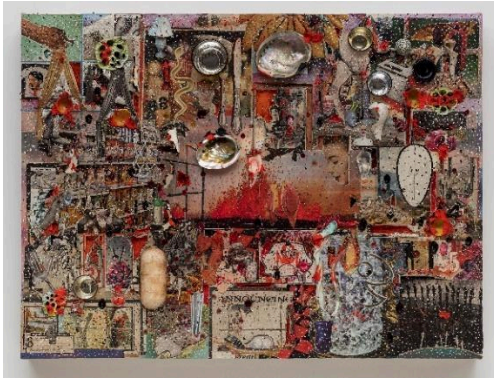




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Left: Elliott Hundley, *Tiered Sounds*, 2017. Paper, oil, fabric, pins, plastic, glass, shells, lotus pods, metal, foam and linen on panel. Private collection, Santa Barbara, CA. Right: Elliott Hundley, *Troy to the Dirt*, 2009. Oil on linen stretched on canvas.

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Santa Barbara Museum of Art Presents Mid-Career Exhibitions by Los Angeles Artist Elliott Hundley Opening April 20, 2025

Proscenium: Elliott Hundley to feature the installation *By Achilles' Tomb: Elliott Hundley and Antiquity @ SBMA*

March 6, 2025 — The Santa Barbara Museum of Art will present an extensive mid-career exhibition of work by Elliott Hundley including an innovative installation rethinking the current display of Greco-Roman antiquities in the Museum's Ludington Court. *Proscenium*, a broad survey, sees his work through the lens of theater, props, sets, and backdrops. It brings together 50 artworks dating from 2000 to 2025, including paintings, collages, assemblages, bronzes, drawings, rarely seen early works, and loans from private collections. In *By Achilles' Tomb*, he rethinks and mischievously upends the display of Greco-Roman antiquities in SBMA's Ludington Court. Long fascinated by the plays of Euripides (c. 480 – c. 406 BC), especially *Medea* (c. 431

BC), *The Bacchae* (c. 405 BC), and *Hekabe* (c. 424 BC), and ancient Greco-Roman culture and myths, he is an ideal artistic partner to reshape the Museum's most prominent and public space, which opens onto Santa Barbara's pedestrianized State Street.

Elliott Hundley has been a nationally and internationally recognized artist since his breakout show in 2006 at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. In 2012, a solo exhibition traveled to the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, and Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas. In 2019, he was awarded a fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. Currently represented by Regen Projects, Los Angeles, and Kasmin, New York, he has had solo presentations with Pace Prints, New York; VeneKlasen Werner, Berlin; Baik Art, Seoul; Bernier/Eliades Gallery, Athens; and Andrea Rosen, New York. Besides being in more than 100 group shows, his works are held by many museums, including the Broad Art Foundation, Los Angeles; Colección Jumex, Mexico City; Dakis Joannou Collection, Athens; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Istanbul Museum of Modern Art; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Pérez Art Museum Miami; Santa Barbara Museum of Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

What began as a straightforward mid-career survey has transformed into an experiment for SBMA and a consequential expansion of Hundley's practice into the reinstallation of a museum collection. During an early visit to the Museum, Hundley walked through Ludington Court with its ancient art and asked James Glisson, SBMA Chief Curator and Curator of Contemporary Art, about putting his art in that space. Since then, *Proscenium* has developed into a hybrid, genre-busting project: part mid-career survey, part startling juxtaposition of Hundley's sculptures with ancient marbles, part collaboration with museum art installers to shake up the display. All of this is with the goal of revealing that despite its apparent playfulness Hundley's art dwells on profound issues—mortality, violence, the ephemerality of beauty, and the inescapability of fate—and returns painting and sculpture to something closer to ritual or

ceremony in which lines between art and life, fiction and fact are blurred. His art imagines a world where the pagan gods acted like humans, and human heroes, such as those in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, could attain something like the status of Greek gods.



Left: Elliott Hundley, *By Achilles' Tomb*, 2009. Expanded polystyrene, wood, plastic, epoxy putty, pins, paper, photographs, willow, bamboo, string, wire, spray paint, found wax vessel. Hammer Museum. Right: Elliott Hundley, *tearing flesh from the bone*, 2011. Wood, metal, plastic, rope, found upholstery coils, goat hooves, metal leafing, pine cones, lobster legs, feathers, and epoxy. SBMA, Gift of L. L. W. W.

