

The Ohio Arts Council's Riffe Gallery is pleased to host *Interwoven: The Many Voices of Fiber*, curated by Tracy Rieger.

How one would define “fiber art” today is often driven by visual and popular culture. It is an art form that is new, evolving, and venerable at the same time. Fabric, yarn, thread, paper, felt—all commonplace materials belonging to the same family: fiber.

Fiber is part of everyday life but often goes unnoticed because it is known more for its utilitarian uses rather than its aesthetic value. These differing forms of fiber are most frequently used in their traditional or expected ways: paper to write on, fabric, felt, and yarn to clothe or keep the body warm, and thread to bind items together or make a repair.

Over the span of only a few generations, the meaning of “fiber art” has continued to evolve. This is in part due to the artists who strive to represent their creative visions by mastering the meticulously technical challenges that these materials present, thereby redirecting the conversation around fiber arts away from utility and craft and towards fine art.

The artists included in this exhibition earnestly utilize fiber to create works of art that explore such topics as our

contemporary culture with its beauty and flaws, personal narratives with their challenges and influences, and feelings and emotions that lie just below the surface of our consciousnesses. These works take us one step at a time, closer to revising the entrenched histories of the materials they use.

The title, *Interwoven*, is pertinent in more than one way. The most obvious is the artists' use of individual fibers intertwining with other like fibers to create a larger whole within their work. Melissa Haviland, Sandy Shelenberger, and Emily Moores have *interwoven* their mixed mediums to better express their intentions to the viewer. Their pieces are collages of different materials and techniques that perform together seamlessly to create conversations between texture and content—all pushing the boundaries of materials and concept by exploring new techniques and aesthetics, and crossing disciplinary borders.

Artists Clare Murray Adams, Priscilla Roggenkamp, and Pamela Macgregor breathe new life into found objects. Purposefully combining fiber with other mediums, their pieces give a suggestion of familiarity while igniting a spark of imagination. Their dimensional sculptures imply a sense of

functionality to which the viewer can relate, and viewers are drawn into the narratives of the works.

For Diane Herbort, Kevin Womack, and Nancy Condon, photography plays an important role in their creative processes. The layering and abstraction of imagery is cultivated through the interfaces of camera, software, and digital print. The resulting products are then manually dyed, painted, cut, and sewn, creating surfaces that are vibrant and bold. Together, these techniques create completed pieces that reflect both technology and improvisation.

Artists Leah Wong and Laura Alexander use paper as their vehicle of expression. Delicate cuts made on paper provide a sense of randomness adeptly controlled by the hand of the artist, emitting a certain contemplative serenity. The interplay between layers and shadows cast offers the viewer moments of stillness, movement, fragility, solidity, rigidity, and organic flow.

Achieving an understanding of the loom is a practice born of presence, patience, and persistence. It is a process of tactile meditation that involves careful observation, preparatory drawings, and mindfulness. Artists Oxana Dallas, Lauren

Davies, and Deborah Silver are masters of their medium. Upon experiencing their work, one might find it nearly impossible to comprehend how these artists are able to coalesce hundreds of individual threads to create such intricate designs that evoke such strong emotions.

For the artists of this exhibition, fiber is a physical material leveraged to translate their inner thoughts, feelings, and emotions into physical form. Although fiber already has a substantiated and lengthy history, through continued exploration and experimentation, the expressive and creative possibilities of this medium are limitless.

- Tracy Rieger, Curator

Laura Alexander

Columbus, OH

My work is material and process oriented. On the backside of the first layer, I start with a drawing, I build on it with paint, then begin hand cutting with an X-Acto knife. I continue the process with each layer, applying paint to reflect off the back of the paper illuminating the shadows with color. Once complete, I flip each layer and space with foam board.

My work is driven by wonder and experimentation. I must have faith in the process. I take many risks and devote a lot of time and pulling layers, trying new approaches to get different results. Each day in the studio is an experience. I build on those like I build up my layers, taking the knowledge from the last piece and determining which direction to go next. I take inspiration from nature and architecture. I use repetitive patterns and architectural details, such as building cornices and tile floors, and translate that into paper. By using the intrinsic qualities of the materials, I transform how paper and paint are perceived by the viewer.

Nancy Condon

Stillwater, MN

My quilted works are the result of personal experiments combining printed images from my photos of nature (e.g., trees, water) with digital manipulation and painting. I am expressing the effects of humanity's impact on nature. The collages are free-floating combinations of found paper and paint.

