dawn
sandra
katherine
melissa
arkansas women to watch 2016

ORGANIC

MATTERS

ARKANSAS STATE COMMITTEE of the
NATIONAL MUSEUM of WOMEN in the ARTS®
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Women to Watch is an exhibition program, held every two to three years, developed specifically for NMWA’s national and international affiliate outreach committees. Each of these exhibitions features emerging and underrepresented women artists from the states and countries with affiliate organizations. The program is designed to increase the visibility of—and critical response to—promising women artists who are deserving of national and international attention. In addition, the program is aimed at involving high quality art professionals, with diverse areas of expertise, in the committees’ activities. All active committees are invited to participate in this program. Women to Watch provides an excellent opportunity to highlight the range and vibrancy of women artists working throughout the country, and the world at large, and bring them more visibility at NMWA.

Women to Watch 2015 illuminated how contemporary artists re-contextualize images of plants and animals to reflect upon the themes of sexuality, gender politics, and the abject. Nature-based imagery created by sculptors, painters, photographers, and video artists extends the Romantic-era idea that the mysterious and uncontrollable power of nature serves as an apt metaphor for the persistent unruliness of human culture.¹

The work of twelve artists selected from nominations put forth by national and international committees was included in Women to Watch 2015. The exhibition was on display at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, DC, from June 5–September 13, 2015. The Arkansas Committee of the National Museum of Women in the Arts (ACNMWA) was represented by Dawn Holder, whose porcelain installation, Monoculture, became a signature piece in the national exhibition.

The online exhibition can be viewed at http://nmwa.org/women-2-watch

Mission
The Arkansas Committee of the National Museum of Women in the Arts (ACNMWA) was established as an affiliate of the museum in Washington, DC, in 1989. The Arkansas Committee of NMWA supports the museum and its mission: to bring recognition to the achievements of women artists of all periods and nationalities by acquiring, exhibiting, and researching art by women, and by teaching the public about their accomplishments. The Arkansas Committee is a statewide non-profit volunteer organization that promotes and supports Arkansas women artists with internships, scholarships, and exhibition opportunities on the state and national levels.

For more information about the Arkansas Committee of NMWA, visit www.acnmwa.org
For more information about the National Museum of Women in the Arts, visit www.nmwa.org
Welcome from the Arkansas Committee President Maribeth Frazer

On behalf of the Arkansas State Committee of the National Museum of Women in the Arts, I welcome you to Arkansas Women to Watch 2016. The exhibit presents four talented Arkansas women artists whose work interprets unique visions within the theme of nature, a theme historically associated with women artists, but one that is presented here within a decidedly contemporary context. ACNMWA is grateful to Courtney Taylor, Assistant Director and Curator at the Arts & Science Center for Southeast Arkansas, for her dedicated service as Guest Curator of the Arkansas submissions for the national biennial exhibit Organic Matters: Women to Watch 2015, and delighted that Dawn Holder’s porcelain installation Monoculture was selected for the national exhibit that concluded September 13, 2015. ACNMWA’s mission is in part to promote and support Arkansas women artists and arts professionals: we do so with this state tour of the Arkansas submissions to the national exhibit, and hope you enjoy this showcase of Arkansas talent.

ACNMWA programs are made possible through tax-deductible memberships and donations. For more information, please visit us at www.acnmwa.org and select the SUPPORT tab on the top navigation bar to become a member or donate to our Present for the Future Program Endowment Fund. For photographs of events and programs, please visit our Facebook page: “like” us and share the great news about ACNMWA and Arkansas women artists.
Arkansas Women to Watch 2016: Organic Matters re-contextualizes imagery from the natural world to explore gender, sexuality, and the abject. Each of the artists represented presents ambiguous narratives to destabilize and dismantle constructed notions of femininity and the artificial cultural dichotomies that have long equated woman with nature. This act of disturbing ordered systems of feminine propriety creates a psychological space understood as the abject. Often signaled by the fragmented, visceral body, it is a space that deals with attitudes around taboo subjects such as sexuality, death, and vulnerability.

Until the twentieth century, European artistic practices prevented women from “serious” artistic undertakings that required imagination such as allegorical or religious paintings. Relegated to decorative craft rather than the realm of ideas, women portrayed landscape and still life genres. The Arkansas Women to Watch 2016 artists draw upon the traditionally sanctioned language of natural imagery to convey abjection. Their work recalls eighteenth century concepts of nature as sublime, considered beautiful because it inspired fear and elation simultaneously. Victorian and Romantic ideas of the sublime extended to women. In women, however, the inherent contradiction in the natural sublime was too dangerous to be admired. Passivity and purity were equated with the beautiful. Uncontrolled female sexuality and realities of the corporeal body remained taboo well into the twentieth century. These artists erode notions of femininity by engaging the visceral and the corporeal and through pointed use of natural imagery and processes traditionally marked feminine.

