

Toward Different Versions of Our World: A conversation with Kate Lorenz



Fazal Sheikh, *Desert Bloom*, 2011, 48 inkjet prints.
Collection of Yale University Art Gallery, purchased
with a gift from Jane P. Watkins, M.P.H. 1979.
Installation view, *Toward Common Cause: Art, Social
Change, and the MacArthur Fellows Program at 40*,
Hyde Park Art Center, 2021.

Photo by Tom Van Eynde

Kate Lorenz is the Executive Director of the [Hyde Park Art Center](#), a hub for contemporary arts in Chicago that serves as a gathering and production space for artists and the broader community to cultivate ideas, impact social change, and connect with new networks. As a venue for *Toward Common Cause: Art, Social Change, and the MacArthur Fellows Program at 40*, the Hyde Park Art Center hosted the work of [Mel Chin](#),

LaToya Ruby Frazier, and Fazal Sheikh from July through October 2021. These artworks foreground the environmental racism and infrastructural inequalities shared by disinvested and disenfranchised communities across the globe.

How did the collaboration with the Smart Museum develop for *Toward Common Cause*?

As the Smart Museum was beginning to organize *Toward Common Cause*, they started talking with our director of exhibitions and residency, Allison Peters Quinn, about the possibility of our hosting a piece of the show. It was super exciting for us to think about having these really incredible artists in our space and available and accessible to our community, as well as to be able to put Chicago art in a national and global context. There are artists like LaToya Ruby Frazier, who lives and works here in Chicago, and then Fazal Sheikh and Mel Chin, who have a national and global profile—they're all thinking about issues that are connected in terms of what they mean for society and the work.

At the Art Center, our mission is very much centered around Chicago artists and offering a platform and resource for Chicago artists. And the lion's share of work we show is new work made by Chicago artists—we are among the few places that offer the kind of time, space, resources for our city's artists. That said, we intentionally try to build a global network and community and conversation for work that's happening here in the city. We have an international residency program and bring artists from around the world to live and work in Chicago, to broaden the conversation and connect what's happening in our

city with the universalities of the world and the period.

Environmental justice is one of the major themes of the exhibition and something that LaToya's and Mel's and Fazal's works are all thinking about and something that is so relevant to Chicago. It's interesting how globally human life tends to get sacrificed for human ambition or human power. And there are trends among who suffers in those cases.

There's something about really good art that makes the personal and the local universal. And in this case, it's a really important conversation to be having locally, nationally, and globally.

What has been the impact of placing these three artists so directly in conversation at the Art Center?

These are beautiful and very powerful works and there's something to be said for seeing them together. To have those perspectives in one room, in one space and in conversation with each other, it's obviously impactful and creates a different perspective and way of thinking—it drives home how universal these issues are in many ways. And Mel Chin's work, the Fundred Project, makes it really tactile and actionable. There's moments for reflection, and then there's something to do, and it gives people a chance to, in a small way, engage and participate in the advocacy and to be part of a movement. There's something about literally putting pen to paper and thinking about something and doing something that makes it internalized. That is part of Mel's intention, to add more voices to the advocacy effort.

The Art Center does so many different kinds of work, programming, and engagement. How do exhibitions like this one fit into the overall work of the Hyde Park Art Center and your mission on the South Side?

We do what artists do and help artists do what they do—from teaching, to making, to educating, to learning, to showing and offering opportunities to present work to the public and engage the public with the work itself. While *Toward Common Cause* was open, we opened another exhibition in a different gallery by artist Lan Tuazon which is very much about the environment and how stuff is valued or devalued, the impact on our world of our built environment, and the human impact on the earth. And it adds yet another lens to that discussion from a very different angle. Our hope is that the exhibitions that are in our galleries provoke thought and conversation and new ways of thinking about and seeing the world—and even lead to changing behavior and action, in an ideal world. *Toward Common Cause* is about art for society's sake, and the artwork really has something to say about our world and in many cases is imagining and leading us towards a different version of our world. And part of that is how we as humans behave, in the decisions we make and how we move through the world.

How did COVID-19 affect the development and presentation of the exhibition?

There's an intentionality to what people do now—it seems like visitors are very purposeful. It seems that people are coming to see the show and spend time with it. They haven't been able to get out and about in the same way, haven't been able to see art

in the way that they're used to. And so it's a really special experience. I know for myself, each time I get to go see art it's so moving because I've missed it, and I think that that's true for a lot of people. We're starved for the work and appreciate it all the more. It reminds us that art does play an important part of our lives and psyches and capacity to learn and think and contemplate and be engaged. Art does that for us in a way that other forms of media don't.

What's next for the Hyde Park Art Center?

Next up, our whole building is getting taken over for the 10th anniversary of the Center Program, which is almost a low-res program for working artists of all levels who come together over the course of six months to a year and share feedback about each other's work, develop new projects, and challenge themselves to think differently about their practice. As part of the 10th anniversary, we're having an exhibition of our current program class as well as an alumni set of shows. It's always a very energetic exhibition, because enormously experimental artists are all doing something new and have developed relationships with each other, and it's a big community celebration for a number of Chicago artists.

Learn more about the Hyde Park Art Center and get involved at hydeparkart.org.

Related Artists

[Mel Chin](#)

[LaToya Ruby Frazier](#)

[Fazal Sheikh](#)

Related Events

[Center Sunday: Fundred Drawing Workshop](#)

May 2, 2021 1:00-3:00pm

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