

TEXTILE SOCIETY *of* AMERICA

Blog <https://textilesocietyofamerica.org/8011/tsa-members-at-fiberart-international-2019/>

TSA Members at Fiberart International 2019

Fiberart International 2019

The Fiberarts Guild of Pittsburgh, Incorporated, Pittsburgh, PA

May 31, 2019–August 24, 2019

Reviewed by Susan T. Avila

Susan T. Avila is an artist and Professor of Design at the University of California, Davis. She has an extensive exhibition record and her work is included in several books and periodicals. She frequently lectures about textile art and has published several articles in leading journals including Fiberarts, Ornament, Surface Design Journal, and TextilForum.

This review will also appear in the Spring 2019 newsletter with a different set of photos. Become a member of TSA to download the most current newsletter as soon as it is published.



Michael Rohde, Wendy Weiss, and Joan T. Weiss at opening reception. Brew House Association Gallery. Photo credit: Polly Mills Whitehorn

Fiberart International is one of the longest running juried exhibitions of textile art in the world. A triennial event, this prestigious exhibition attracts an international group of artists. Much like the city of Pittsburgh,

where it has been held for more than 40 years, *Fiberart International* has developed and grown into a vibrant destination for art enthusiasts. The exhibition is produced by the Fiberarts Guild of Pittsburgh, who partner with local institutions and invite prominent leaders in the field to serve as jurors. Both emerging and established artists are well represented.

The shape and form of the show depends largely on the jurors' curatorial vision. For 2019, Sonya Clark and Jane Sauer had the dubious task of selecting 56 works from 1,441 entries. Their collective voice reflects an interest in conceptually driven work as well as pieces that demonstrate excellence in craft. The exhibition includes many pieces that touch on current political and social themes, giving the overall exhibition a cohesive message that is often difficult to achieve in juried exhibitions. The excellent catalogue that accompanies the exhibition includes a poetic synoptic essay by Clark and an informative explanatory essay by Sauer describing the jury process.



*Xiao Gao. Passing. 2018. Buckram. Layered images. Burning image manipulations. 28" x 20" x 1/2".
Photographed by: the artist.*

This year TSA was represented by four members, **Xia Gao**, **Marie Fornaro**, **Michael Rohde**, and **Wendy Weiss**. In her tryptic *Gaza, Scar, Camp*, Weiss utilizes the technique of handwoven ikat to speak about the fragile relationships between two historically persecuted cultures, Jews and Palestinians, and the desperate need for a humanitarian solution to the ongoing crisis in the Gaza strip. The shifting that occurs during the process of resist dyeing and subsequent weaving gives the words a tenuous quality, like a smoke ring about to fade, adding an additional layer of irony to her subject. *Interrogative*, Rohde's immaculate and formalist tapestry, also conjoins text and textile, but in his case the text is indecipherable and reminiscent of an ancient language. While the gridded structure and pixilated imagery allude to some type of coded message, the soothing colors and well balanced shapes hold their own purely in the aesthetic realm. *Passing*, Xia Gao's quietly powerful and exquisitely beautiful permutational portrait represents a haunting glimpse of her Chinese ancestors. *Passing* consists of three layers of buckram that have been burned to create transparency and convey imagery. By combining different faces her work abstracts gender yet transcends time; the sepia quality of the burned surface



Michael Rohde with Interrogative at Brew House Association Gallery. Fi2019. Photo credit: Polly Mills Whitehorn



Marie Fornaro. It Is Bread We Fight For, But We Fight for Roses, Too (detail) (2018) bleached clothing, towels and bedsheets, hand-dyed cotton batting, thread, tinsel. Machine pieced and quilted, MX fiber-reactive dyeing, free motion embroidery. 81" x 68" x 1/2". Photo credit: Polly Mills Whitehorn

suggests an old photograph. In contrast to the exacting craftsmanship of the other TSA artists represented, Fornaro uses an informal, improvisational technique to convey anger and emotion in *It Is Bread We Fight For, But We Fight For Roses, Too*. Starting with a beige and white quilt as an

emblem of whiteness, comfort, and domesticity, Fornaro slashed into it with the hash tag symbol from the [#MeToo](#) movement; bits of the bright colored lining peek through the cuts and dribble on the ground in a pool conveying blood, rage, and frustration.



Fiberart International 2019. Contemporary Craft (left to right Luke Haynes, Sewlebrity Beth Blankenship, Oiled Eider; Marie Fornaro, It Is Bread We Fight For, But We Fight for Roses, Too; Nicole Benner, Comfort/Confine II) Photo credit: Polly Mills Whitehorn

Overall, these pieces were indicative of the high caliber of work presented in two venues, Contemporary Craft and Brew House Association Gallery. In each space the work was hung beautifully with ample space for reflection and opportunities for discovery.

<https://fiberartspgh.org>