threewalls

DIANA GUERRERO-MACIÁ

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opening: november 2nd, 6–9pm
gallery hours: tues–sat, 11am–5pm

Diana Guerrero-Maciá's Hand-Sewn Hard Edges

by Jenni Sorkin

Diana Guerrero-Maciá's fabric collages are simultaneously nostalgic for, and reminiscent of, radical artistic activities throughout the twentieth century, ranging from manifesto writing and Russian Suprematism to guitar smashing and punk rock. Working in a variety of styles, graphics, shapes and bold color schemes, her works embody spirited rebellion, outsider status, and the pervasive sense of tribalism that often marks group identity. The "us vs. them" oppositions inherent to small communities are often expressed visually, for instance, in the patches that convey belonging in a diverse cross-section of the populace: bikers, scouts, punks, veterans, and protesters.

Guerrero-Maciá similarly employs this patchwork aesthetic in two ways: first, as a formal strategy, using textile techniques to give texture and depth to matte cloth surfaces, which naturally absorb light, and secondly, as a form of cultural sampling, borrowing and reinvigorating symbols largely through an abstract vocabulary of stitching, dyeing, pinning and cutting. Their mash-up surfaces reference psychedelic and free love 1960s memorabilia, hard-edged painting, and Soviet 1970s-era posters, which championed allegiance to the socialist cause.

The artist's laborious hand processes are deliberately analog, a refutation of the increasingly digitized world we inhabit, which has a default tendency to flatten and dampen visual imagery, and with it, tactility. If patching is a mode of mending—strengthening the weak point in the cloth, often torn at the most flexible places, like the elbow or knee—then the work's restoration come in the form of longing, a desire for the unity possible only in the closed system of the visual field. Her collages use piecework to cull, organize and arrange symbols that accrue significance only in relation to their sentimental other: that is, their ability to conjure something familiar, or capture a moment of representation that isn't tied to a physical thing in the world.

The Uncertainty of Signs is a body of work made up of five large-scale collages and a compendium of smaller ones. Mainly hung on grommets, the large pieces convey some combination of mid-century room dividers, Robert Morris felt pieces, and groovy Sixties-era album covers. In *Nomadic Future*, Guerrero-Maciá reworks ever-present cultural symbols like rainbows,

A-Z {Banquo}, 2012, collage and latex on paper, 15" x 17"

stars, smiley faces, hearts and butterflies to create a taxonomy of signs that lend themselves to wry slogans, catchphrases and mottos. Her works are distinctive, hand-sewn geometries that scheme and obfuscate: they stand on the precipice of the declarative, but in the end, are devoid of language. Yet they offer an agility of space that is affirmational, in a somber neutral palate of black, white, and off-white backgrounds upon which a web of imagery is overlaid.

In *Every Place is the Center of the World* (2012), two felt rainbows pop, while three large white decagons are barely visible against a cream-colored canvas. Separated into white bands, they are disjointed like crustaceans, and driven by a stark circular pattern of black rhomboids at each center. These fragmented central zones attempt to offer a sense of "fitting," putting pieces back together, and in doing so, offer the momentum of spinning, as the pattern changes when "reading" the work from left to right. As literal and metaphoric centers, they relay a narrative of simultaneity, both "every place" and nowhere in particular at all, a geographic dispersion of

A-Z {Ophelia}, 2012, collage and enamel on paper, 15" x 17"

conjoined bodies, machines, or both, gears of abstract thought that whir in unison, march in lockstep, and are geometrically harmonious and well-matched. Guerrero-Maciá's graphic precision, when coupled with a quasi-spiritual title from the naturalist John Burroughs, suggests the persistence of utopianism, and the connective logic of the innate human need to join, to create community, and mostly, to belong.

In this way, Guerrero-Maciá's free form compositions are redolent of what the Renaissance art historian Michael Baxandall called "periodization," in which art is part of a larger social structure that is mapped only after the fact, when we look back on it, as a cultural system. Baxandall was interested in focusing on the underlying economic and power systems that created the art, versus rendering the artist as autonomous. Guerrero-Maciá, then, *periodizes* the material effects and ephemera characteristic of late twentieth century protest culture: street demonstrations, underground one-night only exhibitions and afterhours live music venues. Gone are the broken guitar strings and wheat-paste flyers. In their place are the elegant equivalents of intellectual howling and lyrical brawling. Her collages offer a sense of detritus infused with longing, reminiscent of handmade flags and signs, hand-lettered protest banners from the civil rights and feminist movements, the repetitive stenciling of Jasper Johns' works on paper, and most recently, the Occupy Movement, and its particular visuality: profanity-laced slogans safety-pinned to activist-owned backpacks, satchels, and leather jackets.

A Thinking Thing (2012), a dark, all-black work is made of black wool appliqué strips sewn in an architectural format, following the trussed roof system of a Victorian-era carousel ceiling. The strips are sewn to black commando cloth: a light absorbing canvas often used to make black-out theater curtains. The depth of the opacity is tempered with flashes of white, created through a dye discharge process. The work itself becomes a mapping of vanishing points and trickery, in which it is only the stitching that allows the eye to follow the raised lines. This idea of all-over canvases of black-on-black is not new, of course, in the vein of Ad Reinhardt, but not, in that the appliquéd galaxy becomes a hard edge

skyscape, or a mournful album cover, or a cathedral ceiling, punctuated by a garish upturned red string, smiling out at the viewer.

The 26 smaller works, *A to Z* (2012) comprise an alphabet of signs: a stylistic merging of appropriated imagery and pieced collages that reference signal flags and Shakespearian characters, clowns, and fools. Her typography but it also works in the banality of familiar cultural expression: flowers, tartan, underwear models. Each work is a semaphore, a means of conveying information visually, like a red or green light. There are exactly twenty-six in number, intentionally corresponding to a letter of the Latin alphabet each making an analogous gesture, a signaling device. The only actual marker of language is the red letter *A* with definitive black lines through it, titled *Language Gone on Holiday*. Not only is an red A loaded with so many signifiers of sin, desire, and new beginnings, this refutation of language is enacted as a way out: a freedom from the territorial claims of words, syntax, and all the awkward and bitter exchanges that language performs, even when it is well-meaning.

Similarly, the artist's furniture piece, *Let x=x* (2012), is a set of benches translated from one of the semaphores as both a functional and symbolic system. Constructed entirely from the wood of a teardown, a 19th c. Chicago worker's cottage, Guerrero-Maciá repurposes the material, which becomes a larger metaphor for language, which itself is appropriated, recycled, and created anew. The benches are painted in a recognizable palette, matched to the rest of the collages, thereby referencing the fabric in a physical, touchable way, as well as utilizing color as a signaling device. The ability to move the benches is a way to offer a structure of participation, in which a series of indeterminate and varied spatial arrangements–a syntax, in effect–can be made in the exhibition space.

Diana Guerrero-Maciá's works mine the culture of detail, and in particular, the culture of lost details: framing her works within the rich debris of earnest and productive counter-cultural disenfranchisement, it is easy to be struck by the clean lines that the artist draws: the selvage, which is of course, the edge, and an era very much aware of its own dimensions.

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cover: Nomadic Future, 2012, hand sewn wool, vinyl, and digitally embroidered notions on canvas, 72" x 108"