

BLAIR SAXON-HILL





*Previous page*  
*Huff (Legs, Peace, Skirt), 2021*  
 Mixed fabrics, leather, rope, ostrich boa,  
 oil on canvas mounted panel  
 76 x 53 x 5 in



*Tonic (Adjacent Yerba Buena  
 and Poison Oak), 2016*  
 Canvas, fiberglass, acrylic, ceramic,  
 gouache, driftwood, mesh, wood,  
 paper clay, felt, early 20<sup>th</sup> c. mukluk  
 104 x 32 x 8 in

*Reving the Target, 2016*  
 Umbrella, birdies, polystyrene,  
 fiberglass, shoe, ceramic, burlap,  
 wood, speed glove  
 105 x 66 x 12 in



*Still Watching, 2021*  
 Book page collage  
 10½ x 9 in



*Daisy Stayed Hopeful, 2021*  
 Mixed fabrics, Tupperware, metal,  
 woven blanket, wood, oil on  
 canvas wrapped panel  
 76 x 50 x 4 in

“Prose invents; poetry discloses.”

— Jack Spicer

In the roadhouses and bars and dancehalls of the American 20<sup>th</sup> century, the story goes, people used to spread sugar on the dancefloor—like liquor, it made the dancing easier. Sugar on the dancefloor: this flags once more a tale we love, about the ingenuity of poverty, about delight on the cheap, a provisional solution to the limitations of the body. But the tale contains its opposite, too: the labor in the cane fields of Florida, of Jamaica.

Like all things, sugar carries in it the record of its production, and its use. So too do the materials of Blair Saxon-Hill’s work: found objects, often mass-produced, often discarded, that are recast, like the dancefloor sugar, into defiant, ingenious afterlives, into the *lyric* data of reality. This is the reality that Saxon-Hill’s work—her embodied perception—makes visible to us. In this sense her work does not invent something to ‘add’ to the world: it is not mimesis, not commentary, not symbolic, not documentary, and never ideological. Saxon-Hill is a material-driven artist, and in this she is first a poet: her work discloses the world as *it is*, and it does so through her deep trust in material and her concomitant trust in reality. This is a political and ethical position as much as an aesthetic one, for, as Paul Celan notes—and which our recent history has shown us, in stark terms—“reality is not simply there; it must be searched for and won.”<sup>1</sup>

Saxon-Hill’s work refuses cynicism, which, like sentimentality, is a rejection of the real, and it gives us no victims and no villains. It refuses to laugh at another’s expense (though there is plenty of laughter-among—a form of laughter that is the genius of empathy). Instead, Saxon-Hill’s work is an initiation: into our common precarity as finite selves, singular on a singular planet, and into a common splendor, provisional, changeable, and utterly ours. The pronoun blazing at the center of even her most solitary work is not “I,” but the endlessly shifting “we.”

Saxon-Hill’s material is sometimes hydrocal, gouache, or ink, but more often it is the detritus of our epoch: objects that are produced, marketed, sold and ‘used up.’ Against this catastrophic repetition of value into disregard, she figures a whole metaphysic of correspondence, of reciprocity, fate-in-common. A wig, Walkman headphones, a tote bag, a badminton birdie, awning fabric, pantyhose, a punching bag, a resort towel; all these are transfigured, in Saxon-Hill’s hands, into a new fullness of being and relation, undone both from their own perishability and from the trivia of their original purpose. Industrial mop-heads become the hair of a mother (in *Mother*, itself a transfiguring of *Untitled (Ladle, Beak, Horn Solo)*). A fireplace broom, a sport shirt, a tin can together broadcast the specter of history (*History Out of Breath*), slipshod and panting. In an inverse motion, the cast-off everyday is remade in translation and gains new dignity, as in the traffic cone made of an orange silk shawl, or the painted and treated resort towel in *LAI D ME OUT*. Here the banal violence of the resort industry is, like the sugarcane, liberated into delight—a delight that signals urgency, necessity, dissent.

Her work, Saxon-Hill writes, wishes to undo “the hierarchy of things.”<sup>2</sup> It would like to disclose, instead, the flickering net of correspondences that *is* the world, and our life together in it. Her work says: we have to complicate our idea of each other to see each other! The essence of human dignity is precisely this—permitting every person the complexity of self we allow ourselves. Consider *Daisy Stayed Hopeful, Still Watching* and its translation, *Huff (Legs, Peace, Skirt)*. These aren’t portraits, or symbolic figures, as in a frieze, but they aren’t invented faces, either. The subject of Saxon-Hill’s work is not the hero, but the chorus; and this chorus is not an anonymous mass, but a plurality of irreplaceable selfhoods. Saxon-Hill’s work is humanist in its search—or better put, is work in search of a new humanism: one that does not forward an ideal but instead seeks itself anew in the face of each singular human being.

