



KING'S LEAP

SHARONA FRANKLIN

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REVIEWS / MARCH 18, 2020

Sharona Franklin

King's Leap, New York, February 29 to March 28, 2020



Sharona Franklin, *Hemichrome Plate*, 2020. UV print on glazed ceramic, 30.5 x 28 x 5 cm. All photos courtesy the artist and King's Leap, New York. All photos Stephen Faught.

by Dana Kopel

It feels eerily fitting to write about Sharona Franklin's exhibition "New Psychedelia of Industrial Healing" just as the new coronavirus has become a global crisis. Healing is on most people's minds right now: Who will get sick? Who will be able to heal? What procedures, what infrastructure can we mobilize to that end? There's something surreal, if not quite psychedelic, about living at the onset of a pandemic—it requires many of us, at least, to rethink what we've meant by health, vulnerability, sociality and care.



Sharona Franklin, *Mycoplasma Altar*, 2020. Gelatin powder, daisies, foraged rose thorns sourced by Wretched Flowers, baby's breath, juniper berry, metal nuts, kidney beans, amoxicillin pills, hydroxychloriquine pills, methotrexate pills, antibodies in glass syringe vials, tapioca pearls, sunflower seeds, metal button, almond extract, papier mâché, wood, acrylic and plaster, 84 x 43 x 43 cm.

At the centre of Franklin's concise exhibition is *Mycoplasma Altar* (all works 2020), a transparent, safety-cone-shaped gelatin sculpture filled with a variety of carefully arranged items: yellow daisies, kidney beans, methotrexate (an immunosuppressant) and amoxicillin (funny to realize I'm allergic to this artwork) pills, tapioca pearls and syringe vials filled with antibodies, to name a few. *Mycoplasma Altar* is also the first of Franklin's jellies to use a (fungal) mould inhibitor—in part because she hasn't had to sustain the others for the entire duration of an exhibition. But the work isn't totally fixed; it shrinks a little every day, the curved edges at the bottom gradually curling away from the drippy silver pedestal beneath it. While most of her jellies and cakes feature healing herbs and flowers in enticing pastel hues, *Mycoplasma Altar* resembles nothing so much as a 1950s dinner-party gelatin mould, the dusty yellow color of it like a sun-bleached page in a midcentury women's magazine. That visual association with the 1950s feels fitting, given the pharmaco-capitalist approach to the human body that began taking hold in that era.



Installation view of Sharona Franklin, "New Psychedelia of Industrial Healing," King's Leap, New York.

The other works in the exhibition all feature images from a series documenting syringes of a new biopharmaceutical immunosuppressant medication for rare diseases in the moments between Franklin removing them from the fridge and injecting them into her body. The largest, a patchwork quilt that hangs from the ceiling by a goalpost-shaped support, comprises a number of these images and others collaged on found fabrics; brief aphoristic texts about illness and corporeality—"PITY IS A SIN GREATER THAN ANY SICK-NESS," "who's anti-body is your body of?"—are scattered across the quilt itself and line the hanging support. Titled *Comfort Studies*, the work brings pharmacology into the home and the body at once, suggesting that viewers might find solace, rather than fear, in the permeability of both. Two wall-mounted ceramic plates, *Hemichrome Plate* and *Amoebic Self Portrait of Pharmaceutical Preservation Methodologies*, each host another printed image from the series, driving home the entanglement between the pharmaceutical and the domestic. In the former, a bright knit blanket undergirds a syringe resting on a clear plastic high heel, all framed by genetic terminology; in the latter, an assortment of pills and little yellow cakes printed with teddy bears form a kaleidoscopic pattern.

