

## HEIDI SCHWEGLER





*Help Yourself*, 2008  
Aluminum  
20 x 24 x 32 in  
Photo: Stephen Funk



*Separation Anxiety*, 2014  
Glass  
16 x 16 x 6 in  
Photo: Richard Gehrke



*Allergy of Sleep*, 2017  
Glass  
14 x 9 x 14 in  
Photo: Mario Gallucci



*Germs of Empire*, 2013  
Pallet, wax  
48 x 40 x 5 in  
Photo: Stephen Funk

*Previous page*  
*Unseen One*, 2020  
Glass, concrete  
13 x 13 x 10 in  
Photo: Rose Cefalu



*Julia*, 2017  
Wax  
13 x 8 x 8 in  
Photo: Mario Gallucci



Throughout the course of her protean, twenty-five-year career, Heidi Schwegler has explored the reciprocal relationship between the mass-produced manufactured product and the handmade unique art object. Initially trained at the University of Oregon in metalsmithing and fine jewelry, Schwegler is an experienced and influential educator in craft and design. She is well-versed in the dialects, fashions, and *technê* of post-minimal sculpture, and has a keen understanding of the dynamic conceptual range and myriad physical substances of *making*. Yet it is the residue of material culture—those obsolete things of the world that no longer serve a function—that compel Schwegler. In the process of remaking a throwaway plastic toy in concrete or modeling a Roman shard in wax, she joins the timeless to the transitory, playfully balancing their forms on the threshold of oblivion.

An archaeologist of the present, Schwegler culls source materials from urban interzones, the non-sites of the post-industrial landscape: the sinking strata of public dumps, stinking donation bins, crumbling hutongs in Beijing, the blighted roadsides of the Inland Empire, the peripheral spaces where great cities disintegrate into chaotic, sprawling brambles. Her ideal studio is a bankrupt dollar store in some backwater Nowheresville. There, all species of cast-offs are re-discovered as modern fossils: well-worn children's toys and pathetically broken crutches, stained mattresses and crushed takeout containers, waterlogged pillows and ragged prosthetic teeth, found photographs in elaborately kitschy picture frames. Schwegler describes her discoveries as “intermediaries of human desire”: we once played with them; took them into our mouths; we leaned on them; cried into them and for them. Schwegler’s transmogrifications are at once violent and tender: skinned and rearranged then scrupulously sculpted and cast in unexpected materials such as silicone, wax, glass, aluminum, resin, and lead. These sculptures are interventions into objecthood. In Schwegler’s crucible, what was consumed then abandoned—perhaps beloved then lost—becomes a totem of its inevitable decay.

Alongside the never-living, the once-living features prominently in Schwegler’s tableaux. In her desert studio compound, wild animals live furtively and perish in a frenzy: thirsty rodents drown in slurry buckets; amputated lizards’ tails are gruesomely offered by her pet cats; snakes hunt, birds scavenge, and jackrabbits starve. Schwegler creates a

phantom bestiary that ironically and darkly elides these fallen xerocole with the epitome of hyperconsumerist cuteness: the bunny and the squirrel. Disassembled, resculpted, and arranged from plastic figurines, their forms are rendered in tortured, acrobatic recompositions. Crafted in cast glass, in garish, unnaturalistic colors, Schwegler seeks to synthesize (and perhaps exorcise) her immediate experience with the paradox that humans are at once part of and apart from nature: killing is when we become most animal; witnessing the death of a helpless animal is when we become most human.

Schwegler identifies deeply with her fragile, animal allies and views them as a proxy for her mutability and mortality. Furthering this line of inquiry, Schwegler has also considered her own body and self as raw material. She has created a photographic narrative documenting her fictional descent into meth addiction. She has wrestled an invisible mixed martial artist as an allegory of mental illness and learned helplessness. In a seminal work that exchanges the figurative for the figural, the artist meticulously and masterfully fabricated her head and hands at full-size, while her torso and limbs are foreshortened at one-third scale. Despite the traumatic and nihilistic tenor of her work, it is through this uncanny avatar that the artist’s stifled laughter, at last, becomes audible.

Schwegler’s diverse formal vocabulary includes elements of classical statuary. Once heroic, often anti-heroic, these worn emblems of once-prosperous civilizations arrive to us in fragments. Their servile functions—piety to the gods and homage to an emperor—are erased by time. Schwegler’s reconstructions elide the post-modernist tropes of appropriation with humanist figuration. The permanence of antiquities is subverted by Schwegler’s selection of materials: enduring marble becomes friable glass and fusible beeswax.

A roomful of Schwegler’s sculptural works is subtly theatrical, stations of melancholy and humor alternating with bodies of grace and brutality. Together her quizzical investigations are fundamentally existentialist. Schwegler makes work about our collective mortality as expressed through the essential materiality of our cultural artifacts, asking not simply who we are but also what we are.

*Jason Loeffler is a New York-based curator and writer, and the program director for the Database of Recorded American Music.*



*How It Is*, 2019  
Pewter  
4 x 3 x 3 in  
Photo: Mario Gallucci



## HEIDI SCHWEGLER

*b. 1967. Lives and works in Yucca Valley, California*

*2010 Hallie Ford Fellow*

Heidi Schwegler works in the interstitial ruins of Beijing, Los Angeles, New York City and suburban America. She rescues haphazardly dis-used scraps from the bowels of the megalopolis: chicken bones, Big Gulps, broken signs, lost shoes, crumpled pylons, take out containers. Plastic, fiber, and bone: these materials decay but never decompose. A peerless craftsperson, she resynthesizes her sources into facsimiles with cast glass, gold, silver, wax, resulting in artwork that persists in a "living death." Exhibitions of her work have been presented by WBG London Projects, London, United Kingdom; Asphodel, Brooklyn, New York; Sheldon Museum, Lincoln, Nebraska; and the Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon. Schwegler is a MacDowell Fellow, and a Yaddo Artist-in-Resident. Reviews of her work have appeared in *Art in America*, *Daily Serving*, *ArtNews*, *Modern Painters*, and the *Huffington Post*. Schwegler is the founder of the Yucca Valley Material Lab, a platform for making and thinking.

*Passing Resemblance, 2014*

Silicone, doll body, hair  
24 x 22 x 22 in

Photo: Scott Tebeau

**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).



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VISUAL ARTS PROGRAM

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