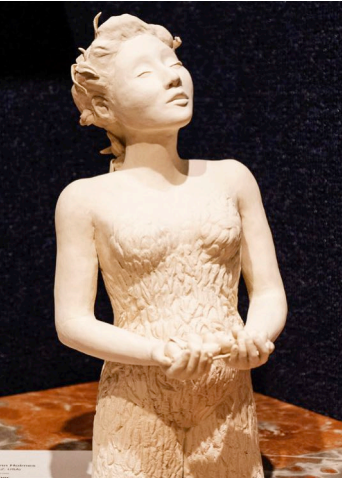
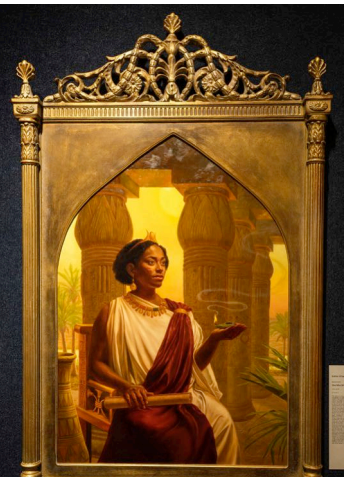




Light emanates from Heavenly Mother in this exhibit entry.



"Our Mother" is Tracy Ann Holmes' entry in the exhibit.



"She Who Shall Become" is a creation by Esther Hi'ilani Candari.



"Utah" is Cindy Lewis Clark's entry in the exhibit.

As belief in a Heavenly Mother continues to emerge from Mormonism's doctrinal shadows, more and more women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are trying to, well, imagine her.

According to Brigham Young University scholars, there have been some 600 references to Heavenly Mother in Latter-day Saint and academic discourse since 1844. In recent years, she has been the subject of articles, poetry, a one-woman play, hymns, even academic debates. And, of course, there is the church's brief official essay, which states that "knowledge about a Mother in Heaven is limited."

Yet this conclusion is built on words. What about using the language of visual arts to explore Mother God's depth and dimensions?

That's exactly what Nicole Woodbury, Laura Erikson, and Mary Brickey have done with their independent exhibit, "Reflections on a Mother in Heaven," on display through Nov. 13 at Anthony's Fine Art and Antiques in Salt Lake City.

The trio scoured portfolios of female Latter-day Saint artists, and invited some 140 of them to submit new works on Heavenly Mother for inclusion in their show. Some 130 did.

These Latter-day Saint women employ a variety of styles, approaches and visual media to express their feelings about the divine feminine. There are pieces from women in Africa, South America and China as well as from refugees and women of color in the U.S. The three curators also produced new works of their own for the show.

The pieces ranged in size from 2"x4" (the size of a business card) to 10 feet tall, Woodbury says, and included bronze, ceramic, plaster, and "honeycomb" stone sculptures as well as interactive installations, watercolors, oils, paper cutting, plexiglass and stained glass, charcoal, mixed media and photography.

Several artists used "sacred geometry" — interlocking circles and shapes — to depict Mother God.

Such diversity echoes the research being done by BYU professors Sarah Coyne in the School of Family Life, and Heather Belnap, an art historian, who have almost 400 images to include in content analysis.

# FAITH



PHOTOS BY RICK EGAN | The Salt Lake Tribune

One of the works of art of Heavenly Mother has a nature theme in the "Reflections of a Mother in Heaven" exhibit, now on display at Anthony's Fine Art and Antiques in Salt Lake City.

## Exploring Heavenly Mother in artwork

More than 100 female artists submit their imaginings of the LDS doctrinal deity.

By PEGGY FLETCHER STACK | The Salt Lake Tribune

"Though we are still in the process of coding, preliminary results suggest that Heavenly Mother herself is portrayed in diverse ways (in terms of race, age, body shape and size) and in a number of roles (including as a creator, protector, nurturer, etc.)," Coyne writes in an email. "Symbolically, she is often represented in nature, in the cosmos, and as light."

Belnap has high praise for the current exhibit.

It "powerfully demonstrates how LDS women artists are using their talents and training to produce artwork that ruminates upon and pays homage to our beloved Mother God," Belnap writes in the exhibition's catalog. "We recognize that there is deep beauty in the creative process — particularly in forging connections with our Mother God — and are grateful for the important spiritual and cultural work that our artists do. It is our hope that our study will amplify these good and praiseworthy efforts."

### 'WOMEN NEED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT HER'

When Woodbury, Erikson and Brickey began curating the art, the

pieces fell roughly into five categories — portraits of her individuality, her role as creator, her role as mother, her role as partner with Heavenly Father, and her feminine qualities. So that's how the five exhibit rooms are organized.

"Mother in Heaven" is Woodbury's third "Certain Women" exhibition at Anthony's, while it's the second for Erikson and Brickey.

Woodbury and two other mothers organized the first such exhibition in April 2018 to showcase the work of Latter-day Saint women and their faith. After that, the others dropped out and Woodbury enlisted the help of Erikson, whose work is more contemporary, and Brickey, whose style is fairly traditional.