Despite the professionally printed images and the technology required to synthesize the medications they depict, these works evince a handcrafted aesthetic—an unexpected approach to the pharmacological, in which one expects every material to be pure and precisely measured, every surface smooth and sanitized. Their appearance links them to the '70s psychedelia of the title, and to the work of artists from that era, such as Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, whose trash-and-tin-foil altars memorialize the strange sacredness of the everyday, and Ree Morton, who integrated text into works that explore the affective and gendered dimensions of craft. I am reminded, in particular, of Morton's *The Plant That Heals May Also Poison* (1974), with the work's titular adage emblazoned on a wall-mounted celastic banner: that which cures us can harm us, and the products of a system that kills us can also keep us alive.



Sharona Franklin, *Amoebic Self Portrait of Pharmaceutical Preservation Methodologies*, 2020. UV print on glazed ceramic, 25 x 25 x 5 cm.

Dana Kopel

Dana Kopel is a writer and the senior editor and publications coordinator at the New Museum, where she was one of the organizers of the New Museum Union. Her writing appears in *Art in America*, *Flash Art*, *Frieze*, *Mousse*, *X-TRA* and several exhibition catalogues. She lives in New York.



Artist Sharona Franklin Displays a Decomposing Jelly Cake—and Explores Fresh Forms—in Her New Solo Show

Sharona Franklin poses in front of a mural at Gottscheer Hall in Queens. Photographed by Chase C. Middleton

BY BROOKE BOBB

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHASE C. MIDDLETON

March 4, 2020

Inside King's Leap gallery, a tiny space on the fifth floor of a multiuse Tribeca building, a large gelatin mold is currently decomposing. The cone-shaped orb was constructed by 32-year-old Canadian artist Sharona Franklin. She's titled it *Mycoplasma Altar*, and filled it with real daisies, rose thorns, juniper berry, metal nuts and bolts, kidney beans, amoxicillin pills, and glass syringes with expired antibodies, among other found objects. The gelatin powder and almond extract sculpture is the centerpiece of Franklin's first solo exhibition in the U.S., titled *New Psychedelia of Industrial Healing*. It's complemented by two UV-printed ceramic plates, as well as a hanging quilt featuring her original photography and graphics.

The show is a sampling of Franklin's body of work, which she's been producing since she was around four years old. As a child, the artist was diagnosed with Still's disease, which causes severe, painful inflammation of the joints and internal organs. She also contends with endometriosis and two blood disorders, among other physical issues. One purpose of her work is to challenge perceptions of disability and chronic illness. A phrase on the bright quilt in the gallery reads, "Pity is a sin greater than any sick-ness."

Through her gelatin sculptures, cakes, and homespun objects—which she calls “bio-shrines” to her treatments—the artist aims to show that being bed-bound for 90% of her day-to-day life and walking with a cane, when she can, is not a roadblock for creativity. Nor are the medications she takes, or the biotechnological testing she's been a part of since she was a toddler. Franklin defines her art practice, and this retrospective exhibition at King's Leap, as “the embodiment of biopharmacology, biocitizenship, and the unveiled autobiography of a daily ritual, private self-injection, and the treatment of genetic disease.” The comforting quilt is meant to represent antibodies that take shape once inside Franklin's body, while the plates examine “questions of ingestion, mutation, and regeneration.” The gelatin reflects the fragility of her body—this particular sculpture of hers will decompose over the next few weeks until the exhibition closes on March 28, giving visitors the opportunity to watch, in real time, an organic degeneration.



The artist commanding the room at Gottscheer Hall.
Photographed by Chase C. Middleton



Franklin's newest work, Mycoplasma Altar, at King's Leap Gallery.
Photographed by Chase C. Middleton

“I think for a long time I thought that I had to not take medicine or to get better in order to be an artist or a person or a friend,” Franklin says. “I felt like those things always had to be divided, and I think most of that division was just born from the public lack of education and misunderstanding.” Now her work is closely aligned with her authentic experience.

