

Whereof One Cannot Speak

A dream: I am on a road in a war zone, maybe Iraq in the beginning of the last invasion. The bombed-out blacktop crumbles. Next to the craters sit women: widows, writers, warriors. I come to a checkpoint guarded by men. You can pass, they tell me, but first we must know if your blood is real.

A knife slashes my palm. In this nightmare I feel no pain. The blood is viscous, dark. The men nod. I am ushered through.

Are you real, do you bleed? No one is allowed to pass through life and witness it viscerally, in all of its iniquity and beauty, and walk away unscathed: the wages of living is grief. How do you carry what you have seen along the road, and what are the vessels in which to hold the labor and the suffering of the world?

Here are some Akiko Jackson has made. A phalanx of tall urns howling at you soundlessly with their cavernous mouths, crowding you out, forcing you to reckon with them. An emperor's Clay Army stripped of pretense and human form, though very much in human proportion. You half-expect them to advance.

Those bottomless mouths. It is unbearable to look inside in the way that confronting death is an "unbearable emotion," as writes the French historian Philippe Arriès about the modern Western practice of banishing death from the public eye. You look anyway—this is art—and you discover that each vessel is depthless, that you cannot fathom the bottom or what it holds, and you come away not knowing, and the not knowing is as terrifying as the grief because we do not have the emotional vocabulary to grapple with either. As terrifying as passing a mirror and glancing to find it empty, devoid of reflection. A hall of mirrors, one after another, casting back nothing but your failure to once again find purchase. A funhouse born of loss.

"A single person is missing for you, and the whole world is empty," writes Arriès. Each moment millions of us around the globe are missing at least one person, the person often out of reach, flung apart as we are, grieving by remote, undone trans-continently. (One of my students wrote about attending a grandparent's funeral, in China, via Skype.) The magnitude of such a global private heartsink: We must invent a unit of measure for it, I think, as we have invented units of measure for the other inconceivable devastations: the war dead, the migrants who perish at sea, the degree of ozone depletion.

Ritual does not alleviate the sorrow but, like vocabulary, attempts to make sense of it. It extends our grief outside our selves—and it also forces us to bring into existence something other than mourning: it makes us create something. Think of the artist coiling intention into the clay urns, think of her prayerlike repetitive casting mirror frame and neckbone again and again and again: creation that exists against and alongside grief, beauty born out of bereavement.

On a spring evening near Akiko's studio a sedge of sandhill crane catch a thermal above the Pecos River and rise, circling. They wheel higher and higher, oblivious to our witness, and I remember the last lines in a Galway Kinnell poem from

The Book of Nightmares:

we will walk out together among
the ten thousand things,
each scratched in time with such knowledge, *the wages
of dying is love.*

-Anna Badkhen





Roswell Artist-in-Residence Program

Akiko Jackson is from Kahuku, a rural North Shore community on the island of O'ahu, Hawai'i. Her exhibitions include the Wing Luke Museum of Asian Pacific American Experience in Seattle, WA, Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art in Virginia Beach, VA, and the 4th World Ceramic Biennale Korea (CEBIKO) in Icheon, Republic of Korea. Awards include the Louise Bourgeois Endowed Fellowship at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, MA, the Windgate Artist Fellowship at the Vermont Studio Center in Johnson, VT, and the Roswell Artist-in-Residence Program, Roswell, NM.

Anna Badkhen has spent most of her life in the Global South. Her immersive investigations of the world's iniquities have yielded six books of literary nonfiction, most recently *Fisherman's Blues*. She has written about a dozen wars on three continents, and her awards include the Guggenheim Fellowship, the Barry Lopez Visiting Writer in Ethics and Community Fellowship, and the Joel R. Seldin Award from Psychologists for Social Responsibility for writing about civilians in war zones.

