



# RELATIONAL MATTERS

In preparation for an opening at CYDONIA, Frances Bagley visits with Justine Ludwig in Bagley's studio.

Artist Frances Bagley has turned ten years of accumulated notes and lists into an immersive art installation titled *Shall We Gather at the River?*. These individual pieces of paper are displayed together on a labyrinthine series of walls that one can easily get lost among. There are phone numbers, shopping lists, records of bills paid, and plans to be made. Throughout the installation are the names of prominent members of the Dallas arts community—highlighting Bagley's long-held position as a fixture in the scene. The massive amount of information is dizzying, calling attention to the minutia that constitutes a human life. The installation also bears similarity to the boards of information omnipresent in crime television shows and movies. The myriad notes demand decoding. As you walk around each corner you become an active participant in the work. Bagley has an uncanny ability to make the viewer feel as if they are part of her art.

Bagley has been part of the Dallas arts community since 1976. She has had high-profile exhibitions across the state and much-loved public commissions including *Wildlife Water Theater* and *Reading Garden*. Bagley's commitment to the arts in Dallas extends beyond her artistic practice as she has served on the board of the

artist-run cooperative gallery 500X and EASL (Emergency Artist Support League).

Most recently, Bagley has taken part in *AURORA*, the Dallas-based exhibition presenting interactive light, video, performance, and sound artworks, where her video installation *Witness* was shown at the Cityplace/Uptown DART Station. This work has been displayed in multiple settings over the years including Marty Walker Gallery in Dallas and Brand 10 Gallery in Fort Worth. In each context the work is slightly altered. The installation is comprised of individually displayed videos of eyes staring directly at the viewer. The crop of each video is tight, only showing the bridge of the nose, eyes, and eyebrows. Bagley instructed the subjects to do their best not to blink, lending an off-putting intentionality behind each eye movement. The work points to surveillance in both the physical and digital realms. In contemporary society, citizens are constantly reduced to data to be recorded and quantified. The installation has a feeling of a dystopian sci-fi narrative somewhere in the realm of *1984* and *Twelve Monkeys*. You become distinctly aware of how you are holding yourself as the work stares back at you a hundred-fold.

This human element is a common presence throughout her practice. In *Braided Rug*, Bagley adopts the technique used to create rag rugs, but uses human hair as her medium. The selection of different shades of hair brings together signifiers of a wide range of ages and ethnic backgrounds. The work is understated, reading simply as a rug at first glance, yet it is conceptually weighty. Long hair, in many cultures, is seen as a manifestation of femininity. In weaving this hair into a rug, she points to feminist discourse surrounding the role of women in familial structures, as well as the commodification of the female form in marketing.

Bagley has a deep sensitivity to the body and the manner in which a viewer navigates her work. There is always a relationship to physical form, whether in direct quotation or subtle allusion. Her works demand to be walked around, to be observed from a multitude of perspectives. This approach has necessitated a large studio. Bagley's studio, which she shares with her partner and occasional collaborator Tom Orr, is a massive industrial space



Above, Frances Bagley, *Shall We Gather at the River?*, 2005-2015, paper and glue, 108 x 396 x 396 in. (10 years accumulation of personal lists, notes, and doodles) installed in Bagley studio. Photo by Frances Bagley. Left: Frances Bagley, *Braided Rug*, 2006, 644 ft. of one continuous braid of human hair, 90 x 72 in. Photo by Frances Bagley.

BY JUSTINE LUDWIG



Frances Bagley, *Witness*, 2015, installed in Bagley studio. The initial version was done in 2006, dimensions are variable. Photo by Frances Bagley.

that rivals many arts institutions in scale. This allows for her installations to be presented in their ideal state.

Dominating Bagley's studio is the large installation, *Unfinished/Untold Story*. The work originated from a loose sketch created by the artist, which she then attempted to render in three-dimensional form. In Bagley's own words, "I first built the doodle three-dimensionally and then kept going with the intent of creating a 3-D drawing to physically travel and move through, like reading a story with your body and your senses...and with no beginning and no end. It references those incidents we all encounter in life that become our story. The physicality and psychology of space is the issue."

*Unfinished/Untold Story* appears delicate, as if at any moment it could come tumbling to the ground, yet it simultaneously reads as a long-standing relic. The work is a pastiche of different cultural and art historical references. Most notably of these quotations are a crumpled up poster of Latin pop star, Enrique Iglesias, and structural similarity to Alberto Giacometti's 1932 sculptures, *The Palace at 4 a.m.* The small work by Giacometti, which appears to exist somewhere between the dream and waking worlds, has previously functioned as inspiration for Bagley. Often seen in Bagley's oeuvre is that one piece organically informs another, even as media and message may drastically change.

Bagley is currently taking part in a two-person exhibition with Portland, Oregon-based artist Ryan Burghard at CYDONIA, a gallery on Payne Street. The exhibition titled *Where You End and I Begin: Relational Dialectics* uses the institution of marriage as a

conceptual framework to bring together the work of these two artists. While none of the displayed works are new, they promise to be born again and appear fresh and timely as all Bagley's work has the ability to do. **P**



Bagley studio. Photo by Megan Wood.