

Art

These 20 Female Artists Are Pushing Sculpture Forward

Tess Thackara Jul 30, 2018 4:52 pm

Sculpture was once considered the domain of ambitious male artists, a medium as challenging in its physicality as it was limitless in scope. But for several decades, artists from Eva Hesse and Senga Nengudi to Phyllida Barlow and Ursula von Rydingsvard have carved a place for women working in contemporary sculpture. And in 2018, it's arguably female artists who are creating some of the most interesting, challenging, and ambitious forms—freely taking the body apart, prodding taboos, and embracing the grotesque.

The eclectic group of 20 international sculptors highlighted here ranges from emerging to mid-career talents. What connections can we draw between them? There's the extraordinary influence of Louise Bourgeois, for one—nearly half of these artists cited the late artist as one of their icons. Doris Salcedo looms large, too. Meanwhile, many of these practices underscore the fact that clay has been comfortably absorbed into the artist's toolbox, moving well beyond the realm of vessels to become a commonplace material—as capable as steel, wood, resin, and other materials in pushing boundaries and helping us to see the world anew.

Together, these artists are helping to define, question, and evolve the future of their medium.

Guan Xiao [⊕ Follow](#)

B. 1983, China. Lives and works in Beijing.



Installation view of Guan Xiao, *Sunrise*, 2015, at the 9th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, The Feuerle Collection, Berlin, 2016. Photo by Timo Ohler. Courtesy of the artist, Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin, and Antenna Space, Shanghai

Guan Xiao's cryptic sculptural arrangements look like surrealistic objects and tableau imagined in *Second Life*, but realized IRL. They can feel flat despite their three-dimensional form. Artificial plants that emerge from car tires are set against screensaver backdrops; a totemic head colored in a glossy pastel blue hue is mounted atop a camera tripod; car wheels become components of faceless, futuristic creatures.

Xiao—who has been featured in past iterations of the New Museum Triennial and the Berlin Biennale, and has upcoming shows at Kunsthalle Winterthur and the Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis—likes to bring together references that are seemingly opposed: old with modern, digital with analog, natural with artificial. In *Callimico* (2017), a reflective metal hub cap is decorated with pieces of faux wood, artificial cattail plants (which could double as American corn dogs), and an iPhone stand. Her puzzling arrangements sometimes suggest a critique of our society's technological love affair, for what appear to be historical artifacts become subsumed by an insidious and pervasive internet aesthetic.