

SOMA  
GROSSA

November 17, 2022 – January 14, 2023



Brew House Association (BHA) is a non-profit art center that provides creative space and support for people to connect and expand their relationship with the arts. Founded in the early 1990s in the former Duquesne Brewing Company facility by a community of artists committed to social awareness, BHA carries these ideals forward in its' programming today. BHA helps artists to grow professionally and creatively by connecting them to audiences, professional resources, and other arts organizations throughout the region and beyond. Housed in a 14,000 sq. ft. facility, BHA has the space, elements, and tools to support the imaginative work of a wide spectrum of creatives.

To learn more about Prospectus, visit [brewhousearts.org/prospectus](http://brewhousearts.org/prospectus)

Brew House Association Staff:

Natalie Sweet, *Executive Director*

Stephanie Garrison, *Operations Director*

Brent Nakamoto, *Program and Marketing Coordinator*

Helen Trompeteler, *Prospectus Program Mentor*

Brew House Association (BHA) is supported in part by the taxpayers of Allegheny County through a public grant from the Allegheny Regional Asset District (RAD), Duquesne Light Co., The Heinz Endowments, Henry L. Hillman Foundation, Opportunity Fund, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council through its Allegheny Arts Revival Grant, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Gallery guide edited and designed by Point Line Projects

Prospectus

AMANDA KLEINHANS

ASHLEY RAMOS

DANIELLE ATTOE

ELISHA COX

JESSE EGNER

KATIE RAUTH

NÉSTOR DANIEL PÉREZ

MOLIÈRE

REN BUCHNESS

SOPHIE PEARSON

ZOË SCHNEIDER

November 17, 2022 – January 14, 2023  
Brew House Association, Pittsburgh

ANNA



MIRZAYAN



SOMA

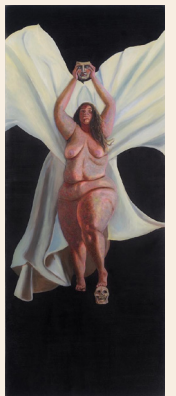


GROSSA



Prospectus is a curatorial development program of Brew House Association that supports emerging talent and produces two fully developed exhibitions at the Brew House Gallery.

ANNA MIRZAYAN is a freelance arts writer, poet, researcher, and editor. Anna holds a PhD in Theory and Criticism and her research exists at the intersection of labor studies, contemporary art and photography, and surveillance. She is currently based in Pittsburgh, where she is the editor-in-chief of the Bunker Review and Operations Coordinator at Bunker Projects. Her poetry chapbook, *Donkey-girl and Other Hybrids*, was published in 2021 by Really Serious Literature.



01 - Ashley Ramos  
*Ascension*  
2022

# PART I: RUTHLESS CALCULUS



**T**he two contemporary fine artists most known for depicting fat bodies are arguably painter Jenny Saville and photographer Laura Aguilar. As a non-fat woman, Saville rose to fame with the Soethby's sale of her self-portrait *Propped* (1992). In it, Saville depicts herself in the tradition of a Rubenesque female nude. Oil paints are layered to exaggerate each bit of cellulite, each bony landmark glistens sensually. Saville has become famous for her moody depictions of corpulent bodies. According to *Artsper Magazine*, her “fascination with obese people” apparently began when she won a scholarship to study in the United States and was greeted by herds of fat women in shopping malls.

Laura Aguilar, a contemporary of Saville, was a Mexican-American photographer from a working-class background, who documented her queer, fat body in a series of black-and-white photographs in and around the arid Los Angeles landscape. Rather than inserting herself into the art-historical

lineage of fat female nudes, Aguilar's intimate self-portraits confronted the tradition of passive female beauty, while questioning women's desire and necessity for it. By photographing her own fat body in majestic natural scenes—subverting the history of landscape photography as a medium for cis White males—Aguilar embraced and naturalized the fat body by transforming it into a literal landscape.

