

JESSICA SILVERMAN GALLERY

Rose B. Simpson: Duo

October 29 – December 21, 2019

Opening reception: Tuesday, October 29, 6–8pm

Jessica Silverman Gallery is pleased to present “Duo,” a solo show by Rose B. Simpson, featuring sculptures that are made at the same time in pairs. Their titles are suffixed 1 and A (rather than #1 and #2) as they are equal originals, loyal alter-egos, potent allies, twins separated at birth. Made from clay with wood, metal and leather adornments, the figures are meant to help us ground ourselves in reality. They bear witness; they seek to dispel delusion and deceit. They are totems that guide us back to our deeper selves, our common human ancestry.

Simpson comes from a tribe famous for the ceramics its women have produced since the 6th century AD. An apprentice to her mother, an acclaimed native artist, Simpson grew up expressing herself in three-dimensions, mastering of a wide range of ceramic, textile and metalwork practices. After three university degrees, including an MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design, Simpson is also well versed in contemporary art, inspired by artists as diverse as Lee Bontecou and Alberto Giacometti. A bold innovator, Simpson combines tribal belief systems with high art concepts and apocalyptic science-fiction forms.

“Duo” addresses the emotional and existential impacts of living in the 21st century. *They Rose 1* and *They Rose A* are about the fragility of the self and the determination to survive. Created using a technique Simpson calls “slap-slab” wherein she repeatedly throws clay against the floor on a diagonal until it is very thin, the sculptures weigh much less than they look, but still stand strong. The title *They Rose* puns on the artist’s first name. “I fell, but I rose,” says Simpson. “If they fall, they will rise again. May we all rise. The verb honors my experience.”

Frere 1 and *Frere A* explore the multiple perspectives and empathetic connections required to create honest consensus. As Simpson puts it, “These siblings see both sides of every story. They hold multiple insights and have grand hopes for themselves and each other.” Meaning “brother” in French, *Frere* is inspired by a friend and riffs on the modern pan-indigenous term “two spirit,” which refers to gender non-conforming people. “We watch our backs. We can be seen as oddities,” explains Simpson, “but it is exactly this strangeness that gives us power.”

While *Frere* and *They Rose* suggest androgynous empathes, three of the other pairs are warriors. Made from red, buff and white clay, *Root 1* and *Root A* are powerful sentinels, who keep vigil and maintain boundaries. They safeguard against transgressions against female bodies, native territories and diverse innocents. “They are agents of change – rather than denial. They see clearly and stand tall for justice, healing and rehabilitation,” explains Simpson.

Tusked 1 and *Tusked A* are seasoned warriors, whose extreme asymmetry suggests the union of victor and victim. Their dark brown core is punctuated on the right side by two large white horns that look like raised weapons. Their left side, by contrast, is splattered with white glaze as if hit by a blast. They are memorials to a life of “walking head first into an incessant wind,” as Simpson sees it.

River Girl 1 and *River Girl A* are punk immortals, who have protective metal feathers that run down their backs like the sharp spines of an iguana. These warrior twins have prayer beads for arms, as if physical conflict was obsolete and their battles were exclusively spiritual. Having been conceived and executed together, these sisters will never really be alone. No matter their destiny, they are comforted by the awareness of their double.

Three other smaller pairs explore issues of identity, mirroring, family and camaraderie. *Mother 1* and *Mother A* explore the dexterity, resilience and equilibrium required for parenting. While *Moon 1 & A* and *Sun 1 & A* are masks whose eye holes invite the viewer to imagine what it is like to see through someone else’s eyes.

Ultimately, “Duo” is about sociality and compassion. Even Simpson’s warriors root for peace.

Rose B. Simpson (b. 1983, Santa Clara Pueblo, NM) recently enjoyed a solo exhibition at the Wheelwright Museum in Santa Fe, NM. Her sculptures are in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Denver Art Museum, Princeton University Art Museum, Heard Museum (Phoenix AZ), Pomona College Museum of Art (Pomona CA), Peabody Essex Museum (Salem MA) and Clay Art Center (Port Chester NY). Simpson has a BFA from the University of New Mexico, an MFA from Rhode Island School of Design and an MA in Creative Writing from the Institute of American Indian Arts.