

Pasatiempo

¡BIENVENIDOS, VLADÉM!

Coming home

By Kate Nelson
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Harmony Hammond
Clayton Porter

Galleries in major art markets represent them. International biennales embrace them. Out-of-state collectors adore them. But in New Mexico, many contemporary artists say, even their neighbors don't know what they do.

Instead, they toil away in near anonymity on art that defies easy explanations. Now, beyond the prestige of a state-owned museum collecting and displaying their works, the most precious thing the new Vladem Contemporary delivers to them could be establishing hometown connections.

For certain you'll see a time-traveling tale of the 1680 Pueblo Revolt, a warship turned dreamy light sculpture, and paintings bound with grommets to evoke a new sense of the human body. Just don't be surprised if you also see one of their makers while shopping at your favorite grocery store.

Harmony Hammond

Layers of midnight-toned Prussian blue oil paint suture the horizontal straps that Harmony Hammond wrapped around *Cinch V*, one of her two near-monochrome paintings in Shadow and Light. In the center, a string laces back and forth through grommets at each end of the straps. Untied at the bottom, the strings hang unevenly off the edge of the painting.

"*Cinch V* is torso-sized," Hammond says from her Galisteo home. "The straps suggest ribs. But the straps are loose. The painting is not about binding, bandaging, or bondage, but rather about the possibility of constriction or binding. There's a kind of tension. Were the strings just untied and loosened? Or might they be pulled tight like a corset?"

In *Witness*, a grid of grommets embedded in the light, buff-colored surface opens a pictorial space, suggesting eyes or body orifices. Referencing an area beneath the surface, they ask, "Who or what has been covered up, buried, or erased?"

Such questions have long informed Hammond's socially engaged abstract paintings. She examines how materials and the ways they are used bring content into abstract work — especially the body. For example, the canvas for *Witness* with its seamed flaps casting shadows on the surface and the grommets in *Cinch V* come from repurposed worn-out Aikido mat covers. Hammond studied and taught the Japanese martial art for 36 years; the canvas literally bears a history of bodies falling on and rolling over it, including Hammond's.

An artist, writer, curator, and university professor, Hammond was a leading figure in the development of the feminist art movement in New York in the early 1970s. Her work has been exhibited in museums and galleries throughout the U.S. and Europe, including the New Mexico Museum of Art, where her pieces have been included in three group exhibitions and two mini-solo shows in the alcove spaces.