Though the two artists were contemporaries who rose to fame roughly during the 1990s, their approaches to the fat body represent distinct attitudes in the art world. Saville depicts fatness as an exaggerated spectacle, rendering cellulite emerging from a tenebrist backdrop alone, underscoring its freakish, grotesque status. Aguilar, on the other hand, presents the fat body as part of nature and a myriad of her other identities (queer, working class, Chicana...). Where Saville is reductive, the complexities of identity are integral to Aguilar's work.

*Soma grossa*, which literally means “gross body,” plays

with the double meaning of “gross” as disgusting and as an amount that exists before any deductions are made. The title is meant to draw attention to the simple yet ruthless calculus fat people are constantly subjected to: without any “deductions,” the fat body is necessarily grotesque. Only once deductions are made—weight is lost—can other important things be gained: social capital, romantic fulfillment, medical dignity, etc. There exists a tension between repression and spectacle that is so often at work regarding fat bodies; fat people are subject to an imperative to hide, make themselves smaller, disappear, or stop existing completely by a populace that nonetheless wants fat bodies to exist in specific acceptable ways—as entertainment, moral analogue, before-and-after horror story, or vehicles for humor. The dueling desires of people whose worst nightmare is inhabiting a fat body are often expressed through shaming fat people out of social spheres, only to bring them back as objects for popular consumption.

“What constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect. ...”

Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (1993), 3.

02 - Katic Rauth  
*Triomphe de la graisse*  
(detail)  
2022

03 - Elisha Cox  
*Bulge* (page 4)  
2020

04 - Jesse Egner  
*Untitled* (page 5-6)  
2019







## PART II: GROSS BODIES

**S**oma Grossa seeks to confront the voracious consumption of fat bodies as spectacles in society by contrasting them with alternative images of fat bodies and lives, made by fat artists. The representation or inclusion of fat bodies in artworks is often a neoliberal solution for a structural issue, frequently resulting in fat bodies merely made palatable for consumption by the public. The artists in this exhibition take up space. They push conventional accounts of fat bodies in media, health and wellness, medicine, and the art world. This multidisciplinary show includes artists working with performance, sculpture, photography, craft, painting, and more. Each artist translates their lived experiences as a fat person into a unique interaction with spatiality, morality, and society that transcends the body.

Performance and installation artist Katie Rauth grounds the exhibition with their piece *Triomphe de la graisse* (2022). A play on the *Trompe-l'œil* (literally “deceive the eye”) technique of perspectival hyperrealistic painting, Rauth’s work is instead translated as “triumph of fat”—its own linguistic trick; this large scale installation features a table mid-collapse, Victorian legs flailing comically. One half of the table is laden with Rauth’s intricate food sculptures. Real produce combines with teeth, dead flies, and intricate flatware, bowls, and candelabras hand-made of sugar. *Triomphe de la graisse* renders a traditional Dutch still life in

3D and confronts the classist nature of etiquette, as well as the moralizing of pleasure and indulgence, associated with fatness.

English artist Elisha Cox’s hanging soft sculpture, playfully titled *Bulge* (2022), is deceptively simple; made of flour encased in a nude mesh material used for women’s tights, *Bulge* descends perilously close to the floor, always inches from skimming the ground. Tactical and interactive—viewers are invited to touch the piece, to see how it moves—the piece evokes celebrated feminist artist Eva Hesse’s 1960s *Untitled* works, a series of drooping, erotic sculptures of rope, net, and paper mache. By allowing viewers to feel the literally pendulous weight, Cox invites audiences to consider the connection between fat bodies and the artwork, bringing weight literally into the gallery.

Also on view are multiple photographs by Brooklyn-based queer photographer Jesse Egner. Like Aguilar, Egner often uses himself as the subject of his work. Selected photographs include close-up portraits of Egner’s face playfully smoking a crayon or adorned with colorful stickers and progress gradually to full-body shots of the artist with other people. Egner expressed that the series represents his slow acceptance of his fat body in the hyper competitive queer dating

scene in New York. Though he began by covering up his face in various colorful ways as a technique to project the loneliness and insecurity he felt, the pandemic forced him to engage with his own body in photographs. He gradually grew more confident showing his form in its entirety—even nude.

