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THINGS TO DO

In the Curator's Words: Fiber art gets a fabulous treatment at Oceanside Museum of Art

Curator says the exhibition, on display through Nov. 2, is a "dazzling celebration of textile artistry, where tradition meets innovation in a vibrant display of texture, color and creativity"

Serena Brooks' "Squeezed" (2019) is commercial and hand dyed fabrics, both machine-pieced and quilted. It's part of "Fabulous Fiber" at Oceanside Museum of Art. (Peter Figen)

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In the Curator's Words *is an occasional series that takes a critical look at current exhibitions through the eyes of curators.*

Before it partnered with the California Surf Museum for a dual-venue surfing exhibition, the Oceanside Museum of Art mounted a show that's just as colorful and lively as surf art.

Brightly hued fiber artworks take center stage at the museum's "Fabulous Fiber" exhibition. It's been open since late summer, but there's still time to see — and touch — the show before it closes Nov. 2.

Kate Stern, guest curator for Oceanside Museum of Art, talks about the exhibit, described as a "dazzling celebration of textile artistry, where tradition meets innovation in a vibrant display of texture, color and creativity."

Isa Guadalupe "Aurora del Pensamiento" (2023) — a hand-beaded headpiece with glass beads on cotton — is part of "Fabulous Fiber" at Oceanside Museum of Art. (Oceanside Museum of Art)

Q: What was the inspiration for this exhibition?

A: I absolutely fell in love with fiber art about five years ago and knew I had to explore the medium further, devouring as much as I could both in person and via the internet.

I did an earlier version of "Fabulous Fiber" at a gallery in Los Angeles a few years ago. Some of those artists are in this exhibition as well. Maria Mingalone, OMA's executive director, came to see that show and a couple of years afterwards, I was invited to do a new version of it here at the Oceanside Museum of Art.

There is so much to explore in this medium and such yummy artworks out there that I feel I could throw myself into this world for years on end and I would still find art that surprises and delights me.

Stephanie Metz's "In Touch Hanging Pod, Orb Cluster" (2019) is a fiber piece made of wool, industrial felt, fiberfill and steel. It's part of "Fabulous Fiber" at Oceanside Museum of Art. (Oceanside Museum of Art)

Q: I love that one aspect of the exhibition encourages you to touch and hug the artwork. Was that intentional from the start, or did that enter the picture after many discussions?

A: At the center of the exhibition space, there are three large felted pods by artist Stephanie Metz which are suspended at eye level. The ones that we are showing are part of a larger body of work consisting of 12 felted pods titled "In Touch."

The artist had been told on many occasions when people viewed her work that they wished that they could touch them. If she was on hand, she would typically grant that wish. The reactions encompassed everything from enormous joy to a deep sense of comfort. Witnessing this led the artist to create these interactive pods meant not only to be touched but to be hugged as well.

Then as we were getting nearer to the installation date for the exhibition, Katie Dolgov, the museum's director of exhibitions, approached me with the idea of asking the artists to each create touchable samples of their work to place beside their art to give people the experience of touching the materials and fill any curiosity about what the various materials may feel like.

I must admit that I didn't quite get how big a hit this concept could be, but people of all ages are loving it. There is even a video someone made on TikTok about the show and the touchable component of it, which sparked great conversation online and the video has gone viral.

Q: The exhibition's description encourages "viewers to step into a world where every stitch tells a story." Can you share a story tied to one of the pieces?

A: Yes. There's a work in the exhibition by Nancy Larrew titled "Crossing Over," where a wooden boat is suspended from above and colorful fabric figures of men, women and children tightly cluster together inside. I wanted to include a statement in the exhibition about this particular work as I wanted people to know what the piece was representing.

From the artist: "In 2016, at least 43 individuals, including 17 children, drowned when two wooden boats carrying Syrian refugees sank in the Aegean Sea. In this work, the white faceless figures symbolize those who lost their lives. The survivors are depicted with eyes but no mouths, voiceless, without possessions or a home — only hope remains. Some figures are adorned with fabric that were once socks. While creating this piece, I was reminded of the often-overlooked aspects of life, such as the simple comfort of dry socks."

Q: What do you hope the visitor experiences or takes away from this show?

A: I always hope that people will leave my exhibitions happier and/or more fulfilled than when they came in that day. I also hope this show expands the viewer's awareness of how far this medium can go. And of course, kudos to these artists for bringing us there. Much of this work veers from the traditional, which happens to represent my taste, but I hope others will take great delight in its uniqueness.

Gillian Moss "Scrap Senses" (2011) is a part of the "Fabulous Fiber" exhibit at Oceanside Museum of Art. (Oceanside Museum of Art)

Oceanside Museum of Art presents "Fabulous Fiber"

When: Through Nov. 2

Where: Oceanside Museum of Art, 704 Pier View Way, Oceanside

Tickets: $15 adults; $10 seniors 65 and up; free for members, youth 17 and under, college students with I.D., and active military and dependents with I.D.

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