

Norma Minkowitz: *Body to Soul*

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The goddess and witch are female archetypes curator Sarah Parrish levitates into the reader's consciousness in her essay on Norma Minkowitz. While Parrish is referring to the work itself—its subjects (goddesses), symbols (ravens, skulls), and formal choices (resin-covered crochet that creates “a gothic sensibility that leads from skin to spirit” [Parrish])—those archetypes can also describe Minkowitz's process. Ancient gods and witches, after all, are often alchemists, changing their own form or that of others.

In *Body to Soul*, which features thirty-three works from 1974–2022, Minkowitz reveals herself to be an alchemist extraordinaire who, Parrish

explains, “takes her cue from the material and does not set out with a predetermined plan.” Rather than framing materials like fabric, thread, and found objects

as tools, Minkowitz endeavors in a collaborative alchemy with them.

Like an architect who designs a house that appears to sprout organically from the landscape, much of Minkowitz's work—while intentional and skillfully detailed—appears to...well...appear. It's as though her objects are conjured by a preternatural source that rejects binaries (i.e., dark/light, good/bad) and hold space for the mystical and timeless. Parrish observes: “Though the exhibition centers on the relationship between body and soul, Minkowitz views these concepts as part of far larger natural and cosmic systems.”

Paradoxically, these works also reflect temporal influences, including the histories of textile art; second-generation feminist art—“Like many feminist artists of the period, Minkowitz used fiber to celebrate women's undervalued household labor and creative expression” (Parrish)—and, seemingly, artists Louise Bourgeois (*Inner Sanctum*, 2003), Alberto Giacometti (*Wild in the Woods*, 1997), Eva Hesse (*Envuelta*, 1989; *Recipiente*, 1992), and Kiki Smith (*Victim*, 1993; *Baggage*, 2007).

One of the show's highlights is the strength of Minkowitz's newest works, including *Swept Away*, *Days Gone By*, *Free to Be Me*, and *Above the Chasm*—a piece that, when viewed from a distance, blends the tropes of abstract painting, drapery, and couture; and upon closer inspection, discloses staggering clusters of stitching—threaded galaxies born from the big bang of Minkowitz's bewitching, alchemical practice. — Terri C Smith



© Norma Minkowitz (American, b. 1937), *Above the Chasm*, 2022, fiber, 47 x 68". Courtesy of the artist and browngrotta arts.