Sculptural artist Zoë Schneider’s contribution, *Swimming in the Nostalgia of Imaginary Pies* (2022) two through ten, is a series of soft, fabricated breads surrounded by lurid primary colors. Schneider’s inspiration came from a scene in the 1991 film *Hook*, where a hungry community of Lost Boys imagines their fantasy foods into existence; their feast then dissolves into a paint-fight with the same intense colors featured in Schneider’s work. The relationship between food as fantasy, feasting, and fatness is on display in this veritable cornucopia of work.

In her trio of paintings, *Feast of Hecate*, *Feast of Hephaestus*, and *Feast of Aphrodite* (2022), Ren Butchness also explores the relationship between feasting and fatness.

These paintings depict the body itself with all the trappings of a feast—celebration, food, holiday, excess—in-tersecting with queerness, kink, and edgeplay. In these images, headless, jewel-toned torsos are secured with rope and surrounded by a bounty of foods, flowers, and objects. Each image depicts a relationship to a different Greek deity, indicated by the ephemera surrounding the body; for example, *Feast of Hecate* features keys and currants, elements associated with the triple-moon goddess.

Other artists and works featured in the exhibition include new media artist Néstor Daniel Pérez-Molière, whose immersive videos explore the role of the fat masculine body; Amanda Kleinhans’ videos depict hands sensually rubbing a fat belly in an ode to its fleshiness; and oil painter Sophie Pearson’s self-portraits present her at

so-called ‘unflattering’ angles. Local Pittsburgh painter Ashley Ramos’ singular depiction of herself as avenging fat goddess in *Ascension* (2022) dominates a wall, while Danielle Attoe’s award-winning jewelry adorns hand-painted, life-sized silhouettes of fat bodies.

Curating this show required not only urgent and caring attention to artworks and artists but also to the living ecology of communities that exist within the radical fat liberation discourse—conversations between the artists in the show, between myself and the artists, and between the artworks and the audience. I asked the artists to write short notes I refer to

as marginalia, which typically describes writings in the margins of manuscripts or journals. Inspired by a series of “field notes” from another exhibition, these marginalia are tangential musings reflecting any thoughts the artists had in conjunction with this show, be it a memory or experience they had as a fat person, another piece of art they were interested in, their artistic philosophy as fat artists, or something else entirely. These small notes are an opportunity for the artists to create a meaningful constellation of thoughts and feelings that connects them as a community and allows them to be present *in-absentia*.



06

06 - Zoë Schneider  
*Swimming in the Nostalgia of Imaginary Pies* (series, 2-10)  
2022



05

05 - Sophie Pearson  
*Engulfed*  
2022

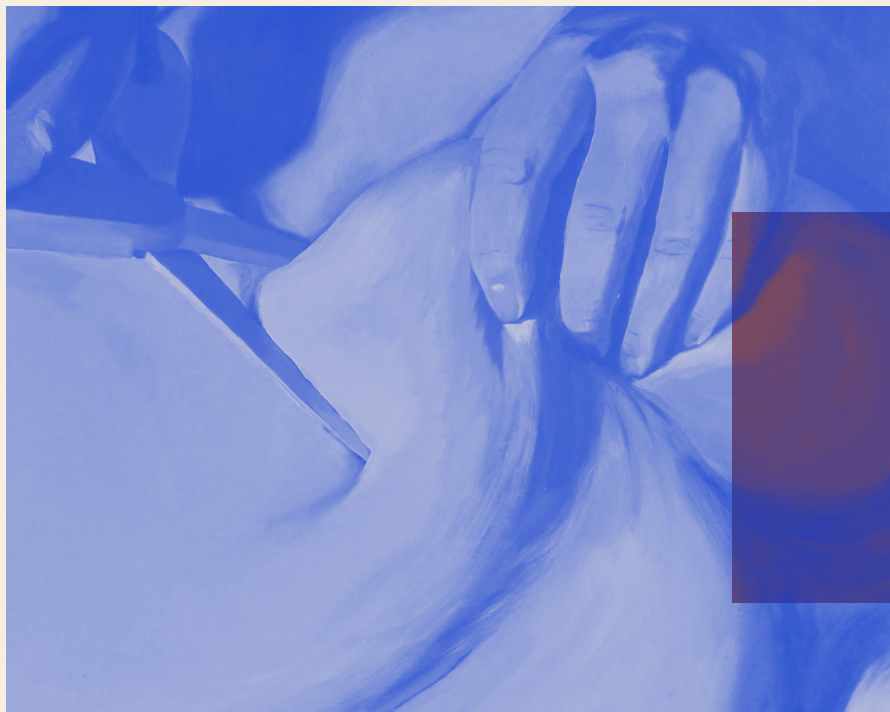
07 - Jesse Egner  
*Untitled* (page 8)  
2020