The first exhibition did not have a theme. The second asked the artists to issue a "statement of purpose," tying their work to their faith.

This time, though, the creators were looking for a contemporary issue that would be unifying. So they made a list and Heavenly Mother was on it. It was Brickey's experience that pushed them further toward her.

"I went through a marriage that was spiritually and emotionally abusive and, after my divorce, I was processing those things," she

says. "That led me into a deep dive into a lot of doctrinal issues that led me to Heavenly Mother."

When they began working on this show a year ago, Brickey says, she sensed "a collective [hunger] on this topic."

It's happening "in a lot of different quarters without people needing to talk to each other about it," she says. "We women need to know more about her role in the home, in the church, in the world and in the eternities."

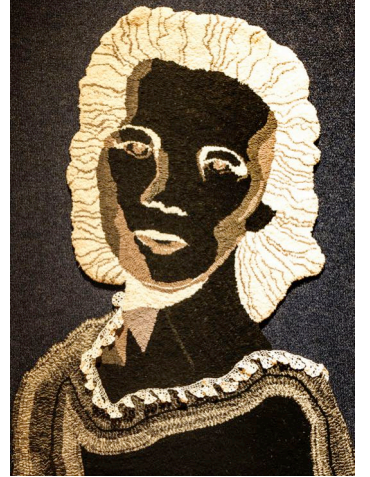
Worried about possible pushback from members who think Heavenly Mother is a taboo topic ("It isn't doctrinally but can be culturally"), Woodbury instead proposed "Heavenly Parents," as the recent Young Women theme underscores.

"It is a tender topic," she says, "and a sacred one."

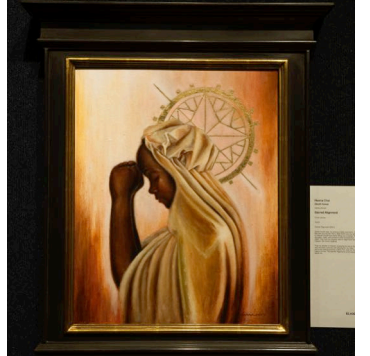
That, though, would shift the focus from the divine feminine alone. Erikson took a "go big or go home" approach, pushing for Heavenly Mother.

They went with "reflections on" Mother God, Brickey adds, that also implies human women are reflections of her "and the divinity that is in us."

The women agreed — "we are a good balance for each other" — they wanted it to be uplifting and



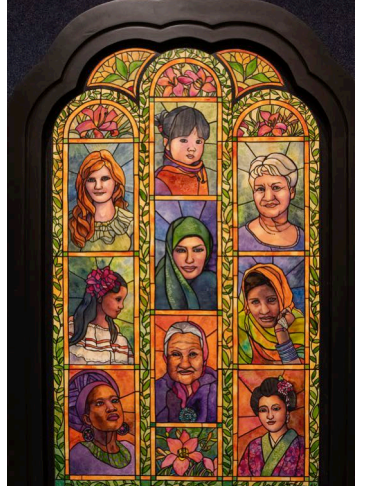
"Mother's Photo Negative" is Rebecca Clark Knudsen's exhibit entry.



Hanna Choi, of South Korea, submitted "Sacred Alignment."



"My Sisters Keeper" is a rendering submitted by Tshikamba



Various female likenesses are featured in this exhibit entry.

open-ended so participants would have the freedom to artistically interpret their spiritual views without restraint.

Some say the topic is "too polarizing," Brickey said, "but Heavenly Mother should be beyond politics. We wanted to help women know their power."

### 'YEARNING ... FOR A CONNECTION'

McArthur Krishna, co-author with Bethany Brady Spaulding of "A Girl's Guide to Heavenly Mother," spoke at the exhibition's opening.

The gallery was packed, Woodbury says, with women and men eager to experience the art.

"There was a palpable yearning in the room," Erikson says, "for a connection" to this female deity.

Woodbury grew up in Texas and other Bible Belt states but was taught about Heavenly Mother by her Latter-day Saint dad.

"I grew up with an open knowledge about Heavenly Mother and this confidence in my eternal destiny, and that has powered me through my whole life," she says. "What surprises me about this show is what a big deal it is to others."

Erikson was reared as a church member in California and Utah, and knew that Mother in Heaven existed, but the divine feminine wasn't discussed — or celebrated — in her home.

As a missionary to Italy, she never mentioned this Mormon belief to potential converts.

She didn't start thinking about the female deity until she was 32 years old and became a mother herself, Erikson says, getting teary. "It dawned on me. It was an awakening that my Mother in Heaven was just as involved with me and loved me just as much as Heavenly Father. I came to that understanding because I had my own child and had stepped into my role as a mother."

There is power in knowing, the artist says, that "she is present in my life."

Though Latter-day Saints are cautioned against praying to a Heavenly Mother, the artist believes it is "as important to develop a relationship with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ."

All three hope their exhibit and the "glorious diversity" of voices will help others find this Mother God, too.