

Brooklyn Textile Artists Weave a Delicate Social Fabric

By Andrew Salamone



Laura Anderson Barbata's costumes installed in Material Cultures. All images courtesy of BRIC House. Photo: Jason Wyche.

Eight artists each display their own take on textile production at BRIC House.

A fiber arts exhibition in Brooklyn points out that textile production doesn't just result in fabrics that we can touch, it plays a crucial role in the creation of social fabric as well. Material Cultures is a group exhibition at BRIC House, which features work by artists that make work informed by textile production processes. As the exhibition's press release explains: "One of the oldest forms of human production, textiles maintain profound connections to history, ritual practice, cultural identity, creative expression, and politics."

The concept of the exhibition took shape when BRIC House approached Brooklyn's Oak Knit Studio and TATTER founder Jordana Munk Martin. As Martin tells The Creators Project, her curatorial decisions were guided by TATTER's mission statement: "to promote the consciousness of cloth by considering, and celebrating cloth's intrinsic and essential relationship in human life—through portals that include but are not limited to: art, shelter, comfort, science, commerce, and culture."



Xenobia Bailey's striking crocheted works. Photo: Jason Wyche

Martin admits that her biggest challenge in the curatorial process was narrowing down the vast array of work that relates to textile productions, and ultimately chose to focus on “artists informed by very essential aspects of textile.” The resulting exhibition brings together the work of eight artists from a diverse array of backgrounds, including: Laura Anderson Barbata, Xenobia Bailey, Lucia Cuba, Adrian Esparza, Elana Herzog, Lorenzo Hurtado Segovia, Sophia Narrett, and Marela Zacarias.

The role textiles play in our daily lives as garments is a concept explored by some of the works in the exhibition. Laura Anderson Barbata's installation illustrates the political and social implications of indigo dye in textile production in a series of costumes. Social issues are also present in the work of Lucia Cuba who created wearable works that are developed through interviews with individuals dealing with cancer.

Some of the works in the exhibition approach textile production from a more traditional perspective, like the work of Xenobia Bailey, who uses crochet techniques to produce colorful mandalas that relate to the history of African American culture. Other works made from traditional textile processes include Sophia Narrett's embroidered paintings of

American popular culture. Meanwhile, works by artists Lorenzo Hurtado Segovia and Marela Zacarias use materials that aren't traditionally related to textile processes at all. Instead, Zacarias' wall-hanging plaster sculptures, and Segovia's woven paper pieces reference the aesthetics of traditional textiles.



A deconstructed sarape by Adrian Esparza is installed on a wall adjacent to a work by Elana Herzog featuring a disintegrating Persian rug. Photo: Jason Wyche

In contrast to the textile fabrication processes, some of the works in Material Cultures examine the social impact of textile production by deconstructing those processes. Starting with an iconic garment like a sarape, Adrian Esparza explores cultural identity by unraveling the garment into a colorful, abstract installation. Elana Herzog's installation also looks at taking things apart and consists of a disintegrating Persian rug that she stapled to the wall to illustrate ideas of collapse and growth within civilization.

Material Cultures reminds the viewer that, although it can be easy to forget about the importance of materials as ubiquitous as fabric, textile production is a powerful lens through which to understand culture. "The hope is that through extremely dynamic, ambitious work, all which highlight the power of textiles specifically as amplifier, that we see textiles for the fertile medium that they are," says Martin.