
Ephemera

Norma Minkowitz: Body to Soul

Spring 2023

Norma Minkowitz: Body to Soul - Informational Panels

Fairfield University Art Museum

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/normaminkowitz-ephemera>

Recommended Citation

Fairfield University Art Museum, "Norma Minkowitz: Body to Soul - Informational Panels" (2023).
Ephemera. 4.

<https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/normaminkowitz-ephemera/4>

This item has been accepted for inclusion in DigitalCommons@Fairfield by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fairfield. It is brought to you by DigitalCommons@Fairfield with permission from the rights-holder(s) and is protected by copyright and/or related rights. **You are free to use this item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses, you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.** For more information, please contact digitalcommons@fairfield.edu.

MATERIAL MATTERS

Threads are an intimate part of everyone's daily life. They provide second skins at our most vulnerable moments: swaddling us at birth, clothing us in public, veiling us in worship, and shrouding us in death. Art made from fiber - made from threads, rope, and fabric - taps into these associations in ways that traditional media like oil paint or bronze cannot, as one rarely encounters these materials outside a museum. Though fiber has been a creative material for centuries, it was not recognized as fine art in the United States and Europe until the mid-twentieth century. Minkowitz has played a leading role in shifting the perception of textile processes from craft to fine art.

Nearly every work in *Norma Minkowitz: Body to Soul* begins as a single thread. A thread is like a line in space that the artist uses to write and draw. A single thread is thin, but crocheted together they can create masses and shapes. Minkowitz sets herself apart from other fiber artists working with this material by freezing these forms with hard resin or paste, so that the formerly soft fibers appear almost like stone or metal.

*What associations do you have with fiber?
How do these works challenge or confirm
your experiences with this material?*

En español



VESSELS

“The body is a vessel” – Norma Minkowitz

Following her early experimentation with fiber techniques, Minkowitz embarked on a series of vessels during the 1980s. Stiffened with shellac, these are frequently mistaken for baskets. Their fine, openly crocheted threads allow glimpses into their interiors, which often contain figurines or objects.

Minkowitz frequently combines fiber with found objects. These may initially seem like everyday items, but they carry deep personal significance for the artist. Such is the case with *Mother Mine*, in which the artist’s mother’s gloves are tenderly stitched into a vessel. Echoing the contours of the bowl, the absent hands are cupped in a perpetual gesture of maternal cradling or offering. Using the original gloves rather than a facsimile, or substitute, forges a material connection across generations. Certainly, these are treasured relics for the artist, but the intimacy of gloves and thread – both suggesting touch and care – are nearly universal.

En español



GO WITH YOUR GUT

Throughout this exhibition and Minkowitz's broader body of work, fiber could be understood as a metaphor for skin. Both flesh and fabric have soft surface textures, respond to gravity, and degrade over time. Yet Minkowitz's engagement with skin is most literal in a series of works using stretched, dried hog gut. Paradoxically, the artist reveals the beauty in this normally repulsive matter. The fluid surface of *Vessel* takes on the iridescent sheen of a seashell, couching a "pearl" of gut-encased twine in its center. Threads are also visible through a scrim of gut in *Untitled*, a cushion with a deep, ominous hole in its center where a head or object would normally rest. These shapes extend Minkowitz's exploration of inside and outside, solid and void, through complex reversals of these binaries. The interior organs of animals become the exterior skins of the vessels. Several of these incorporate art supplies, such as the spools in *Wrapped*, further underscoring the connection between fiber and flesh.

En español



NATURAL FORMS + MATERIALS

Though this exhibition centers on the relationship between *body and soul*, Minkowitz views these concepts as part of far larger natural and cosmic systems. The niches of this wall feature two examples of how Minkowitz incorporates nature as a theme. *Chrysalis* uses the titular motif to suggest a process of transformation. Far larger than an insect's cocoon, we confront this semi-abstract shape on a human scale and are encouraged to think of our own past, present, or potential metamorphoses. While *Chrysalis* capitalizes on natural imagery, *Wild in the Woods* literally incorporates organic elements as its raw materials. The gnarled branches and sticks forming the armature of this sculpture also invoke bones, circling back to the human connections of *Body to Soul*.

Where can you find other references to nature throughout this exhibition? What is the relationship of thread to the non-human environment?

En español



IS NORMA MINKOWITZ A FEMINIST?

Norma Minkowitz has never considered herself a feminist, but women's issues are a recurrent theme in her art. She explains, "My work is not intentionally feminist nor does it try to address issues of inequality, anger, or a path to change. It concerns everyday women - how they live, act, their self-esteem and the choices they make, bad or good." This gallery brings together some of her earliest and most recent work, which is united by a particularly urgent emphasis on women's experience.

Minkowitz's earliest experiments in fiber were part of a wider effort by feminist artists to reclaim thread, fabric, and textiles as potent symbols of women's domestic experience. Second-wave feminist artists celebrated women's overlooked creative expression in craft, while also viewing these materials as symbols of women's labor and oppression.

Today, women's experiences are different, and so are the materials needed to articulate them. A recent series of collages treats the representation of women in the media. Rather than planning the compositions in advance, the artist gathered a series of clippings that speak to one another and waited for a theme to appear. Slogan like titles identify what Minkowitz describes as "universal themes applied to the struggles and life of women in search of perhaps a better future or fulfilling changes in their lives, as well as making choices - sometimes leaving them in despair."

*Would you describe Norma Minkowitz as feminist?
Would you call yourself a feminist? How does the art in
this room shape your perception of women's experiences
around the world?*

En español



COLLAGE

Virgin, bride, mother, queen, consumer, crone...Minkowitz' recent series of never-before-exhibited collages laments the limited range of roles available to women. At the same time, she expands this list to include new possibilities - creator, fertility goddess, or hybrid monster. Cut from the glossy pages of art and fashion magazines, images of symbols and celebrities are snared in a vortex of hand-drawn lines and imagery. The black and white of pen and ink create an ominous backdrop for pops of blood red that unite the entire series.

While much of Minkowitz's art addresses issues of identity, these are some of her most overtly political pieces. The medium of collage is a fitting vehicle for her feminist critique, as the violence of cutting and pasting mirrors the physical and metaphorical violence routinely inflicted on women. Dizzying fragmentation and unclear relationships between elements also capture the unstable reality of contemporary women's experience. In terms of medium and subject matter, these collages are a significant departure from Minkowitz's sculptural fiber work. Among the myriad messages conveyed in these collages is that of an artist who never stops evolving.

En español

