



between friends

Nyeema Morgan and Mary Simpson
David Petersen Gallery

- I. November 4 – December 17, 2022 [DPG] 44.92797° N, 93.24768° W
- II. [*acute*: “rapidly becoming a crisis”]
- III. Motherhood! What was it? We did not know or greatly care. My mother and I were good chums. I liked her. After she was dead I loved her with a fierce sense of personal loss.
– W.E.B. Du Bois, ‘The Damnation of Women,’ *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*
- IV. M: If you were to drop a shadow over the map between the gallery, George Floyd Square, and the 3rd Precinct (each about a mile from each other) it would have this shape.
- V. M: Form helps me process things, especially darkness.
- VI. M: What did you do with your mother’s body after she died?
- VII. N: I was really surprised at how heavy her ashes were. She was transcendent, despite the gravity of it all, of life. She always emanated light and had an eye for subtlety, what she called the difference between looking and seeing. And a deep capacity for stillness. And yet the density of her body—her remains—are very heavy. When I commented after the mortician handed me her ashes, he said, tenderly, but matter-of-factly, “Her bones were dense. We all have different bone densities.”
- VIII. Metamorphic rock: the “parent” rock will become a completely new rock under intense heat and pressure. From the Greek *meta*, “change,” and *morphe*, “form.”
- IX. N: I was a relatively new mother, so at the time I was understanding what that meant as I was losing my own. I was slipping into her (maternal) space.

- X. N: I didn't tell you this, but in my mom's death throes, she needed to be on the ground, so we eased her down from the bed to the floor.
- XI. [bell hooks on camaraderie and love]
- XII. N: What did you do?
- XIII. M: She was also cremated. She was scatterbrained, kind of impish, and hard to hold onto. I was only comfortable talking with her when I also felt outside of reality, when I was, for whatever reason (tired, happy, hungover), having a kind of “floaty” day and I could match her untethered energy with my own. So we didn’t scatter her ashes. We grounded her underneath a tree in Alaska.
- XIV. [tree] 62.58433° N, 147.93075° W
- XV. M: Can I tell you a secret?
- XVI. I feel that I am just earth, *soil* lying helpless to move myself, but *thinking*. I seem to hear herds of big beasts like horses and cows thundering over me, and rains beating down; and winds sweeping furiously over—all acting upon me, but me, well, just soil, *feeling* but not able to take part in it all. Then a soft wind like love passes over and warms me, and a summer rain comes down like understanding and softens me, and I push a blade of grass or a flower, or maybe a pine tree—that’s the ground thinking. Plants are ground thoughts, because the soil can’t move itself.
 – Zora Neale Hurston, *John Reading Goes to Sea*
- XVII. M: I expected my mother’s heart to never burn, like Percy Shelley’s heart. Did you know his heart was calcified and refused to turn to ash? His closest friends kept it and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley had to chase them down to get it back. So I had this silly idea that my mother’s heart would solidify into bone.
- XVIII. N: This feels like a place for a song— a folk song. My mother loved to sing.
- XIX. [reference to time] 1949-2021
- XX. [reference to time] 1950-2017
- XXI. N: Her death, and my giving birth— ruined me, so to speak— in the best possible way.

between friends brings together works by artists Nyeema Morgan and Mary Simpson. The exhibition culminates their yearlong correspondence reflecting on the shared loss of their mothers, becoming mothers, and their art practices against the tumultuous backdrop of a global pandemic and political unrest.

Morgan’s large graphite drawing and collages, from her ongoing series titled *Like It Is*, are meticulously rendered and manipulated reproductions of the title page of the self-help book *Extraordinary Togetherness*. Chosen for its use of the word ‘extraordinary’ (among other books in her series), Morgan creates a sensual correlation between the speed of making and the intensity of reading, looking, and thinking. As in much of her work, this formal strategy troubles the relationship between image and text to question how language mediates experience, and how such mediation can be represented visually.

Simpson’s series *Purple Noon* (2021-22) uses the transformative processes of pressure and heat to produce nine works on paper and one sculpture. Simpson inked fragments of mirrors and ran them through 1,000 pounds of pressure on an etching press to crack and embed glass fragments into paper, then collaged the fragments with ink, oil and mylar elements. The sculptural table includes carved shapes from a paired collage, along with feminine cabriole-style legs, which were then blackened with an 1,800-degree torch. The title, *Purple Noon*, comes from *Stanzas Written in Dejection, near Naples*, by Percy Bysshe Shelley, written in the aftermath of the death of the poet’s one-year-old daughter. It is also the Italian film title of Patricia Highsmith’s first novel in her series chronicling the serial murderer, Tom Ripley. Simpson’s sensual transformation of materials attempts to grapple with intense sensations of rage, shame and grief to create cooled forms and compositions.

Nyeema Morgan’s solo and two-person exhibitions include The Philadelphia Art Alliance at The University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA; Marlborough Contemporary Viewing Room, NYC, NY; Grant Wahlquist Gallery, Portland, ME; the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Boulder, CO and Patron Gallery, Chicago, IL. Her work has been shown in group exhibitions at The Drawing Center, NY; The Green Gallery, Milwaukee, WI; Bowdoin College

Museum of Art, Brunswick, ME; the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY; the Worcester Museum of Art; the Studio Museum in Harlem, NY; and Galerie Jeanroch Dard, Paris, FR. Awards and residencies include Shandaken Projects at Storm King Art Center, NY, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Workspace Program, NY; the Joan Mitchell Painters and Sculptors Grant, NY and an Art Matters foundation grant. Morgan attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME and earned a B.F.A. from the Cooper Union School of Art, New York and an M.F.A. from the California College of the Arts, San Francisco. She currently lives and works in Chicago, IL.

Mary Simpson was born in Anchorage, Alaska and currently lives in New York. She earned an MFA from Columbia University and attended the Whitney Independent Study Program. Her work has shown at Bortolami Gallery, On Stellar Rays, Rachel Uffner Gallery, Simone Subal Gallery and Situations, all New York; David Petersen, Minneapolis; Haynes Court, Chicago; Almine Rech, Brussels; Hilary Crisp, London; Chambers Fine Art, Beijing; Seattle Art Museum; Boise Art Museum. Film Screenings, projects and lectures include the Artists Institute, The Kitchen, Goethe Institute, all New York; Henry Art Gallery, Seattle; CAM2, Madrid.

Image, left: Mary Simpson, *Mom's Tree, June 5, 2022, Sheep Mountain, Alaska*; right: Arlene Burke Morgan, *Between Friends*, 1985, ceramic, collection of the Walker Art Center.