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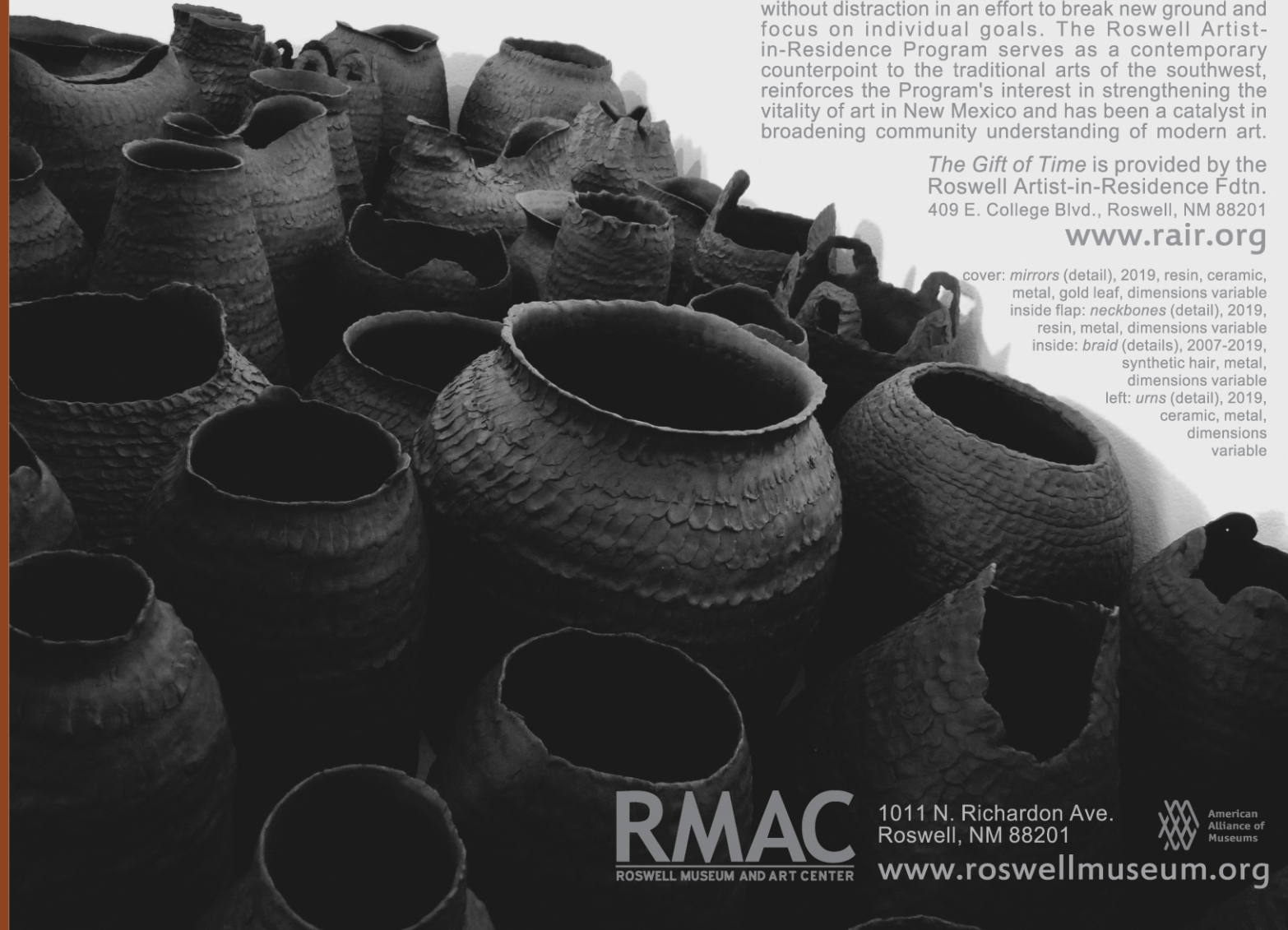
Instagram: @akikojacksonstudio

The Roswell Artist-in-Residence Program was established in 1967 to provide professional studio artists with the unique opportunity to concentrate on their work in a supportive, collegial environment for periods of up to one year. This "gift of time" allows artists to work without distraction in an effort to break new ground and focus on individual goals. The Roswell Artist-in-Residence Program serves as a contemporary counterpoint to the traditional arts of the southwest, reinforces the Program's interest in strengthening the vitality of art in New Mexico and has been a catalyst in broadening community understanding of modern art.

