

ESSEX FLOWERS

19 Monroe St
New York, NY 10002



Onion Union, hand-embroidered, painted, and hand-quilted cottons, appliqué, 2026

Sonya Derman

Wet Blanket

October 16 - November 14, 2026

Opening Reception: Friday, October 16, 6-8pm

THE WORDS appearing in Sonya's works take up a most confounding presence in our field. She cycles through these terse fictions—I imagine they first appear as slogans, riddles, or jokes in her filtering mind. It just feels like they have been held for a long time before they are put down. Becoming too anthemic, she empties them. As fabric applique, they fill out again, by themselves, decorated ghosts on a quilt object. Amid the traditional culture revivals happening on Etsy, Sonya calls on an older spirit of crafting, evoking garage sales and hand-me-downs.

Can't help the adolescent transference from Sonya's job teaching middle school. DODO, excised, floats amid a landscape decidedly anti-aesthetic, touching something pretty touching something ugly. Anonymous cats and humans animate the soft sheets, with a few sequins to lightly stroke, and quilt binding to tamp down the hyper-optimization beneath. The quilt delivers its social and emotional learning modules, reproducing coping skills. Superstitious layers of meaning and gesture are tucked into pockets in a handbag and held close to the body. School teacher in situ.

CAT DAD. Sonya tells me about her romantic life and we end up talking about books. Several dates she describes to me sound like a mini refusal exercise in preparation for a bigger refusal

yet to come. Dating, like quilting, is an everyday frame in which to be negative, to give one's pessimism a soft resting place.

JOY appears as a blob: cherry patterned JOY, exertions of the nuclear family on the unconscious JOY. She engages the psychic and somatic mechanisms of a culture of women who take their hopes and worries into looping thread, extravagantly claiming the interior spaces, practical and inventive. And the way this material becomes saturated with meaning, with thought, with words measured against the physical memory and detritus of the family: the group which Sonya memorializes through cutting, ripping and re-shaping. She can't stop attaching two textures, seeing the time in color, and pushing color to coalesce into shorter periods of maximalism.

END OF THE BAR. As I consider the drag of her image words, Sonya passes me a quote from Lauren Berlant which says: the optimistic concept of the later suspends questions about the cruelty of the now. Sonya's constant fixing on the potential for use: a cheapness rubbing against the horizon.

-Jamie Chan

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Sonya Derman is a multidisciplinary artist based in New York City. Her recent work integrates drawing, painting, embroidery, appliqué, and writing into quilted visual fields. She holds an MA from the Royal College of Art in London. Derman has been awarded residencies at Vermont Studio Center, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and Spaceworks. Derman's recent exhibitions include a solo presentation at Sunview Luncheonette, a two-person presentation with PAD Gallery, and a show with artist Jamie Chan at Essex Flowers in 2024.

Essex Flowers is a New York City based artist-run cooperative project space founded in 2013. Over the past decade, the group has mounted nearly one hundred exhibitions with a focus on emerging and underrepresented contemporary art. Essex Flowers, which retains its name from its first home in the basement of the eponymous flower shop on Grand Street, is located in a 300-square-foot storefront gallery at 19 Monroe St. at the intersection of Chinatown, Two Bridges, and Lower East Side neighborhoods in Manhattan.