

ART SY

"How Jessica Silverman Helped Open Up the Bay Area Art Scene"

By Emily Wilson

August 25, 2023



Portrait of Jessica Silverman by Drew Altizer. Courtesy of Jessica Silverman.



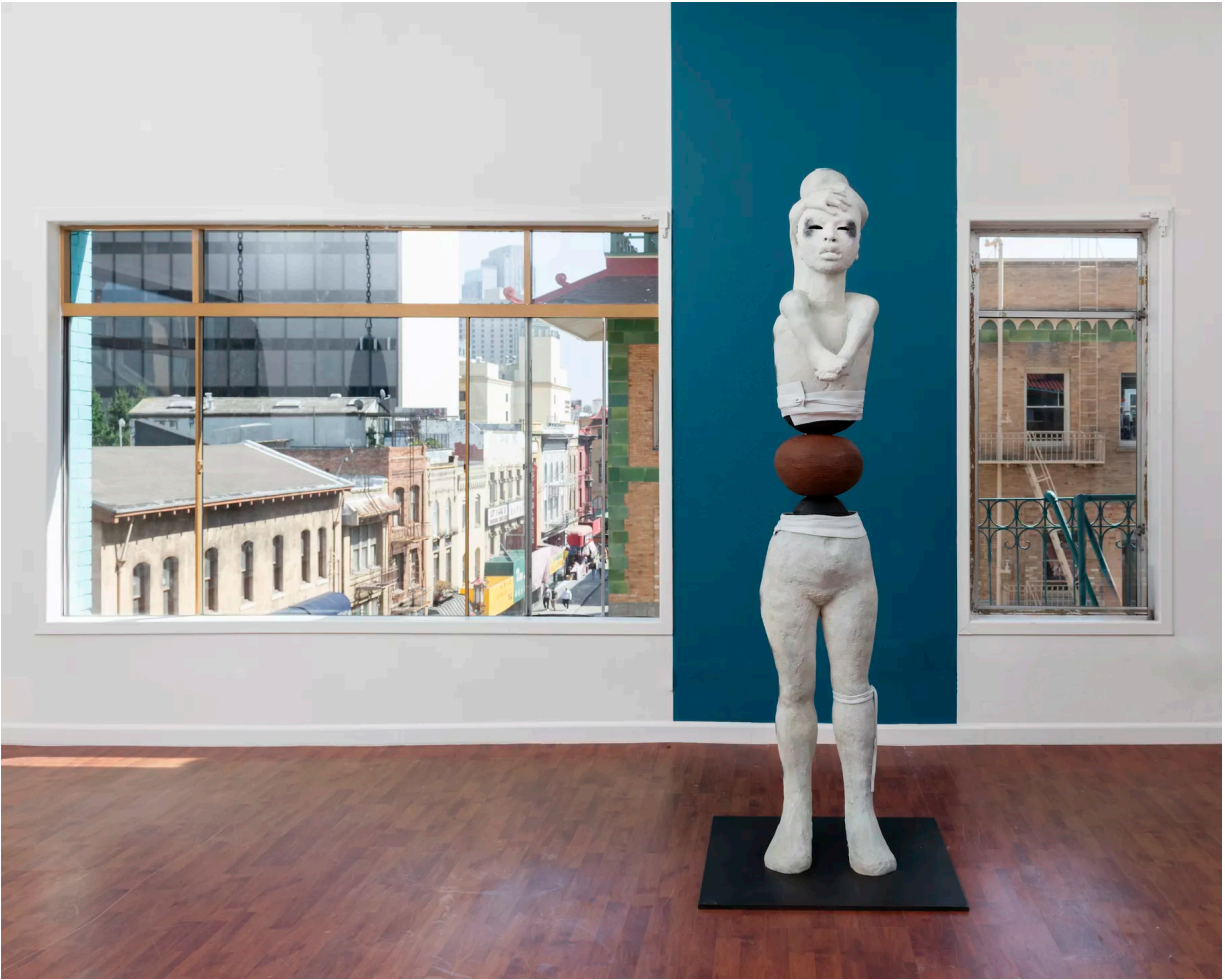
Loie Hollowell, *Pregnancy in three acts*, 2022. Photo by Melissa Goodwin. Courtesy of the artist, Pace Gallery, and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

At her pop-up show "A Growing Season," [Jessica Silverman](#) is on hand to point out different works by more than 30 artists that her gallery works with. The show, which is on view until September 19th, takes place on the fifth floor of a space next to her gallery in San Francisco's Chinatown, and commemorates 15 years since the gallery was founded in 2008. It explores themes of "growth, transcendence, and maturation," and includes a 10-foot-long painting by [Julie Buffalohead](#), works on paper by [Loie Hollowell](#), and a seven-foot-tall sculpture by [Rose B. Simpson](#), depicting a cast bronze Madonna and Child.

"She's a Native American artist, and she's a single mother and the motif of mother and child come up a lot in her work," Silverman said of Simpson, who lives in Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico and has worked with the gallery for several years. "The idea was to translate this smaller-scale ceramic into a large-scale bronze because the imagery was just so powerful, and it holds up beautifully. It's amazing."

