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EDITORIAL

by Elizabeth Kozlowski

Soft Borders

We put our membership to task with this year's theme of "Soft Borders" for the 2019 *Surface Design Journal* Exhibition in Print, and you did not disappoint. Interpretations ranged from the use of maps and physical demarcations to abstract representations of exclusionary social practices. Materials and techniques spanned from the traditional to the contemporary.

After a hurricane scare here in New Orleans over the summer, I thought a lot about the physical borders we erect. For example, the levee that surrounds the city—for without it, this area would be inhabitable to humans. Managing geographical borders has become the topic of political conversation as we grapple to assist asylum seekers across the globe.

Borders are also a familiar tool for artists. For example, they can be used as a pictorial framing device. I have added a border to a quilt on more than one occasion to save myself from the (sometimes) weary process of piecing. The selvedge or border is also a necessary part of textile manufacturing and keeps the ends of fabric from unraveling. It would seem we cannot escape the boundaries we create.

In the pages of this issue, you will recognize familiar faces and new friends. It is exciting to follow the growth and development of our membership and to learn from those who have dedicated their livelihood to the field of fiber arts. Each round is a blind jury followed by a conversation between the guest editor and myself. This year we had the pleasure of welcoming Monika Auch, a frequent *SDJ* contributor and practicing artist. She brings an international perspective paired with a contagious passion for our field.

I want to thank all of the artists who submitted and congratulate the individuals who were selected as this year's featured artists and award winners. I believe these pages demonstrate that our material contributions have purpose and a voice.

We hope to see you in St, Louis!

Please share your stories of personal and artistic discovery at journaleditor@surfacedesign.org

Elizabeth Kozlowski
Surface Design Journal Editor

Alison Muir *Custodial Water* 2019, cotton, silk organza, dye, Pentel pen, pencil, block-printed, drawn, hand and machine-stitched, 38" x 29". Photo: Andy Payne.



GUEST EDITOR STATEMENT: SOFT BORDERS

by **Monika Auch**

What is the influence of technological developments, new media and, on a much grander scale, global themes like climate change, political conflicts and identity issues on textile art? **Surface Design Journal's Annual International Exhibition In Print** wanted to pose questions and trigger investigations. Juror **Elizabeth Kozlowski** and I were impressed to receive so many brilliant, thoughtful and skillful contributions. In this essay I wish to pay homage to the dexterous hands and the curious, empathic minds that immersed themselves within the theme of "Soft Borders." The diverse interpretations and commitments resulted in poignant perspectives and beautiful textile art.

The crossing of borders has become a global phenomenon. It can be either a pleasure trip or a perilous flight for economic or political reasons. When related to the artistic working process, it can be the transgressing of traditional methods or appropriation from other disciplines. However, at borders that are meant to divide, an exchange is still possible. This may be a fluent, fertile process and possibly lead to cutting-edge innovation. Or it can be a standoff without exchange, marked by

Susan Smith *The passage: mourning cloth* 2019, linen, woodblock, screenprint, boro-stitched, laser-cut, 72" x 72".



Amy Usdin *Dismount Left* 2019, cotton, linen, paper, silk, wool, repurposed horse fly net (rope), needle-woven, knotted, 31" x 15" x 6".

a mine field in no-man's land, much like the Iron curtain which divided Eastern and Western Europe after WWII. The headlines of news are dominated on a daily basis with stories around borders in the America's and continental Europe including the exclusion of certain groups of people based on race or gender.

Many of the works represented in this publication address these current issues. Artists worked with themes ranging from political questions about equal rights, the use of natural resources and climate change, to works that turn the gaze inward, concerning spirituality, identity and gender. Artists used textile and other techniques and a great variety of materials. They are conscious of their imbued value and meaning and apply them with great dexterity and sensitivity. Some works are critical comments, some quiet reflections. Others excel in prolific engagement and long-term commitments to social and community work.

