

Gallerist Monique Meloche Talks EXPO, Sanford Biggers, and More

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By Katy Donoghue

For Chicago gallerist Monique Meloche, the week of EXPO is busy—with her booth at the fair featuring works by artists like **Sanford Biggers**, **Ebony G. Patterson**, **Jeff Sonhouse**, **Carrie Schneider**, **Nate Young**, **Sheree Hovsepian**, **Cheryl Pope**, and **Brendan Fernandes**; a solo show of new work by Biggers at her West Town space; and Fernandes' "Reverence" performance at the DePaul Art Museum.

But so is every week, really. Meloche makes a point of traveling a good deal in support of her artists exhibitions, talks, and projects in other cities and abroad.

Whitewaller caught up with Meloche to talk about her robust roster of artists, her plans for this week in Chicago, and how we might get an invite to her annual private pizza and prosecco party.

WHITEWALL: Can you tell us about the show of new work by Sanford Biggers currently on view at the gallery?

MONIQUE MELOCHE: This is Sanford's third solo show with the gallery and presents an array of new marble sculptures, quilt paintings, quilt constructions, and 3D wall reliefs.

WW: The artist recently spent a year in Rome. How did his time there influence some of the new works on view?

MM: Sanford's work has always been about the convergence of varied social, art, and cultural histories. His time in Rome clearly offered fertile ground for that project, given the city's long history as a site for civilization. The new Chimera sculptures are very clearly born from Rome's classical past and the history of marble sculpture.

The bust piece *Love Supreme* is comprised of two forms: the bust of "a Roman lady" with a mask from the Dan people of Cote d'Ivoire superimposed on top of it. The figure *St. Marvelous* is comprised of a Luba Hemba fertility figure on top of a toga-clad classical standing figure.



Photo by Kevin Penczak . Courtesy of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago

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Installation views of Sanford Biggers at Monique Meloche. Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery.

Sanford sourced all of the original forms on Ebay and used 3D modeling to re-proportion them and ultimately converge them onto each other—an extension of his interest in “dubious origins,” cultural appropriation and borrowing, and the alchemical transformation of one object or idea into another material or substance. The two works have an incredible bodily presence when experienced in person, a sense of corporeality that is also reflected in the cut quilt piece *Lucretia*, which is installed right near the *Chimeras*.

According to Roman tradition, *Lucretia* was a noblewoman in ancient Rome whose rape by Sextus Tarquinius, an Etruscan king's son, resulted in her own honor suicide. This prompted her husband and brother to avenge her death, causing a rebellion that overthrew the Roman monarchy led to the transition of Roman government from a kingdom to a republic. The aggressive cut-out portions of the piece allude to her self-stabbing, and the entire work suggests a flayed figure, with sagging bits which figure evoke the human body. Considered with the *Chimeras*, which are of course created through a reductive process, an interesting conversation about negative space arises, and how meaningful the absence of something can be when considering form, and perhaps, history more generally.

The quilt *A Convenient Truth* is specifically looking at Roman architecture, in particular *acqueducts*, which provided technology for moving water long distances, a recurring theme in Sanford's work that goes back to his use of wave-like forms to evoke the Middle Passage as well as waves in Japanese art, a rich formal history that Sanford often mines given the time he spent there earlier in his life. And of course the title *Neroluce* – “black light” – is taken from the Italian language.

One of the quilt construction pieces, *Trastevere*, is also directly inspired by his time in Rome, in particular the view out of his window at the American Academy, which is located on a hill that provided a vista of the city.

WW: The gallery recently moved to West Town – can you tell us about the new space and how artists have been responding to it?

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MM: Our new gallery is significantly larger than our previous space in Wicker Park/Bucktown. It is just under 5000 square feet and is a unique L-shape, so when you first visit you walk directly into gallery one (which is about the size of our previous exhibition space) and you see a nice long corridor that leads you past our reception desk and office area made by gallery artist Nate Young and into the larger gallery two.

My office is behind gallery two and it looks like that could be it, but there is a sliding door which opens up onto our viewing room and you turn the corner to see that our "back of the house" viewing room, art storage, kitchen, and loading dock take up the same footprint and the "front of the house" gallery spaces. The fabulous Chicago-based Dirk Denison is our architect and he really maximized our space, let in some terrific natural light by keeping some of the very Chicago glass block windows already in the building, kept the typical Chicago brick wall in our viewing room that is a nod to our very discreet façade, and just ground down the concrete floor leaving a rich variety of stains and textures that are a palimpsest of all the previous tenants.

