

HYPERALLERGIC

Rupy Tut: "San Francisco Museums Acquire Works by 30 Bay Area Artists"

By Emily Wilson

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Wesaam Al-Badry, works from the Al-Kouture series (2018): "Valentino #X," "Gucci #VII," and "Gucci #II," archival pigment prints (images courtesy the artist and Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco and New York)

[Wesaam Al-Badry](#) calls it an "institutional stamp of approval." For [Chelsea Ryoko Wong](#), it's "monumental." And [Rupy C. Tut](#) says she will now be able to walk into the de Young Museum and feel a sense of belonging.

These are three of 30 artists whose work was acquired by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco with a grant of \$1 million from the Svane Family Foundation.

"It feels very fresh and new," Wong told Hyperallergic. "At the same time, I wish this were more the norm, for living artists to be shown in great museums."

In 2023, an exhibition of the 42 new works is slated for the de Young, one of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (the Legion of Honor is the other). The works include Wong's "Mint Tea in the Sauna During Sunset" (2022), Al-Badry's *Al-Kouture* (2018) and *Migrant Workers* (2020) series, and "A New Normal" (2022) by Tut.

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Rupy C. Tut, "New Normal" (2022), natural pigments on handmade hemp paper (photo by Eric Ruby, courtesy de Young Museum).

After the [De Young Open](#) in 2020, in which artists from the nine Bay Area counties showed their work on the museum's walls, the Svane Foundation got in touch, seeing its mission of supporting local artists in the region as aligned with the museum's goals.

Claudia Schmuckli, curator of contemporary art and programming at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, spent the past year visiting galleries and artists' studios to select the works. A few themes emerged, Schmuckli says, including responses to environmental issues, historical depictions of women in art, and migration.

Al-Badry's work falls into two of those categories — womanhood and immigration — with his *Al Kouture* photos showing women wearing luxury scarves as *niqabs* (part of a 2018 show at the de Young, [Contemporary Muslim Fashions](#)) and his *Migrant Workers Series*, captured in 2020 in the California cities of Salinas, Fresno, and Bakersfield.

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Wesaam Al-Badry, "Tangerines #XI (Migrant Workers Series)" (2020), archival pigment print (image courtesy the artist and Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco and New York)

The artist, who was born in Iraq and spent time in a refugee camp in Saudi Arabia before moving to Nebraska with his family, says he's thrilled his photos of workers harvesting tangerines and pomegranates during the pandemic will be on the walls of the de Young.

"A lot of times at museums they talk about social justice, but they do not collect that work," Al-Badry said. "When Claudia [Schmuckli] told me she was interested in the farm workers, it was beautiful to me."

Tut expressed a similar sentiment about the acquisition of her triptych "A New Normal." Each side of the work shows a woman wearing a scarf, one representing the forest and the other the ocean. Both are gazing toward the middle painting of a tree surrounded by fire with snakes twined around it, representing an unloved creature, ignored during a crisis. Anger was the driving emotion behind that painting, which directly addresses climate change, Tut said. She was moved by others' reactions to the acquisition.

"I had this flood of emotions to the way women in my community responded," Tut told Hyperallergic. "I always felt what I do is not in a vacuum — doing this is also about people who look like me, and that's what's hit me the most with this announcement."

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Chelsea Ryoko Wong, "Mint Tea in the Sauna During Sunset" (2022), acrylic on canvas (photo by Randy Dodson, courtesy the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco)

Wong created her painting of two people in a sauna with a view of Marin's Mount Tamalpais after visiting the spot in Richmond, a city near Oakland.

"It was so aesthetically interesting to me," Wong said. "I went during the sunset, and it was so beautiful with a picture window looking straight out to Mt. Tam. I wasn't even relaxing – I was just thinking, 'I'm going to make a painting.'"

Both Wong and Tut are represented by Jessica Silverman. Its namesake founder says artists want to see their work displayed where they live.

"Being a dealer in San Francisco and being surrounded by institutions like the Berkeley Art Museum and the de Young and SFMOMA and the San Jose Museum of Art and the Asian Art Museum – these are my hometown museums, and I want to see work by Bay Area artists there," Silverman told Hyperallergic.

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The recently acquired works include videos by Cristóbal Martínez and Ana Teresa Fernández, sculpture by Guillermo Galindo and Sahar Khoury, ceramics by Ruby Neri, and collage by Rashaad Newsome. Some pieces combine different media, such as Stephanie Syjuco's "The Visible Invisible: Plymouth Pilgrim, Antebellum South, Colonial Revolution" (2018), featuring three dresses fabricated entirely out of green "chroma key" backdrop fabric that can be superimposed with new patterns.



Stephanie Syjuco, "The Visible Invisible: Plymouth Pilgrim (Simplicity), Antebellum South (Simplicity), Colonial Revolution (McCall's)" (2018), installation, sculpture, textiles (photo by Simon Fujiwara, courtesy Catherine Clark Gallery, San Francisco)

Thomas P. Campbell, the director of the museums, says he looks forward to seeing the pieces in conversation with the rest of the permanent collection — such as Syjuco's installation among the de Young's 19th-century historical works — to offer commentary on how we create fantasies about the past.

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Rashaad Newsome, "Thirst Trap" (2020), collage on paper in custom mahogany and resin artist frame with automotive paint (photo by Randy Dodson, courtesy the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco)

Being part of reshaping the canon is part of why Al-Badry went to art school, and he wants the people he takes photos of to feel welcome in the museum and be represented in the artwork.

"They've been working and feeding Americans, and they'll be in the same space with some of the best artists in the world," he said about the migrant workers portrayed in his series. "I'm going to invite the workers to come see it themselves. I come from working class, so to me, it's like, 'Yo, we're here.'"

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