Sarah LaBarre is an artist whose work is informed by the language of painting, but uses a vocabulary appropriated from traditional fiber techniques and mediums. She draws upon historical decorative and textile designs combining these blueprints with soft reflective portraiture. A graduate of OCAC, Sarah is now a practicing fiber artist who has exhibited nationally. BFA, University of the Arts; Post-baccalaureate, Oregon College of Art and Craft

I create work with a trinity of purpose in mind. Firstly, I create worlds: parallel existences to our own, concurrent environments, and imaginary yet totally believable spaces. Secondly, I populate those worlds with flora and fauna native to reality, a chimera of the real and the fantastic, and the fully fictional. Thirdly, I place myself in the worlds I have born through anthropomorphic and zoomorphic self-portraiture and invite the viewer to come inside my created spaces also.

Functionally I make work using textile media, illustration, drawing, and computer design applications. I work in a naturalist fashion; mentally entering worlds and taking taxonomic and descriptive visual information and then bringing it back in visual form as artifacts, sketches, studies, and curios. In synthesizing my creation of worlds, populations, and a sense of self I remake reality from the ground up and so can reframe the challenges, hardships, problems, and questions that I face in everyday life.
Weaving is an introspective experience for me; I use it as mediation, therapy, and a time for reflection. Yet at the same time, my goal as an artist is to create work that inspires these feelings in others. I thrive on the possibilities in texture, color and pattern, all of which are dominant focuses in my work. I use highly controlled geometric patterns, using strict loom construction, and then deconstruct the rigid pattern with more organic and unpredictable marks from dye techniques. As an artist, I am drawn to these very physical craft processes.

My relationship with fiber is constant. I am fascinated by the use and beauty of fiber in other cultures and throughout history. It is a way I can connect to the world. I especially like to employ traditional dye methods like ikat and shibori. My work is often influenced by iconic fiber artists such as Annie Albers and Sheila Hicks. Albers’ pattern work and color pallet seduce me with their subtleties, and Hicks’ bold, enveloping sculptures astound me. While I love traditional fiber processes, I also derive inspiration from the things that surround me in the present: from nature, to fabric, to architecture and the human body. I often take colors from skin tones or plants that I see, and designs from grid-like structures and buildings. The translation of these sources into fabric creates something completely new for me, and often takes on the feelings of the moments in which the work is created rather than the sources from which they are borrowed. This element of transformation is what continues to excite me in my work. The use of a loom is an extension of my own body, and yet it removes my hand from the artwork in a way that allows for a number of surprises.
We see what we want to see. We perceive the world around us in our own way and sometimes our perception is far from reality. We have got used to rely on our feelings and emotions when we see or judge something and sometimes this leads to the misinterpretation of the things around us, because feelings and emotions can’t be objective. I believe that any modern artist needs to push the art forward, inventing, defining new paradigms of expression with powerful meanings. It can be done using new technology, or researching new techniques with old media. It is about the experience the artist delivers to the public - whether it is provocative, whether it changes how the viewer thinks, feels and views the world. This is what really matters, and it has nothing to do with the techniques that the artist chooses to use. Just as the development of acrylic paints in the 20th century did not mean that oil paints or even the practice of creating one’s own paint from pigments fell out of practice, so it is with technology. Just as some artists paint in oils only or acrylics only, some create their work digitally. Image editing and graphic design software programs are yet another tool to add to the artist’s palette.
I tend to analyze and attempt to understand certain cultures in scientific and historic terms in order to make statements about memory and identity. Therefore, the images come from both cultural heritages I have preserved in Turkey and the places I have visited. I believe memories have some contribution to our identity, as we build on them when creating new memories. I have called many places “home” over the years. I was born in Germany and attended schools in Turkey and the USA. Both emotionally and philosophically, these experiences have let me use a visual language consisting of patterns and images derived from various archeological and historical references including miniatures, fiction, scientific theories, mythology and my photographs that link cultures one to another.

