

Marcelle Alix

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Majd Abdel Hamid, Diane Cescutti, Hessie, Teresa Lanceta, Liz Magor, Ernesto Sartori, Mira Schor, Suzanne Silver
joie

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« I remember when women wore jabots on their blouses. Sometimes these jabots were quite ornate and were taken off when the blouse was sent to the laundry. Then you would find the jabots in drawers and hanging from belt racks like little creatures that hibernated when they didn't have anything to be attached to. »

Pati Hill, *Letters to Jill – A catalogue and some notes on copying*, Mousse Publishing, Kunstverein München, 2020

CB: We first focused on one title, then another, and finally this third one, which settled on a single lowercase word: "joie [joy]." Let's see it as an invitation to revel in works whose materiality tells the story of a life spent 'saving' time for oneself, calmly producing difference, and contradicting a history that has never ensured that every person mattered. This collective exhibition also benefited from the influence of Ernesto Sartori's show, which took place at the gallery from May to July of this year. It was precisely in this context that a friend conceptualized, in contact with the artist's paintings and installations, the joy that permeates our entire program according to him. Even though the year has been so challenging due to extreme political positions and is ending with a shared immense fatigue, excitement is still there, as is visual pleasure. Feeling the positive effects of the works we exhibit and the loving way in which the artists work gives us room to breathe. The works we have chosen for this show, with the help of other galleries and the artists themselves, resonate with the touching animism of American artist and writer Pati Hill, mentioned in the introduction. In another of her letters, clothing is associated with an insect's molt, a material clue to the unfolding of the self. I can't help but seeing the exhibition's works as forms that identify the harm done when what awakens us and changes us daily is not valued. Here, the material, like a fellow being, adds to the attention and care we provide to our loved ones and ourselves. Our sensitivity to material comes from the home, where we are supposed to have a concrete place to connect to exercise this sensitivity. Artists are those who never lose sight of the multiplication of this connection and associate it with perseverance directed towards non-predetermined goals.

A smell of soap permeates Majd Abdel Hamid's textile works, while Hessie has left her fine sewing needles, now rusted, in her compositions. Teresa Lanceta, whose work I discovered thanks to the research on textile art led by someone who is important in my personal life*, values the free community of weavers from the Middle Atlas, with their way of being totally in the present, shuttle after shuttle**. With them, it is possible to think: familiarity, language, rootedness, identity. All the works in this display can do without the history of exhibitions and spaces deemed 'appropriate' or dedicated to their permanence. They are born in the spaces where they are produced (a damp mill for Hessie), within deeply embedded cultural codes of class and race. They are fragile and robust, traveling rolled up like free paintings or 'flat sculptures'. Suzanne Silver uses aluminum sheets to play with light and create an entire environment of objects that dream of being miniaturized, as visible and vulnerable as a hopscotch drawn on the sidewalk. Forms caught between struggle and enchantment to meet the outside world sustainably.

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For the exhibition, we favored small paintings and drawings by Mira Schor, whose qualities resemble the more irreversible nature of weaving or embroidery. Mira Schor doubles her lines, while Ernesto Sartori gives a reverse to his paintings. Most of these are modest works, stubbornly bringing out an indestructible humanity supported by the great tolerance of the material. A material on the side of soft, malleable, and subtly colored forms. Each work is an opportunity to reexamine a shared history, also because well-being truly matters. Liz Magor brings an experimental spirit sustained by a great confidence in the material, which she transforms into a lever of action to share her keen observation and understanding of the human soul. For Diane Cescutti as well, all the works are wefts that constitute a field of experience, a heritage, but also a usage that makes us responsible and could prove useful in our roles as citizens, allies, and friends.

IA: Borrowing from a photogram by artist Suzanne Silver, we used the expression "rien nier" as a working title for a while, before adopting "joie [joy]." At a national and international political moment when many things seem to evaporate (from election results to racist statements quickly swept under the rug), "rien nier [deny nothing]" was a way to acknowledge the need to assume a historicized position that embraces the world — and art — in its historical depth.

