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In 1990, Victoria Chapman was working at the Isabella and Stewart Gardner Museum as a security guard while studying art at The School of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston at Tufts University. While on duty at the museum, six months before the largest art heist in the nation, a man approached Victoria asking her if she wanted to take part in a robbery of its European Masters. Out of obvious integrity and a lack of any kind of social deviance or sociopathy, she said no. Later that year on St. Patrick's Day 1990, 13 works valued at \$500 million were stolen including seminal works by Vermeer, Rembrandt and Degas. In 2015, the FBI announced that both thieves were associated with a Boston-area mafia family and had since died. The Isabella and Stewart Gardner Museum continues to search for the missing works in concert with the FBI.

Chapman's personal art practice has evolved since her early days of study at Tufts where she focused on Asian art studies, performance and studio art. As a former cellist who was invested in a more unconventional realm, the lyrical element of music resonates in her work. Victoria moves through the world in a graceful, artful way in every moment from working with artists to carrying

Victoria moves through the world in a graceful, artful way

out the mundane tasks of everyday life. After graduating from Tufts, Chapman returned to her native England to continue her studies in art and philosophy. She secured work at the Victoria and Albert Museum where the inception of her art practice was realized as an assistant to numerous curatorial advisors. This experience employed her interests making core connections in her contemporary art





practice to the historical canon of art. Upon returning to her childhood home of Southern California, Chapman worked for the Laguna Art Museum and the Orange County Museum of Art before venturing into the for-profit realm of the art world. From her wealth of curatorial experience, she became an art director, researching, visiting art

El Nido is a nest of art.

studios, traveling to international art fairs, and gathering selections for senior art consultants building national and

international art collections for the hospitality sector.

Chapman's experience culminated into the desire to launch her own art business that would include artist management, curatorial ventures, liaising and promoting an international artist residency, and establishing an



experimental gallery space focused on providing a select few with intimate experiences with the work of artists.

Chapman relocated from Orange County to the eastern region of Los Angeles where she supports L. Mikelle Standbridge, an American photographer based in Milan, as well as Los Angeles-based artists, Yuri Boyko and Shane Guffogg. Boyko and Guffogg have studios at the Western Avenue Collective in a building owned by internationally renowned artist, Ed Ruscha. In the 1960's, Ruscha and his fellow artists commonly referred to as the LA Art School or "The Cool School" converted a former outdoor shopping mall into individual artist spaces that provided live/work spaces, studios and gallery spaces. This space was held by Ruscha and the LA Art School through the 1980's and continues its tradition as an activated art center by some of today's great contemporary artists.

The Western Avenue Collective is home to SPACE 1028 and The Lodge, as well as Chapman's latest venture – El Nido, an experimental art space. True to its name, El Nido is a nest of art that embraces the viewer in an interactive experience with visual art, music, sound, design, and cuisine. Whereas the Western Avenue Collective is a refuge of art in the heart of the city, El Nido is a space inside the Collective's walls that invites the viewer to suspend belief and imagine one is in a bustling European locale. It could be a nest in Paris or Italy if one stays in the present moment while engaging with the art and the momentary respite that Chapman provides. Artist and designer, Greg Smith designed the space during the height of the pandemic with the intent of creating a feminine space that embraces the essence of Chapman. Having traveled the world extensively visiting galleries, El Nido is unlike any other art space I have experienced given the complexity and depth that

Chapman has been able to infuse into it. Now is the time for women artist's voices to be heard in an art world traditionally dominated by males for

"The works in the exhibition share narratives about transformation."

two millennia. It is my hope that Chapman's voice, work and creative vision is embraced on a larger scale in the contemporary art scene of Los Angeles and beyond.

El Nido's first exhibition, "In Your Absence, Something can be Born: An Allegory of Love" is on view from June 8 – July 12, 2021. The exhibition was conceived from a curatorial standpoint of being in the midst of a worldwide pandemic and the need to transcend death and uncertainty via the experience of art. Using the notion of alchemy, she posits that love is a transformative experience just as making art from everyday materials like paint, paper and photography becomes an alchemical experience the artist infuses their mediums with the energy of their own spirit and the socio-political, time-based landscape in which each artist resides. On a curatorial level, Chapman is interested in using a single narrative to connect a diverse range of mediums and an eclectic group of artists.

