

Christy Matson's work is the result of a collaboration with Mark Gallay during a 2006 artist-in-residency at the Experimental Sound Studio in Chicago. She received an MFA from the California College of the Arts in 2005 and is currently an Assistant Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Sabrina Gschwandtner is an artist, curator, and writer working in New York City. She received a BA in art from Brown University and is currently working towards an MFA from Bard College (NY). Her video, sound, and textile work has been exhibited widely over the past seven years and most recently at The Museum of Arts and Design (NY) and The Images Festival in Toronto, Canada. She is founder and editor of KnitKnit magazine.

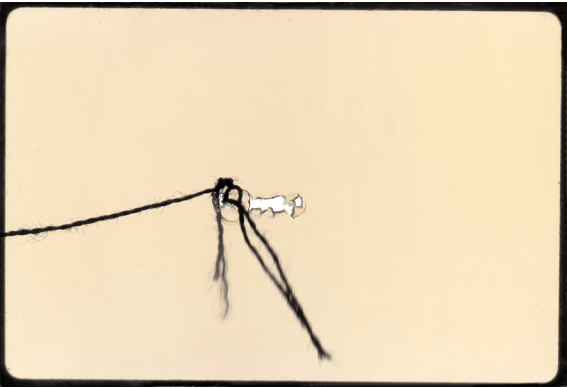
The Cleve E. Carney Gallery

May 20 - June 24, 2007

Bionic Threads



Christy Matson
Satin_Wrap (detail)
2006
Copper wire and cotton thread
18 x 18 inches



Sabrina Gschwandtner
Selection from
Phototactic Behavior in Sewn Slides
2004
80 slides, thread, and slide projector

Hyde ParkARTCENTER

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The use of textiles and fabrics in art-making often explores our practical relationship to the medium. Long associated with the craft and decorative arts (e.g. ceramics, jewelry, paper-making), fabric artists, as well as the other decorative arts, have solidified a much deserved spot in the canon of contemporary art. The interest in these art forms relies heavily on their use as practical tools and aesthetically pleasing objects—a blending of form, function, and beauty. The artworks by Christy Matson and Sabrina Gschwandtner in *Bionic Threads* build on this notion by converging the historical ideas and techniques of traditional fabric-making with modern digital, mechanical and electrical elements. Both artists extend the medium beyond its functional attributes, and reveal it as a legitimate definer of how we interact with the world.

Just as recently as May 10, 2007, the Associated Press reported that archaeologists discovered a 2,700-year-old piece of fabric inside a copper urn at a Greek funeral site.¹ Found yellowed and fractured, but surprisingly intact, the fabric is believed to have been used in an elaborate cremation ceremony that imitated the funeral ceremonies described in Homer's Iliad. The link to the great Greek narrative poem makes the fabric particularly interesting to archaeologists. Learning how it was made and how it was used help reveal the ancient culture's reliance on it as a revered item, or

in other words, as something to be used as a funerary object. The fabric's specific use may never be known, but we do know that it was something people interacted with beyond the practical uses of cloth, making it an object demanding attention and contemplation as well.

While not directly inspired by the recently discovered Greek fabric, Christy Matson's weaving, *Plain_Fold*, explores a similar, but wholly contemporary, idea of interaction by incorporating auditory and digital elements into the tapestry. Using a traditional Jacquard hand loom, Matson wove together cotton thread and copper wire that were then connected to electrical circuits and speakers, effectively making the tapestry into working antennae. As visitors approach and touch the weaving it reacts by playing one of five programmed sound compositions.

The compositions, arranged by sound artist Mark Gallay, were derived from New Zealand Outsider artist Martin Thompson's ballpoint pen drawings, which are also reflected in the weaving's pattern. Based on the marks and patterns of Thompson, sound engineer Gregory Taylor designed an algorithm, or a mathematical equation, that Matson adopted and plugged into a computer to generate the pattern on the loom. The six small sample tapestries in the exhibition exemplify the

algorithm folded onto itself or extracted at a certain sequence to produce a variety of images from abstract blotches to circling florets.

The use of metallic wire in weaving or wall tapestries has long been used for adornment and decoration—medieval tapestry makers wove gold thread into their wall hangings to add luster (and worth) to the dyed wool. Matson's copper wire not only adds luster, but relies on human interaction to complete the artwork's full intent, making it excitingly more dynamic than a static object on a wall. We are first drawn to *Plain_Fold* by sight, then by touch, and this connection yields the final auditory element: the musical composition.

Sabrina Gschwandtner's *Phototactic Behavior in Sewn Slides* focuses more closely on the interaction between the organic elements of textiles and modern mechanical and electrical components. She uses a slide projector to enlarge and animate a series of discarded slides that she has run through a sewing machine to stitch patterns with thread into the film. The projector's fan and lens act as mechanical, yet arbitrary, manipulators of the image, blowing the threads while the lens struggles to focus the slide. The result is an unpredictable series of abstract images that rely on the forces created by the mechanical slide projector (wind, heat) and the organic, fragile qualities of the thread.



Selection from *Phototactic Behavior in Sewn Slides*, 2004, 80 slides, thread, and slide projector

Slide projectors immediately bring to mind the mundane travel slide show. One of the projector's limitations is that it displays images that took place in the past, as with all photography and film, whether it is travel memories or major motion pictures. Gschwandtner blurs the separation between things that have taken place and viewing something in the present. The abstract images of threads, punctures, and empty color fields move and change as we view the projection. As animation, *Phototactic Behavior* holds little in common with stop-motion video that is recorded and then played back. Rather, the shivering threads resemble more the view from the lens of a microscope. What is seen is immediate, and the microscopic effect helps us interact with the blending of organic textiles and mechanical component.

Matson and Gschwandtner use the ancient medium of textile and fabric to respond pragmatically to elements of our modern society. *Bionic Threads* reveals that the function of fabric will continue to change, but more importantly that its limitations as a purely practical and decorative medium are something to be left in the past.

Philip Nadasdy
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¹Paphitis, Nicholas. 2007. 2,700-year-old fabric found in Greece. Yahoo News, May 10. http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20070510/ap_on_re_eu/greece_ancient_fabric_7.



Installation view of *Plain_Fold*, 2006, Copper wire and cotton thread, 54 x 48 inches