

ART SPIEL

Reflections on the work of contemporary artists

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The Immigrant Artist Biennial: Sari Nordman



Sari Nordman, Assembling on Ancient Towers, 2020, video, video still courtesy the artist

The Immigrant Artist Biennial (TIAB) is a volunteer, female-led, artist-run project. TIAB 2020 launched in March in New York City at Brooklyn Museum, and continued in September through December at EFA

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Sari Nordman, a native of Finland, is a NYC-based interdisciplinary artist working with dance, video and installation. She loves to travel to the isolated parts of the world to reflect on nature, history and female experience, the recurring themes in her works. She continues developing Tornj-Tower, an installation work which has received support from the Catwalk Institute and NYU, The Immigrant Artist Biennial, The Amsterdam Collective and Tohmajärvi Residency, for Jamaica Flux: Workspaces and Windows 2021 exhibition and Performance Mix Festival. She worked as a performer with choreographer Dean Moss in 2009-2018, and holds a M.F.A. from NYU/Tisch School of The Arts.

Do artists have political responsibilities at this moment, if so, what are they?

I can only speak for myself, however as an artist and educator, I feel that I have political responsibilities and urge anyone to feel the same; times are challenging. The responsibilities that I feel are of high importance are environmental protection (stopping climate change), developing equity and acceptance, and providing education that fosters high values, foresightedness and equitable long-term gain rather than greed, exploitation, consumerism and short-term gain.

Reflect on an encounter of displacement, becoming, belonging, trauma, healing, or simply comic relief from your journey of immigration.

When I was disrupted for speaking in my broken English and told that they speak English, I was flabbergasted. During my more than 20 years in NYC I have accepted that I will never be quite an 'American' and at the same time my 'Americanism' has changed my Finnish identity to a degree. In my journey as an immigrant, I have felt a sense of not fully belonging and having a transitional identity. At the same time, I feel this allows me to have some freedoms from social norms. I think that it can be more accepted that I do not fit or am different from the general population in the U.S and Finland. During the Covid-19 pandemic I have been able to exercise nomadic lifestyle and have very much enjoyed that.



How has the turn toward the digital and virtual affected your artistic practice?

My artistic practice as a performing artist was a practice of ephemerality. I work with dance, video and now installation, so my practice has seen changes over the years. It was a challenge to turn sculptural installation work to a video form for TIAB but I find the potential of film, video and virtual forms very interesting. Digital and virtual work has helped amplify what I do as an artist. Also, TIAB's virtual exhibition makes it possible for my work to be viewed from anywhere in the world and be viewed repeatedly.

Tell us about the work you are exhibiting in The Immigrant Artist Biennial.

Tower is a multi-disciplinary installation work incorporating sculpture, video projection, archiving and community participation. Tower reflects on climate change and the biblical story of The Tower of Babel – the story of greed and importance of cultural differences.

Having extensively traveled in Greece visiting scores of ancient archaeological sites I have seen collapsed walls, towers and monuments that once represented magnificent cities and peoples. These ruins are the artifacts of humanity in their transition to dust. Contemplation of one's place in the world, nature and history have provided much of the inspiration and direction in my work.



Sari Nordman, Building Tower installation, 2019, photo by Robert Mencarini

Please share a piece of advice or a resource that may be useful to an immigrant artist.

As an immigrant artist it may be easy to lose oneself when exposed to new norms, views, expectations and so forth. I feel by recognizing this and being true to myself, I am the most successful in my art making. Being an immigrant has been, and continues to be, a process of re-discovery and re-evaluation.

The Immigrant Artist Biennial's virtual exhibitions are open through December 18th 2020, visit them [here](#), and a list of their ongoing events [here](#).



Anna Mikaela Ekstrand is a New York-based Swedish/Guyanese independent curator and the founding editor-in-chief of Cultbytes, an online art publication focusing on interdisciplinary and non-hierarchical art criticism. Alongside an all-female volunteer team, she currently serves as an advisor and co-curator for the inaugural "The Immigrant Artist Biennial."