There is more to see for interested viewers online: Franklin’s Instagram account [@paid.technologies](#) documents the stunning, surrealistic confections that she molds and bakes from her small apartment in Vancouver. She has nearly 50,000 followers on this account and thousands on her other three accounts, which act as additional portals into her media like quilting, ceramics, poetry, and graphic design. She has become a well-known advocate for the disabled community, both online and in her home city of Vancouver.

A few days before her solo show opened at King’s Leap, Franklin was noshing on a Bavarian pretzel the size of a serving platter. She was having her portrait taken for *Vogue* inside Gottscheer Hall, a dusty German bar and chandeliered ballroom straight out of 1950s Queens. Like her art, Franklin is at once sweet and deeply profound. “The way that people engage with my work, I think, says a lot about their comfort levels,” Franklin says, mid-bite of salted sourdough. “Most people are like, ‘Oh, we love the cake, just make a beautiful cake and we’re going to celebrate,’ which is important, so I do that, but then—sometimes things do decompose and do their own thing and aren’t consumed.” Franklin hopes this new exhibition will introduce her followers to the breadth of her work beyond the viral jellies.



The artist at her first solo show in the U.S., inside King's Leap Gallery in Tribeca.
Photographed by Chase C. Middleton



Franklin's "antibody" quilt, which includes a series of graphic art works and photographs that she has been creating for the last couple of years.
Photographed by Chase C. Middleton

One of eight siblings, Franklin lived with her family in trailer homes in two different rural areas in Canada. Growing up without a movie theater, without cable TV, and without the internet, she entertained herself with foraging and fashion magazines, designing her own clothes and creating collages with found materials. But Franklin was confined to a hospital bed for a large chunk of her early years. She finished high school when she was 27, and went on to attend an art school in Vancouver. She didn't graduate, but the time and place allowed her to define her at-home art practices while she made money by designing album art for local bands and posters for techno parties.

As she honed her own voice, Franklin found early inspiration in a Parisian magazine called *Cheap Date*. "They had all of these fake fashion ads, but instead of clothes or recognizable logos, there were messages about AIDS or the Salvation Army done in the style of Calvin Klein or YSL," Franklin explains. "So I started to look at fashion magazines I had alongside my medications and I thought, Why are these things never combined? Why can't you talk about them in the same context?" She began to create her own zines, which she viewed as a new way of looking at pop culture that reflected her own experience. As a kid, Franklin says, "I always felt like medical treatments were so dehumanizing, even though they are naturalized in so many homes."

As King's Leap curator Alec Petty says of Franklin's art practice: "I think she has a really unique way of inviting viewers in to understand these really complex issues around disability and activism, and also larger bureaucratic structures; and at the same time, it's really thorough and really beautiful work."



The artist's quilt features phrases that underscore her efforts to demystify medical treatment for chronic illnesses and disabilities.
Photographed by Chase C. Middleton

When Franklin's carefully layered work found momentum online, it quickly spurred imitators, the most noticeable being Gucci, which released ads featuring jelly cakes that were strikingly similar to Franklin's. She's now focused on the positivity that arose from the incident: "I've had a lot of other artists write to me and thank me, which has been really nice," Franklin says. "I had people write to me from inside the company and praise me for speaking out. I just think it's important to have those people like me—who are working outside of the fashion community—be a part of it."

Franklin would eventually like to incorporate clothing into her repertoire, since she already makes some of her own wardrobe at home as well as bags. It was her grandmother who taught her to sew and to bake. "She was an oil painter," Franklin says proudly. "She refuses to paint now, though. My grandmother is a gardener and very resourceful, very industrious." Franklin smiles at the thought of the woman who taught her how to be a maker. This is perhaps where Franklin gleaned her tenacity, though she does admit that it took her a bit of time to realize that she could use art as a method for pain management and disability recognition.

"So many people live like me, and they live shrouded and hidden," Franklin says. "Part of the idea of making cakes and gelatines and quilts is celebration—I want to celebrate the things that make our lives livable. For me, it's the treatment and medicine, which, though complicated politically, or some are really toxic, they make my life more enjoyable. My work is a kind of radical self-acceptance."