The Gift of Time is provided by the Roswell Artist-in-Residence Fdtn.
409 E. College Blvd., Roswell, NM 88201

www.rair.org

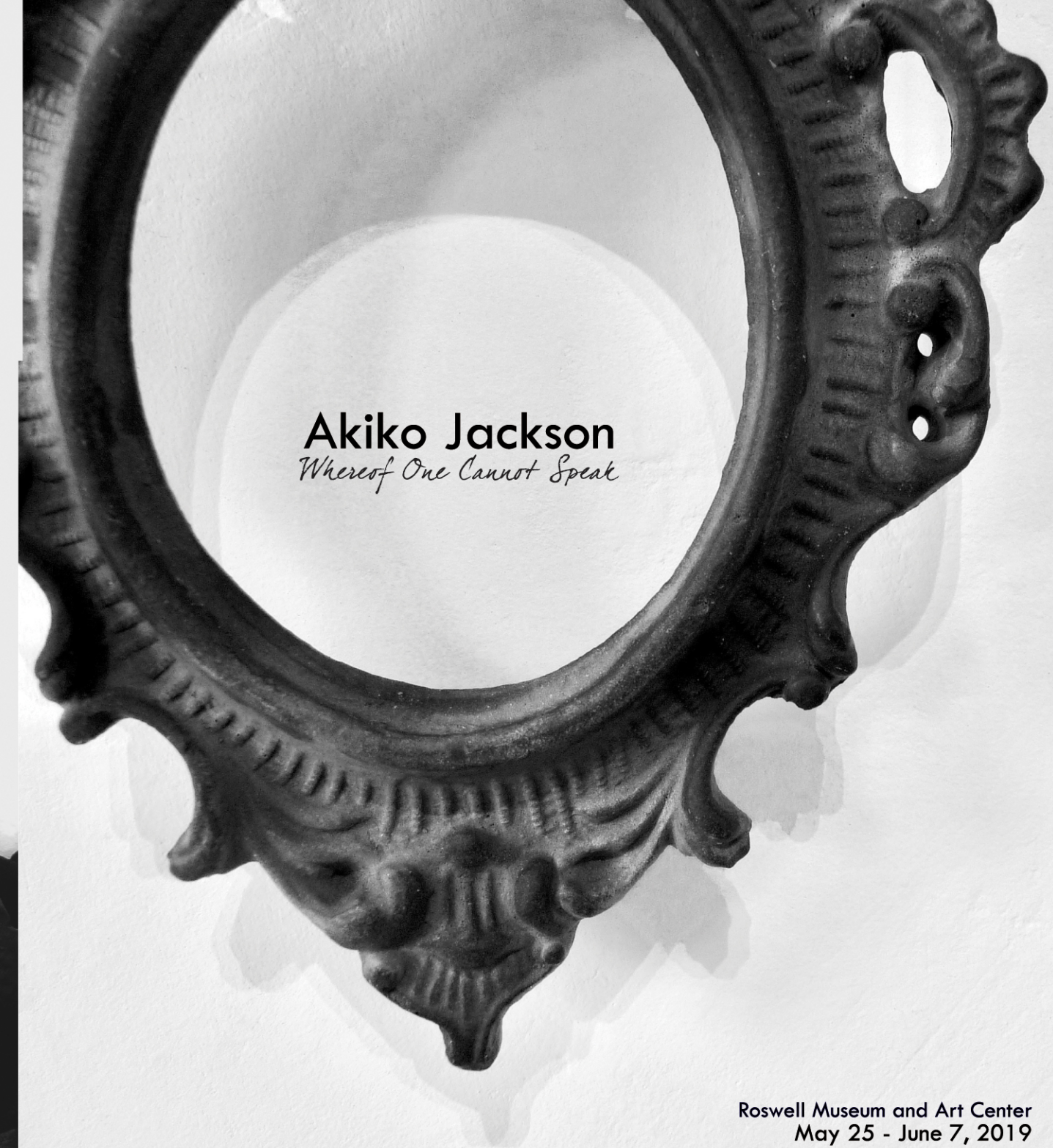
cover: *mirrors* (detail), 2019, resin, ceramic, metal, gold leaf, dimensions variable
inside flap: *neckbones* (detail), 2019, resin, metal, dimensions variable
inside: *braid* (details), 2007-2019, synthetic hair, metal, dimensions variable
left: *urns* (detail), 2019, ceramic, metal, dimensions variable



RMAC
ROSWELL MUSEUM AND ART CENTER

1011 N. Richardson Ave.
Roswell, NM 88201

www.roswellmuseum.org



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