

Cultural Undertow
Tidawhitney Lek and Gloria Gem Sánchez
Luna Anaïs Gallery
Curatorial statement
Narsiso Martinez and Phoenix Rodman
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One doesn't have to look far back in history to see the oppression of some communities in society and the exclusion of their voices in the arts specifically. Take voices of women and people of color, for example, which have been severely underrepresented. Classically confined to function as objects of the western gaze, women and people of color embody rich creativity and perspectives in art, the recognition of which is long overdue. So when I was invited to curate a show at Luna Anaïs Gallery by founder Anna Bagirov, herself an immigrant from Azerbaijan, I was inspired to extend this platform to present work by female artists of color who offer their cultures through their artistic practices in complementary ways.

In my endeavor to share the opportunities I've been given in realizing my own artistic vision as a member of a minority group, artists Tidawhitney Lek and Gloria Gem Sánchez came to mind. Considering medium and method, the two artists could hardly be more different. Lek's artistic practice is rooted in traditional figurative oil painting while Sánchez's work takes on a more sculptural form that makes use of experimental materials. Both approach their subjects quite differently as well. Lek, a first generation American born from Cambodian parents, offers us intimate depictions of often fantastical scenes from her life and family. Her paintings are at once deeply personal and universal, raising questions about human practices derived from cultural identities and how those can be unique and identifying or general and familiar. Leaving us to ponder similarities and differences across cultures, her work presents delicious details of family and traditions that ultimately indicate a humanity unified.

As narrative and pictorial as Lek's paintings are, Sánchez's more sculptural works take viscerality and creativity head on. Directly influenced by the materiality which is derivative of her Chicana-Filipina background, she includes found pieces of fabric, hair, corn husk, bamboo sticks, and shade snake skin, incorporating all by the act of weaving. True to her *Rasquachismo* sensibility and with the labor of her hands expressed throughout her sculptural works, Sánchez honors the traditions of care and craft in stark contrast to the overwhelming volume of output that is glorified in today's capitalistic cultures. With the use of repurposed materials and ordinary objects that are often imbued with spiritual or personal significance, Sánchez shows how mass production seems unnecessary. Her work is a bold reminder of the importance of respect for resources and the importance of meaning over quantity consumption.

While Lek carries on the tradition of figurative oil painting we find in Vermeer's affectionately detailed quotidian scenes and Sánchez invents unconventional constructions as in Italy's Arte Povera movement of the 1960's, both artists bring us to consider how we are connected to each other, to the earth, and to our pasts.