Dawn Holder confronts expectations of feminine sweetness. Her Once Upon a Time in the Forest of I’m Not Sweet Enough recognizes landscape as both nature and culture. In it, the viewer finds herself immersed in an unresolved psychological and physical environment. Installation inherently requires bodily re-contextualization; it pushes viewers to temporarily step out of the gallery and into another world that demands they examine their own desires while examining what is desired of them. From Atlanta, Holder is no stranger to the particularly sweet form of femininity expected of Southern women.

Holder’s enchanting, candy-coated Forest seems to encourage consumption. It recalls a history of depictions of landscape and the female body as ripe for male consumption and control. Yet the excess and artificiality of the literal sweetness and feminine visual cues—the implied purity of the natural white porcelain trees and the soft pinks and yellows of delicate porcelain flowers—becomes
suffocating. This landscape, and in turn the female, becomes less a site of male desire, consumption, and activity, and instead a site of contemplation of distaste.

Katherine Rutter’s lyrical algae-driven forms with soft, warm colors and delicate lines evoke Victorian illustrative traditions and a sense of fragility and vulnerability associated with the feminine. The fantastical and whimsical qualities of the figures are complicated by mutations that create a sense of the irrational and grotesque—markers of the abject. The dried algae drive much of the hybridity between creatures. The dark, hair-like algae act as a sinister, invasive, mutating force leaving the stain decay. Her figures’ bodies are incomplete. Their flesh is uneven with hints of gray and red that signal encroaching disease or death.

Algae, nature in substance, becomes the juncture between both natural and unnatural, human and other, beautiful and repulsive. This aesthetic intersection of the beautiful and the repulsive—the potential to be the most pure and the most defiled—termed “the exquisite” by Rebecca Solnit, exemplifies the danger associated with affirming the biological realities of the female body and nature.⁴ Rutter’s women are not objects of desire; nor are they goddesses. They are at once connected to the natural and the unnatural. Rutter remains ambivalent in her adoption of essentialist notions of women’s innate connection to nature and nature’s uncontrollability.

Sandra Luckett’s Sexy Puddles series features vintage lingerie placed in puddles and streams after storms. The photographs are eerily seductive leaving the viewer with the sense of yet another elusive narrative. The artist herself wonders what wearers experienced in these discarded garments—the most intimate acts, fleeting moments of ecstasy that blur boundaries between self and other.⁵ The act of photographing these garments is fleeting too. Reliant upon rainwater to create puddles and elevate streams, brief twilight, a breeze, or the flow of water to animate the garment, Luckett considers these photographs events.

Literally photographing unmentionables, Luckett’s work nods to the abject. Water serves as surrogate for the body and lingerie as a fetish object linked to femininity—and the ever-present threat and allure of female sensuality. The reflected light on the water’s surface, the turbulence of agitated water, and most notably, the absence of the body hint at a mysterious, perhaps perilous narrative. Closely cropped pieces of lingerie amid dirt and leaves suggest the fragmented body might dissolve alongside the decaying sediment of the puddles.

Melissa Wilkinson’s data bending creates an immediate sense of fragmentation, destabilization, and even irritation. These sensations are intended. Her process begins by building digital layers of imagery appropriated from historic masterworks and contemporary pornography. The juxtaposition of a classical nude and lush floral motifs from a seventeenth century still life with the bold, kitschy palette inspired by the lighting of pornography upends the visual pleasure associated with the objectified female nude.
Combining the male genre of the classical nude and the feminine genre of still life with pornography, predominantly the product of male gaze, Wilkinson asserts her role as spectator, consumer, and creator. Literally dismantling preexisting imagery, Wilkinson figuratively dismantles grand narratives. She confronts the elitism of classical genres with her addition of pornography, a taboo genre far outside of the canon, and highlights the artifice of both forms that exist to excite visual pleasure and desire. The corporeality of the work borders on the explicit, but the disembodied, unexpectedly fused body parts interrupted by natural imagery upset completion of the narrative experience. Clear gender and sexual difference is intentionally obscured making the viewer unaware of whether her/his desire is hetero or homosexual, which further destabilizes viewing pleasure and one’s sense of self. Each work is part of Wilkinson’s *La Petite Morte* series, which references both the pleasure of orgasm and the reminders of death taken from the still life sub-genre of *vanitas* painting.