Special Thanks: Café Forgot

New Psychedelia of Industrial Healing is on display at [King's Leap Gallery](#) now through March 28.

For Chronically Ill Artists, Coronavirus Is the Worst-Case Scenario



Installation view of "Sharona Franklin: New Psychedelia of Industrial Healing," 2020, at King's Leap, New York. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND KING'S LEAP

For weeks, the news about the [coronavirus \(https://www.artnews.com/t/coronavirus/\)](https://www.artnews.com/t/coronavirus/) has filled artist [Ezra Benus \(https://www.artnews.com/t/ezra-benus/\)](https://www.artnews.com/t/ezra-benus/) with dread. As someone with immunosuppression and chronic illness, the pandemic spread of Covid-19 poses an immense risk to the 26-year-old artist's health. "It's a recipe for disaster," he told *ARTnews*. "What will happen to me if the medical system gets overwhelmed and I lose access to medications and doctors?"

Artists with chronic illnesses, autoimmune diseases, or respiratory issues are watching the spread of the coronavirus pandemic with concern. The high rate of infection puts many of these artists at extreme risk for contracting the disease; some have been required to enter a medical quarantine, preventing them from accessing their studios or working their daily jobs. And, because of high medical costs, lost income over the next few months could put many of these artists at financial risk.

Sharona Franklin spent months preparing for her solo show at King's Leap gallery in Tribeca, but the exhibition closed prematurely this week because of the coronavirus. The show, "New Psychedelia of Industrial Healing," was supposed to shed light on the artist's experience living with chronic illness and a physical disability. Franklin was also forced to postpone a panel she organized with Printed Matter NYC called "Methodologies of Care," and she has been forced to undertake similar measures for other planned events because of restrictions on travel for people with chronic illnesses. "When I traveled to install [my exhibition] last month, medical insurance was still in place," the Vancouver-based artist said. "Now medical insurance for travelers has been revoked."

A group exhibition called "Rituals" at the Marlene Meyerson Jewish Community Center in Manhattan has also prematurely closed because of the virus. The show—which was curated by Benus and included his work alongside pieces by artists Romily Alice Walden and Yo-Yo Lin—intended to articulate the complexity of living with chronic pain, navigating care systems, and reckoning relationships with oneself and others.

With many of his events canceled through April, Benus says he has lost \$2,000 in expected income. He was planning to be able to use that money to supplement the cost of his trips to the hospital for necessary infusion treatments. "Everything is particularly acute for sick and disabled people," he said.

"Worrying about contracting disease is something we do every day, but the mass hysteria only heightens our anxiety and hopelessness," said Patty Lu, an artist who has been bedridden for most of the year. "The panic and hoarding from able-bodied fear mongers have shown me that, in times of crisis, people are more worried about themselves than community preservation. That is terrifying in a world where we already feel that desperation daily."

Online, artists are already banding together to share resources with each other. Benus says that friends have started to send him money, which he has since redistributed to other needy artists who have lost gigs. And on Thursday, artist Shawn Escarciga started a **relief fund** (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/for-artists>) for his low-income colleagues in New York City with a current fundraising goal of \$20,000. Hours after the fundraiser was posted, the **GoFundMe page** (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/nyc-lowincome-artistfreelancer-relief-fund>) was overwhelmed with applications for aid, demonstrating the need and panic that's currently pervading the art world. Another relief fund, created by author Ijeoma Oluo for Seattle artists affected by the coronavirus outbreak, has raised more than \$93,000 of its \$100,000 as of this writing.

