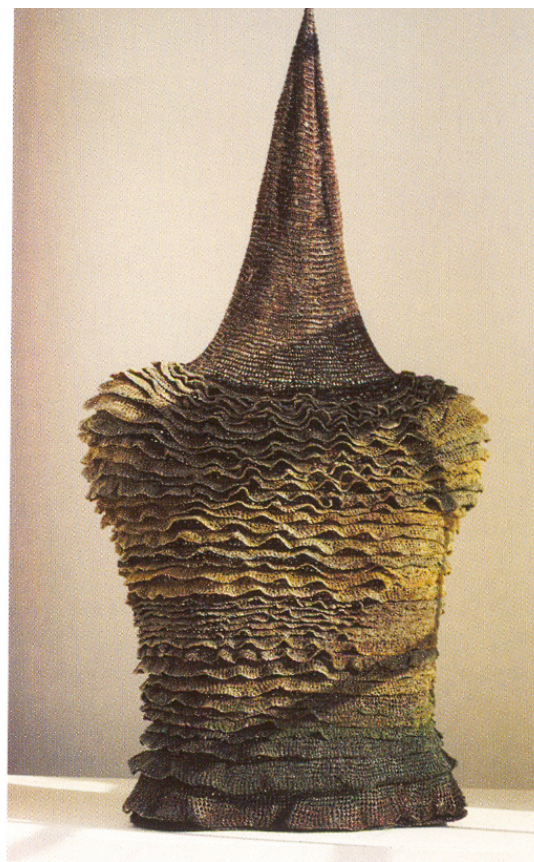


Reviewed by  
David Plerce

**New York Fiber in the 21st Century**  
*Lehman College Gallery*

Lehman College Gallery worked with curator Sandra Sider to organize this exhibition of 47 works from 30 New York-based artists working with fiber. *New York Fiber in the 21st Century* surveys the current state of an increasingly practiced and very diverse medium. A mix of emerging artists and established names created a fascinating overview of the current state of the medium. The exhibition sought to survey the current diversity of work being made in the medium rather than to find a conceptual string amongst the artists and their work.

Some of the works employed a repetitive process that brings a meditative, intimate quality; meaning and materials become fused. Throughout the show, the language, nuance, and manipulation of the fiber through stitch, color, weaving, and the vast array of approaches the artists employ are critical to the meaning of the



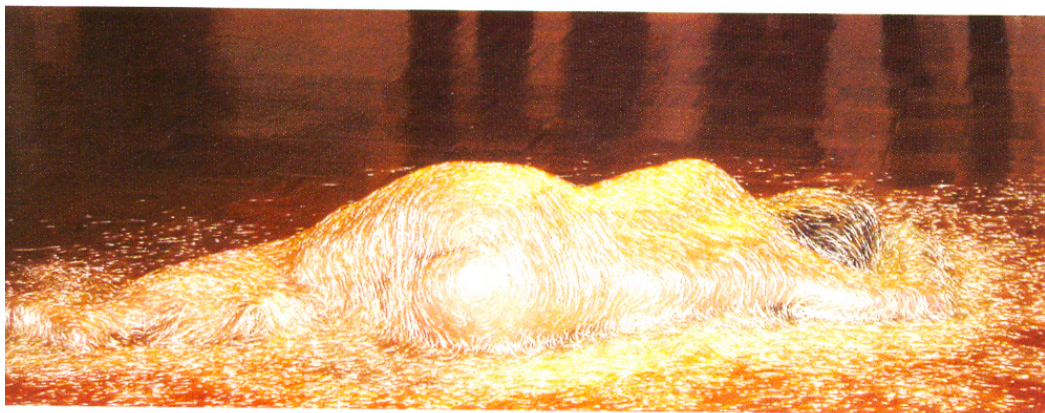
fiber art in New York City for decades. The variety of aesthetic decisions and approaches reflected the growth of fiber's popularity today as well as its roots in the pioneering work from the 1960s and 70s. Besides works on the wall, there were performance pieces like Gema Alva's *Here and There A/P* that quietly evolved in the furthest corner of the gallery. Rather than presenting a one-time performance, Alva returned to the piece periodically to change it. Visitors astute enough

to notice the artist's presence were rewarded with the first-hand experience of seeing the work growing and changing over time as the artist cut away and morphed the piece during the run of the show.