Holder, Luckett, and Rutter go beyond depicting the natural. Nature is substantively present in the process of creating via porcelain, water, and algae. They exercise a level of control in their use of these natural elements, but reference fragility in the control they exercise. With their pointed embrace of the natural, they declare the value of the natural world and expose the imagined division between nature and culture. Further, none of the artists dispenses with the feminine in process. Holder’s sugar-covered porcelain aligns with a history of female food preparation and service. Rutter adopts soft color and delicate rendering that evokes women’s role in botanical illustration. Luckett makes lingerie, distinctly feminine, material to her work. Wilkinson chooses to render small, intimate watercolors. This embrace of the feminine not only refutes dated dichotomies, but also asserts the value of those realms historically considered feminine and subsequently thought “lesser than.”

Their careful use of the feminine ensures desire and attraction are at play in the viewer’s experience. Abjection, though pushed aside day-to-day, is a craved site for release.² Holder, Luckett, Rutter, and Wilkinson interrupt visual pleasure and one’s sense of self by inspiring distaste and even disgust.³ Ambivalence is central to each of the works in this exhibition and the viewer experience. Each is alluring yet threatening.

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5. Arya, 29.
7. Arya, 35.
Artist Statement
The forest is a psychologically complex landscape: a place of beauty, solitude, reflection, and sometimes danger. In fairytales, the forest can be a place to flee and hide in, a place to lose one’s way and become ensnared, or a place to stumble upon the mysterious and otherworldly. As a young girl, I was more likely to imagine myself as an adventurer in the enchanted woods than as the manicured princess at the ball. As an artist, I am drawn to the ways we manipulate the landscape, in actuality and in fables, to communicate specific cultural expectations and ideologies.

The longing for sweetness is perhaps the first incarnation of desire, and often lasts a lifetime. Sweetness is a quality especially desirous in women, not only in fairytales but also in the south where I grew up. I was never very good at small talk, and that kind of sugar, while delectable, makes me a bit queasy. In my mouth, the saccharine behavior of sweet debutantes tastes suffocating and artificial, especially when I long for the cool forest air. A bright wad of cotton candy is difficult to resist, yet its consumption often leaves one sticky and regretful.

This installation seeks to reconcile these ideas, creating a space that is trivial and mysterious, superficial and magical. The candy-coated forest is a scenic glen where the viewer, deeply inhaling the sugary scents, may reflect upon both what she desires and what is desired of her.

Artist Bio
Dawn Holder received an MFA in Ceramics from the Rhode Island School of Design and a BFA in Ceramics from the University of Georgia. Holder holds a Sheridan Collegiate Teaching Certificate from Brown University. She is currently Assistant Professor of Art at University of the Ozarks in Clarksville, Arkansas. Learn more about Holder’s work at dawnholder.com

Once Upon a Time in the Forest of I’m Not Sweet Enough
porcelain, porcelain paper-clay, poly-fill, plaster, sugar, chocolate and butterscotch almond bark, hard candy, cotton candy, iridescent paint
2008–2010
Dawn Holder’s installation Monoculture is a meditation on ideas surrounding traditional feminine craft, ecofeminism, and the intersection of nature and culture in the form of a ceramic lawn.

Holder draws upon poet Joyelle McSweeny’s theory of the Necropastoral conceiving of landscape as “a political-aesthetic zone in which the fact of mankind’s depredations cannot be separated from an experience of ‘nature’ which is poisoned, mutated, aberrant, spectacular, full of ill effects and affects.” Holder not only questions the lawn’s status as natural, but its utility. Lawns are used and enjoyed far less than they are maintained. She suggests lawns exist more as a symbol of upward mobility, suburban morality, and consumer culture, while their environmental cost is seldom considered.