Artists have also worked together to create a **comprehensive list** (<https://covid19freelanceartistsresource.wordpress.com/>) of resources for freelancers, including access to various emergency grant applications. And although it was not created specifically in response to the current pandemic, the New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) and the Rauschenberg Foundation recently announced a new medical emergency grant that will provide artists with up to \$5,000 for unforeseen health expenses. (**Applications** (<https://www.nyfa.org/Content/Show/Rauschenberg-Emergency-Grants>) will be reviewed on a rolling basis starting in late May or June of this year.) Other arts organizations, like the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, say they are also actively working on ways to support artists in the midst of the pandemic.

"A virus could be a deadly situation for many of us. That is why we are pleading that the general public start social distancing to reduce contagion," said Hayley Cranberry Small, who established the Lutte Collective in 2017 to foster dialogue after noticing a lack of support for artists with disabilities and chronic illnesses. Small (who is related to the author) said that the public could do more to help artists. "It is so easy to support the disabled community, yet time after time we find only the marginalized supporting the marginalized. Now is the time to prop us up. In fact, yesterday was the time, but we're asking again today."

Suggestions from disabled and chronically ill artists include offering to buy or cook meals, picking up their medications at the pharmacy, buying their artwork or curating exhibitions about it, and voting for a better health insurance system.

But there is also mounting frustration from sick and disabled people who have previously been denied the ability to work remotely—only to see universities and arts organizations open those opportunities in the face of a pandemic. "We have lost jobs over this," Benus said. "Suddenly, people are realizing that better hygiene and access to remote work and learning are societal obligations. Until something like the coronavirus affected the general population, these things were presented to disabled people as impossibilities."



'My sculptures are like shrines to my treatments': Sharona Franklin's mould breaking artwork

Ahead of her first solo show in New York, the Canadian artist discusses her work, which references her rural childhood and her disabilities

Serena Fokschaner

Sun 9 Feb 2020 05:00 EST

Wobbling, jewel-toned jelly has been a decorative centrepiece of western dessert trollies for centuries. Now artists are harnessing the moldable potential of this teatime staple. Jelloid sculptures and installations, infused with personal and political messages, are popping up in galleries and lingering long past their sell-by date.

At the helm of the jelly-as-art movement is the Canadian artist Sharona Franklin, who has her first solo show in New York's King's Leap gallery this spring. Franklin's delicately coloured jellies presented on dainty serving dishes often feature flowers and herbs, a reference to her childhood growing up on the edge of the British Columbian wilderness.



Smoked Rainbow Trout in Rosemary Chilli Broth and (top) Orange Blossom Jelly. Photograph: Sharona Franklin

“I’d go into the forest and find plants, like Canadian thistle or wild asparagus,” says Franklin, one of eight siblings. “We’d hunt rabbit and grouse, go fishing, look for clams. It was a do-it-yourself upbringing.” In her teens, Franklin moved to Vancouver for medical care. She works from home focusing on pieces that combine a childhood love of the outdoors with nuanced references to her disabilities. At first glance, her creations, filled with lichen or sprigs of baby’s breath, appear botanical, but by using gelatine, a bovine byproduct, Franklin makes a statement about today’s wellness culture and the animal-based drugs that she needs to survive.

“I’ve encountered resistance from vegan friends, but I feel it’s important to show the everyday realities of my conditions. I benefit from alternative medicine, but I’m also stigmatised by it. My sculptures are like shrines to my treatments, which are complex and controversial. If a plant works for you, that’s wonderful. But everyone has different needs.”



Clamnsi citric jelly. Photograph: Sharona Franklin

Income from her art is a lifeline for Franklin, 32, who lives in social housing and works in a kitchen “as big as a queen-size bed”. So she was flattered when fashion house Gucci contacted her through her Instagram account, @paid.technologies, last year. “In retrospect, I was naive as the paperwork was vague,” says Franklin, who alleges that the fashion brand broke off negotiations with her but still used her ideas in their latest ad campaign. Although Gucci cited budgetary concerns, Franklin wonders if the relationship ended as a result of the brand discovering her disabilities.

