

# SURFACE DESIGN



## **FUTURE FABRICATION: SDA INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION IN PRINT**

CREATIVE EXPLORATION OF FIBER AND FABRIC

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# FUTURE FABRICATION: INNOVATION IN THE INFORMATION AGE

by Kathryn Hall

**I**n a time when data mining controls the market by gathering personal information, it is important to remember that textile innovation led to the evolution of computer programming and data entry. French weaver and merchant **Joseph Marie Jacquard** revolutionized textile manufacturing in 1804 with his invention of the jacquard loom. His power loom automated weaving with a sequence of punch cards, allowing for elaborate patterns to be produced with greater ease. Jacquard's punch cards led to the development of an electromechanical punch-card tabulator, patented in 1889 by American inventor **Herman Hollerith**, whose company later became **IBM**. Textile innovation continues to inspire critical advancements in fields beyond craft, especially science and technology.

Celebrating 40 years of artists who have made significant contributions to the field, the Surface Design Association has

nurtured an increasingly global community of individuals who have challenged the boundaries of fiber art and contributed to its critical discourse. Looking back, it would have been hard to predict the strides that have been made in technology over this period of time, as well as some of the challenges provoked by the race to keep up. Now that we are here, faced with the future, how do we learn from the past and adapt to change? Based on the information that we know, what might the future look like?

For this *Exhibition in Print*, guest editor **Richard Elliott** and I selected a group of artists who, with a fresh approach, address these questions by wielding traditional techniques as well as problem-solving with new processes, technologies and materials. Fiber art has taken on new areas of innovation, as several artists utilize their background in textiles, film,

performance and photography. Despite the allure of new tools, it is also worth noting that innovation in the context of this group of artists is strongly rooted in an understanding of traditional techniques. Their reference to many traditional processes and techniques speaks to the evolution of the Information Age, as social media and online resources make it easy to document and disseminate information.

Given the state of aggression in global politics coupled with a series of natural disasters, this year, in particular, has been overwhelming. Time feels compressed as what seems like a year's worth of news is packed into a single week. Regardless of the polarity between personal beliefs and opinions, anxiety and lethargy are sentiments that unite many individuals. Popular online television series like *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017–), inspired by Margaret Atwood's novel, and Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* (2011–2016) cater to the current zeitgeist as cautionary tales of an increasingly dystopian future.

To counteract the anxiety surrounding a foreboding future, craftivism has remained a steady positive force

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Left page: **Rachel Merrill and Devon Merrill** *Light Dance* 2017, silk, cotton, polyester, electronics, 61" x 30" x 30". Photo: Howard Max.

Below: **Kristina Aas** at jacquard loom weaving color samples. Photo: Povilas Reklaitis.





for change. Individuals have taken up handwork as a way to slow down the pace of life and encourage a thoughtful dialogue as well as promote community building. After all, a hand-embroidered banner that is captured on Instagram holds more staying power than a fleeting tweet that is effortlessly rebutted and redacted. Many of the artists selected for this exhibition shed light on the future through thoughtful responses to perceived environmental and social challenges, in support of the critical role that textiles have played in activism.

Vancouver-based artist **Nicole Dextras** advocates for equitable products in the fashion industry through her strikingly elegant “botanical wearables.” Her *A Dressing the Future* series (2015–), featuring mythical survivors in dystopian scenarios, provides an alternative to the dramatic post-apocalyptic blockbusters of Hollywood. The first character in her trilogy, Persephone, is a contemporary adaptation of the Greek goddess of spring.

Her short film, *Waiting for Spring* (2016), shot by **Paolo Pennuti**, takes place after a series of forest fires have caused

the agricultural economy to fail. Persephone, played by **Nita Bowerman**, takes refuge inside a fruit warehouse. Pomegranates become her life force, and she utilizes the invasive garden that surrounds her to create ornate clothing, demonstrating a resourceful balance between practical construction and savage beauty. Dextras draws on her basketry skills to fashion a bodice made of reeds, while thorns pin together a protective layer of pomegranate peels, orange peels and dried mushrooms. In this future, Dextras redefines modern luxury through her material exploration, dismissing the need for fast and technologically driven methods of production. Her resourcefulness presents a solution to slowing down the effects of global warming and the depletion of natural resources on our economy by mitigating waste.

Top: **Nicole Dextras *Persephone and the Venus Terrarium*** (video still) 2016, pomegranate peels, dried mushrooms, thorns, fish mah, orange peel, bark, red dates, constructed over sea grass and reed armature, peels attached with thorns, peyote stitch, glass terrarium, terra cotta, Venus of Willendorf, plant materials.

Right page: **Nicole Dextras *Waiting for Spring*** (video still) 2016, featuring *Pomegranate Ensemble* and *Pomegranate Respirator Mask*.





