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Check out Julia Couzens' Artwork



Local Stories

Today we'd like to introduce you to Julia Couzens.

Julia, we'd love to hear your story and how you got to where you are today both personally and as an artist.

I was born and raised in Auburn, California — at the time a farm and ranching community in the Sierra foothills. My mother was a writer and founding editor of WestArt, the West Coast's first publication dedicated to contemporary art. Artists would come to the house, to meet my mother, or drop off images of their work, and I was always struck by the force of their personalities, their manner, and offbeat style of dress — very different from the taciturn cattle ranchers who were my father's clients. From the get go my teachers, family, and community recognized my abilities as an artist. But I

was introverted, something of a loner, and intuitively knew I wasn't prepared to contend with the socially competitive dynamics of the art world, so took my undergraduate degree in English and Philosophy. After graduating from college I worked in San Francisco, hanging out in North Beach, soaking up the bohemian vibe, meeting journalists, pool sharks, and poet longshoreman. Life was a mystery. But the hot poker of ambition and desire to make art is a fierce and eternal goad, so after marrying my husband, I returned to school to get my M.F.A. from UC Davis in 1990. I have since taught as adjunct faculty and as a visiting artist at U.C. Davis and Santa Cruz, San Francisco Art Institute, Scripps College, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and CSUSacramento. I also lived a year in Roswell, New Mexico as an artist-in-residence at RAIR. Besides my studio practice, I currently write about contemporary art for squarecylinder.com and The Sacramento Bee. I live with my husband, two dogs, one cat, chickens and honeybees on Merritt Island, just outside the rural Sacramento River delta community of Clarksburg. It's extraordinarily beautiful, but remote, so I have a studio in downtown LA to sustain meaningful relationships in the art community.

We'd love to hear more about your art. What do you do you do and why and what do you hope others will take away from your work?

I began as a painter, with a special emphasis on drawing. Drawing remains an abiding touchstone in my life — the concerns of drawing are the infrastructure that supports all my work. For several years I did nothing but large scale charcoal drawings that referenced the body. After squeezing out every ounce and scrap of information from that practice, I turned to sculpture, using Sculpey, a low-fired clay, and poured adhesives. The work continued to explore the figure as a constantly evolving and contingent organism.

T.S. Eliot said "Art is a raid on the inarticulate," and I love that, for his statement speaks to the ineffable ambiguity that is art's life blood. I view my work as a process of

identifying visual phenomena that moves me physically, and that causes my very cells to curl with a deeply resonate feeling. For the past several years I've been working with mixed textiles, fiber, and wire to create abstract, painterly constructions that often refer to the grid and to linear entanglements found in both natural and human-made entities. My work is meant to be experienced on an intuitive level, from a place of experiential feeling, and like jazz, it offers questions, not answers.

Artists face many challenges, but what do you feel is the most pressing among them?

Earning a living from the sale of work is hugely difficult. Success as an artist cannot be measured in economic terms. Too many worthy artists work in relative obscurity and support themselves by other means. Art is an inexplicable force that comes from the center of the earth. It has nothing to do with the worldly concerns of sustaining a career. Nevertheless, the biggest challenge an artist may face is sustaining the quality of will to work over the span of a lifetime — to stay working in the face of parades and recognition that may pass them by. Some artists choose to only work on the work and some artists choose to strategize a career. It's possible to do both. But the primary relationship must be to the work itself. Follow the work, follow the work, follow the work ... and help other artists, for success raises all boats.

Do you have any events or exhibitions coming up? Where would one go to see more of your work? How can people support you and your artwork?

My work has been shown in museums and galleries throughout the United States, most recently at Leslie Heller Workspace in NYC and Transmitter in Brooklyn. My work has been recognized with a Louis Comfort Tiffany Fellowship, and is represented in such public collections as BAMPFA, Yale University, Weatherspoon Art Museum, Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Art, Butler Institute of American Art, and Crocker Art Museum. I invite people to my website, juliacouzens.com for further information on my work, and

to follow me on Instagram @julia_couzens. I also encourage your readers to seek out the best contemporary art galleries and museums they can find — to learn, to look, to experience visual art for themselves. Galleries are free, and absolutely nothing compares with seeing work first hand! Social media is great, but digital images give only half the story. Visual art is a physical thing that triggers ALL our senses. Artists work in a room to make it, and viewers are meant to be a room to experience it.