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ROCK STAR

LA artist Elyse Graham's electric-hued, resin-coated geodes make a colorful statement.

BY ALEXIS MULLIKIN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY BRANDON HARMAN

Artist Elyse Graham began creating her neon "geodes" several years ago as a meditation on time. After studying art and semiotics at Brown University in Rhode Island she returned to her native LA, where after years of experiencing full-blown East Coast seasons she became hyperaware that because LA lacked them, the passage of time was more difficult to define. This realization led Graham on a search for a way to permanently represent time—in a visual and intellectual manner—which brought to mind her childhood fascination with geodes (formed when a pocket of gas is trapped underneath sediment and compressed under pressure, creating crystals over the course of thousands of years). "Sooner or later the geode is unearthed, and we get lucky and find it," says the 33-year-old.

In many ways, Graham's artistic process mirrors this geological one. She creates her own air pocket by inflating small balloons, which she arranges and sticks together in mini sculptural formations. "I see breath as a marker of time because it's the force that keeps us alive. We have to do it; we are compelled to do it," she says. "I began counting how many breaths I take in a minute, and then wondering what one minute of time actually looks like in a tangible way. By [trapping] my breath in a balloon, I was able to represent that. I encapsulate that one minute, and it is sealed forever."

She then proceeds to "paint and pour" psychedelically colored liquid resin—acid green, turquoise, fluorescent pink—in various layers over the balloons to create a solid "rock." This process takes approximately one month per geode. "Part of the excitement for me is that I'm working from the inside out," says Graham, noting that she loves the surprise of the reveal when she saws open each object and removes the balloons to see the crevices created in the layers of dry resin,



FROM TOP: Elyse Graham in her studio; the artist's sculptural vases; a colorful geode.

mimicking what the pockets of gas do in a natural geode. "I've saved a moment by sealing it into an object. By opening the geode and releasing the sealed breath, I can share the enjoyment with other people."

Recently, Graham began to experiment with sculptural vases using a similar process. She inflates one large balloon, covers the exterior in plaster, and, when that has dried, removes the balloon and coats the interior in her signature resin. She lets it dry upside down so thick resin drips are suspended to gravity-defying effect once the vase has been turned right side up. "The experimentation involved in my work is what motivates me," says Graham. "It gets me out of bed; it keeps me up at night. I like the transformation of everyday objects into otherworldly, weird things." *TF*

