

LAUNCH F18

June 25, 2020



IN CONVERSATION

**GRACELEE LAWRENCE
& CHRISTIN GRAHAM**

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In connection with Gracelee Lawrence's Viewing Room, *Thick Pulp of Life*, Christin Graham sat down with the artist, to dive deep into her influences, drive as an artist, and overall commitment to the arts beyond just her studio practices. Gracelee is a Brooklyn based artist whose sculptures draw from historical and cultural references, merged with cutting edge technology.

CHRISTIN GRAHAM: One of my favorite things on your "about" page on your website is how you describe yourself as a "lifelong horsewoman". A very pointed statement! Can you give us a little information on your background, where you are from, and where you are now?

GRACELEE LAWRENCE: I grew up on a tobacco farm in Sanford, North Carolina, started riding horses at 7, and competed nationally into my mid-twenties. I competed seriously in Dressage and Eventing, but also did quadrille, played Polocrosse, and much else. I approach my art making in a similar way to my horse life- with great emotional stake and daily, measured attention. I very much miss having horses as a constant part of my life, but my travels in the past few years have made that difficult! In the past three years, I've done 10 residencies, lived in Thailand, and taught sculpture at Kenyon College. There is so much more to be told about my wanderings in the world, but I'll leave it there for now!

CG: One of my favorite questions to ask is always about an artist's morning routine. Since almost everyone's routine has been disrupted in the past few months, can you share with us how you are spending your mornings during quarantine?

GL: In the past few months, digital space has become an even more important connector in my daily life, as it has for most of us. For the first two months, I was teaching remotely, meaning that much of my life was spent planning virtual classes and communicating with my students. Now that the semester is over, I'm focusing fully on my work and other projects. Most mornings I make a pot of green tea, water my plants (including a cute dragon fruit seedling and my prized variegated lemon tree) and then jump into organizing the [Virtual Studio Visit Network](#) artist that day. I've been organizing VSVN live studio visits since quarantine started and it has been incredibly exciting and expansive as I'm constantly introduced to new artists! After making sure that things are ready to go for VSVN, I do a bit of computer work and (if it's nice out) go on a long bike ride before getting to the studio. I have a tendency to eat dinner quite late, so ideally I'm in the studio until 10 or 11 pm. My work is incredibly labor-intensive, so I have to chug away every day to make any notable progress.

CG: I know that you spent the last year teaching at Kenyon College in Gambier, OH and have been teaching since 2016 in other capacities, how did first start? Have you always wanted to teach?

GL: I do enjoy teaching as it is, at best, a fulfilling parallel to my own practice that constantly encourages me to expand my knowledge and consider my own work in the context of new thoughts and systems. I began teaching while living in Thailand on a Luce Scholars Fellowship and working with the incredible

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artist Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, who founded the Multidisciplinary Department of Art at Chiang Mai University. While I originally thought that I'd be assisting her with her own work full time, she ended up asking me to teach in the department alongside working on her projects part-time. The vast majority of my students did not speak English and I was in the process of learning Thai, so it was an interesting experiment in communication beyond language. My time at Chiang Mai University paved the way for me to teach in the US. Teaching fully allows me to make the work I deem necessary apart from the desires of the art market. While I would love to be able to focus on my own work full time, this is absolutely the best concession I could imagine and I'm so grateful for my students and colleagues who keep me present and ever learning.

CG: Teaching, as I perceive it, takes a lot of patience but is subsequently very rewarding. During your time teaching, what is the most important thing you try to convey to your students?

GL: Apart from the evergreen importance of wearing safety glasses in the shop, patience and confidence are two of the most important things I work to give my students. Empowerment comes from learning how to use a chop saw as much as it does from learning about the systems of disparity that pervade the art world, so much of my work is in giving my students as complete of a view of any topic as possible. It is not enough to only gain the skills; they must be put to thoughtful and considerate use. I wish all of my student's patience in thought and confidence in action.



Gracelee Lawrence. *A Whole Hand*. 2020. Polylactic acid 3D print, 8 x 8 x 7.5 in

CG: A majority of your work includes fruit, vegetables, and specific body parts- such as feet and hands- can you tell us why these elements are so important to you?

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GL: I'm interested in the ways that bodies, in particular female-identified bodies, are historically and cross-culturally compared to foods and more specifically fruit. In almost every language there is a saying that compares female bodies to fruit in appearance, availability, or enjoyment, drawing the clear line of commodity and distribution between the two. Secondly, there is an important sense of humor or perversity in the combination or comparison of foods and bodies that interests me as a line of entry into the work.

I was originally drawn to the fragmentation of bodies because it allowed for the ambiguity of gender and removal of personhood, as well as a nod to art history in the fracturing of Classical marble sculptures. Fragments belong to everyone and no one; there is an alluring openness in a disembodied hand or floating foot. I feel a need for the body fragments to be larger than life, at the size or height of a monumentally scaled object, to feel relatable yet also slightly removed from lived reality. In the same way that a fragment can be all yet none, a scaled-up object is not related to one particular person or narrative. That is a freedom.

