

kofflerarts

180 Shaw St., Toronto
kofflerarts.org

Feb 13 – May 11

ELANA

HERZOG

Curated by
Jessica Stockholder



ELANA HERZOG

Work and Metaphor

We often call them Art '*works*'. When I met Elana Herzog in 1985, she was working as an electrician; here she works with materials to make Art. The *work* that goes into making is part and parcel of the *work's* meaning. Different needs are addressed, but to stay alive bodies intersect materials.

Herzog's materials reveal the labour she put into them. The disintegration of fabrics worn away by staples resonates with holes in the worn knees of jeans and shirt elbows. The staples eat away at logs while morphing into new surface. Material is used up while the aliveness of invention evokes fantasy and feeling, with all arriving at unforeseen ends. Care for human agency in relation to material circumstance is immediate in the works in front of us and, at the same time, these works are about form and set metaphor in motion.

Herzog's stitching intersects and, to some degree, alters the readymade fabrics she works with. It appears that all peoples have made fabric, and yet the design and craft of each fabric

can be traced to a specific culture. In this way, fabrics embody something universal about human beings while they are also imbued with particularity. Herzog's work asks that we value both. And her agency as an artist resonates with the inventions of all of those who came before her.

Something of Herzog's subjective experience is communicated in the myriad small decisions she has made. My subjective and sensual experience of the work mingle simultaneously as attention is drawn to small physical details, to history, to global expanse, and to abstract ideas.

Logs found in the woods bump up against plywood – former logs in the woods – that have passed through a complex human manufacturing process. The log used in Elana's work has a gesture, a result of how the tree grew; the plywood has a gesture, a result of Herzog's manipulation. Her gesture imitates the tree while it embraces the constraint imposed by the flatness of plywood. The surface of the work – bark, sliced log end, plywood, bits of fabric, yarn – come together as one work, a whole object, presenting the unworked and worked surfaces of material as equivalent. A meeting of human invention with the limits of control, with the facts of life.

Jessica Stockholder
Exhibition curator



Untitled (P113), 2015, Pigmented paper pulp, textile, 23 x 31 inches



Untitled (P143), 2016, Pigmented paper pulp, textile, 22 x 30 inches

This project called “Civilization and its Discontents,” is titled after the essay by Sigmund Freud of the same name. I began Civilization and Its Discontents In 2003, just as the United States was about to go to invade Iraq. I stapled “Oriental”-style carpets to panels, using hundreds and thousands of metal staples to partially shred the textiles, to create surfaces of metallic patterns, scarred surfaces and carpet residue. This was my attempt to convey the fragility of that historical moment, and the anguish and sense of powerlessness I felt in the face of ongoing world events. The works speak of loss, mortality and violence, as well as delicate enduring beauty.

Elana Herzog



Untitled 1997, Textile, elastic, electrical conduit, drywall, Dimensions variable



Cross Pollinations 2, 2020. Cut fragments of wooden crate, miscellaneous lumber, mixed textiles, embroidery floss, hardware, nylon cord, 144 x 88 x 45 inches (dimensions variable)

ELANA HERZOG

Always in Relation

Including works from the 1990s through the present, using a variety of different forms and materials over the years, this exhibition reveals several consistent threads running throughout. Elana Herzog explores relationships between beauty and abjectness, between autonomy and dependence, while always asserting care for how the marks of an individual's labor accumulate in an object and resonate in relation to time, culture and place.

The New York City where Herzog lived in the 80's was different from today's more sanitized version. Grittier and more textured, Herzog describes it as having the aura of Martin Scorsese's 1976 film *Taxi Driver*. As a younger artist Herzog's work was made in relation to New York City, the world that she grew up in. As the work grew, so did her experience of the larger world, and the work began to include references to the histories and cultures that participate in generating material culture, and fabric most particularly.

The works evoke thoughts of the feminine, of the domestic, of monumental sculpture, of factory production versus the handmade, and of cultural specificity versus universal human experience. They revolve around a pursuit of pleasure arising amid the gritty pathos of human lived experience particular to New York City, and germane to human experience everywhere.

Some of the materials Herzog uses are off the shelf building materials, and others are utilitarian objects removed from their intended contexts. A fitted bed sheet, a form intended to hug a mattress, here removed from that intended purpose, is apprehended as an odd form with an irregular geometry, with folds and drapes, creating a particular and eccentric form that belies its origin as a factory-made object.

Some works behave as 'sculpture' and stand alone, albeit without a pedestal, thereby becoming actors in the space of the gallery. Most of the works are, in one way or another, tied to the architecture, literally with lines of rope or stapled into the gallery walls. In this way Herzog always tends to the relation between the personal nature of being an artist working alone in the studio and the much larger collective conversation that the work grows from and is aimed towards.

