

Material Witness: Aldrich presents a survey of Harmony Hammond's work

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Harmony Hammond

A comprehensive look at the work of a woman at the forefront of feminist and lesbian art is coming to the region.

After moving to New York City, artist Harmony Hammond in the 1970s co-founded the city's first all-women's co-op gallery, A.I.R., and the journal *Heresis: A Feminist Publication of Art & Politics*. She later wrote the book *Lesbian Art in America: A Contemporary History*, still considered a go-to source on the subject.

The Harmony Hammond: *Material Witness, Five Decades of Art* exhibit runs from through Sept. 15 at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield. It will be the first museum survey — or comprehensive career overview — of her work, covering her creative efforts from 1971 to 2018.

“What makes Hammond’s work so significant is not only her dedication to her own practice, but also her advocacy for the visibility of feminist, lesbian and queer art and artists,” said Amy Smith-Stewart, Aldrich Museum curator and organizer of the show.

“A true trailblazer, she is not only a pioneering artist but also an activist, author and independent curator,” Smith-Stewart said.



Floorpiece VI

Her work has been shown at museums throughout the world, from Munich to Mexico City. It’s in the permanent collections of many others, including Hartford’s Wadsworth Atheneum and three “well-known New York institutions — the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art and Brooklyn Museum.

Hammond, 74, is known for her large installational paintings, painted textiles and sculptures, and for combining abstract images with both traditional and scavenged materials, such as rags, burlap, straps, straw, leaves, dirt, hair, burnt wood, grommets and rope.

The result is “surfaces and forms infused with social implications,” according to an Aldrich Museum press release.



Presence VI

The Aldrich show will bring together paintings, drawings, sculptures, textiles, mixed media and printed materials.

The exhibit includes the 1989 mixed media painting *Chicken Lady*, highlighting a woman who lived with her animals in cars and trailers on the Milford waterfront. The piece includes an old quilt and recycled rusty roofing tin.

“The work raises issues of gender and class — the homeless, the misfit, the alien, the artist, the female outsider who cannot participate in society or chooses not to,” according to the museum release.

The show will feature the *Presences* and the *Floorpieces*, textile-based installations made in the early 1970s with discarded fabric collected from friends and garment district dumpsters. Parts of fabric are braided, painted or dyed. The *Presences* had been part of her first solo exhibition in New York.

Hammond considers *Floorpieces*, featuring painted textiles in circular shapes on the floor, to be one of her most important works because it’s “negotiating a space ... between art and craft.”

The vast gallery spaces in the 17,000-square-foot Aldrich Museum present a rare opportunity to display Hammond’s large and uniquely shaped art, said Emily Devoe, Aldrich head of marketing and communications.



Chicken Lady

Five of the original seven *Floorpieces* will be installed together for the first time at the Aldrich in a double-height gallery, offering an aerial view. “You’ll be able to walk through and around them and also see all of them from above in a special viewing area,” Devoe said.

Smith-Stewart has been working on the show for a few years, securing work from museums and private collections and having frequent interactions with the artist. She said Hammond has “been

crucial to what works were chosen and how they will be installed in the museum,” while Devoe said the artist has “been gracious with her time and knowledge.”

Hammond’s impact on the contemporary art world has been significant. “Visionaries like Hammond must be celebrated for their tireless opposition and their influential dedication, which has provided visibility and context for so many unheard and marginalized voices and histories,” Smith-Stewart said.

Hammond was born in Chicago and graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1967. Two years later she moved to New York and began participating in feminist art activities, curating and showing her work in openly lesbian shows, and teaching at the New York Feminist Art Institute.

She moved to New Mexico in 1984, where she still lives, and was a professor at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

Deciding what to include in a museum survey can be a challenge. “Since the exhibition covers nearly fifty years, we needed to show representative works from the many important series within her long career — her early years in New York City and her time in the Southwest,” Smith-Stewart said.

She said “many of the works are being presented together here for the first time, others have rarely been seen, and some haven’t been shown for decades.”

The exhibit will include the production of a hardcover book with text and photographs of Hammond’s work, to be available in May or June.

For more information, visit aldrichart.org.

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