

IN SEARCH OF WISDOM'S GOLD

SEPTEMBER 6 - OCTOBER 31, 2024

OPENING RECEPTION: FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 6-9 PM

ARTISTS: Annie Artell, Jonah Reenders, Kristen Wong, Paola de la Calle, Sylvia Hughes Gonzales

Before scientists established chemistry as the system for defining and explaining matter, chemical reactions were bubbling potions; the body was made of humors, not bonded atoms. The artists in the exhibition *In Search of Wisdom's Gold* embrace the esoteric dimensions of alchemy — the proto-science that many consider to have foreshadowed modern medicine and chemistry.

Alchemists fused science with magic. They believed that matter and spirit were one and the same, that the Earth could provide elixirs of immortality, and that there was one type of potion that could cure any disease. A top priority for alchemists was making gold: they believed that metals could be transmuted into one another, allowing common and poisonous lead to be transformed into rare and noble gold.

Jonah Reenders uses altered research methodologies in an artistic practice that is personal, intimate, tender. A former biologist himself, Reenders thinks through a queered approach to the scientific method, documenting people and places in the process of transformation. In doing so, his photographs relish in the moments of ambiguity, humanity and introspection he encounters during scientific field tests.

Paola de la Calle and **Sylvia Hughes-Gonzales** use found images and materials to recreate and memorialize places far away in time and space. De la Calle prods at the extractive relationship between the United States and Colombia by intertwining imagery from familial and institutional archives, transmuting these images by layering, reprinting, and hand stitching them into something new. Hughes-Gonzales celebrates creation and destruction in equal measure by weaving together bits of tinsel—gaudy, metal coated plastic, that often ends up in the street in her hometown of New Orleans. Often associated with festive moments, Hughes-Gonzales's tinsel also recalls human excess and failure in a nod to the increasing number of natural disasters caused by climate change, such as Hurricane Katrina.

Kristen Wong's photo-based practice monumentalizes trivial moments by blowing up and hand altering digital images taken on iPhones and old digital cameras. By pouring care, attention, and resources into images of moments that some would consider insignificant, Wong creates something magnificent out of the mundane. Left out to age, accruing dust and fissures in their surfaces, Wong's images are then brought back to life—collaged together, scanned and completely transformed.

Annie Artell is a ground scavenger, collecting treasured bits of glass that are then melted into ceramic totems of ritual. Merging science and spirit through material explorations that intertwine clay with dejected materials, Artell references both the archeological reconstruction of artifacts from scattered fragments and the ubiquitous spiritual notion of rebirth. Artell views her combined writing and sculpture practice as a form of healing, suggesting that the creation and use of these objects can function as a salve.

These artists may not believe in a universal solvent, but they do seek the immortal through their practices; they transform materials and images to resuscitate memories of people and places lost; they embrace an approach to the natural world that poses questions instead of answers. By analyzing the world through a nonobjective lens, these artists create space for possibility, for something unexpected. While they may not turn lead into gold, they provide viewers with a brief moment of respite from an overly defined and dictated world.

Off Hours is a nomadic curatorial project led by Katherine Jemima Hamilton, Shaelyn Hanes, and Ebt. Together, they present artist-driven exhibitions that result from dialogue developed during studio visits, ongoing conversation, and collaborative writing practices. Off Hours supports and spotlights emerging Bay Area artists through thoughtful curation, programming, and writing.