Herzog has used fabrics from many different parts of the world. She sources them during extensive travel as well as close to home, though they are often produced continents away from where she finds them, and they have already participated in global exchange. Herzog's own activity in the studio is at first glance more eccentric than the grid-like structure of woven fabric and the decorative patterns and aesthetics these fabrics often contain. In fabric design, these decorative patterns often function culturally, like shared alphabets. Perhaps the forms and aesthetics of western contemporary art are parallel to those used in fabric design

in that, in both cases, artists adhere to shared systems of communication. Certainly, the grid structure of woven fabric has far reaching resonance with contemporary art and architecture.

The emphasis placed on the unique voice of an individual is always in relation to shared communal values expressed regionally, globally, through history, and at every current moment. Herzog's work sits, and wiggles, beautifully at the intersection of these lines of thought.

Text by Jessica Stockholder, exhibition curator, with contributions by Tatum Dooley



In 2018 I spent a month in St. Petersburg, Russia researching the Pre-Soviet, Soviet, and Post-Soviet textile industry and motifs. Plant motifs are predominant in Russian textiles, and they are pervasive throughout most of the world. In my travels I've collected textiles that reflect the broad spectrum of decorative floral motifs from Scandinavia, Asia, Russia, and the United States. Plant life, both cultivated and uncultivated, participates in the global migration of cultures and goods - sometimes inadvertently impacting the ecosystem of its new surroundings. Many terms refer both to plants and to people, for instance: uprooted, transplanted, invasive, native, alien. Conquerors often import the gardens of their homelands to their colonies, planting them as they would plant their national flag.

Elana Herzog





Untitled #7, 1995, Two fitted sheets, strung glass beads, 60 x 36 x 6 inches

ELANA
HERZOG



Site-Responsive Installation, 2025, wallpaper, textile, staples

Artist **Elana Herzog** lives and works in New York City. She earned a BA from Bennington College and an MFA from Alfred University. She has held solo exhibitions at the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey (Summit); Daum Museum of Contemporary Art (Sedalia, MO), DiverseWorks (Houston, TX); Herbert F. Johnson Museum (Ithaca, NY); Sharjah Art Museum (United Arab Emirates); among others. Her work has been exhibited nationally in group shows at the Brooklyn Museum of Art (NY); Museum of Arts and Design (New York, NY); David Rockefeller Creative Arts Center (Tarrytown, NY); Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum (Saratoga Springs, NY); and Weatherspoon Art Museum (Greensboro, NC). In addition, she has participated in international group exhibitions at Mercer Union (Toronto, ON, Canada); Museums of Bergen (Norway); and the Reykjavik Art Museum (Iceland). Her work is in private and public collections including the National Academy of Design. Herzog has participated in residencies at the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation (Bethany, CT); Dieu Donne Paper (Brooklyn, NY); MacDowell (Peterborough, NH); Joan Mitchell Center (New Orleans, LA); Marie Walsh Sharpe Space Program (Brooklyn, NY); and Yaddo (Saratoga Springs, NY). She is the recipient of the Anonymous Was a Woman Award; Saint Gaudens Memorial Fellowship; John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship; and Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award, among others.

Jessica Stockholder, curator of this exhibition, is an artist in her own right, having exhibited widely in museums and galleries internationally. Her work is represented in the permanent collections of numerous museums, including the Whitney Museum of Art (New York, NY); The Art Institute of Chicago (IL); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (CA); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (CA); the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MA); The British Museum (London, England, UK); the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, the Netherlands); and Vancouver Art Gallery (BC, Canada). Stockholder's recent solo exhibitions include in 2025 at Es Baluard Museum (Palma de Mallorca, Spain); 2024 at Carnegie Museum of Art (Pittsburgh, PA); 2023 at Frac Normandie (Sotteville-lès-Rouen, France); 2021 at at 1301PE (Los Angeles, CA); 2018 at The Contemporary Austin (TX); and 2016 at Galerie nächst St. Stephan (Vienna, Austria). Recent group exhibitions include in 2025 Catriona Jeffries Gallery (Vancouver, BC Canada); 2022 at Musée d'art modern et contemporain (Saint-Étienne, France); 2022 at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (San Francisco, CA); 2021 at Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (Turin, Italy); and 2021 at Centre Pompidou (Paris, France).

Exhibition Credits

Artist, Elana Herzog

Curator, Jessica Stockholder

Installation Technicians, Brett Despotovich and Nina Ankisetty

Koffler Arts

General Director, Matthew Jocelyn

Director of External Relations, Laura Chapnick-Klein

Head of Artistic Engagement, Josh Heuman

Gallery and Production Coordinator, Meredith Kenny

Office Manager, Maria Segura

With special thanks to Heather Nicol and Pure + Applied