The exhibition's title, ***Proscenium***, is taken from the name of the arch that surrounds a stage and divides it from the audience in the real world. However, there is no proscenium in this exhibition. Hundley has turned the galleries into a stage without barriers. Theater is woven through the artworks and installation of ***Proscenium***. The large painting, *Actor (Purple)* (2015), shows out-of-focus frozen figures standing on what feels like a darkened stage with, perhaps, a curtain being pulled away on the right. *A Sea-Thrashed Thing* (2009) evokes waves breaking and the ocean's dangerous power. The title comes from a line in Ann Carson's translation of Euripides' tragedy *Hekabe*, when Hekabe, wife of Priam the defeated king of Troy, sees her son's mangled corpse on the surf. Two drawings, *Alkestis* (2012) and *Herakles* (2012), also take their titles from Euripides' plays. In them, Hundley forms poems from cut pieces of text mixed with handwritten notations and a dirty halo of waffle-soled shoe prints. *Tiered Sounds* (2017) (top and detail above) is titled from a phrase found in the opening of Antonin Artaud's play, *There is No More Firmament* (1933). There the playwright describes flashing-colored lights and a

primordial cacophony of sounds slowly turning into a busy street scene. Hundley's artwork mirrors Artaud's opening. With an explosion of details, littered with cast-off objects, covered with pins, and erupting lava, *Tiered Sounds* distills the roiling chaos of our world and the center dilates as if it were a curtain opening on a stage.



Left: Elliott Hundley, *Tiered Sounds* (detail), 2017. Paper, oil, fabric, pins, plastic, glass, shells, lotus pods, metal, foam and linen on panel. Private collection, Santa Barbara, CA. Right: Elliott Hundley, *Constellation with the Mysterious Object*, 2008. Painted wood, string, bamboo, Masonite, paper, wire, floral putty, screws, eye screw.

The desire to remove the barriers between audience and art is especially relevant to objects from more than two thousand years ago presented utterly out of context in a museum behind glass. Hundley shares, "I've always wanted to do something with antiquity because these objects are so rarefied. But the more I learn about them...one of the things that I see is that they have lost their intimacy. I have always aimed to do that in my work and included classical themes and images, but this [installation] is a way to do that even more directly." James Glisson, SBMA Chief Curator and Curator of Contemporary Art, shares, "We immediately started talking about how to reconnect with these ancient objects as things that were used and handled before they entered the Museum with its clean-room methods of handling and displaying artworks." Hundley encouraged SBMA's installation team to present the ancient Roman glass in a safe but completely untraditional way. As if in a window display at a department store, contemporary commercial perfume bottles will be mixed with ancient ones held aloft by plant-like

custom-made mounts that seem to grow out of the case. Many of these ancient glass containers were not particularly expensive or precious, and this display vividly makes that point.

Hundley's reimagining of the ancient art in Ludington Court is part of a bigger Museum commitment to reinterpreting the permanent collections to create a dialogue between past and present and make the galleries feel active, accessible, and, yes, fun. This effort extends to bilingual (English/Spanish) labels for exhibitions, more informative signage, and dynamic displays with bold juxtapositions of art from different time periods and cultures.

This exhibition is made possible through the generosity of the Earl and Shirley Greif Charitable Trust, Jacquelyn Klein-Brown, Lilac Drive Foundation, Merrill W. Sherman, and an anonymous donor.

The Museum is grateful for the assistance of Regen Projects, Los Angeles with planning and preparation.

James Glisson and Elliott Hundley will produce a publication to document the exhibitions and rethought displays.

Related Event:

Sunday, April 20, Noon

Elliott Hundley Dialogue with James Glisson, SBMA, Chief Curator

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is one of the finest museums on the West coast and is celebrated for the superb quality of its permanent collection. Its mission is to integrate art into the lives of people through internationally recognized exhibitions and special programs, as well as the thoughtful presentation of its permanent collection.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA

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