When Instagram followers began to ask if she had made the jellies featured in the Gucci ad, she decided to go public. “Bad things happen in fashion all the time, so I was amazed at how much support I got. It’s allowed me to talk about my ideas,” says Franklin, who recently worked with fashion label Opening Ceremony on their spring ad campaign. “People are drawn to jelly because it appeals to all senses: touch, taste, smell. It’s an accessible way of telling complicated stories.”

New Psychedelia Industrial Healing opens 29 February at Kings Leap Gallery, New York
<https://kingsleapprojects.net/>

This Artist Is Making Psychedelic Jelly Worlds to Explore Disability

We talked with Sharona Franklin about wellness culture, tree sap, and the power of domestic practices for the chronically ill.

BY ADRIENNE MATEI
OCTOBER 21, 2019



PHOTO BY RHONISHA FRANKLIN

In Person of Interest, we talk to the people catching our eye right now about what they're doing, eating, reading, and loving. Next up is artist **Sharona Franklin**, who uses gelatin to create otherworldly botanical sculptures.

Growing up at the edge of the British Columbian wilderness gave 32-year-old artist **Sharona Franklin** an elemental connection to nature. "I would just wander in the woods all the time and pick up plants like wild asparagus and burdock," she says. "We'd hunt rabbits, catch crawfish, collect freshwater clams, go fishing..."

In her teens, Franklin, who lives with over 20 rare complex systemic diseases, moved alone to Vancouver for medical care, and has since been developing an artistic practice integrating her love for nature with her experience of chronic disability. Among her current projects is [@Paid.Technologies](#), an Instagram account where she posts images of her entrancing gelatin sculptures—slick, semi-translucent works of varying edibility that can take days to create and begin to degrade the moment they're complete.

"When I started making art I wanted to show the more human aspects of living, and less this facade of design or aesthetics," Franklin says of her work. "I really wanted to start talking about disability, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals—a lot of my gelatin work is a shrine to cellular use of animals."

Filled with prickly thistle, chrysanthemum, or hovering masses of champagne grapes, Franklin's psychedelic jelly worlds may seem thoroughly botanical. Yet by using animal-derived gelatin as her medium she protests one-size-fits-all wellness culture and references her own dependence on transgenic and stem cell-derived medication. "I've been met with a lot of pushback on gelatin, especially from vegan friends," she says, but "everyone has different needs."

In addition to exhibiting her work at galleries including Vancouver's [221A](#) and [Unit 17](#), Franklin writes about bioethics (her latest zine project, titled *Mechanisms of Action, Injustice In Biopharm*, was released by [Cassandra Press](#) at MoMa PS1's bookstore this fall) and runs Instagram accounts dedicated to [disability awareness](#) and [fostering personal connections](#) among the differently-abled.

"I feel empowered when I see other people sharing their experiences, and when people tell me my art or my experiences have helped them," says Franklin. "I want to expand people's ideas of what disabilities entail, and I want to [encourage] a generative and collective community."

The era with the aesthetics I appreciate the most is... the seventies. And then I love the seventies revival in the nineties, because I grew up during that time and my older sisters were anarchist hippie punks and we would stitch smiley face patches on our jeans. I think I am drawn to the vocalness of that time.

I love working with gelatin because... it's a medium I haven't seen experimented with enough, and it offers a lot of flexibility for three-dimensional sculpture and two-dimensional painting that doesn't damage the immediate environment. Gelatin is biodegradable and it does not emit VOCs (volatile organic compounds) or asthmatic toxic chemicals, plus it doesn't end up in landfills or waterways and harm wildlife.

My dream gelatin is... definitely interdimensional. I want it to be very large with a lot of different pockets and openings. And I want to make an extremely complex paper maché candelabrum to be inside of it.

It is important to make art from my home... because on top of the ill being stigmatized as "un-useful in the home," we are often trapped there, seemingly further from a sense of professional accomplishment. So many people think, "oh you're disabled you can't make things," or "you can't produce," so it's kind of subverting that within disability. The fridge where my injections are kept is the same fridge where the jellies are kept.