As a simulated natural zone willed into a perfectly manicured state through unnatural chemicals, specialized tools, and (historically) with male labor, the lawn represents nature tamed and dominated. Yet Holder encroaches on this traditional male role through the creation her own lawn. She adopts feminine modes of making marked by fragility and repetition. Holder’s lawn is comprised of 75,000 ceramic blades aligning her process with repetitive female crafts such as needlepoint. Her work highlights the parallel between the western obsession with taming, cultivating, and controlling the natural landscape and patriarchal control over the female body. –Courtney Taylor

2Based on conversation and written communications with Dawn Holder, March–September 2014.
3Based on conversation and written communications with Dawn Holder, March–September 2014.
Artist Statement
Water is seductive—as is lingerie.
Both can be alluring, fluid, transparent.
A visual tease, begging for a gaze.
Allowing the lingerie to interact with the pools of water
brought life to the garments
and implied a mysterious scenario,
suggesting the female form in her absence.
I think of these photos as still shots from a movie
with an undefined conclusion.

Artist Bio
Sandra Luckett holds a BFA and MFA in painting from Virginia Commonwealth University. She is the founder of The Squirrelly Girls Art Collective. Luckett is an Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway, Arkansas. Learn more about Luckett’s work at sandraluckett.net

Sexy Puddles
digital photography
2014, installation of 12: 68.25” x 21.75”
individual: 3.5” x 5”
**Artist Statement**

There is a deep desire in us as humans to feel understood, to have our souls nourished and loved. Yet we have progressively isolated ourselves—from nature, from one another, even our own inner beings. We create noise. We seek to be individuals, to be independent, to be in control. We have lost our sense of interconnectedness with one another and with the Earth. We have forgotten that we are not separate entities, that the well-being of others is our own.

My work explores images and ideas that express our connection to the universe and to ourselves; an existence that is full of both wonder and struggle. My drawings usually begin by ‘painting’ with hair-like algae, an intuitive process that allows me to connect with my subconscious, like one might find images in clouds. Muddy shapes gradually evolve into recognizable forms. Gentle lines and colors give an initial feeling of warmth and familiarity, often bringing to mind illustrations from old children’s books. An ambiguous narrative is created. The ambiguity challenges our immediate perceptions—are these beasts and plants consuming/strangling or embracing/nurturing? A reminder that we rarely know the complication of one’s story; a request for deeper understanding. I primarily use pencil, watercolor, and gouache, but also use a variety of non-traditional materials including coffee, salt, and plant dyes. Through the ambivalence of these images, my work addresses our emotional and physical beings, as well as the coexistence of the grotesque, the beautiful, and the fantastical.

**Artist Bio**

Katherine Rutter earned a BFA from the University of Central Arkansas with an emphasis in photography and drawing. A native Arkansan, Rutter grew up on a small farm in Little Rock where she developed a close relationship with nature. She currently lives and works in Oakland, California.

Learn more about Rutter’s work at katherinerutter.com

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<th>Title</th>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Size</th>
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<td>Be gentle with yourself, with your sorrows, with your anger</td>
<td>pencil, watercolor, gouache, ink, algae</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>26” x 18”</td>
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<td>Domestication, liberation &amp; parasitic plants</td>
<td>pencil, watercolor, gouache, ink, algae</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>22” x 30”</td>
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<td>The Harlequin</td>
<td>pencil, watercolor, gouache, ink, algae</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>18” x 14”</td>
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<td>The letting go, we still don’t know</td>
<td>pencil, watercolor, gouache, ink, algae</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>17” x 13.5”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rain does its work</td>
<td>pencil, watercolor, gouache, ink, algae</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>30.5” x 22”</td>
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Artist Statement
This series of paintings relates to my interest in dichotomies: obscuring and revealing, attraction and repulsion, good and evil, the past and the present. I appropriate imagery from a variety of sources in order to develop a pastiche that fractures the conventional male gaze and positions art historical models as both subject and spectacle. I choose to dismantle epic narratives from the past to create a schizophrenic perspective. The images break from their original sources into fragments, creating a complex visual experience that both irritates and seduces.

The romantic process of painting allows me to meditate on issues of gender, identity construction, and beauty. Though the paintings are initially conceived of using digital processes, they are made employing traditional techniques borrowed from the old masters. In doing so, I endeavor to uphold these painting processes while dismantling the elitism with which they are often associated.

