



Fuzzy Logic

Traditional handicrafts like needlepoint, latch-hook rugs, and patchwork quilts provide the inspiration—as well as the techniques and materials—for the work in the exhibition *Fuzzy Logic*. When these mediums are utilized in the realm of fine art, many of their cultural associations are subverted. But since knitting has become a hip hobby, simply utilizing materials like yarn, felt, or fake flowers isn't particularly radical. Instead, we are faced with multiple meanings of the term "craft"—in particular its connotation of utility—which contradicts the already tenuous delineations between it and "fine art" or "design."

Handicrafts are familiar and accessible to the viewer. They are textural and tactile, inviting our participation, and taunting us to touch. The work in *Fuzzy Logic* exploits this, evoking our desires for comfort, connection, contentment, and indulgence—as well as the complacency, superficiality and fleeting joy that might accompany these feelings. While the myriad new directions in fiber art in recent years have encouraged us to consider the ways craft can look and function, the artists in this exhibition ask, "how does it feel?"

While a traditional patchwork quilt may be both beautiful and functional, what it asks us to feel is straightforward: Good. Warm. But the artists in *Fuzzy Logic* recognize that even good feelings may have a more complex reality beneath the surface.

Laura Splan's *Prozac, Thorazine, Zoloft* (2000) is a trio of plump, huggable pill-shaped pillows. Made for an exhibit at the first Ladyfest in Olympia, Washington, it could be argued that *Prozac, Thorazine, Zoloft* arrived on the cusp of the contemporary DIY movement. Ten years later, Splan's cheerful Pop sculpture still plays on our desire for comfort, but as mood-altering drugs have become increasingly common, we now read them as iconic objects—like modern-day Campbell's soup cans—whose cultural significance reaches beyond their literal use.

Splan has said that the process of latch-hooking itself is so repetitive as to be mind-numbing, like a drug. But the process of needlework can also be introspective. **Stacia**

Yeapanis' *Everybody Hurts* is a series of cross-stitched screen stills of her favorite television characters in pivotal moments of emotional duress. Her TV-viewing tastes tend toward cult-classic shows with unforgettable characters, like Inara Serra of the space opera *Firefly* or Bill Haverchuck of the short-lived *Freaks and Geeks*. Part found photography, part portraiture, this work is deeply personal: Yeapanis freezes the emotional state of her subjects, noting that "emotions mediated through stories are not 'unreal' emotions."

The ways in which we perceive reality are also present in **Amanda Browder's** soft sculptures. She utilizes brightly-colored, common materials—chiefly felt and recycled fabric—to address the psychedelic experience, recreating the "subtle change in perception" that arises at the intersection of the familiar and the strange. She uses the idioms of Pop to exaggerate and celebrate, but is, like many of the artists in *Fuzzy Logic*, uninterested in irony. Her idealized interpretations of nature (or human intervention on it)—achieved by fashioning hard rocks with soft stuffing and making flaming logs with faux fur—are lyrical, not cynical.

There is more than a touch of irony in **Rob Conger's** latch-hooked wall hangings. In the series called *Disneyland Deaths*, he depicts sites at which people have died accidentally at the "happiest place on Earth." *Big Thunder Mountain* references an incident in which a man was killed when a ride malfunctioned. Conger's piece does not depict that death; on its surface it is an innocuous (though visually dynamic) picture-postcard view. It is the subtext that is morbid, yet intriguing. Conger has observed: "I am fascinated and fulfilled by the idea that I can use craft to surprise people into seeing through their shields." This is perhaps the strongest link between the works in *Fuzzy Logic*: that the tactile and familiar encourage us as viewers to let our guard down long enough to discover a real connection to the art.