“FAT PEOPLE OF THE WORLD, UNITE! YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE...” Judy Freespirit and Aldebaran, “Fat Liberation Manifesto,” *Off Our Backs* Vol. 9, No. 4 (April 1979): 18.



# PART III: CONFRONTATIONAL SENSORIUMS

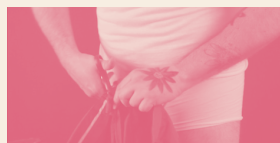


09

In the radical fat zine *La Cerda Punk / The Punk Pig* (2014), creator Constanzx Castillo dismisses the notion of “fat pride” as a concept that dominates fat liberation movements in the US. *La Cerda Punk*, a dual Spanish and English publication, declares that fat pride is a discourse that centers around inclusion—creating size-inclusive clothing, making Medicare cover so-called “fat diseases,” or otherwise being accounted for by mainstream society. Rather than fat liberation, this is fat assimilation.

The history of anti-fat bias has always been intertwined with systemic racism, sexism, and classism; the burden of fatness is felt most acutely by communities marginalized in other ways by capitalist imperialism. Instead of looking to Western capitalist production to make the existing world more accommodating of fat bodies, this exhibition harnesses the duality of revealing and concealing in order to bring these bodies (both physical bodies and bodies of work) into mainstream, performative spaces in a way that chal-

lenges society’s ideological perceptions of fatness. Bringing in fat artists whose work explicitly displays fat bodies also allows these communities to take control of a narrative that usually belittles, demonizes, and dismisses them. It pushes the margins of what audiences are comfortable with in order to get them to think critically about fatphobia and how it manifests in their daily lives.



10



11

09 - Sophie Pearson  
*What I would do*  
2022

10 - Néstor Daniel Pérez-Molière  
*Properly Fit*  
2021

11 - Ren Buchness  
*Feast of Hephaestus*  
2021-2022

## WORKS EXHIBITED

**Zoë Schneider**  
*Swimming in the Nostalgia of Imaginary*  
*Pies* (series, 2-10)  
2022

**Amanda Kleinhans**  
*I'm Ready for My Close-Up*  
2021

*Fitting X*  
2019

**Ashley Ramos**  
*Ascension*  
2022

**Danielle Attoe**  
*Series of jewelry*  
2022

**Elisha Cox**  
*Bulge*  
2020

**Jesse Egnér**  
*Lite Brite*

*Crayon Cigarette*  
2018

*Untitled, Disidentifications*  
2019

*Untitled (self portrait), Disidentifications*  
2019

**Katie Rauth**  
*Triomphe de la graisse* (detail)  
2022

## EXHIBITION NOTES

**Néstor Daniel Pérez-Molière**  
*Worth*  
2021

*Properly Fit*  
2021

*Intimate*  
2021

**Ren Buchness**  
*Feast of Hecate: I put a Spell on You, and*  
*Now You're Mine*  
2021-2022

*Feast of Hephaestus*  
2021-2022

*Feast of Aphrodite*  
2021-2022

**Sophie Pearson**  
*Belted*  
2021

*Engulfed*  
2021

*Compress*  
2021