Artist Bio
Melissa Wilkinson received an MFA in painting from Southern Illinois University and a BFA in painting and drawing from Western Illinois University. She is currently Assistant Professor of Art at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Learn more about Wilkinson’s work at melissawilkinson.net

Coiffure
watercolor on paper
2014, 22” x 30”

Man Eater
watercolor on paper
2014, 30” x 22”

Rapture
watercolor on paper
2014, 22” x 30”

Spin
watercolor on paper
2014, 22” x 30”

Head and Tail
watercolor on paper
2014, 22” x 30”

Sleep
watercolor on paper
2014, 22” x 30”
curatorial

Acknowledgments

Working on Arkansas Women to Watch 2016 has been a pleasure and a labor of love. I feel fortunate to have come to the project at the right time with the right theme: the opportunity to break down barriers related to gender and sexuality and confront the continued inequality in arts professions, among others, is a welcome one. It has been an absolute honor to serve as Guest Curator for this Women to Watch cycle. I would first like to thank the Arkansas Committee of NMWA for trusting me to bring this project to fruition and providing women artists and myself the opportunity and the support to connect with National Museum of Women in the Arts. I would also like to express my gratitude to the National Museum for the Women to Watch program connecting emerging artists and curators with national and international women artists, curators, and arts professionals.

I would like to specially thank Arkansas Committee members Barbara Satterfield, Shannon Dillard Mitchell, Dabney Pelton, Kitty Rubenstein, and Maribeth Frazer as well as NMWA National Advisory Board member MaryRoss Taylor for their unwavering support and their advocacy on my behalf throughout the project. I would also like to thank Dr. Lenore Shoults, Executive Director of Arts & Science Center for Southeast Arkansas, for her dedicated guidance and encouragement. Dawn Holder, Sandra Luckett, Katherine Rutter, and Melissa Wilkinson must be thanked for their commitment to this extended project; it has been a pleasure to get to know each of these artists.

Bio

Courtney Taylor earned a master’s degree in Museum Studies with a focus on Visual Studies from the University of Tulsa and a bachelor’s degree from Hendrix College in history and art history. A native Arkansan, Taylor currently serves as Assistant Director and Curator at the Arts & Science Center for Southeast Arkansas in Pine Bluff.
Exhibition Tour Schedule

December 3, 2015 – January 21, 2016   Arts & Science Center for Southeast Arkansas
  701 Main Street, Pine Bluff, AR 71601, 870-536-3375

June 29 – July 28, 2016                         The Arts Center of the Ozarks
  214 S Main Street, Springdale, AR 72764, 479-751-5441

August 4 – September 1, 2016              South Arkansas Arts Center
  110 E 5th Street, El Dorado, AR 71730, 870-862-5474

September 8 – October 20, 2016         UALR Department of Art Galleries
Fine Arts Building, 2801 S University Avenue, Little Rock, AR 72204, 501-569-3182

December 8, 2016 – January 12, 2017   Argenta Branch Art Gallery
  William F. Laman Public Library, 420 Main Street, North Little Rock, AR 72114, 501-687-1061

January 19 – February 16, 2017            Stephens Fine Art Gallery, University of the Ozarks
  415 N College Avenue, Clarksville, AR 72830, 479-979-1349

February 23 – April 6, 2017                  Arkadelphia Arts Center
  625 Main Street, Arkadelphia, AR 71923, 870-210-5235

For the most recent list of host venues: check the EVENTS & EXHIBITS tab on the Arkansas Committee website (acnmwa.org) or email Project Manager Barbara Satterfield at barbarabdesign@yahoo.com

State Tour Exhibition Committee
Barbara Satterfield/Project Manager
Courtney Taylor/Guest Curator
Rebecca Mullikin-Brantley/Guest Graphic Designer
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State Honorary Chairman
First Lady Susan Hutchinson

National Advisory Board Member, National Museum of Women in the Arts
Mary Ross Taylor
Exhibition tour made possible in part by the Windgate Foundation.

Images
Cover Image, Page 9 (detail)  *Once Upon a Time in the Forest of I'm Not Sweet Enough*, Dawn Holder, 2008–2010, porcelain, porcelain, paper-clay, poly-fill, plaster, sugar, chocolate and butterscotch almond bark, hard candy, cotton candy, iridescent paint

Page 12–13 (detail)  *Sexy Puddles*, Sandra Luckett, 2014, digital photography, installation of 12: 68.25” x 21.75”, individual: 3.5” x 5”

Page 14 (detail)  *Be gentle with yourself, with your sorrows, with your anger*; Katherine Rutter, 2014, pencil, watercolor, gouache, ink, algae, 26” x 18”

Page 15  *The Harlequin*, Katherine Rutter, 2014, pencil, watercolor, gouache, ink, algae, 18” x 14”

Page 16  *Rapture*, Melissa Wilkinson, 2014, watercolor on paper, 22” x 30”

Page 17  *Man Eater*, Melissa Wilkinson, 2014, watercolor on paper, 30” x 22”

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