

Trend magazine!

Rose B. Simpson: "ON AUDACITY (What I Want to Say to Santa Fe)"

By Rose B. Simpson

Photography by Kate Russell

May 26, 2023



The celebrated mixed-media artist Rose B. Simpson in words and images

It's a Thursday late afternoon and I'm in a hotel room on 10th Avenue in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood. My black linen shirt is still nicely flattened on the ironing board, a few pieces of jewelry next to it. I'm curled up in the pink chair by the window to gather my thoughts, tracing the leafless branches of the one tree outside with my eyes. Amidst the smattering of New York City street sounds, my phone buzzes. I don't dare look at it. I'm missing home. I miss my mama—the sun across her living room floor, the crackle in her wood stove, the smell of bean stew. I miss the silent nights broken only by dog barks and coyote calls. I think of my converse tracks all around the sandy driveway. Proof of life. I close my eyes and I'm suddenly walking the hill behind the house. Stiff yellow grasses twitch through long juniper shadows in a raking afternoon breeze.

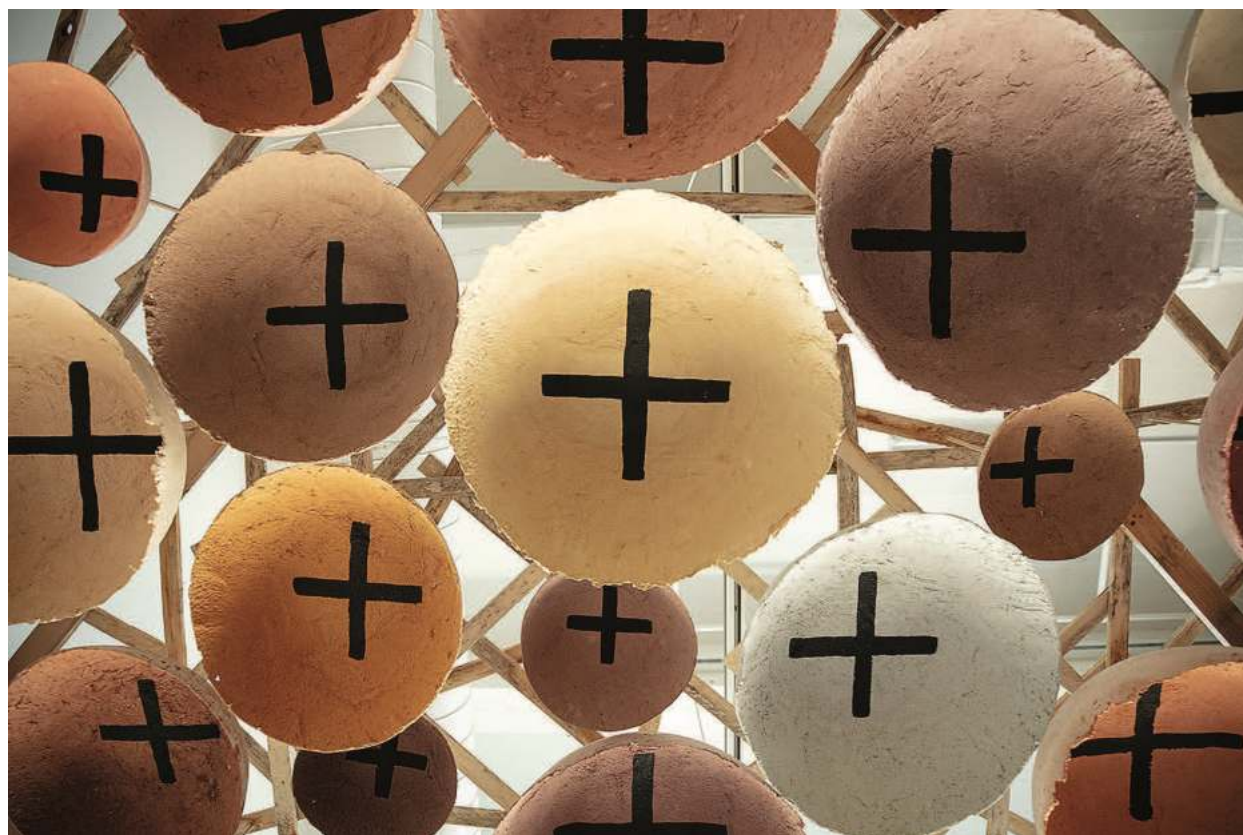
My phone buzzes again, and I flip it over to see the numbers on the screen. It is time. I pull the shirt over my head, then lower the strands of heishi beads to my shoulders. I catch my somber

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

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

reflection in the mirror and take a deep breath. It's time for this ceremony.

From the street I can see my name in big, vinyl letters through the gallery window. My feet don't leave tracks on these damp sidewalks, but here, this is one way to make a mark. Before I take the first step into the gallery-opening maw, voices beginning their layering into a monotone chorus, I whisper a small prayer: Guide me, help me to know my way.



Simpson's Dream House at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia. Inverted vessels shaped like bowls and marked with symbols of direction and protection form the ceiling of the final room in the Dream House experience.

