

## Meet Anna Elise Johnson



**Today we'd like to introduce you to Anna Elise Johnson.**

**Hi Anna Elise, can you start by introducing yourself? We'd love to learn more about how you got to where you are today?**

My father is an artist, and I grew up making art. I wasn't one of those kids who drew all the time though – I was more of an inventor/ alchemist/ artist, putting together assemblages and using unusual materials. Through art school, I continued to experiment and push ideas forward, and even when I made oil paintings, I was driven to use the traditional medium in ways that felt new. I continued to make work in Berlin, in grad school in Chicago, residencies in Houston and London, and now I have a studio in downtown Los Angeles.

**Would you say it's been a smooth road, and if not what are some of the biggest challenges you've faced along the way?**

The continuous challenge in my life has been making original artwork. I just read Karl Ove Knausgaard's book on the painter Edvard Munch, and Knausgaard discusses the goal of originality in art. He writes about the irony that artists like Munch who break free from certain constraints of their time become emblematic of their period. Artists try to see beyond the limitations of their time and place to access truth, even though they are inevitably still bound by their time.

For me, trying to understand the period of time that we're in by reading history, political theory, and art theory has been a preoccupying aspect of my artistic research. I try to understand the ideologies that form our understanding of our world, how images are seen, and how the art world operates while also creating artwork that can push back against the limits of our moment. When making art, my conceptual investigations also face consuming material challenges, and solving those challenges guides the work. Trying to find a balance between material and conceptual investigations has led me to make some unusual, and I hope original, artwork.

**Appreciate you sharing that. What else should we know about what you do?**

In the last few years, I have been working on a series I call "Earthworks" that I start on the ground in particular places in the landscape. Once I find a place to begin, I soak canvas in water and plaster, lay the canvas on the ground, cover it with earth and plaster, and let the material bake dry in the sun. The canvas records the topography of the ground and holds the minerals of that exact location formed by the site's geological history. Once the canvases are dry, I bring them back to my studio in L.A. and further fix the earth onto the canvas, layering the pieces in more plaster and other media. This process partially obscures the initial record of the place where they started but evokes my memory and feeling about the experience of the physical site. I name each piece after the road nearest to where I begin them. I often start the work in far off places away from any other people. I search for places that feel truly outside of cities and the cultural sphere, but in the age of the Anthropocene, we know that no part of the earth has been untouched by human impact. The dichotomy between a "natural" site and a constructed, manipulated site no longer holds. The journey of searching for an outside and still being there as a human in our era holds for me a tension that drives these works.

**Do you have recommendations for books, apps, blogs, etc?**

Telling you my favorite books would be as hard as pinning down my favorite movies, so I'll give you my weekly podcast routine. I start each day listening to the New York Times' The Daily Podcast and Democracy Now. The Daily goes in depth with one of the newspaper's stories through a conversational interview. Democracy Now is an hourlong news program that is funded by listeners and does not take corporate advertising funding. They cover stories often ignored by corporate news media, and they interview experts and people directly involved in news events rather than pundits.

Weekly I listen to The Ezra Klein Show and WTF with Marc Maron. Ezra Klein does in depth interviews with writers and thinkers about some of the most pressing issues of our times, and Marc Maron interviews actors, musicians and comedians with an empathy and thoughtfulness that creates fascinating conversations.

For an analysis of the media and how news stories are being covered, I listen to On the Media. To stay in touch with what's happening in local Hollywood news, I listen to The Business.







**cris worley**  
FINE ARTS



**cris worley**  
FINE ARTS

