

Exhibition Review: New Suns



Photo by Nicholas Lea Bruno

By Purva
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From March 29 to May 5, 2023, the CCA Campus Gallery is hosting *Women to Watch 2024: New Suns*. This exhibition is supported by the San Francisco Advocacy for the National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) and is presented in conjunction with the NMWA Women to Watch 2024 exhibition series. The show features five Bay Area artists—Adia Millett, Cathy Lu, Genevieve Quick, Nicki Green, and Sofía Córdova—selected by curator Lauren Schell Dickens. Interestingly, four out of the five artists have taught or are currently teaching at California College of the Arts.

The theme of this year's show revolves around "new worlds," and the artists in this exhibition engage the theme through topics as varied as science fiction, mythology, dreams, weaves, and iconography. As stated in the exhibition description, the organizers want to look at artists' visions of a new world, especially considering the turbulent past few years. As said by author Octavia Butler, whose words are a source of inspiration for the show's curator: "There's nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns."

Although there are a total of ten pieces in the exhibition by five outstanding artists, all of which are worth seeing, this article will talk about the work of artists Cathy Lu and Adia Millett, and how their works in particular reflect visions of a new world.

Cathy Lu and the American Dream

Cathy Lu's *American Dream Pillow (Nuwa's Double Ended Hands)* (2022) is a long sculpture that snakes across the floor, with hands on either end. There is not necessarily a beginning and end to the sculpture, as it can be viewed from multiple directions. The palm and fingers of one of the hands is facing down, while the other is facing the ceiling. The color of the sculpture is yellow with 3D gold appliques and green marks all over the body. Upon closer inspection, you can see slight gaps in the piece, as if it was made and assembled in segments. There are four depressions in the sculptures painted a green-gray color. Next to each of the depressions lies a blue mat.



Cathay Lu, *American Dream Pillow (Nuwa's Double Ended Hands)*, 2022
Photo by Purva Gangur

According to the description provided by the artist, this sculpture is inspired by the Chinese mythological creation goddess Nuwa. In traditional Chinese culture, ceramic pillows are believed to affect the dreams of those who rest on them, and those dreams can then become reality. Hence, the depressions and mats laid out along the ceramic sculpture are meant for visitors to rest their heads, and dream. Revisiting the title and theme of this exhibition, “new suns,” this piece depicts a way we can all dream of a new planet and a new vision. The fact that there is room for multiple participants to dream demonstrates a sense of community, suggesting that we all must work and dream together to make something a reality.

In Chinese mythology, Goddess Nuwa is not only credited with giving birth to humanity, but also with repairing the four pillars of heaven meant to protect the Earth. This sculpture also has exactly four places to rest ones ahead, showing that as humans we can also be the pillars to restore the “heavens,” or the peace which protects us all. The two hands facing the floor and ceiling—signifying the Earth and the Heavens—also represent the idea that the metaphoric harmony between the Earth and the sky are held together by our dreams and visions, which can be made into reality through the help of this ceramic pillow.



Adia Millett, *The Collective*, 2022
Photo by Purva Gangur

Adia Millett and the Weaves of Inheritances

Adia Millett’s work entitled *The Collective* (2022) displays vibrantly colored fabrics shaped into ten silhouettes resembling human bodies laying down horizontally. The fabrics are cut into sharp geometric shapes and the unique patterns and textures in the fabrics are pieced together into a whole, demonstrating Millett’s quilt-inspired practice. As written

in the exhibition statement, “Millett weaves together complex inheritance of African American womanhood with personal and collective histories. Forms are fragmented, disassembled and built anew—a landscape of changing horizons and possibilities.” Fragmentation of form is evident in Millett’s work through her use of different fabrics, starkly contrasted within each silhouette. The artist does not try to blend in similar patterns or colors, and wants to showcase these contrasts in her design. This demonstrates the different aspects of our background, such as culture and

gender, and how they play a part in our identities. Because all of the silhouettes are similar in form and are presented grouped together, the work also shows that although we have differences, this sense of uniqueness is also what helps us relate to each other and thus be united.

In the exhibition area, this work is mounted on the wall right behind Lu's sculpture. As previously mentioned, Lu's sculpture invites people to lie down and dream on the ceramic pillow. It is interesting that this piece featuring horizontal human silhouettes is placed right behind Lu's sculpture, as if to create that environment of sleep, or as a way to instruct visitors. In reference to the idea of *New Suns*, Millett's work shows that fragmented and disassembled pieces can represent a landscape of changing horizons and possibilities.



New Suns installation view
Photo by Anjni Shah



New Suns installation view
Photo by Josef Jacques

Purva Gangur is currently pursuing a BFA in Interaction Design. In addition to that, she holds a special interest in creating fine art through drawing and painting.