Oxana Dallas

Lititz, PA

Dedicated to every soul who wades through the darkness on the way to the light.

Disease is like death.

It is not worthy to be spoken of.

It is eroding from the inside, taking energy and destroying minds.

It is vicious and must not be glorified.

But soul eager to survive at all costs, and body as an evidence of crime committed by disease,

They are uniting in a single burst and giving birth to the inspiration.

Revelation creates images.

Images are moving, puzzling into the pictures, and freezing, caught by digital camera.

They acquired a new dimension and depth by weaving into the sophisticated cloth.

This series of woven works is a manifesto on the power of the human spirit. It was inspired by my friend who fought breast cancer and won. Embodied in woven cloth, her real story becomes a legend, where every row of thread is like a line in a book or an octave in music. Woven together, they consolidate in an augmented reality of my thoughts and emotions, trying to answer eternal questions of human existence. Body and soul are two unbreakable parts of one whole. Soul is invisible, divine, eternal, and intangible. Body is visual, transient, tangible, and mortal. The photography and jacquard structures interweave as one, transforming the flat image into a relief and multidimensional texture.

Just as weft and warp interact on the jacquard loom, we as humans constantly interact within the threads of time and existence. The energy of our decisions and actions vibrate on the surface of space-time fabric. Every little dot of human behavior turns into a colorful pattern of fate, similar to a thread of woven cloth interlaced with different ornaments and shapes.

Lauren Davies

Broadview Heights, OH

After spending decades in California, I returned to my Rust Belt region roots. This geographic change shifted my attention toward decaying American manufacturing sites and the impact of global and internet economies on communities around Cleveland, Youngstown, Pittsburgh, and Detroit. Combining experimental photography with digitally woven textiles and collage processes, my series “Industry Unraveled” connects historical narratives to a current sense of economic unraveling witnessed in both the landscape and industrial architecture scattered throughout the Rust Belt region. The work included in this exhibition was photographed in Youngstown, Ohio.

Melissa Haviland

Athens, OH

My piece, "You Can't Take it With You... (Curiouser & Curiouser)," is a set of 44 soft-sculpture teacups and saucers sewn from blue tarp and Tyvek which are screen printed with graphic depictions of waves. They are displayed in clumps throughout the space—always feeling off-kilter or floating.

My ongoing series, "You can't take it with you...," is about being swept away by the sea of life, as if the ocean just flooded through the doors and windows of our homes and swept us away. It is inspired by feelings of chaos entering our lives—the swirl of daily stresses caused by bedtimes, homework, meetings, deadlines, as well as larger cultural issues involving refugees, migrants, rising sea levels, ocean pollution, and the recent high rates of depression, over climate change. "You can't take it with you..." stews in blue. Blue is melancholy, but also meditative and timely. "You can't take it with you..." is also about staying afloat and the joys of riding the waves. It pulls prints from the wall and allows them to drip on the floor, flowing like waves.

Diane Herbort

Arlington, VA

My style is primarily rooted in the curves, asymmetry, and sinuous lines of Art Nouveau. Traditional needle arts, often considered “women’s arts,” are important to me, both as a source of inspiration and as skills that I can use and adapt to tell my story. I think of my quilts and collages as sister artworks. They are all assembled from the same things: textiles, paper, embellishments, and memories.

This series started with my photo of lampwork beads. The colors and patterns seemed so joyful and endlessly interesting. I cropped and altered my photo dozens of ways, then chose one as the starting point for each piece. My goal was simply to see where I could go and to enjoy the process.

Pamela MacGregor

Grand Junction, CO

My work is primarily inspired by nature and upcycled objects. I am compulsive in collecting seed pods, shells, interesting twigs, bones, old laboratory glass, and much more. These wonderful objects often find a home in my works. It is my way to honor nature and reuse what others have thrown away.

Emily Moores

Cincinnati, OH

My work consists of hand-cut and ornately layered materials, which create both wall works and large-scale installations. My work investigates the playful engagement of the body as essential to understanding and experiencing spaces or objects.

I was selected as one of the Women to Watch in 2020 by the Ohio Arts Council's Riffe Gallery in collaboration with the Ohio Advisory Group of the National Museum of Women in the Arts. I created "Let's Celebrate," a large scale installation consisting of wood, paper, and fabric.

