

Hyperallergic

Moya Ford, Lauren: *What Can Art Do for Women?*

19 January 2023

HYPERALLERGIC

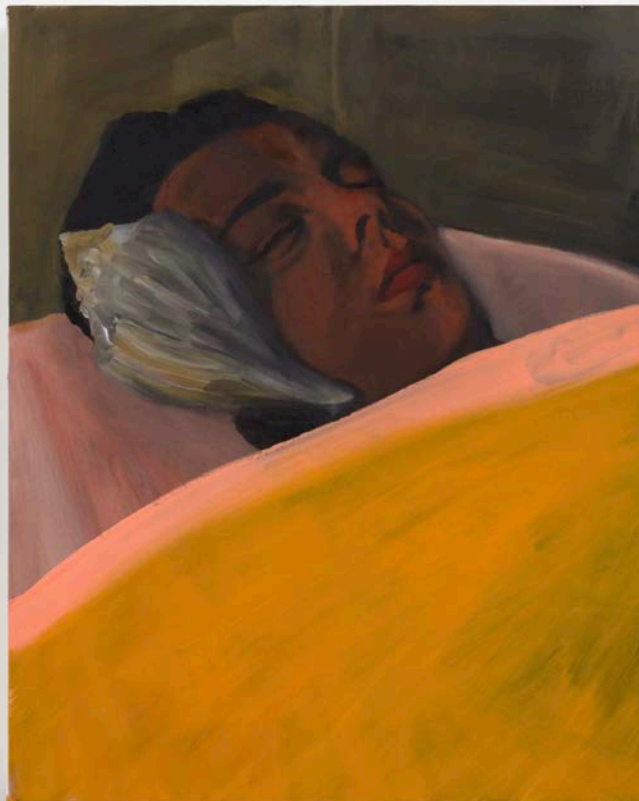
Art

What Can Art Do for Women?

A group show of women artists at The Contemporary Austin addresses the weight and urgency of the current political moment.



Lauren Moya Ford January 19, 2023



Danielle Mckinney, "Dreamer" (2021), acrylic on canvas, 20 x 16 inches (collection of Sarah Hendler and Vinny Dotolo, artwork © Danielle Mckinney, courtesy the artist, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York, and Night Gallery, Los Angeles, photo Pierre Le Hors)

AUSTIN, Tex. — When the US Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022, it left nearly 22 million women of reproductive age without access to safe abortions. Texas has one of the most severe bans in the country: There are no exceptions for cases of rape or incest, and medical exceptions are restricted to grisly, life-threatening extremes. Medical professionals who perform abortions now face felony charges punishable by up to life in prison. A diverse but heavily-gerrymandered state, Texas’s political conservatism has taken a rapid turn to the far right in recent years.

For countless women here, these changes have put our survival — to say nothing of our well-being — on the line. What role can artists play at a time like this? How can culture and its producers respond to and even shape such real, daily problems? Can art do anything in the face of such a situation?

It’s hard not to think about these questions when viewing *IN A DREAM YOU SAW A WAY TO SURVIVE AND YOU WERE FULL OF JOY* at The Contemporary Austin. The group exhibition takes place just seven blocks from the Texas Capitol building, our clearest symbol of state power. Though none deal with abortion specifically, artists Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, Adriana Corral, Ellie Ga, Juliana Huxtable, Tala Madani, Danielle McKinney, Wendy Red Star, and Clare Rojas all work with themes of identity, the body, and control that resonate with the current climate.

“The curatorial framework is directly positioned against the political context, broadly speaking, but especially with Texas’s leading role in right-wing conservatism moving toward the mainstream and restricting all kinds of rights,” curator Robin K. Williams told Hyperallergic on a recent tour of the exhibition. “This [show] was conceived 18 months ago in its initial phase, and now it feels, unfortunately, much more urgent than it even did before.”