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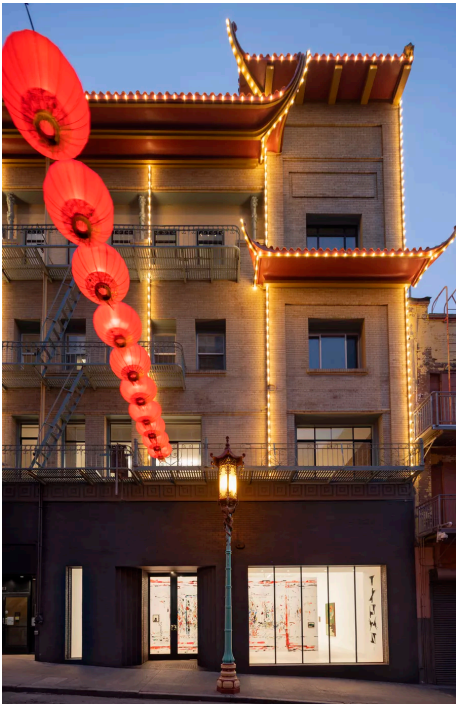
Rose B. Simpson, installation view of *Cairn*: bronze, 2023, in "A Growing Season" at Jessica Silverman, 2023.
Photo by Shaun Roberts. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

Now in its third space, Jessica Silverman has become one of the leading gallerists of a burgeoning Bay Area art scene. She decided to open her own space while doing a curatorial residency at the Frankfurt Kunstverein, while receiving her MA in curatorial practice at San Francisco's California College of the Arts. "They brought in work from all over," Silverman said of her time there. "San Francisco seemed a little insular, and I wanted to show artists not from here."

Combining her love of business and art, Silverman opened her first gallery in 2008 in the lower Nob Hill district of San Francisco when she was in her mid-twenties. Its current, 5,000-square-foot location in Chinatown now has 10 employees and represents nearly 30 artists. The gallery is also internationally known and regularly participates in fairs like Art Basel in Miami Beach and Frieze.

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Exterior view of Jessica Silverman, 2021. Photo by Henrik Kam. Courtesy of Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.



Rupy C. Tut, *Cupping Therapy*, 2022.

In those 15 years, Silverman has evolved with the art scene in the Bay Area region to encompass emerging artists. This includes San Francisco resident [Chelsea Ryoko Wong](#), whose painting of people in the desert in Joshua Tree, *Hot Rocks on a Hot Day*, hangs in "A Growing Season," along with Oakland artist [Rupy C. Tut](#)'s *Cupping Therapy*, showing a table set with cups, saucers, and snacks for teatime.

"I live here, and I like spending time here," said Silverman. "And the best way to get to know an artist's work is to visit their studios."

Another local artist who joined Silverman's gallery earlier this year is [David Huffman](#). His work *Summit* is a pyramid of 650 basketballs in a rainbow of colors with "you make me feel mighty real" written at the base, after the title of a gay anthem by San Francisco singer Sylvester.

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Installation view of "A Growing Season" at Jessica Silverman, 2023.
Photo by Shaun Roberts. Courtesy of the artists and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

Huffman says Silverman is unique among Bay Area gallerists for her gallery's diversity, both in subject matter and the artists she represents.

"The Bay Area has not really done well with that sense of inclusion, and she's also found new types of art that really haven't been represented, because of her eye," Huffman said. "She'll have someone like [Judy Chicago](#), for instance, who to me is an art history artist. She's masterful and amazing, and in some ways has not been given her due until fairly recently. Jessica saw that and wanted to be a part of putting more light on that, and I don't know of any other gallery out here that has had that kind of daring."

Silverman works with artists at all stages of their careers, from ones who are emerging to established names such as filmmaker [Isaac Julian](#), and Chicago, whose stained-glass logo from her "Holocaust Project" is featured in the 15th-anniversary show. The work depicts a triangle in a rainbow of colors, which the artist said was "structured as a journey into the darkness of the Holocaust and out into the light of hope."

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Judy Chicago, *A Warning: What happens when tyranny goes unchecked*, 2022.
Photo by Eric Ruby. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

Silverman says she focuses on certain qualities in the artists she chooses to represent. "I would say consistency and that they have an ongoing studio practice that they take seriously," she said. "I'm looking for artists who move between conceptual rigor and visual sensibilities. I want them to have interesting ideas, but I'm also really dedicated to materials."

In July, Silverman hosted two solo exhibitions, a show of photographs by Julien, "Once Again. . . (Statues Never Die)." That same month, the gallery's upstairs hosted "ONCE MORE WITH FEELING," with collages by [Jeffrey Gibson](#), who will be the first Indigenous artist to represent the United States pavilion with a solo show at the 2024 Venice Biennale.

Silverman says she is ambitious for her artists and wants to be in more art fairs and for the gallery to keep expanding. That's what attracts Huffman to her. "I trust her instincts, and they always seem creative to me and never stale. I wanted to be a part of that, like her saying, 'Let's do a pyramid,'" he said. "I feel like her ambition to do pop-ups to do all these fairs—she'll do all the top stuff, but she'll do the middle stuff, and she'll do the bottom stuff. And I just trust it."

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