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## 3 Questions With Artist Marietta Patricia Leis



(Doug Merriam)

By Riley Gardner

Marietta Patricia Leis isn't one to slow down. After decades pursuing the arts from performances to paintings, she's still showing in galleries—pandemic-be-damned—at 83 years old. Leis' newest exhibition *Sense Memories* at the **Center for Contemporary Arts (1050 Old Pecos Trail, 11am-4pm, Fri-Sun. \$10)** is just as it sounds; a show that takes you as a viewer both into her own senses, but also into your own. Maybe that's a view of the natural world, or something far more personal. This is where nostalgia and the earth's physicality intersect. With a play on light and shadow, art becomes something beyond a frame and spills into our own senses. A longtime fan of minimalism, one of Leis' major goals is to evoke emotion from simplistic elements. SFR spoke with Leis about her showcase, the things that inspire her and how a grandmother gardening can become a catalyst for decades' worth of creation. (Riley Gardner)

### **Can you give us a little background on your career?**

You might call me a 'lifetime artist.' The arts have been the primary focus of my life since I was a child growing up in New Jersey. Like many artists, my career's gone down a long and circuitous road. I was always painting whenever I could. I studied and performed as a dancer at 14 and then moved to New York City when I was 17 to continue with my dance studies. I studied the Stanislavski Method of acting with Lee Strasberg. Between classes and gigs as a dancer, actor and model, I continued to paint and began to show my work in the East Village.

In 1962, I moved to Los Angeles for my acting career and played minor roles in film as I continued to paint whenever I had a chance. Visual art eventually became my primary creative expression, which led me to New Mexico and an MFA from the University of New Mexico. Extensive travel has really influenced my interests, specifically my interest in the planet, its sustainability and the inter-connectivity of everything in it. I've been fortunate in having been given numerous artist residencies throughout the world too, which have really inspired my work's sense of place.

### **With the name *Sense Memories*, there's an element of human sensation involved with the work beyond mere sight. Why go for this route rather than a more traditional one?**

My grandmother was an Italian woman who responded to life in very visceral ways: gardening, cooking, appreciating beauty. [My use of] color recalls being with her in her gardens and eliciting the emotions of love that I feel for her. When I smell olive oil and garlic, the sense of her and her home is vivid. These are examples of 'sense memories.' Actors and psychologists use sense memories to stimulate memories and the emotions behind them. One of my intentions in my art is to engage the viewer, to invite them to participate and connect with the work, perhaps recalling their own memories, sense of place and feelings.

### **Light and shadow are notoriously difficult to work with, for obvious reasons. With that in mind, what are unique aspects of working with those elements that you can't get from other elements?**

They extend the art. Shadows and light can be seen as halos, and that is really magical to me. With installations consisting of several pieces, the shadows bridge these individual pieces. Sometimes they can make the work larger than the work itself. Plus, when I was a kid, I loved the Robert Louis Stevenson poem *My Shadow*, which reads 'I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me...'

My reductive art strives to be beautiful, to seduce people to think about larger and underlying issues. When I extend my art off the wall, I'm attempting to meet the viewer where they are. These resulting shadows are a way to reach out and invite the viewer into conversation with the work [and this is] usually is a unique connection. Sometimes I use mediums that reflect light—glossy mediums and surfaces that can be burnished, metal leaf and others. We respond to light because we need light. It completes the darkness.



## Riley Gardner

Riley is has been a culture writer for SFR since February 2021. He likes classic Italian movies, big boats and anything extremely old that your grandfather would like too. He graduated from Santa Fe University of Art and Design in 2016.

### Letters to the Editor

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