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Review: How Tanja Rector creates visual poetry from old sheets and shirts

By LEAH OLLMAN



Untitled 2020 piece by Tanja Rector. Burlap, textiles and archival gel medium, 20 inches by 16 inches.(Tanja Rector and Craig Krull Gallery)

Tanja Rector's show "Textile Paintings" at Craig Krull is handsome and heartening. Rector practices a sort of alchemy of regard, repurposing utilitarian fabrics and endowing them with new import.

Burlap, sheets and shirts serve as the L.A. artist's raw materials. She cuts the fabrics into pieces resembling the components of sewing patterns and stitches them together, then stretches the whole across a frame, in the manner of a prepped or painted canvas. The shapes — rectangles, stripes, triangles, quarter-circles and more — align in jaunty rhythms like the fragmented building blocks of poems.



“Yellow and Black Stripes” by Tanja Rector, 2020. Cotton and archival gel medium, 24 inches by 24 inches. (Tanja Rector and Craig Krull Gallery)

“Yellow and Black Stripes” is a dynamic jumble, a tight toss of straight and curved bands, angular and rounded masses. The effect is vaguely calligraphic, a crisp version of Franz Kline, or typographic, as of bold-lettered signs spliced and reconfigured.

Throughout, Rector extracts much visual energy from narrow means. She juxtaposes different shades of off-white to generate minor shifts and interruptions of the field, and she uses the direction of a weave to subtly shift static parts into action. Through texture too, she invigorates the surface by setting coarse cotton against smooth sheeting, the porous weave of burlap against the dense delicacy of linen.



“Wings” by Tanja Rector, 2019. Cotton and archival gel medium, 30 inches by 30 inches(Tanja Rector and Craig Krull Gallery)

Pulling the sewn collage around a frame sometimes exposes seams; the rows of stitches contribute their own minute percussive beats to the overall musicality.

Often, Rector runs neutral strips along the outer edges of a piece, suggesting a frame within a frame that defines a discrete pictorial space. Just as often, though, she extends her compositions from edge to edge, giving them the appearance of momentarily stilled excerpts from a larger, animated continuum. Tapering shapes might evoke a receding path or an arch’s shadow, but mostly that space reads as frontal, shallow and abstract.

Gee’s Bend quilts are an obvious source of inspiration, as are the late fabric “drawings” of Louise Bourgeois, sewn from old tablecloths, yellowed bed linens and worn clothes as self-professed acts of personal repair and reconstitution. Rector’s work carries less of an emotional charge than those webs and grids of tired cloth, but there is something implicitly restorative too in its transformation of the merely functional into the assertively beautiful, and especially in the dignifying of materials associated with home and body, the traditionally female sphere of the domestic.



"String 2" by Tanja Rector, 2020. Textiles, linen and archival gel medium, 20 inches by 18 inches. (Tanja Rector and Craig Krull Gallery)

Tanja Rector

Where: Craig Krull Gallery, Bergamot Station, 2525 Michigan Ave.,
Building B3, Santa Monica

When: Tuesday-Saturday, ends Saturday

Info: (310) 828-6410, www.craigkrullgallery.com