

"Thread, Johansson Projects." *Artillery* (September/October 2007)

Fiber art is often treated as synonymous with textiles or fashion, but it has a specific place within the history of conceptual art. Work made with thread is both craft and art, bringing up historic distinctions in academic status, economic value and the roles of women in industry and society. A robust engagement with fiber as material support for conceptual practices has emerged over the past half-century, as women have made strides within the art world. Both women and men are experimenting with the pliable materiality and the emotional resonance of thread, using fiber to investigate cultural, environmental and technological interests in forms that range from single filaments to complex weaves.

In the work of Katie Lewis, myriad delicate lines traverse distances representing the durations of bodily sensations. Her frenetic compositions of pins and string embedded in the wall make up a diaristic record of the artist's experiences with illness. These maps, mirrored by negatives where only pinholes and notations remain from the mapping, suggest a compulsion to quantify the body, as well as a sense of the futility of this action. Nearby, Tucker Schwarz' raw canvas wall hangings bear minimally-sewn sketches of city and suburban streetscapes, which dissolve into dangling threads that snarl and tangle, abandoning representation.

In Christy Matson's wall piece *Gradient Noise*, an electromagnetic circuit of copper cable is embedded into the cotton weave. When touched, the piece produces sounds that can be manipulated to make music. Like Matson, Lia Cook uses a Jacquard loom to weave detailed CAD designs. Her nostalgic imagery has a cinematic grain, as though she'd transferred her home movies from film to needlepoint. Devorah Sperber employs whole spools as pixels in her low-resolution photo in thread, which appears abstract to the eye, but resolves clearly in the magnifying glass provided into a recognizable vision of Grant Wood's *American Gothic* couple.

The small globes made by Alex Case, from antique canvas, pins and steel remnants, suggest antique land mines or mechanical planets dropped from space or perhaps unearthed. Obsolete yet menacing, these machinelike orbs are strangely organic. That animated energy also figures in the Frankensteinian owl by Kathryn Spence, an uncanny dummy roughly hewn from clothing and stuffed toys that perches on a shelf. On the floor below, leaves that Spence cut from patterned clothing collect loosely in a pile. Around the corner, Steve MacDonald's embroidered scenes also reference the outside world, in this case heroic landscapes of the kind usually found in painting.

Johansson Projects is a new gallery that brings a skillful, spare touch to the corner of Telegraph and 23rd, the hub of a burgeoning Oakland scene that is challenging and reshaping Bay Area arts. *Thread* has its kinks, notably a lack of concision that lets in some weaker works, which is likely a reflection of the curator's evolving knowledge of her new space. Nonetheless, the mix of emerging and established artists here, and the inclusion of artists from beyond the Bay Area, suggest more good shows are to come.