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## Shared experience: Second Street launches new web gallery with ‘Bond/Bound’



“Dreams” by Netherlandish artist Frijke Coumans is one of the pieces featured in Second Street Gallery’s “Bond/Bound,” which address the complicated experience of adjusting to life during a pandemic. Image courtesy the artist

**Erin O’Hare, 4/24/20 at 7:00 AM**

Throughout the month of March, sad email after sad email landed in Kristen Chiacchia’s inbox. Art fairs postponed, gallery shows canceled, museums closed to the public—and then there were the news reports.

The Second Street Gallery executive director and chief curator decided to close her gallery on March 13, but she didn’t want to contribute to the deluge of despair if she didn’t have to.

Instead of focusing on what SSG couldn’t do for patrons and artists at this time (they’ve had to postpone four exhibitions at this point), Chiacchia and Outreach and Events Coordinator Lou Haney decided to put expertly curated exhibitions online.

They immediately created virtual tours of [“By the Strength of Their Skin”](#) by Aboriginal Australian artists Nonggirnga Marawili, Regina Pilawuk Wilson, and Mabel Juli, and [“Nature Tells its Own Story”](#) by Pakistani artist Tanya Minhas.

And on Wednesday, April 15, the gallery launched [“Bond/Bound,”](#) on a new site, [virtualssg.org](#). The exhibit, which takes stock of the complex, complicated experience of adjusting to life during a pandemic, is the first show the gallery has curated specifically for the web. Haney had the idea for “Bond/Bound” as she started contemplating the dichotomy of bonding with other people—either those we’re already physically and emotionally close to, or the millions of complete strangers suddenly sharing our experience—during a time when we are bound to our homes.

One-hundred-and-eleven artists from around the world submitted work, and SSG accepted a little less than half for the exhibition, which covers a variety of media, from sculpture to collage to video. Viewers can click on individual images for a closer look, and to read the artists' statements.

"Dreams' visualizes the feeling of self isolation for me. The desire for being close to other human beings," explains Netherlandish artist Frijke Coumans of her photograph, in which a man lies sleeping on a bed in a pair of boxer-briefs, mannequin arms draped over his body. "Seeing videos of hugging friends and people being close to each other almost starts to feel unreal," she writes.

Hanna Washburn, based in Beacon, New York, thought a lot about the term "shelter in place" as she created "Hive," a soft sculpture hanging in a tree that "emulated a home, and [is] constructed from the materials of home," including her old backpack, a rug from her childhood, two of her T-shirts, and a work blouse from her mom, all in hues of pink, red, and white.

Other statements explain how the pandemic has affected artists' creative processes. "The gloom hanging over our global heads has filtered into my work," writes Chris Gregson, a Fredericksburg, Virginia, artist whose black-and-blue sumi ink grid of shapes on paper is a stark departure from his usual work, which he describes as "life-confirming abstract oil paintings rooted in the joys of spring."

Charlottesville artist Madeleine Rhondeau-Rhodes submitted "Fairies always did admire the crocodiles," a collage in which a human-rabbit figure, wearing moth wings both on its back and as clothing, carries a crocodile away from a house, against a purple-red-blue sky. "The pandemic has forced me to further retreat into my own imagination," Rhondeau-Rhodes writes. It's unusual for artist statements to play such a prominent role in an exhibition, but for "Bond/Bound," "in some cases, the statement was just as important as the work," says Chiacchia.



Take Penny Chang's 38-second movement piece, "If You Came This Way," presented in black-and-white video. The camera focuses on Chang's open palm as she spins around her bedroom, then wraps herself in an embrace, and holds her own hand. Chang's statement deepens the viewer's understanding of the piece: For the past 10 months, she's been home alone, recovering from a traumatic brain injury sustained after a tree branch fell on her head in New York City's Washington Square Park. Even before the pandemic, she knew the difficulty of isolation.

Chiacchia anticipates that COVID-19 will change the way we look at, and interact with, art. "We've taken for granted being able to just pop into a gallery on a Saturday afternoon, or go to a museum," she says. And though she hopes people will once again fill those spaces when it's safe to do so, she plans to continue adapting SSG's exhibits for the web. SSG may even hold more online-only exhibitions.

At this point, it's cliché to declare that a lot of great art will come out of this period in history; artists always create work as a response to the world around and within them, and the coronavirus pandemic will be no different. "Bond/Bound" offers an early look at some of this work, and how it will evolve from here. Whether some of these images become tropes of this period in time, or stand as original reactions, is impossible to tell, says Haney. But in this moment, they're evidence of the ties that bind us.