

**Flesh, Fragment, Form: The corporeal abstractions of a
Harmony Hammond and Ivens Machado**

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*And there's a physical bliss to which nothing else compares. The body
is transformed into a gift. And you feel that it's a gift because you
experience, right at the source, the suddenly indubitable present of existing
miraculously and materially.*
Clarice Lispector, *Agua Viva*

This affirmation found in material presence permeates Clarice Lispector's *Agua Viva*, a narrative the Brazilian writer assembled through fragments with the assistance of her friend Olga Borelli—a collaborative process Lispector described as "breathing together." Writing from the persona of a painter, Lispector approaches words as objects in *Agua Viva*, understanding language itself as material to be shaped and reshaped, as tangible as flesh. This methodology of fragments breathing together, each reinforcing the material presence of the other, offers a compelling lens through which to understand the corporeal abstractions of Ivens Machado and Harmony Hammond—two artists who find their own physical bliss in the indubitable present of matter. In their material choices and formal strategies, Hammond and Machado demonstrate how abstraction need not to be a retreat from the body but rather an intensification of its presence.

Though emerging from vastly different contexts—Hammond from the liberatory feminist and lesbian movements of 1970s United States, and Machado from the oppressive atmosphere of Brazil's military dictatorship—these artists employ remarkably parallel strategies for materializing the body's porosity. Their pairing at *auroras* offers an unprecedented chance to witness the material dialogue between two artists whose bodies never occupied the same room, yet here they are, their works breathing together in one space. Both explore the body as contested territory, battleground and sanctuary, evoking corporeality through strategies of wrapping, layering, and puncturing. The materials they use – from fabric to concrete – become surfaces through which connection passes, like skin, a membrane that holds and releases.

In Hammond's own words, "all painting is about the skin of paint."¹ Arising

¹ Harmony Hammond, "A Manifesto (Personal) of Monochrome (Sort Of)" in: Tirza True Latimer, *Becoming/UnBecoming Monochrome*, 2014.

from post-minimalist and feminist concerns, Hammond's near-monochrome paintings consistently reveal what lies underneath. *Flesh Fold #2* (2015) exemplifies this impulse: the work consists of two canvas layers - a smaller upper canvas adhered to a larger base - with the top right corner peeled back like a healing scab, revealing chunky fresh red paint underneath against the burgundy soaked canvas. For some, the visual might connote pain, yet who hasn't experienced the pleasure of picking at a scab or peeling back a bandage prematurely to glimpse what's underneath? This is the agitated promise of surfaces in transformation.

Hammond's systematic deployment of grommets throughout her practice establishes these circular openings as multivalent symbols—simultaneously functioning as orifices, eyes bearing witness, and peepholes into hidden depths. In *Flesh Fold #2*, as well as *Frazzle* (2014), raw, bright red paint emerges from within them, oozing as if in the aftermath of being punctured, while in works such as *Bandaged Grid #7* (2016-2017), the grommets are wrapped and painted over, suggesting processes of healing and containment. This piece finds its echo in a series of black and white photographs documenting Machado's *Performance with surgical bandage* (1973), in which he binds his body with gauze in a seemingly erotic ritual of bondage. His literal wrapping of the body heightens our reading of Hammond's surfaces as corporeal—and vice versa, in one of Machado's photographs the bound form becomes so abstracted that the specific body part disappears, reducing flesh to pure matter.

Punctures and orifices reverberate across the gallery in Machado's floor-bound sculpture positioned in dialogue with *Flesh Fold #2* and *Bandaged Grid #7*. The untitled piece from 1983 appears like a four-flapped tongue, its surface somewhere between muted pink and taupe—seemingly soft at first, but revealing itself as concrete upon closer inspection. One flap bears a perforated upper layer that echoes Hammond's grommets while evoking the body's porousness. Like *Flesh Fold #2*, this sculpture employs stratification: the perforated panel appears as a discrete layer applied to the main form, creating a tension between surface and substrate. Elevated on legs that tilt the sculpture into subtle animation, Machado's piece demonstrates his attention to sculpture's performative dimensions, where seemingly static objects pulse with the suggestion of movement.

Both artists practice a form of cultural cannibalism, taking what already exists and transforming it into something distinctly their own—an approach that echoes Brazil's anthropophagic concept of creative consumption. Yet their material vocabularies reflect their different environments: Hammond salvages fabrics and textures from abandoned domestic sites across the American Southwest—fragments of roofing tin, rusted drainpipes and worn linoleum that serve as testimonies to the weathering effects of both

environmental exposure and human habitation. Machado turns to concrete, iron, cement, and roof shards, the harder materials of urban decay and construction. Both bring together the industrial and organic, hard and soft, solid and malleable. The histories of these materials, and the artists' reluctance to hide those histories, most palpably brings content into the work. These salvaged fragments carry the residue of their former lives. In refusing to disguise these materials' origins, both artists transform histories into present moments, insisting on the narratives embedded within their abstractions.