*Timmy Straw is a poet, translator, and musician.*

<sup>1</sup> Paul Celan, *Der Meridian und andere Prosa*, (Suhrkamp, 1988), p. 22. “Wirklichkeit ist nicht, Wirklichkeit will gesucht und gewonnen sein.” (“Reality/actuality is not; reality/actuality must be sought and won.”)

<sup>2</sup> Conversation with the artist, May 2021.



*Mother*, 2021  
Mop heads, fabric, oil on  
canvas wrapped panel  
76 x 50 x 5 in



*History Out of Breath, 2017*  
Fabrics, sports shirt, wood,  
fiber-reinforced plaster,  
hydrocal, foam, gouache, paper,  
headphones, can, plastic, string,  
fireplace broom  
68 x 24 x 5 in

## BLAIR SAXON-HILL

*b. 1979. Lives and works in Portland, Oregon*

*2016 Hallie Ford Fellow*

Blair Saxon-Hill's cast of characters are queer, surreal, humorous, gritty, and urgent. The sculptures anticipate their relationship to a staged performance and work to ensure that they are capable of conversing with the daily news in installation. Saxon-Hill studied studio art at Reed College. She has received fellowships from the Oregon Arts Commission and the Joan Mitchell Foundation. Exhibitions of Saxon-Hill's work include the 2021 New Museum International Triennial of Contemporary Art, New York, New York; 500 Meter Gallery in Sapporo, Japan; Nino Mier Gallery, JOAN, VENUS Over Los Angeles, and Maccarone LA in Los Angeles, California; and the Hallie Ford Museum, Salem, Oregon. Her work has been reviewed in numerous arts publications including *Frieze*, *Artforum*, and *LA Weekly*.

**Hallie Brown** was born in 1905, outside of Tulsa, in Indian Territory that would become the state of Oklahoma. She supported herself as she earned a bachelor's degree at East Central University and taught in Oklahoma before her parents moved their family to rural Oregon. In 1935 Hallie married Kenneth W. Ford and together they established Roseburg Lumber Company in the midst of the Great Depression.

Hallie Ford was drawn to art all her life, specifically the accessibility of artmaking. She took classes with the painter Carl Hall at Willamette University in Salem, and painting became a central part of her life. Her philanthropy established and supported key Oregon visual art museums and universities.

After Hallie's death in 2007, The Ford Family Foundation's Board of Directors honored our co-founder by establishing a Visual Arts Program. The first element of this program was the Hallie Ford Fellowships in the Visual Arts, awarded since 2010. Through these unrestricted fellowships, we seek to make significant awards to visual artists who have worked to establish their voice and craft.

Another of our goals is to help support the ecology that builds connections and capacity in the visual arts community of our state. As the Fellows become the focus of exhibitions throughout the world, they bring more attention and support to their Oregon peers. We are certain that Hallie Ford would be pleased to see how both individual artists and the visual arts community in Oregon have flourished since the establishment of this program in her honor.

We could not be more excited each year to bring new Hallie Ford Fellows into this family, and to share their work with you.

*Anne C. Kubisch  
President, The Ford Family Foundation*

The Hallie Ford Fellowships are the flagship element of The Ford Family Foundation Visual Arts Program. The Foundation commits to an ongoing relationship with our Fellows through exhibition support, convenings, and professional development opportunities. In addition, the Visual Arts Program offers grants to visual artists for unanticipated career opportunities; supports artists-in-residence programs in Oregon and nationally; brings curators and arts writers from outside the region to Oregon for studio visits and community dialogue; commissions arts writing and publication; supports exhibitions, catalogues and other forms of documentation for Oregon artists; and awards grants to enhance exhibition spaces.

The Foundation is pleased to partner with the Oregon Arts Commission, University of Oregon, Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA), Portland State University, Reed College, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA), Creative Capital, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, United States Artists, and the artists and visual arts organizations of our state.

The Ford Family Foundation was established in 1957 by Kenneth W. and Hallie E. Ford. Its mission is "successful citizens and vital rural communities" in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. The Foundation is located in Roseburg, Oregon, with a Scholarship office in Eugene. For more information about the Foundation and its Visual Arts Program, visit [www.tfff.org](http://www.tfff.org).



VISUAL ARTS PROGRAM

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*Reving the Target, Tonic (Adjacent Yerba  
Buena and Poison Oak):* Courtesy JOAN,  
Los Angeles, CA

*Huff (Legs, Peace, Skirt):* Courtesy the artist  
and Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

*Mother:* Courtesy the collection of Beth  
Rudin DeWoody, West Palm Beach, FL

*History Out of Breath:* Courtesy the  
collection of Alexander DiPersia, Los  
Angeles, CA

*Still Watching:* Courtesy the collection of  
Lori Spector, Wynnewood, PA

*Daisy Stayed Hopeful:* Courtesy the  
collection of Joseph S. Berg, Aventura, FL