stones, a material that, like clay, exists across multiple temperature-determined states, from liquid to solid.

Conjure II (2022) is a head without a body, the face painted with flat white circles that become a physical, three-dimensional composition of white clay circles over the forehead. *Guides* seems similar in concept, with three connected figures emerging from the top of the central figure's head. These are thoughts made manifest—what (or how) you think is what you get, the past is always within shaping the without.

Rose B. Simpson's solo exhibition "Dream House" is concurrently [on view](#) at The Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia through May 7, 2023.

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508