

*Adam 1* (detail), *Adam Organs* (detail), *Adam 2* (detail), by Gillian Genser

art selection and comment by [Lil Copan](#) in the [July 13, 2022](#) issue



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“It is not without irony,” says sculptor Gillian Genser, “that the creation of this piece was to be my demise.” When she set out to depict the story of the first man, Adam, Genser sought to reimagine the man who should have been. Not the one given dominion over the earth. Genser reimagined a different starting point: an original person who didn’t subdue but was in “interconnected coexistence with all other life on this planet,” as she writes in her artist’s statement. What would *that* look like?

It would look like beginning again, perhaps this time with, as Jewish tradition suggests, the original woman, Lilith. What if he were in relationship with the earth, and Lilith were not cast aside for another, for Eve?

Sculpting, creating limbs, organs, muscles, bones from materials of the primordial womb—the sea—Genser re-created the symbolic start of the world: blue mussels, shells, the butterfly pupae of transformation. And as she worked, the toxic residues of Adam’s kin’s harm began to harm Genser, through the work she sought to reimagine that would do no harm. She names the invasive toxins—“lead, arsenic, cadmium, manganese”—that led to her body sustaining “devastating neurological and metabolic damage.”

“I will never recover,” she says, even as she continues on paths of transformation of her own work and process, now sculpting using remnants, shells, bones, and protection of mask and gloves and ventilation. New artwork continues to emerge.