

WAVE HILL SUNROOM PROJECT SPACE

October 17–November 29, 2026

MELANIE ELYSE BREWSTER

A Metaphysical Quest for the Deepest Backbend

MELANIE ELYSE BREWSTER

Born in Miami, FL
Lives in New York, NY

Detail from *A Metaphysical Quest for the Deepest Backbend,* 2026, mixed media. Courtesy of the artist.

In *A Metaphysical Quest for the Deepest Backbend,* Melanie Elyse Brewster imagines the aftermath of a mysterious ritual in the Sunroom. The installation blends fact and fiction to tell a story of a woman whose extreme yoga practice transforms her into an ouroboros, an ancient symbol depicting a serpent consuming its own tail signifying renewal, transformation, and the cycle of life. In Brewster's envisioning, this metamorphosis marks a state of "Completion," a passage that transcends the physical body, from which the woman disappears.

Brewster's visual and narrative lexicon draws from surrealism, cultural anthropology, queer aesthetics, ancient religious systems, and occult practices to reflect on the limits of wellness enlightenment. Large, suspended banners of hybrid figures chart bodily contortions that progress into impossible physical postures. At the center of the installation, a cork exercise mat and yoga blocks are encircled by black rope braided from upcycled yoga pants that honor those who have achieved Completion, creating a protective circle of devotion. Nearby, shed snakeskin and a sandy black substrate suggest evidence of transcendence.

Throughout, objects gathered from the artist's family and flea markets are repurposed as ritual artifacts of an imagined belief system. Crystals, vessels, gold-plated body jewelry, dried herbs, and other objects blur the boundaries between altar, yoga studio, and archaeological site. Chains connect materials and coalesce practices rooted in control and power, requiring extreme discipline and trust. Watercolor and metallic foil works recall illuminated manuscripts that honor the sacred, while journal entries, food logs, poetic fragments, and purification instructions reveal a disciplined, daily spiritual practice.

While some world traditions view the primordial serpent as female, Brewster's mythology moves beyond traditional gender constructs. Rooted in nature worship and rewilding, the artist's uncanny and unresolved mythology asks what happens when spiritual liberation demands transformation of the body into a non-human form, through self-sacrifice.

Distorting familiar narratives of mind-body approaches, *A Metaphysical Quest for the Deepest Backbend* also considers the distance between contemporary practices and yoga's traditional frameworks rooted in ancient Indian philosophy, as well as questions of access to wellness practices. In Brewster's reimagining, spirituality, esoteric practices, and nature worship converge to create an opening for a discipline guided less by explicit self-awareness than by an intention to produce collective transformation through shared knowledge and interconnectedness.

Brewster is a Greek American interdisciplinary artist, scholar, and author of *Atheists in America.* She has exhibited nationwide, including New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and Chicago. Brewster earned an MFA from the School of Visual Arts, NY, and a PhD from University of Florida, Miami. She is a professor in the Department of Counseling and Clinical Psychology at Columbia University.

PUBLIC PROGRAM: SUN, OCT 18, 2PM: Performative walkthrough of the exhibition with anthropologist and professor Dr. Janet Lykos, PhD.

Organized by Curator of Visual Arts Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger, the Sunroom Project Space provides an opportunity for early-career artists in the New York City area to develop and present a site-specific project as a solo exhibition. The 2026 season features Sujin Lim, Hyunjin Park, Etienne Gisto Cipriani, Tarik Jeremiah Brown, Camille Cooper, and Melanie Elyse Brewster, consecutively.

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