We thought when we designed the space that we could show two artists in gallery one and two, but so far every artist has chosen to take over both spaces and **Ebony G. Patterson** has plans to even continue her exhibition into the viewing room in November!

WW: You have such a strong roster of artists. How would you describe the gallerist/artist relationship you try to have with each?

MM: Each one is unique, but all of them are extremely close. We are a small but mighty operation with myself, my director **Aniko Berman**, and gallery manager **Allison Moore**; and we divide our roster so that we are in constant contact with all of our artists. Many of them we call, email or text (depending on each artist's preferred mode of communication) at least a couple times a day! I take great pride in starting to work with artists when they are just getting started and helping to strategize the trajectory of their careers from unknown to having their work shown and collected by museums worldwide.

I personally travel as much as I can to support my artists wherever and whenever they are showing. In July and August I travelled with **Nate Young** to Cleveland to celebrate his inclusion in the Front Triennial curated by Michelle Grabner, to New York with **Brendan Fernandes** for his performance on the High Line and managed a couple studio visits with **Cheryl Pope** and **Carrie Schneider**, to Indiana University for "Out of Easy Reach" exhibition curated by Allison Glenn to support **Sheree Hovsepian** and **Abigail Deville**'s works we have on loan, to Kansas City with Ebony G. Patterson for her amazing installation in "Open Spaces" city-wide exhibition curated by Dan Cameron (and I will go back in October for Sanford Biggers performance in the same exhibition).

We are only mid-month, and already in September I travelled with Sanford Biggers to St. Louis for his solo show at the Contemporary Art Museum, then onto Bentonville, Arkansas the next morning to meet **Amy Sherald** for her solo show and artist talk and see **Kendell Carter**'s work in "The Garden" exhibition both at Crystal Bridges Museum. My wonderful husband Evan Boris flew to St. Louis for Biggers actual opening, since I was only there for the preview and artist talk, and represented us at Brendan Fernandes' solo show at the DePaul Art Museum in Chicago while I was in St. Louis! It is very much a team effort, where myself and my staff work hard for our artists and they work equally as hard and support each other.



Installation view of Sanford Biggers at Monique Meloche. Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago

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WW: What will you be presenting at your booth in EXPO this year?

MM: A curated booth with works by **Sanford Biggers, Ebony G. Patterson, Jeff Sonhouse, Carrie Schneider, Nate Young, Sheree Hovsepian, Cheryl Pope, and Brendan Fernandes** whose three sculptures from his recent "Master and Form" exhibition at the Graham Foundation will anchor the booth and will be activated daily by dancers from the Joffrey Academy. Brendan's performance "Reverence" will usher in the audience at EXPO into his talk with author Sarah Thorton on Friday morning at the fair and he has a solo booth sponsored by DePaul Art Museum and will be doing a book signing there on Friday following the talk.

WW: Outside of the fair, are there any exhibitions or events you're personally excited about seeing or attending during the week of EXPO?

MM: Saturday morning Brendan Fernandes will also present his "Reverence" performance at the DePaul Art Museum where he has his solo exhibition "The Living Mask" which includes photographs, sculptures and videos interspersed with early African masks from DPAM's collection.

I'm looking forward to VIP reception at the Harold Washington Library for ProjectArt and EXPO Chicago to celebrate exhibition curated by Laura Dvorkin and fundraiser chaired by Kyle DeWoody "My Kid Could Do That" featuring artworks made by artists when they were kids from ages 4-17 including such artists Judy Chicago, Karl Wirsum, Tony Lewis, and gallery artist Cheryl Pope – a figurative painting made when she was just 17, which is oddly prescient of her brand new felt paintings that we will debut in our EXPO booth!

Cheryl Pope will also be honored at the Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art's Annual Visionary Ball with the 2018 Trendsetter Award alongside Susann Craig 2018 Visionary Award, and Patty Carroll and Tony Jones, CBE, 2018 Advocate for the Arts Award. The best event of EXPO weekend is always my private Pizza & Prosecco party at my home for my out of town dealer friends, curators, and collectors!