

CHICAGO

Elana Herzog and Luanne Martineau

WESTERN EXHIBITIONS

Elana Herzog and Luanne Martineau echo familiar parries to modernism's vainglorious legacies. Their works substitute common materials, including textiles, for oil paint; involve craft techniques such as papermaking and needle felting; and focus on the domestic, the gendered, and the everyday in place of the grandiose and the utopic. Yet, though they are invested in these critiques, both artists happily provide more than admonitions, as their recent pairing for "COMPRESSION" emphasized.



Herzog's medium-size works in the show—they were not quite collages, since the textile fragments were interwoven with wet paper pulp to yield one cohesive substance—were intense visual stimulants. Rigid textures achieved in the papermaking process offset the gestural interplay of fabrics and painted marks, often casually dabbed in neon oranges and greens. While abstraction predominated, a buttoned shirt-sleeve in *Untitled (P108)*, 2014, explicitly referenced the body; likewise, in *Untitled (P141)*, 2016, adhered fabrics conjured two central figures in long dresses. Herzog's history of wall-mounted works, such as *Untitled (Peacock)*, 2006, in which she stapled a large cotton chenille bedspread to the wall and then tore it away, was here reversed: Recombined fragments produced objects that insisted less on negation than on the development of singular forms that cleverly confused categories of drawing and collage.

Like Herzog, Martineau uses textiles (primarily hand-needled felt) to make forms. Yet the artists' works differ markedly in subject and tone: Martineau's felts mimic banal, often abject objects—including dead fish, half-smoked cigarettes in dirty ashtrays, and dismembered animal legs, conjoined or hung together on gessoed linen—but their incommensurately vivid colors and soft, felted edges provide levity. In Martineau's *Hypnos*, 2018, which sets an oversize eye in enigmatic relation to a bestial limb and giant moth wing, hues vacillate between childish and nauseating; it seems the titular god of sleep could dispense nightmares just as easily as arcadian reveries. But the show's stunner was the wall-size *Knocking Hangers*, 2018, in which some sixty individually felted objects hang on strips of linen or factory felt from a rectangular black support. Several nominal clothing hangers peek over the top edge alongside two mouths, complete with lolling tongues: The composition is reminiscent of Jasper Johns's *Target with Four Faces*, 1955, or Marisol's *Self-Portrait*, 1961–62. The objects gathered below include pliable cockroaches, a candle stub, a half-eaten BLT sandwich, a brown

Luanne Martineau, *Knocking Hangers*, 2018, hand-needled felt, factory felt, handmade paper, linen, gesso, wood, Velcro, 6' 11" × 12' 7".

mug, and something that *might* be spaghetti, all dangling in a loose grid, seemingly ready to be plucked off, played with, and rearranged.

In shuffling supposedly high and low materials and techniques, both artists undermine taste as a valid aesthetic criterion. Herzog picks most insistently at the often parasitic relationship between modernism and textile patterns, foregrounding dated fabric swatches as visual protagonists. Martineau, in contrast, responds to modernist narratives of de-skilling: Her use of needle felting counters strategies of the readymade and expressionist ideals of gestural authenticity alike. But each artist seems most successful when she escapes modernism's orbit: Herzog's *Untitled (P2017-1)*, 2017, for example—an unwieldy construction in which a loose grid yields to fabric tendrils eager to escape the rectangle—avoids the problems of other works that overly anticipate the frame. The risk of countering *narratives* of modernism, of course, is that one misses the nuances of modernisms in practice. The comic, for example, is one of the many facets of early-twentieth-century art obscured by mid-century criticism. While Herzog dexterously confronts the tragic concerns of the mid-century, Martineau finds the absurdity in modernism's solemnity: the flaccid droop of the studio painter's discarded cigarette, or the farcical violence of barbed felting needles stabbing a woolen cockroach into form.

—Brian T. Leahy