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CG: Your work has this larger than life feel to it, from the small banana feet to *Perceived Happiness as the Ultimate Revenge*, a sculpture you made while at Franconia Sculpture Park as a Jerome Fellow. Technology, along with precise planning is very present in your work, producing surreal, beautifully crafted sculptures. Can you speak a little bit about this intersection of the two?

GL: The digital planning and production processes allow me to fabricate to incredibly precise specifications, which are often necessary for fountain making or objects that require component build-outs. I'm often starting with a 3D scan of my own body in a particular pose that is then combined with food/fruit that I have scanned myself, purchased, or designed in digital space. The use of 3D scanning, 3D modeling, and 3D printing allows for me to replicate a form, image, or object with relative accuracy and in that it becomes both a "true" replica and almost a ghost of the original thing. The apparitional nature of digital fabrication is very exciting to me, as it feels so related to the way that the digital world infiltrates our human perception of reality.

CG: What is your favorite part about the marriage of technology and art on a larger, global scale? Is there anything about it that scares you?

GL: As our daily lives become ever more soaked in the digital world it's natural that other parts of our experience will as well. The wonderful thing about the intersection of art and technology is that it allows

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for a speculative inquiry of how technology affects our physical selves. It is just another tool, albeit one that can still feel novel, for artists to use or subvert as necessary.

CG: In the past three months artists, galleries, and institutions have really adapted to the abrupt need for virtual accessibility to work, making programming and learning available online. How do you think this changes our experience with art - as a creator and a viewer?



Gracelee Lawrence. *Delicious Roman of Solitude*. 2020. Polylactic acid 3D print, 5 x 5 x 4.5 in

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GL: The idea and definition of accessibility, the importance of physical presence in understanding any given piece of artwork, and the tangible role that the artist takes in society are all important considerations in this question. In some ways, the virtual viewing rooms, uptick in VR/AR exhibitions, and digital build outs of gallery spaces have allowed for broader viewership and theoretically a larger viewing audience than what is possible on foot. On the other hand, much work that is not well suited to the digital sphere is being forced into that space in order to continue pushing the same agendas of sales and exposure, to the disservice of the work. If digital spaces are used thoughtfully they allow for a broader viewership and exciting experimentation, which I very much hope becomes a part of our new reality.

CG: Artists are given the unique opportunity to reimagine the future and how we come out of this time in our current history. As creatives and problem solvers, I think it's important to decide how we can use this time to create a better future for ourselves, and the art world as a whole. As new challenges arise, do you see your work changing or adapting in any way?

GL: I'm hoping that the struggles of the global pandemic combined with the incredible energy and redistributions of power happening from the Black Lives Matter movement will allow the art world to create sustainable systems for artists of all backgrounds and career levels to thrive, rather than allowing historically predicated sales models to encourage the success of a slim margin. In my own work, I'm thinking about VR/AR experiences that will bring my work into new spaces and allow folks globally to step into my world. The collective that I'm a part of, [Material Girls](#), is also actively thinking about how to create more opportunities, platforms, and systems of care in the art world as a whole. It will take the efforts and intentions of a majority, but I am hopeful for positive change!

CG: Before you go we would love to know what you are listening to, watching, and reading these days. Can you give an example of your top picks for either inside or outside of the studio?

GL: In the studio, I alternate between podcasts (recent favorites include [The Memory Palace](#) and [1619](#)) and internet radio (usually [The Lot](#) or [NTS](#)). If I'm really trying to get some work done I'll find a long set by [Shanti Celeste](#) or put on [Mr. Fingers](#). Internet radio is my absolute favorite- I love having a DJ in charge of the listening experience so I can focus on my work!

Gracelee Lawrence opened her first solo show in New York at Thierry Goldberg in May 2019. Recent exhibitions include Postmasters Gallery (New York, NY), Greenpoint Terminal Gallery (Brooklyn, NY), SPRING/BREAK Art Fair (New York, NY), and The Wassaic Project (Wassaic, NY). In 2017 she returned from 15 months as a Visiting Professor in the Multidisciplinary Department of Art at Chiang Mai University and assistant to artist Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook on a Luce Scholars Fellowship. She is a member of the collective MATERIAL GIRLS, a 2019 Jerome Fellow at Franconia Sculpture Park, a 2016-17 Luce Scholars Fellow, a recipient of the 2015 UMLAUF Prize, 2013 Eyes Got It Prize, and the 2011-12 Ella Fountain Pratt Emerging Artist Grant. Press for her work includes The New Yorker, Hyperallergic, Artspace, Beautiful/Decay, and MAAKE Magazine, among others. She is an enthusiastic dancer, a lifelong horsewoman, and an aspiring indoor gardener.