Although I am open to a variety of methods, I am mostly interested in drawing process. Drawing allows me to explore various creative materials and techniques to realize my creative vision. I combine a variety of methods to achieve the desired solution and build an image in layers. With pen, pencil, watercolor, tempera, and ink; I often employed a variety of stenciling techniques to make vivid colors and archetype shapes. I draw spontaneously to capture fluid motion and energy. Pattern functions as metaphors for layers of time that conceal rather than reveal images of decaying walls. I also tend to cite a type of beauty that flows from nostalgia. It is a lexicon gleaned from my time working and studying as a conservator & restorer at the Topkapi Palace in Turkey.

Combining global with local, traditional with contemporary and adding my visual narrative, I meditate upon them and reflect their long and numinous lives. Through the use of mixed media to unify the imagery, each drawing becomes like a separate memory; the characters engage in some otherworldly exploration of these memories, and expect the viewer to experience the work on their own.
We live in an age of constructed paradigms set up through social and political ideologies in mass media. My work utilizes vintage and iconic imagery from the modern age of America (50's - 70's) to stimulate a sense of nostalgia. It is interesting how an image or amalgamation of images can hint at the slightest thing(s) and our memory fills in the details. Nostalgia gives us a sense of the good old days, of comfort, of pleasure and warmth.

Intimate feelings and relationships emanate from memory as one views sourced images in my work. These emotional attachments are formed by ones prior preconceived notions, which are defined through their experience or relation to each image sourced. Using these notions I stimulate tension, playfulness, and ambiguity in my work through the melding and reforming of the collage process. During this process new meanings are formed, strengthened or diffused through the interrelation of the visual image(s), their notions, and our memory.

Our memory is of personal interest, for it is frozen at the point of entry yet subject to change over time. In the recollection of memory I see a state of crystallization, the forming and reforming of the past, each time we recollect something we slowly evolve it into a polished form until we reach its essence. My work looks to reach for such a state, the crystallization of memory, where the essence of being can be found through a nostalgic recollection or internalization of the self.

Intuitively, I think there is an innate yearning to understand layers of information that make up the environment one lives in. I have become inexplicably drawn to un-idealized instants captured in images that create a dialogue; sometimes by the assertion of the person photographed, but more over by using a personal narrative to create a scene encompassing my learned history of a moment in their life. I am also interested in exploring how within a group the whole sometimes acts as a single identity. By using various mediums and through the editing of information I intend to create vignettes of fully articulated areas built on intense color and mark making in contrast with areas of barely manipulated quite.
I make. I do it because it is a love affair that I know never has to end. Working with my hands imparts my offering to the world. Creating is like a meditation clearing my mind. Without concern for time, I am content. Accomplishment in expression is my key to the universal language. My Art balances me and I was made to make it.

My process is not always deliberate. I embrace serendipity, and avoid feeling forced. Inspiration comes from wonders of life in natural world, my existence both spiritual and physical, and my experiences both real and surreal. I welcome Metal’s solidity, its diverse auras, and permanent qualities. Metal can be a seductive focal point or the perfect framework for integrating leather, stones, and found or recycled objects.

I have very much come to enjoy making objects that resemble functionality or objects that have an odd function. Creating works such as this makes me feel as though I am an inventor as well as a jewelry/metals artist while also making a social commentary. There is an absurdity in my intent as a maker that connects back to me. Through my design I aim to make viewers question issues that I am constantly bombarded with as a woman as well as objects and their relationship to the body. I also aim to change the context of recognizable objects through a kind of drama and absurdity.

Although I still have a love for creating pieces that tell a story or focus mainly on elements and aesthetics, I am also very excited by creating works that insinuate humor and dysfunctional aspects.
Sculpture calls attention to the movement of the viewer and the stillness of the object; a viewer observes, passes by, and later, reflects on their experience with a work of art. Current works are layered subtle conceptual considerations that seek both physical and intellectual interaction. It is my intention that my sculpture holds a viewer’s gaze by formal assessment as well as convey philosophies regarding the existential psychological make up of the human condition. Our internal framework is held together as well as separated from the rest of the world by our flesh, shells that contain a closed matrix of experiences that make up our individuality. The idea of “containment” is a very important aspect in my artwork. 

