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WE LIKE THESE GUYS!

## In Unison

A choir boldly sings where it's never sung before.

A YEAR AGO, members of the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus (SFGMC) believed they were going places—faraway places, like Cuba, maybe, or China. They were coming up on their 40th season, and the milestone deserved a landmark tour. Then came the presidential election—and with it, the fear that the gay rights high of the past few decades could collapse. SFGMC board chairman Steve Huffines was alarmed by that chilling notion. "I wasn't concerned with liberals versus conservatives," says Huffines (rhymes with *lines*), who sings bass in the group. "I was worried about the normalization of hatred."

Huffines's idea: scrap the international jaunt and instead take the chorus down South. "Folks of all stripes live in the South," says Huffines, who grew up the gay son of a minister in Birmingham, Alabama. "But it's also where some of the country's most problematic anti-LGBT legislation is coming from." Within 48 hours of the election, Huffines's vision sprouted choir-wide support. "We needed to combat fear with compassion," says SFGMC executive director Chris Verdugo, "and we can muster a lot of that." More than 220 singers' worth, to be exact. All are either fundraising or paying their own way to join the tour, which kicks off October 7 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and then goes to Alabama, Tennessee, and the Carolinas.

The ambitious itinerary includes five benefit concerts, proceeds from which will go to local civil rights organizations. The group might raise eyebrows, but they'll be keeping a song in their heart. Says Verdugo, "We're bringing the biggest of olive branches: music." —Z.D.



Learn more about SFGMC's fall tour at [sfgmc.org](http://sfgmc.org)



Clockwise from left: Cowan's *Burmese Dream*; the artist contemplating *Basket*; *Creamer and Sugar*, *Swans in Sky*; *River Green and Mint*.

WOMEN WHO MAKE BEAUTIFUL THINGS

## The Fine Tint

Amber Cowan sees the world through rose (and cobalt and pearl) colored glass.

**ONE WOMAN'S AMETHYST** candy dish is another woman's treasure—especially if the treasurer is Philadelphia-based sculptor Amber Cowan, 35. Cowan has spent the past six years hunting for glass knickknacks manufactured from the 1950s to the present, with the goal of manipulating them into modern sculptures that are more than the sum of their fusty parts.

**OLDIES AND GOODIES** Cowan's obsession with pressed-glass tchotchkes (think ruby red water goblets, bright blue lampstands) started simply enough: They abound at thrift stores, garage sales, and junkyards—so she could get a lot for a little. But her ongoing attraction can be credited to the material's historical preciousness. "Many items I work with are no longer produced," says Cowan, who's also an adjunct professor at Temple University's Tyler School of Art. "And some of the molds used to make them date

back to the 1800s." By reworking the retro relics into abstract art, Cowan gives them new stories to tell.

**PIECES OF HER HEART** Cowan's best friend is the 5,000-degree torch she uses to melt and twist pieces of scrap glass into spikes, flowers, feathers, and other shapes. She then combines those new forms—by the hundreds and sometimes thousands—to build monochromatic sculptures ("adding different colors would be chaotic") ranging in size from several inches to six feet.



Even with a vast collection, Cowan mourns the trinkets that got away. "I found a barrel of broken yellow and pink Christmas tree figurines several years ago, and I still regret not buying it," she says. "I would have loved to make a big forest piece out of them."

**REACTION TIME** Despite Cowan's avant-garde aesthetic, her candy-colored swirls and curls tend to make viewers nostalgic. A 2014 installation at the Philadelphia airport prompted one anonymous admirer to send the artist a thank-you note: "He told me it reminded him of the green dishes his grandparents served ice cream sundaes in," she says. "He hadn't thought about them in 40 years."

—CATHRYNE KELLER