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

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



Simpson places River Girls (2019, clay, wood, and metal) along the water's edge. The work was made in response to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls crisis in communities across the continent and beyond.

I've spent my life pondering lots of things; one has been the role of audacity in my becoming.

I was born at the Santa Fe Indian Hospital and spent most of my childhood in my ancestral homelands at Santa Clara Pueblo, with alternating weekend visits to my father's in Santa Fe. I lived in the very transformer on the utility pole of culture, passing through me back and forth, forever duly noted. My bicultural vantage point, a misfortune/privilege.

My families: psychologically complex, academically sutured, glistening sharp, blissfully haphazard, tortured and innovative, rapturous, headstrong, and notoriously misfitted.... This was what grew me.

For these foundational neural pathways, I give thanks.

For the (many) moments of self-righteous justification, I give a chuckle and a thanks. For the stomach drop when the chair collapses under me and I ended back at the bottom of my self-loathing, I give thanks. Who, yes, who do you think you are?! What a ride.

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

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



River Girl 1 and River Girl A are punk immortals who have protective metal feathers that run down their backs like the sharp spines of an iguana. Top: The warrior twins have prayer beads for arms.



Clockwise, from top left: Simpson participates in the 2022 Native Guitar Tours New Mexico showcase at the KiMo Theatre in Albuquerque; a Simpson-designed necklace worn by participants; and a Simpson belt.

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

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



Maria, a 1985 Chevy El Camino, is driven up Canyon Road in Santa Fe flanked by a squad of post-apocalyptic Indigenous warriors and people with queer identities. During the procession, the sound of a heartbeat was broadcast through a 1,000-watt speaker system from the El Camino.



Countdown I, II, and III (2020, made of clay, steel, leather, jute string, grout, and adhesives) is installed with a photo of Maria, a 1985 Chevy El Camino, in the group show Ceramics in the Expanded Field at MASS MOCA, North Adams, Massachusetts.

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

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



**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

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

Simpson's Dream House installation consists of multiple spaces made out of plaster, mud, and lathe, using traditional building techniques found throughout New Mexico and the Santa Clara Pueblo. Each room signifies a part of the process and experience of bringing art into the world. Top: Simpson sits at a table in a Dream room that yields rest and safety, collecting and gathering with the ancestors.; A room in Simpson's Dream House invites community and dialogue; Another room people can enter with shoes off. With her hands in clay, Simpson builds a sculpture in her studio.

Audacity has taught me to believe my thoughts, deeply. I've marched them straight to handcuffs in the backseats of police cars, lengthy art school critiques, drudges, slogs, and eruptions through a plethora of relationship dynamics. These audacious thoughts were my fuel, my ID, my ticket to ride, with a can of Red Bull in hand. My self-righteous victimhood paraded me through the times when the sucking hole in my center might have imploded, but didn't, and I give thanks. My audacity got me here. My irreverence and my daring, toxic natures made changes happen. My disdain for beliefs that differed from mine pulled, prodded, and whined. I stomped until I got what I thought I wanted. But there was always more. I preyed on audacious discomfort.

My art practice is not a perfect one. I have dared myself to threaten what I was taught was acceptable, to delve into distorted figure, or reality, or imperfection. I have journeyed to find love in the roughage of self. I've scratched and clawed at truth. I've spat and screamed and sobbed, and turned the volume all the way up—which might be why my ears ring and my eyes feel so heavy. There are stories in there.

All this digging, chewing and spitting, ripping at myself and everyone around me, and there I was: tired. Breathing hard. Sitting at the head of a massive trail of destruction. Accomplished. Deconstructed.

There I was, so tired I didn't have the energy to believe myself anymore.

And for once, there was silence. It felt good. Like shadows do.

The justifications dissolved, the bones from my jaw to what was once the soft place in my infant skull unclenched. Is it still audacity if it is not inherently in a state of opposition? Even the turmoil found a neutral witness. For what, what could I possibly know?

I still might ask, I still might listen, I might just wonder. I might, at times, find solace in an old pattern and get back to my entitled beating. And this, too, makes some endearing sense.

In all the breaking down, there is rhythm and process. In all the smashing is faith. I might laugh when something breaks, feel the smallness in an exhale and the strata move on an inhale. I might remember that the witnessing goes both ways. I might notice that vulnerability might just be an audacious act in a world reeking of entitlement. Hey, we are not alone. Hey, water flows with the grace of a guest.

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

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

My audacity is the squeeze of my lungs to push my breath in prayer as it curls down around my chin and up over my nose, wrapping itself between my eyes and trickling through the strands of my hair. It plops itself to the earth and sieves through the crust. It flaps and lifts higher and higher, and upon hitting sunlight, scatters into thousands of miniature spheres, each popping like soap bubble explosions, turning into the wild.

It is an audacious one, intention in the third dimension.



Counterculture, 12 nine-foot-tall cast concrete figures, sits on the Field Farm in Williamstown, Massachusetts, the ancestral land of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans. The figures are adorned with beaded necklaces made of clay from the surrounding lands.

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

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