Right now I'm learning about... perfumes. I really like essential oils so I've been using lots of frankincense, vetiver and clary sage lately. I got this [Thierry Mugler](#) perfume, its name in English translates to 'furious fern,' and it's kind of spicy and floral and powdery, but woody. It's my first perfume.

I've been listening to... binaural beats a lot. They're just really soothing. I find it helps with pain—it's not a treatment or anything, but I find it just helps me focus and calm down my thoughts.

I've been watching... this show on Netflix called *Girls Incarcerated*. I think underage incarceration is an under-discussed issue.

When it comes to strategies for coping with illnesses... I think community is the number one thing—realizing you're not alone even if you feel isolated. I talk a lot with people online and we check in on each other if we know we have tests or we start a new medication or we have new symptoms.

Watching wellness culture become a status signifier... has been very difficult for me. People with disabilities can get silenced [by the wellness complex]. People think, "oh meditate and you'll be fine, do yoga and you'll be fine," when really those are just skills that make the pain easier to manage. They don't make your disease go away, not in my experience anyway.

If I could give my young self one piece of advice... it would definitely be to believe in myself. Don't second-guess and doubt things, but continue to be open and find the right places and people that want to have the same conversations that I did.

My skincare regime involves... a lot of snail gel! The [CosRx 96% snail mucin](#) is so soothing. I have redness, inflammation, so I use that. I really like yogurt masks with licorice root powder. I put rosemary oil or tea tree oil in my shampoo. I take a lot of baths with magnesium salts. And facial massage! I find that is really good for headaches and tension; it's surprising how much tension you hold in your face.

The seasonal botanical I've been really excited about is... sap. Pine, birch and balsam sap are anti-inflammatory, anti-fungal, and anti-bacterial, so I use them in a soothing topical balm I make. You can eat them, too. I've been really wanting to make birch sap cookies and a gelatin. Sometimes I make jelly gummies with vitamin D, so I might make something like that.


I want ... a garden, very bad. I've been wanting to grow edible flowers and hyssop for a really long time, because you can't really buy it for some reason. You can use hyssop in tea but it's really good in jelly because it has a sweetness to it.

I always crave ... chocolate! I really like the [Endangered Species](#) chocolate. They donate to the Amazon Rainforest, and they have eco-friendly packaging and are fair trade. It's kind of a treat but they have a chocolate-mint one that I really like.

Some artists whose work I admire... are [Martine Symes](#) and [Kandis Williams](#).

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Artist Accuses Gucci of Ripping Off Her Art for Ad Campaign—Fashion Brand Responds

BY RAHEL AIMA  October 16, 2019 5:07pm

In recent years, a number of artists have accused fashion brands of stealing from their work, including [Brad Troemel](https://www.artnews.com/news/you-directly-copied-the-series-brad-troemel-accuses-fashion-designer-of-ripping-off-his-grid-work-for-ready-to-wear-collection-8663/) ([\(art-news/news/you-directly-copied-the-series-brad-troemel-accuses-fashion-designer-of-ripping-off-his-grid-work-for-ready-to-wear-collection-8663/\)](https://www.artnews.com/news/you-directly-copied-the-series-brad-troemel-accuses-fashion-designer-of-ripping-off-his-grid-work-for-ready-to-wear-collection-8663/) (who pointed the finger at Vika Gazinskaya) and [Barbara Kruger](https://www.thecut.com/2017/11/i-think-about-when-barbara-kruger-dragged-supreme-a-lot.html) (<https://www.thecut.com/2017/11/i-think-about-when-barbara-kruger-dragged-supreme-a-lot.html>) (who roasted Supreme). Now new allegations concern one of the biggest fashion houses in the world: **Gucci**



Sharona Franklin, *Pain Is a Peace Teacher*, 2019.