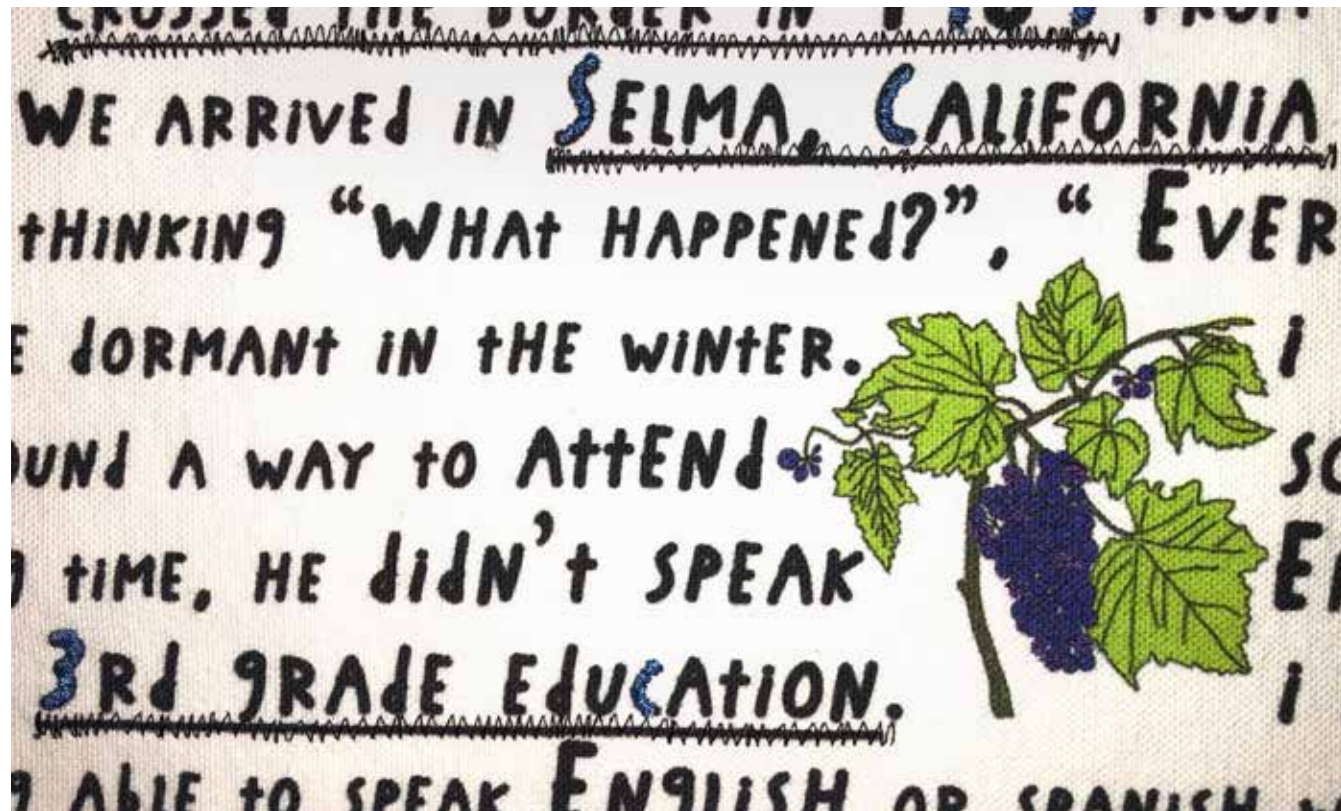
Nomads

A mesmerizing, archaic form is contained in the sculptures crafted by **Amy Usdin**. The loosely intertwined ropes and softly colored, braided and woven leather strips evoke a sense of longing for nature and companionship with animals. Much like traveling on a horse, we long for a pastoral way of life, before climate change started to threaten us. The openness of the sculpture with its subtle use of materials is intriguing and invites contemplation.

Susan Smith's work, especially the canteens covered with cloth, are visually related to Usdin's object but carry a much darker aura. They serve as a harrowing statement about forced nomadism based on long-term research by the artist. The installation and performance documentation depict the inhuman conditions at the site of the Texas / Mexico border in 2019. It is a reminder of the fact that humans need water in



Susan Smith *The passage: canteen* 2019, water canteen, recycled textiles, collagraph print, jute, found objects from Texas/Mexico border, hand-stitched, 20 canteens in series, each 11".



order to survive and points at the cruel act of taking the most basic life support away from refugees. An additional part of Smith's installation contains clay bricks and a cloth worked in boro stitching: a "mourning cloth" which references the arduous paths refugees follow. Smith uses clay and burlap, materials that have been with humans since the dawn of time supplying shelter and help for carrying essentials like food and water.