Far from a formalist approach, focusing on the materiality of works is also a way of writing their political history. If the birth of conceptual art is linked to artists' engagement against imperialist wars in North America and in opposition to the dictatorial regimes of South America, the political implications of manual work appear less obvious in the history of art.

The laborious work of art, akin to tasks assigned to women and more generally to subordinates (embroidery, weaving, sewing, ornamentation work), is often presented as non-historical, linked to ancestral knowledge. The artists we present here are radically on the side of making, and they make it a life project, a source of joy.

Hessie developed her "survival art" in the 1970s around minimalist embroideries on cotton that remind viewers of their craftsmanship by the frequent presence of a needle stuck in the fabric, a signature of the artist and the work done. "Survival is inscribed in the everyday and comes out of the sewer," wrote the artist, who spoke very little about her work, raising materiality as a political standard while imprinting her work on fabric and paper with lightness and humor.

Liz Magor's casts, the results of various experiments with silicone or resin that she calls 'polymerized gypsum,' stem from gestures in the studio that resemble culinary preparation. On thrifted wool blankets, trapped in silicone casts of dust covers, she sews labels borrowed from others, emphasizing through textual elements the cultural nature of textiles used for body protection. Her work, now so familiar to us, initiated our reflection on art from the point of view of materiality, as the objects — crafted, modified, or casts by the artist — appear as alter egos: "a body as a thing (not a person)," writes Liz in a cross-interview with Moyra Davey (*Octopus Notes* n°11, summer 2024).

Diane Cescutti continues this approach with *Distress Wear* (2018), a kind of survival blanket that hybridizes traditional weaving and LED strips. She crafted it in Japan following the rules of the art, while maintaining the idea that our integrity today depends on each individual's ability to master digital technologies that safeguard personal data. As with Hessie, manual production becomes a condition for survival.

Majd Abdel Hamid repeats embroidery stitches to form simple patterns on fabric or cardboard. His work is not about excellence in execution but about bringing Palestinian techniques, now listed as UNESCO Intangible Heritage, closer to the geometric forms imposed by the Suprematists in the Western modern art landscape. Yet, he lets "muscle memory" (another possible title for this exhibition!) do its work, a conveyor belt between body and mind, repetition and joy.



The artists in the exhibition belong to an artistic family that has transmuted into art the manufacturing gestures passed down by their elders: the transition of these skills from the domestic sphere to art appears today as one of the aesthetic revolutions of the 20th and 21st centuries. Contrary to the canon of art history, which has emphasized artistic projects aimed at sublimating material, the artists of this other art history consider repetitive tasks as a given of minority lives. They are the ones available to them and which they have chosen to develop. The works we have selected weave an affected thread between yesterday and tomorrow, like the paintings of Mira Schor's *Trauma* series. The diversity of materials — paint, pigments, threads, types of weaving and embroidery, formats chosen by the artists — nevertheless testifies not to a nostalgia for the "handmade" but to an ability to define the right gesture drawn from a personal repertoire to access — even in the most adverse circumstances — the joy of making and sharing.

*But also thanks to the artist's first solo exhibition in France organized by Jean-Roch Dumont Saint Priest, which I saw at Musée d'Art Moderne de Céret: "Teresa Lanceta. La Mémoire tissée", 2024.

**In weaving, the shuttle is the passage of the weft thread between the warp threads.

Majd Badel Hamid (b. 1988) lives between Beyrouth and Paris. He is represented by 16 avril, Paris.

Diane Cescutti (b. 1998), lives in Saint-Etienne.

Hessie (1936- 2017) is represented by Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre, Paris.

Teresa Lanceta (b. 1951) lives in Mutxamel, Alicante, Spain. She is represented by 1 Mira Madrid.

Liz Magor (b. 1948) lives in Vancouver.

Ernesto Sartori (b. 1982) lives in Marseille.

Mira Schor (b. 1950), lives in New York.

Suzanne Silver (b. 1955) lives in Columbus, Ohio.

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