Clare Murray Adams

Southington, OH

Paper, fabric, paint, encaustic wax, boxes, and containers are the materials I choose to work with. I select these materials for their ability to communicate my ideas or create a narrative. My interest in techniques and processes includes collage, printmaking, sewing, painting, and assemblage. Despite the variety of materials and techniques, there are common threads running throughout my work. Reoccurring themes include exploration of memory, reference to women and women's work, a sense of vulnerability, and observations of the natural world.

I use stitching to hold things together or in place of a line drawn with a pencil. I find the act of sewing slows my hand and my thoughts in order to contemplate the experience or memory I am conveying.

Priscilla Roggenkamp

Alliance, OH

Working as an artist is the way I process the world around me...sounds obvious, but it's not always clear or easy. Some of my works deal with topics that overwhelm me, such as issues of migration, immigration, and the environmental crisis we find ourselves in. Some works tease elements of myself and my relationships/our relationships.

Sometimes I am overtaken with the beauty of the natural world...again sounding obvious. There is something elemental, something that takes me back to my earliest memories, something that is essential that speaks to me there. I am not often a realistic drawer/painter/printer, but in abstraction, those visual and spiritual ideas drive my two-dimensional work.

Grounded in drawing, painting, and printing, I've always found myself drawn to textiles, both aesthetically and contextually. Sewing and costume design are processes that I integrate into my work. Drawing and various mark making methods are also important to me. As are the movement and

interactions between shapes and colors. These foundational ideas coalesce in both my two-dimensional and three-dimensional works.

Sandy Shelenberger

Conneaut, OH

My intention with this body of work is to explore the ways stitching and fiber can be combined with encaustics.

Encaustic is a combination of refined bees wax and damar resin to which pigments can be added. I want to push the boundaries of fiber art by using the tradition of stitching in an innovative way with alternative materials and techniques. I am interested in the interplay of pattern and texture and how it evolves as the designs are arranged.

Deborah Silver

Cleveland Heights, OH

The portrait weavings in this exhibit explore themes of restriction, including constraints on women's rights in American society and the workplace. "Planning the Revolution" is a response to the Women's March, depicting a woman from the era when women in America were first fighting for the right to vote. This portrait is combined with an image of an ancient goddess figurine.

The Einstein piece explores attitudes towards refugees based on their country of origin and faith, centering on Albert Einstein's status as a German Jew at the beginning of World War II. It includes a barbed wire abacus, Greek math symbols, and approximately 907 woven flames representing the Jews on the *MS St. Louis*, who were denied entry into the United States and sent back to Europe. (254 black flames/skulls represent each of those Jews murdered by the Nazis.)

During the COVID-19 lockdown, spending time outside my house became a necessity for my mental, as well as physical, well-being. I began taking regular walks in the historic, park-

like Lakeview Cemetery in Cleveland, Ohio. I enjoyed reading the old tombstones, peering into the crypts, and ruminating about the lives of the people buried there. The “Mausoleum Window” weaving depicts wrought iron fronting a stained-glass window. The quilted look is caused by the piqué weave structure. Extra padding has only been added in the larger stuffed areas.

Kevin Womack

Forest, VA

I intend to cause the viewer some discomfort but ultimately help them seek stability. Quilts evoke feelings of comfort, home, and family. Though my subject matter and imagery may explore hard edges or uncomfortable feelings, I aim to balance this using soft media, quilts, and cloth.

I draw inspiration from personal experiences, and in particular, the city of New Orleans. I am intrigued by surface design techniques, and I am especially fond of making marks on cloth that show the hand of the artist. I often utilize Asemic writing—illegible text I create while thinking of words related to the subject matter of the piece—to add a sharp, graphic quality to my designs.

When printing, I produce cloth yardage designed to stand on its own. I sometimes chop up the yardage as I design my quilts. More recently, I have begun grouping large square or rectangular pieces to reveal the narrative. I am purposefully obscure, allowing the viewer to seek out their own story in the work. In life, all answers are not evident—some things remain

hidden while others are revealed. We must dig deep to find the softness.

Leah Wong

Columbus, OH

My work takes inspirations from the sky, light, and water to create artworks that reflect the infinity of nature. I'm interested in shaping and reshaping these life essentials as visual forms. To explore the physicality of paper materials, I renew paper cutouts as floating paintings/drawings. I want my work to be part of a dynamic element in space. My work captures an interpretation of light and water that intertwines with energy and motion to communicate with viewers. Both abstractly and metaphorically, my two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms are suspended between concepts and imaginations of time and space. My intention is to invite viewers to participate in visual conversations drawing on their lives and cultural backgrounds.