Alicia Decker approaches the theme of immigration with scientific diligence. She records personal stories of Oaxacano people and the assimilation process that follows immigration and leads to a hybrid cultural and personal identity. The stories are transferred onto woven cloth stitch by stitch, highlighting the fact that textile practice remains crucial to the cultural and personal identities of many Oaxacano indigenous communities.

Mediation of the eye

Anne-Claude Cotty uses a pin-hole camera to show the viewer a different world. This technique, dating back to Italian painter **Caravaggio** (1571-1610), was used by painters to project a realistically proportioned image onto canvas. Cotty's image resembles continents being torn apart to reveal the slightest of human figures. The artist taps into her unique views of reality

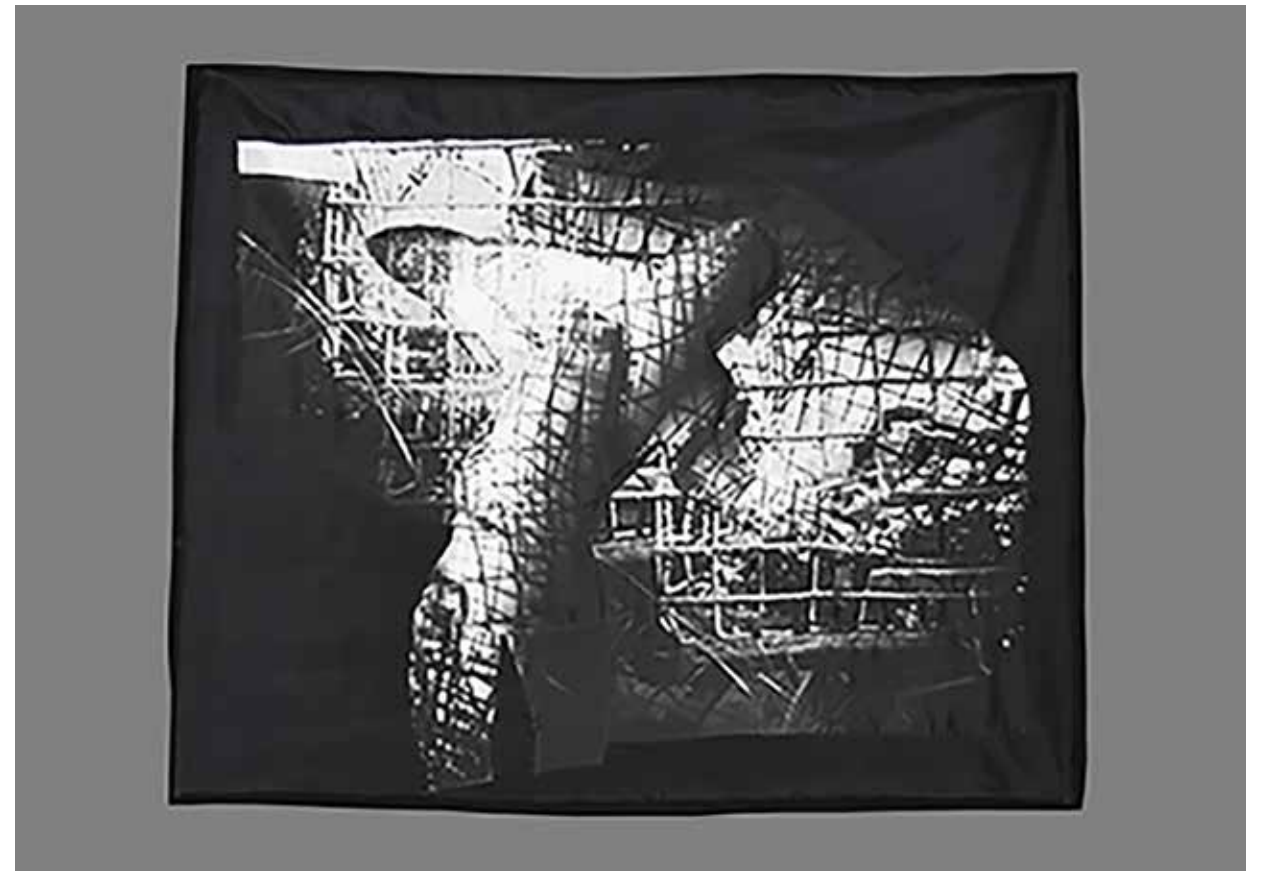
through the mediation of an age-old technique. She applies it skillfully and fittingly to a silk canvas while adding a sense of poetry and the ephemeral through her stitching.