Like *Dextras*, **Jayoung Yoon** of New York explores the interplay between fiber sculpture and film. The mind-matter phenomenon that distinguishes the mind from the brain is central to her work. In her films, she uses her own body as a stand-in for the viewer. Yoon depicts herself with her back turned, inviting the viewer to meditate by stepping into her world, drawing attention to the viewer's own thoughts and perceptions. Her film and performance work includes soft and sinuous sculptures made out of Yoon's own hair that she meticulously knots and weaves as physical representations of her thoughts. Traditionally, hair is an intimate symbol of remembrance. Yoon uses the material to give a corporeal presence to her own thoughts as she shares a moment of intimacy with her audience.

In *Listen to the Mind I* (2009), Yoon constructs a white cube with a 4-foot diameter hole, cut into the ceiling. Placed in a grassy meadow, the box serves as a giant pinhole camera, as the sun slowly rises and sets over the 10-hour span that Yoon lies naked inside the box. Throughout the nine-minute video, the camera captures the passage of time as the wind blows the large hair funnel that pools from her ear. Her thoughts, represented by her hair sculpture, remain largely unaffected by the sun's powerful rays while her skin gradually burns, changing color as the sun shifts from right to left. The sculpture is an extension of her body, a representation of her mind, as it exists beyond her naked form.



Top: **Jayoung Yoon** *Listening to the Mind I* (video still) 2009, human hair, resin, hand knotting, approximately 8'.

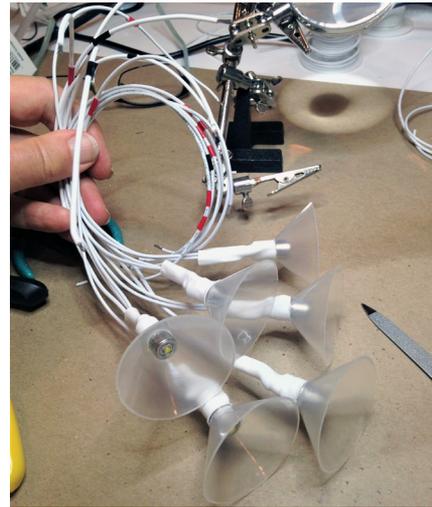
Bottom: **Jayoung Yoon** *Emptying the Mind* 2010, video documentation.

Emerging artist **Mali Mrozinski's** *INVENTory* collection is similarly introspective, though it functions much more like a personal journal than as a meditation guide. Mrozinski's work questions the strategy of customization to reduce personal waste and unnecessary belongings. She works with local farmers to source her wool and indigo dye. In her photography, she is shown wearing her Carpet Suits splayed, facedown on the ground. Her gray *Carpet Suit* with orange and black stripes looks like a bird found in the grass, suggesting a connection with the surrounding environment. Cozy and warm, her machine and hand-tufted wool suits function as security blankets that offer her comfort and shelter. Conscious of her own neuroses, she uses these objects as both a physical barrier and an emotional coping mechanism to address her personal quirks.

Mrozinski's work questions the strategy of customization to reduce personal waste and unnecessary belongings.

**Mali Winfield Mrozinski** *Carpet Jacket (a tool to feel grounded)*  
2016, machine and hand tufted wool, 72" x 60".





Some of this issue's other award winners are venturing into cutting-edge technology, like **Rachel Merrill** and **Devon Merrill**, who have incorporated LED lights controlled by small computers into garments to further enhance the movement of the wearer. **Yekaterina Mokeyeva**, on the other hand, identifies new, sustainable resources for her wet-felting process. As illustrated by her dress, *One's Shell*, Mokeyeva fuses graceful patterns with a blend of nettles and wool. Identified by Mokeyeva, the nettle plant is a sustainable resource that is both fast-growing and durable.

This exhibition lays the groundwork for the future direction of the field of textiles. Like many craft media, fiber has become increasingly interdisciplinary. It demands a fundamental shift in how we think about the material and its potential. As exemplified by this selection of artists, tradition and innovation go hand in hand as a strategy for securing the future growth and success of the field. Now more than ever, artists should feel empowered by a critical need to address and reflect on the challenges that lie ahead.

—*Kathryn Hall is the curator at Houston Center for Contemporary Craft in Houston, Texas. She is a scholar of contemporary craft and material culture.*



Left: **Yekaterina Mokeyeva** *One's Shell* 2017, fiber derived from nettles, merino wool, wet sculptural felting, 60" x 30" x 12". Photo: Sergey Mokeyev. Model: Anne Goodling. Bottom: detail.

Right page: **Rachel Merrill and Devon Merrill** *Light Dance* 2017, silk, cotton, polyester, electronics, 61" x 30" x 30". Photo: Howard Max. Top right: in-progress. Photo: Rachel Merrill.