These material histories find particularly poetic expression in *Voices II* (2023), a piece from a recent body of work that revisits territory Hammond first explored in the 1990s. In that earlier decade, Hammond salvaged flower-patterned linoleum and turned to Monique Wittig, the lesbian theorist who famously argued that lesbians are not women, for “woman has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems.”² With this Wittig made a radical suggestion not only that gender is indeed a construct, but she detached lesbian identity from gender altogether. Turning to Wittig to comment on the marginalization of lesbian identity, in 1997 Hammond created a large work titled *What Have You Done With Our Desire?* using the flower-patterned linoleum and old venetian blinds. *Voices II* conjures the phantom body of this piece. Hammond has used the same stash of linoleum she salvaged in the 1990s to create a mosaic of fragments. She allows her materials to dictate their own breaking points without editorial intervention, creating forms that emerge from material logic rather than imposed design. The fragments here consist of the underside of the linoleum, therefore darker and more abstract than *Voices I* (exhibited in Hammond solo exhibition at Site Santa Fe in Spring 2025), which used primarily the flower patterned top of the linoleum surface. Hand-inscribed into the surface with an oil stick is Wittig's quote, the title of the earlier piece, now queried by Hammond: What have you done with our desire? The sentence requires searching to decipher it, revealing itself mainly to those who know to look for it, much like the lesbian desire it references. This indeterminacy becomes particularly significant when understood within the context of lesbian visibility in the 1970s, when desire emerged from obscurity into a contested public sphere. Yet Hammond's engagement with forms of desire through abstraction predates her encounter with theorists like Wittig, suggesting an intuitive understanding of how abstract forms might articulate experiences that resist direct representation.

The weight of desire becomes materialized in Machado's Untitled (2006) sculpture hanging on the wall perpendicular to *Voices II*. The work's bilateral symmetry, with bulbous ends connected by a narrower central span,

² Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and other essays* (Boston: Beacon Press), 1992.

evokes a double-sided dildo hanging gently curved into a reversed shallow arch. Where one might expect smooth silicone or rubber, Machado presents cement and stones contained within a framework made of chicken wire. This material substitution transforms an object of intimate pleasure into something that speaks to both desire's weight and its industrial contexts. Machado's engagement with queer sexual iconography through the language of construction materials creates a productive tension between the private and public, the tender and the harsh—a recurring strategy in his practice that grounds queer erotic experience within Brazil's concrete urban reality. The steel cable loops at each end appear to pierce through the bulbous forms like Prince Albert piercings, further emphasizing the work's reference to penetration and puncture. By rendering a private, intimate object in public, industrial materials, Machado creates a productive friction between domestic sexuality and public infrastructure, suggesting how desire must navigate and transform under conditions of social constraint. The stones trapped within the wire mesh suggest both weight and fragmentation, creating a dialogue with Hammond's fragmented linoleum in *Voices II*—both artists embrace the fragmented nature of queer histories, marked by rupture and incompleteness. Hammond and Machado activate these fragments as a generative force, resisting the melancholic impulse to mourn what has been lost, instead proposing that queer history's discontinuities offer productive avenues for meaning-making.

A particularly titillating dialogue in the exhibition emerges through the spatial conversation between two works in *auroras*' smaller room. "Titillating" here carries both its colloquial sense of excitement and its etymological suggestion of touch—from the Latin *titillare*, to tickle. The act of tickling implies two subjects: the active agent and the receptive body, a dynamic that plays out across the gallery space. Machado's diptych of protruding spikes (*Positive Negative*, 2007) — though they appear more like oversized pencils than weapons, crafted from eucalyptus wood—hangs directly across from Hammond's *Marker II* (2011-2020). This pale-yellow work, the color of fresh butter, presents a grid of grommets on a smaller canvas affixed to a base layer. The grommets ooze only lightly, creating brief moments of rupture as if Machado's protruding forms had dipped into Hammond's surface, had tickled it into response. A physical bliss, indeed.

While separately these works might court interpretations of violence, in conversation they become unmistakably erotic. They project the possibility of touch across space, of surfaces yielding to contact. And isn't that what the simple title "Hammond + Machado" evokes? The plus sign implies connection, a possible relationship, carrying the childhood logic of joining names with a + to suggest intimacy. As Hammond reminds us, the plus sign is also a cross – a recurring motif throughout her oeuvre. In bringing together these practices, allowing the artists to cross paths and breathe together, we witness

how corporeal politics transcend specific cultural contexts, revealing parallel strategies for articulating embodied experience. Both artists understand the body as porous surface in constant exchange—always absorbing and releasing. Through wrapping and unwrapping, puncturing and mending, they insist that abstraction need not to abandon the flesh but can instead intensify our encounter with the body. At *auroras*, Hammond and Machado reveal themselves to be intimates across time and space, united by their commitment to corporeal abstraction with a sustained attention that can only be evidence of love.

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