





*Mycoplasma Altar*, 2020

Gelatin powder, daisies, foraged rose thorns sourced by Wretched Flowers, baby's breath (*Gypsophila*), juniper berry, metal nuts, kidney beans, amoxicillin pills, hydroxychloroquine pills, methotrexate pills, antibodies in glass syringe vials, tapioca pearls, sunflower seeds, metal button, almond extract, papier-mâché, wood, acrylic, plaster

Bone Dust Sculpture: 17 x 17 x 17 in. (43 x 43 x 43 cm); Plinth: 16 x 17 x 17 in. (41 x 43 x 43 cm); Overall: 33 x 17 x 17 in. (84 x 43 x 43 cm)

# List Projects 24: Sharona Franklin

March 25–June 5, 2022, Bakalar Gallery

Working with a wide range of media and materials, the artist and disability-justice advocate Sharona Franklin reinterprets vernacular and domestic craft techniques to make psychedelic, hallucinatory artworks.

Her textile, ceramic, and cast-gelatin pieces reference ecology, biomedicine, and pharmacology with a distinct, near-alchemical, material sensibility. Revealing tensions between the intimacy of the handmade, the natural world, and biotech's industrial-scale production, Franklin's works raise complex questions about access, care, and disease and disability in relation to biomedical research and ethics.

For her first institutional solo exhibition, Franklin debuts an installation of newly commissioned sculptures looking at medical waste, so-called "Big Pharma," and the products and byproducts of

bioscientific research. Connecting her own extensive research into environmental harm and bioethics with more holistic propositions for remediation and care, Franklin's work approaches these themes from a variety of perspectives—including her own relationship to healthcare economies and medical waste formed through lifelong interactions with the medical system. The works on view offer nuanced reflections on interconnected cycles of production and consumption within and beyond the pharmaco-industrial complex, and the inequitable distribution of resources and ecological consequences that they manifest.

In her ongoing performance *New Psychedelia of Industrial Healing* (begun in 2017), photographs, which the artist refers to as “bio-shrines,” reframe Franklin’s daily act of self-administering injections of an antibody treatment as a ritual performance. The resulting images—shared by Franklin on social media as performance documentation and incorporated into artworks like *Hemichrome Plate* and *Comfort Studies* (both 2020)—each feature a syringe containing her daily dose arranged into a still life–like composition alongside small objects with personal significance, decorative plates, food, flowers, and other household items.

The performance and these other works, which take the form of dinner plates and a quilt, reference the comforts of domesticity and, more obliquely, its constrictions. Franklin—who lives

with mobility impairment and chronic degenerative disease so is often homebound for long periods—nurtured her artistic practice with the resources available in her home and kitchen, where she developed the technique for her signature gelatin sculptures. In one, titled *Mycoplasma Altar* (2020), the artist encased fresh and dried flowers, medicinal plants and herbs, prescription pills, personal ephemera, hardware, and medical syringes in an “altar” of molded-and-cast gelatin (an animal byproduct frequently used by the pharmaceutical industry). Over time, the wobbling, translucent membrane dried, leaked, and shrunk, partially decomposing with the sculpture’s other organic and inorganic components—an inherent mutability that summons associations with the body’s resilience and ultimate decay.



*Hemichrome Plate*, 2020  
UV print on glazed ceramic  
12 x 11 x 2 in. (30 ½ x 28 x 5 cm)





*Mycoplasma Altar*, 2020 (after decomposition)

The installation at the List Center expands on Franklin's interest in relating spiritual and ritualistic practices to medical and scientific ones, present in these earlier works. Floor-to-ceiling curtains, typically employed as mobile partitions in medical care facilities, wrap the gallery's interior, while found pews repurposed from a church and emblazoned with the artist's words offer a place for rest and contemplation. Franklin's interventions, referencing both institutions, transform the exhibition space into a site to hold, in the artist's words, "a memorial to commemorate the biohazardous waste that impacts flora, fauna, earth, and humans, often non-consensually."