Carson Fox's work makes use of some of the most disarming materials one might imagine: silk flowers, glitter, and artificial

birds and butterflies. Fox packs this girly, gaudy ephemera into balls, wreaths, and other sculptural objects that reference Victoriana, funereal memorials, and notions of decorative art and beauty. Made in anticipation of her first major solo show in New York, Fox sees her installation as a way to memorialize the many rejections she faced as an emerging artist. "I am interested in beauty, but I mistrust it. Instead, I look for beauty that exists in tension with the materials or the circumstances that invent it," she says.

Sprawled over the grounds of the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut like a monstrous afghan, **Orly Genger's** massive installation *Mr. Softy* was hand-woven out of thousands of feet of multicolored nylon rock-climbing rope. The short video on view documents a performance in which Genger struggles to hide beneath, crawl through, and rearrange her monumental creation. In this way, *Mr. Softy* is both an unstable landscape and a vehicle for exploration of relationships between the artist's body and her work.

Gina T. Alvarez's installation consists of various small soft sculptures and works on paper, placed under a series of hand-blown glass bell jars she had commissioned specifically for this exhibition. Under the jars, each piece is as she describes, "suspended in time" and "deprived of oxygen." Alvarez's instinct to place the work under glass lends a sense of melancholy to this suspension: evoking the experience of the protagonist in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, the delicate, feminine, traditionally crafted works "struggle to breathe" under their objectification. As Alvarez memorializes each object, she simultaneously prevents us from entertaining our instinctual desire to touch it.

In creating work like *Strategic Recreation*, **Shelby Donnelly** researched historical paintings of leisure and battle scenes. "I wanted to create a leisure scene that took on the physicality of being socially awkward, she says. She sees the picnic blanket as a "social battle ground." Donnelly's bold juxtapositions of color and texture (which often

incorporate paint with fabric), oddly stretched shapes, and punctuations of kitschy materials evoke uncomfortable, even physically painful, feelings. Her use of traditional textiles like doilies is more than poignant than sardonic, part of a process of unraveling art's idyllic and heroic ideals.

A similar tension between materials is also at work in **Mike Andrews'** woven wall hangings. Andrews is interested in how these cheap materials like synthetic yarn evoke the awkward feelings that may arise when one receives an unattractive, shoddily made homemade gift. But this work is not solely driven by material—the use of tapestry technique is as much about its ability to "have a dialogue with painting, sculpture, or common domestic objects." Recalling decorative wall hangings, Neo Geo painting, and the abstractions that arise from enlarging pixels in a digital image, the work offers, as Andrews hopes, "moments when the pathetic transforms into something powerful."

While technical definition of "fuzzy logic" is a mathematical construct, we might also understand the term as, according to answers.com, "decision-making with imprecise data." Even in a technology-driven world, our lives are full of this "imprecise data." As the artists in *Fuzzy Logic* navigate between the realms of "art" and "craft," other spheres emerge and overlap: rare and common, public and private, masculine and feminine, hand-worked and machine-made. The work in this exhibition does not exist in an either/or realm of any kind. Its intangibility—its literal fuzziness, its lack of hard-edged qualities—encourage us as viewers to rely on our emotional intelligence, however imprecise, rather than quantifiable definitions and prescribed ideas, as we interpret its myriad meanings.

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For an expanded essay and additional images, visit www.desleegallery.com/fuzzy-logic-catalog/

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Opening reception Friday, February 5, 2010
From 6 to 9 PM

Special gallery hours for this exhibition
are Wednesday, Friday and Saturday
from 1-6 pm, and by appointment.

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Front images listed from left to right, top to bottom:

1. Orly Genger, *Mr. Softy*, 2005
2. Carson Fox, *No*, 2004
3. Rob Conger, *Big Thunder Mountain*, 2005
4. Shelby Donnelly, *Strategic Recreation*, 2005
5. Stacia Yeapanis, *Bill Haverchuck*, 2009
6. Gina T. Alvarez, *recollect*, 2010
7. Laura Splan, *Prozac, Thorazine, Zolofit*, 2000
8. Mike Andrews, *MIA Wears Anna Sui for Patagonia*, 2009
9. Amanda Browder, *Bonfire*, 2001