By utilizing principles that emphasize interior/exterior compositions, art works offer a viewer a glimpse of the inside, as well outside. One is left to consider that the internal makeup is equal, if not more important than the outer surfaces.

My work examines the notion that as humans, our existence and individuality is molded from the piecing together of our experiences and environment. Sculptures explore questions of human purpose that feature abstract forms that offer open spaces and cavities that enclose our deepest thoughts, offering an extension on my ongoing meditation that continuously ponders my place in this world.
My artwork is an investigation into how my personality traits have been shaped through physical and psychological development as a result of the surgeries I underwent as an infant. I am exploring how these surgeries could create a type of trauma that is unable to be mentally recalled but is evident in my mannerisms, obsessions, temperaments and scars. My figurative work is an exploration of the lack of proper emotions that can result from early trauma. I tone down the emotions to focus on the unflattering gaze, subtle micro-expressions and repetitions of self to tempt the viewer into a psychological dialogue while also repelling them with a sense of unwelcome probing.

In my peephole paintings, I place the viewer in the position of the voyeur. There is skepticism and paranoia of the outside world as I observe my neighbor’s life from a safe, discreet location within my secure environment. I then turn this eye inward to focus on this secure environment—my living room. The interior location is a metaphor for my inner self—seemingly together and well maintained but fluctuating between dark and light, order and chaos. Repetition of motifs alludes to both ritualistic behaviors and the obsessive desire to define who I am. The consistent use of the circle creates a visible passage of time and visual unity. It is a lens that allows me to look outside while staying firmly within. The repetition of self-portraits shows a consistent expression that has subtle shifts in emotion. The self-portraits and peephole paintings serve the same function by reflecting my compulsive drive to maintain a daily routine and to reveal the obsessive need to understand my own psychology.

When the Scandinavian nations of Norway and Finland achieved independence at the beginning of the 20th century, they turned to their artists to craft national identities that would unite their people and distance them from their former overlords. These artists utilized the traditional crafts and the oral storytelling of the villages to find the seeds of cultural identity.

I have used this model as I developed my own identity as an artist. I have embraced my Scandinavian heritage and the work of the artists of this time of nation building, finding inspiration through the techniques and the sagas. Norse mythology and folktales have been a particular obsession since I was young, and the lyric Icelandic sagas captivate me with their depiction of magical beings and the heroism and baseness of humans.
I utilize traditional oil painting methods dating to the Renaissance and Baroque eras, drawing influence through the Romantic period from artists such as Rubens, Vermeer, Ingres and Delaroche. My attraction to such methods is partially derived from my love for history, but also from my admiration for realistic painting. My technique involves a system of Scumbling and Glazing in thin transparent layers of oil paint over a Grisaille under-painting while maintaining the principles of fat-over-lean to build a painting that allows for the natural luminosity of layered oil paint. I use these techniques specifically because they allow for the greatest range of subtlety within the paint to create a higher sense of realism than would be present in Alla Prima painting. In the past, I have created works reminiscent of historical styles and themes and while some of these motifs recur throughout my work, I have shifted towards a more contemporary approach to realism drawing influence from artists such as Robert Bechtle, Jeremy Geddes and Justin Mortimer.

The majority of my works are of small scale, which reflects upon my desire for the viewer to become intimate with the details of the paintings. My current work deals primarily with the ideas of identity and anonymity, as well as the struggle between the many dualities present in existence. I am especially interested in subjects that convey a sense of detachment. I use figurative representation, as well as still life, to create paintings utilizing personal/found photography and drawing as a basis of reference. I feel that this body of work is still in its infancy but that it will continue to develop conceptually through time to reflect the interaction of man within himself as well as the world. Many of my current works focus on the Genre scene, which depict the interaction of things and people within their environment in an everyday setting. These works are primarily driven by the ideas of detachment as it relates to inner psyche as well as isolation from society.