In Chapman's words: "The works in the exhibition share narratives about transformation. As the curator, I was interested in a dialogue related to alchemy. This could be based on the artist's materials or a type of transcendence resonating from the finished work. I believe that all objects have a frequency designated by the maker, and it is from this place that art reminds us to bear witness to a greater

understanding." Chapman's curated artists use painting, drawing, photography, and found historical works that weave together a common narrative about the universality of the human experience. The artists featured "In Your Absence, Something can be Born: An Allegory of Love" are Erica Shires, L. Mikelle Standbridge, Denis Forest, Shane Guffogg, Dennis Ekstrom, Greg Smith, Yuri Boyko, Takafumi Iimura, and Victoria Chapman. While the exhibition prominently features this eclectic group of artists, Chapman's work *Souls of the World* (2011-2021) quietly ties the show together through its process of mixed media on canvas,





L. Mikelle Standbridge, *Veritas no.2, 2019*

Chapman is interested in using a single narrative to connect a diverse range of mediums.

note to this artist residency. It serves as a means of providing time for artists across disciplines, including writers and musicians, to create new works of art. The residency is unique in that it will also include great thinkers of our time, including scientists, philosophers and other academics to explore new work while nestled in the hills of Mosso Santa Maria, located in the Piedmont region of Northern Italy. Chapman not only collaborates as the liaison with artists interested in attending Casa Regis, she also assists in curating its programming- inviting both emerging and emerged artists to participate in exhibitions and community programs.

Victoria Chapman continues to evolve in both her own creative art practice as well as her immersion into the heart of the Los Angeles art scene where she will carry on making cross-cultural connections between a myriad of international locales in the future. This work continues with an exchange between Los Angeles, Italy and England whereby Chapman's El Nido and Standbridge's Casa Regis will collaborate with artist Alice Sheppard-Fidler's English-based artist retreat, The Hide, located between Bath and Bristol. These three artist-run sites are working on turning their own contemporary art practice to structure a collaborative program of opportunities and services across three locations and on digital platforms. Chapman is further pursuing curatorial projects with Reykjavik-based artists Bjarni Sigurbjornsson and Ragnheidur Gudmunds in order to invite the artistic culture of Iceland into this discourse and exchange between a growing international network of artists. While the pandemic is still raging in much of the rest of the world, Victoria is using this time of rebirth to conceive a future for her own creative practice as well as the beautiful souls she gathers on her journey.



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which includes lace as well as layers of paint sanded down during a decade of growth from life experience and process that is worked into the final piece. Chapman invited me into the space to engage with the works while brewing an authentic Moroccan mint tea and presenting an elegant array of hors d'oeuvres where we discussed the exhibition and a myriad of topics from politics to spirituality, to what it means to be a woman in the art world.

Future exhibitions include a solo show of L. Mikelle Standbridge's work – a woman artist who uses true life stories that incorporate mixed media and photography as a mode of documenting the complexities of the human experience. Curated by Chapman, through close collaboration with Standbridge, this show will present selected works from her series *Photo-Bodies: In Between the Edge of a*

Stitched Soul that features Standbridge's ongoing documentation of women's joyous but also tragic experiences with life, birth, survival and death. A resounding undercurrent in all of these works is the responsibility that women hold in society by virtue of their bodies. Further, each work included in the show demonstrates Standbridge's inventiveness to push the limits of photography as a medium by presenting her photographic works as mixed-media sculpture and 3-D installations. Standbridge's exhibition *The Host And The Guest* will be on view at El Nido from July 31 to September 3, 2021 and is available by appointment only via: www.vcprojects.art.

Standbridge is also the founder and director of *Casa Regis – Center for Culture and Contemporary Art*. She and Chapman collaborate to bring American and international artists of



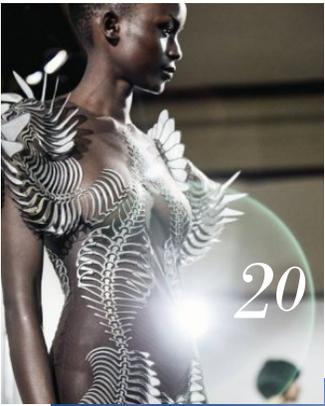
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