



to strike a match

G5 Collective at the Jung Center

By Erika Mei Chua Holum, August 2023

True to form, the G5 Collective marks three years of art-making with an exhibition that embraces mutual care, support networks, and inclusive practices that extend beyond the studio. Citing partners, children, friends, peers, and chosen family, the five artists release their creative practices from the confines of singular trajectories or solitary studios for community, camaraderie, and collectivity in artistic practices. They recognize inclusivity defines a requited recognition of others. When speaking with each artist about G5, there is always an acute appreciation of each member, what another artist is exploring, or how another member is growing. It is how, as art historian and curator Patrick Flores describes, “many-ness is ‘shared’ and is productively reciprocal for those who partake of it.”

Founded in 2020, the G5 Collective brings together Houston-based artists to release themselves from the trajectories of individual aims and emboldened by inclusive efforts to support others. I view this approach as a more expansive methodology of inclusivity that broadens from the narrow, anachronistic efforts of simply attempting the “I” in DEAL. Inclusivity is regarded through the practice of radical empathy, problem solving, and offering a spark of inspiration to one another. Participation and appreciation for art collectives runs counter to the capitalist tendencies of the art world to create an individualized art commodity for the consumer marketplace. Collectivist tendencies work to slow the pace of creating art products in favor of process.

The collective is self-defined through the ethos: to serve as a collaborative force for good, igniting positive action in the Houston art community and supporting each other without ego. The ego, as described by Jung, is the center of our consciousness where our awareness of existing and personal identity is constructed. Collectivity as an approach to artmaking sustains a needed role to offer an alternative to the myth of the artist as a reclusive figure making work in isolation. While art can certainly be created in such conditions, art-

making also happens at the dinner table, in a group text, while asking for feedback, or in practicing radical empathy.

Doug Welsh and Liz Gates co-founded the artistic collective to support graduate art students unable to obtain summer residencies due to the pandemic. Now in their third year, the G5 Collective presents IGNITION, a group exhibition auspiciously held at the Jung Center, which brings together artworks in dialogue to ask, what ignites you? A question posed a direct challenge to the presumptions of the ego’s role as a driving force in our lives and creative impulses.

Saran Alderson’s hyperfocus on the idiosyncrasies of fat rolls or the curl of a pubic hair in the work *Fleshy Business* is a monumental meditation on the uncanny in relationship to the body. In *Bloomin’ Bosoms*, amoebic areolas are abstracted in gritty textures and milky colors to resemble a bouquet of flowers. Alderson’s large-scale paintings offer an approach to seeing the human form that supersedes differences between racialized or gendered bodies. The visual plane of the canvas transforms into a close look with intent fascination with the unseen or overlooked part of ourselves.

Driven by a similar impulse, Sarah Fisher uses portraiture to record, witness, and archive herself and people around her. The images take on the art historical imperative of portraiture—a practice of depicting the icons, heroines, or persons of significance as an articulation of representation. Fisher’s approach moves beyond this paradigm to not only valorize the characterization of others, but place importance on the need to be seen and known. Working across two and three dimensional forms, Fisher addresses her experience with disconnection from her own thoughts, feelings, and memories in *Disassociation IV*. In this fragmented self portrait, Fisher’s face becomes a spectral figure across multiple dimensions to depict the break between one’s body and mind. In the portrait, *Dear Bill* the artist paints a friend through an exploration

of porous boundaries between form and figure. As the subject's shirt and body quietly dissolve into the grays of background, the stern expression of the sitter's face becomes more prominent against the muted colors across the canvas.

Doug Welsh's abstract paintings also take inspiration from who is around them, in particular their partner and fellow artist Mitch Pengra. Pengra, described as Welsh's afflatus, sparks a divine creativity energy for the artist and whose presence reverberates in the ongoing series Life Raft. Through a ritualistic and meditative process, Welsh listens to a song on loop and creates a synesthetic response to the music in visual form. The resulting work combines vibrant colors and abstract geometric shapes against a soft layer of spray painted canvas. Pengra's presence is seen in the work through green forms and figures, such as Living in a fantasy, where a hand extends upwards to join a soft blue, the color representing Welsh, colliding across the canvas. The synergistic forces moving and pulling towards each other create compositions of a world-building using love, tenderness, and joy as sources of strength and inspiration.

For Liz Gates, an approach to materiality and soft sculpture reimagines art historical depictions of motherhood. Trained as a painter, Gates addresses the dichotomies of the self constructed in feminism, societal roles, gendered labor, and the assertion of one's agency. Utilizing this approach, many of the materials within Gates' work are recycled or inherited, such as moving blankets, diapers, or baby shoes. Please Return consists of moving blankets containing recycled denim, sewn together in patches of varying sizes, and embellished with postage stamps, all of which reference Gates' child recently moving from their family home. Throughout each of Gates' works, the familiarity of household symbols—torn envelopes, a hand-sewn seam, or the shadow of an embossed soda can top—conjures a sense of nostalgia reminiscent of unseen or overlooked work of material labor and care. The works are bold in their subtleness, and evoke a sense of rebellion in

their making—one that could be easily missed if not for its urgent necessity.

Ashita Sawhney is a designer exploring inclusive practices for viewers with limited color vision. Employing graphic design and communication, Sawhney's works educate audiences on limited color vision through research and visual strategies. In the work, 34 miles and back from the series Color Blind Curriculum, a lenticular effect allows viewers to see colors at a traffic stop from the perspective of full color and limited color vision when viewing the work from different perspectives. Continuing this approach, Sawhney created paper models of grocery carts to showcase three types of color blindness when shopping for produce, cereal, or flowers. Sawhney's approach brings audiences closer to the subjects of her work. She works with limited colors to cleverly inverse the effects of colorblindness for those who may never consider another way of viewing the world.

Surveying the multivalent practices of the G5 Collective, there is sustained interest in varied imagery, media, and even some aspects of performativity. All this constitutes the materiality of the experimentation and allied approaches that move beyond aims to simply gain currency in the contemporary art world. A few of the tendencies surface, such as new ways of approaching the body as a source of inspiration, archive, tenderness, and love. For the members, the dreaming, care, and connection is also the critical necessity of the G5 Collective. As the statement describes: "This show is equally about the specific things that motivate us as individual artists, and the shared sense of purpose and urgency we feel in a collective desire to help shape an art world that embraces positivity, inclusivity, service and support – without ego." To ignite and keep inspiration alight is driven by the crucial need to remain attentive, open, and connected to each other.