COURTESY THE ARTIST

(<https://www.artnews.com/t/gucci/>).

Sharona Franklin, an artist based in Vancouver, Canada, who runs the popular Instagram account [@paid.technologies](https://www.instagram.com/paid.technologies/) (<https://www.instagram.com/paid.technologies/>), has accused Gucci of ripping off her art, which often takes the form of jelly cakes, the kind commonly served for dessert, but also, in Franklin's work, allude to DNA therapies and medical treatments that she has received for multiple chronic illnesses. The cakes are made with animal cells of a kind that have been used to treat people with her disability, and she alleges that her work looks similar to pastel-toned jelly sculptures surrounded by flowers on silver trays and brocade tablecloths in Gucci's recent "Cruise 2020" campaign.

According to Franklin, Gucci contacted her about including her work in the campaign—but then the brand reneged. After a series of messages to an email address connected to her [@paid.technologies](https://www.instagram.com/paid.technologies/) account, she told representatives her identity, and she believes that once they researched her online, they backed out after discovering her disability and her activist-oriented work, which has involved calling out brands for co-opting the aesthetics of medical treatments and accessibility. "I gave them my full name, and then after that I never heard from them again," she told *ARTnews*. "I lost so many opportunities in the past by disclosing my disability to employers."

Franklin said she was initially contacted in May by the British agency Simmons LTD, which wanted her to work on a shoot for what was described to her as "a large Italian house." Only later, Franklin said, did she find out that it was Gucci, which asked her to sign an NDA that, she said, made no mention of dates, which she found vague and suspicious. Over a series of emails that were reviewed by *ARTnews*, Franklin and the agency set up a photo shoot for July.

As the date grew closer, Gucci representatives did not respond to emails, Franklin said. Ultimately, a representative told her, in an email reviewed by *ARTnews*, "Due to the budget they are looking into someone else to execute in Europe."

"I hadn't even spoken with them about a budget! I live in social housing, and I'm on social assistance, so it's kind of shocking," Franklin said, noting that her cakes are cheaply made and that her production tends to be funded by donations. She continued, "I've never worked a large job, and I've never signed an NDA before. I was kind of surprised."

Contacted by *ARTnews*, a representative for Simmons LTD said, "Brightly colored jellies have been used previously by Gucci as a campaign decoration and have often been incorporated in designs throughout the years by different artists and chefs. Each selection process—for a campaign, for a show, for an event—consists of a series of phases before an artist is chosen for a collaboration. We

do not always proceed with every artist we approach for consideration for a variety of reasons that can be logistical, technical, or time-related.”

GUCCI **gucci**
39.9m followers

[View Profile](#)



gucci

On the table in a setting for the [#GucciCruise20](#) campaign, colorful jellies like those served at retro dinner parties. The campaign [#ComeAsYouAre_RSVP](#) launches tomorrow. [@alessandro_michele](#) [#AlessandroMichele](#)

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Franklin said her jelly works are related to her disability and echo her feelings of alienation while undergoing the biotechnical treatments she has received since she was a child. When one eats jelly cakes, one is ingesting animal cells from connective tissue that some individuals may need to consume when undergoing recombinant DNA therapy, which has been administered to patients with immunodeficiency disorders and forms of cancer.

“Within wellness culture,” Franklin said, “so many diseases are being advocated as being curable by veganism. But for so many people with degenerative diseases, what’s actually healing us is these cells.”

After others asked if she had made the jelly cakes in the Gucci campaign, Franklin went public with her allegations via Instagram, where she said she received many messages related to coercive NDA agreements with brands and companies in the fashion world and beyond. Now the artist wants to direct her energy toward making others aware of the constraints of these contracts, rather than taking legal action against Gucci. “Yesterday, I was at the hospital for a couple hours getting tests and treatments, and I’m trying to balance things,” she explained. “I don’t have a lot of expendable energy, and they’re such a big corporation.”