Soft and almost invisible strands of silk lying on the floor provided an intriguing entrance to the show. These strands were remnants of *Plasma*, the opening night performance during which the artist Vered Sivan poured delicate fibers over a model lying on the floor until they covered her like a cocoon.

This time-based ephemeral work erased any new-to-fiber viewer's preconceived notions about what the medium can be.

Counterpointing the materials of Sivan's performance were those in works like *Light* and *Tempest* by Nancy Koenigsberg, where similarly



VERED SIVAN *Plasma* Performance installation. Dimensions variable, 2011.  
Photo: Arlé Sklar-Weinstein.

TOP: NORMA MINKOWITZ *King of the Hill* Mixed media. 36" 18" x 11", 2000.  
Photo: Courtesy the artist and Brown/Grotta Arts.

pieces. Environmental and political concerns are manifested in some works, while others focused on the materials and the gesture of hand.

As a newcomer to the medium, I found it exciting to have a chance to look deeper into what was one of the most extensive surveys of



MY MOTHER CLAIMED THAT  
IF YOU STEP OVER A CHILD



THAT CHILD WILL STOP GROWING



**DON PORCELLA** *There You Remain in the Drain of the Mainframe Food Chain*  
Pipe cleaners. 96" x 96" x 96", 2008-2010. Photo: Lehman College Art Gallery.

**LEFT: ANDREA DEZSÖ** *My Mother Claimed That If You Step Over A Child That Child Will Stop Growing* Cotton and metallic thread embroidery on fabric, 10" x 8", 2009. Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Frey Norris Contemporary & Modern.

linear fibrous elements had a stiff, almost menacing, trajectory protruding from a 2-D field. Koenigsberg's works challenge the idea of flatness vs. the sculptural, a middle ground that fiber works can uniquely occupy.

The show effortlessly eased the viewer through a variety of spatial treatments. Flat works such as those Arlé Sklar Weinstein made from two-dimensional transfer prints somehow flow into the playful manipulations of space and form in Koenigsberg's wire pieces. Contrasting with these were Xenobia Bailey's softer, inwardly twisting snake-like shapes in *Medicine Mandala*. The undulating plays on space, texture, form, and dimension created a circular dialogue within the dramatic gallery space.

Text-based works like those of Andrea Dezsö and Margaret Cusack certainly belonged in a survey of contemporary fiber art. Cusack produced a poignant take on the breaking of the levees in New Orleans. Dezsö's very personal embroidered stories about the things her mother claimed during her childhood are humorous and moving. *My Mother Claimed That When The Light Bulb Flickers God Says I See You* is reminiscent of stories our parents told us that, revisited later in life, hold dubious credibility.

Rounding out the show were slightly sinister works like Don Porcella's installation

*There You Remain in the Drain of the Mainframe Food Chain*. While a pair of swimmers constructed of pipe cleaners seem to be quietly enjoying themselves, their upbeat expressions barely mask their apprehension about their place in the surrounding world. A vulture hovering precariously over them adds to the drama of the narrative.

The bright fabric work by Ai Kijima, simply titled *Hello*, masterfully combines pop art references, Native American figures, text, and cartoon icons. As in Porcella's work, the cheerfulness of Kijima's subjects seems to lie above an unspoken menacing force. Stitched together with masterly command of the medium, this work provided an eye-catching painterly field at the back of the gallery.

*New York Fiber in the 21st Century* offered viewers unfamiliar with the medium an excellent overview of what is happening in it as well as a history lesson on pioneers like Norma Minkowitz whose work is now recognized in the fine art world. For long-time followers there were familiar and unfamiliar names, exciting new themes, and a chance to see what some of their heroes are currently creating.

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