Within the curtained sanctum, new sculptures focus Franklin's meditations on how life and death cycles mirror those of consumption and waste. A biodegradable child-sized casket made of willow wicker is glazed with a layer of resinous, hardened gelatin. Its relatively diminutive size, for the artist, acknowledges and gives voice to the experiences of "those who have been made to feel small" through historical and systemic marginalization. Alluding to a funerary bouquet, the casket's exterior is adorned with detritus from the pharmaceutical industry, including empty gel capsules and small pieces of medical equipment, as well as fragments of the artist's writing.

The work's invocations of mortuary rites and decomposition as a process of regeneration stand in stark relief to the methods required for disposing of the biohazardous, industrial waste materials on the casket's surface.

*Wish You Well* (2022), the exhibition's central sculpture, takes the form of a wishing well, a metaphor for life-sustaining water that, while hopeful, also alludes to contamination. The well's translucent cobblestones, made of desiccated gelatin, encase homeopathic botanicals, fungi, bones and pelts of small animals (some routinely used for biomedical research), medical and biohazardous waste, as well as collages of found text and pharmaceutical advertisements from Franklin's personal archive. The work offers an allegory for the cyclical relationship between toxicity and the production and consumption of biohazardous waste by reflecting on

how environmental harm from industrial pollution creates conditions for epigenetic changes that can then cause chronic disease—in turn increasing the demand for pharmacological treatments. This pattern, disproportionately affecting low-income and historically marginalized populations, is referred to by the artist as “biological poverty,” since many individuals are “born into ecologies that are experiencing a biological deficit or put them at risk of biohazardous exposure.” Through her artwork and disability activism, she shines a light on these imbalances and asks: “How can we regenerate this information to develop safer, bio-ethical practices that center those living in precarity and at higher risk?” Seen together, Franklin's new body of work unfolds the complexities and contradictions of our dependency on biomedical products and the uneven distribution of their benefits and harms.



*Mycoplasma Altar*, 2020 (detail, after decomposition)



Comfort Studies, 2020 (detail)



## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Sharona Franklin (b. 1987, Vernon, Canada) lives and works in Vancouver. Recent solo exhibitions and projects include *Axioms of Care*, La Maison de Rendez-Vous, Brussels; *Tellurian Dinner*, Audain Gallery, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver; *New Psychedelia of Industrial Healing*, King's Leap, New York; and a city-wide public art project with the city of Vancouver. Franklin's work has also been presented in group exhibitions at Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; Remai Modern, Saskatoon; april april, New York; New Image Art Gallery, Los Angeles; La Casa Encendida, Madrid; Flux Factory, New York; Unit 17, Vancouver; and Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography, Toronto; among others. Recent publications include *Injustice in Biopharm* (Cassandra Press, 2019) and *Rental Bod* (Peace Library Publications, 2016).

*List Projects 24: Sharona Franklin* is organized by Selby Nimrod, Assistant Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center.

## PUBLIC PROGRAMS

All List Visual Arts Center programs are free and open to the public. Registration is required. For more information about events and programs related to this exhibition, please visit:

[listart.mit.edu/events-programs](http://listart.mit.edu/events-programs)

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### Opening Reception Celebration

Thursday, March 24, 2022, 6:30 PM

In-person program



### Curator Tour with Selby Nimrod

Wednesday, April 27, 2022, 12:15 PM

In-person program

Top image:

*Comfort Studies*, 2020 (detail)

Bottom image:

*Amoebic Self Portrait of Pharmaceutical*

*Preservation Methodologies*, 2020

UV print on glazed ceramic

10 x 10 x 2 in. (25 x 25 x 5 cm)

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## SPONSORS

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October 21, 2022–February 26, 2023

Front cover:

*Mycoplasma Altar*, 2020 (detail)

All images courtesy the artist and King's Leap, New York  
Photos: Stephen Faught

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