Ruth Tabancay plays with our perception by pushing beyond the limits of what the naked eye can see. Her prints of images taken with a scanning electron microscope reveal the hidden beauty of fibers. Dangerously close to get lost in a virtual world, mediated by aesthetically appealing software, she returns to the material world by adding the slightest touch of embroidery. Moving from the micro to the macro, Tabancay allows the formerly invisible to merge with the touch of her hand. The awesomeness of innovative techniques is counterbalanced by the knowledge of construction. To weave out of materials, to spin from humble fibers, to knot from remnants is the realization of the power of making.

Top: **Alicia Decker** *Crossing Paths* (detail) 2018, cotton canvas, fiber reactive dye, hand-drawn illustration, digital-printed, hand and machine-embroidered, 54" x 42".

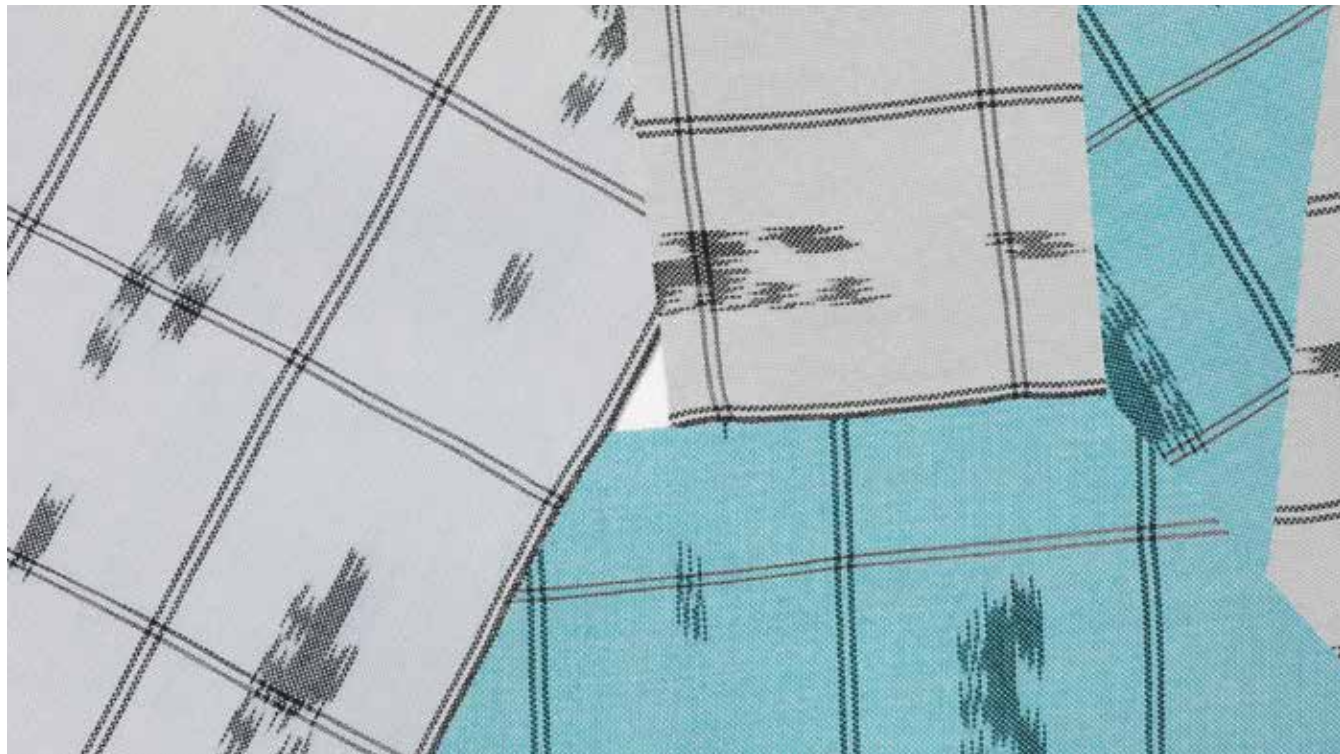
Right page, top: **Anne-Claude Cotty** *Without Within / Caged* 2019, silk, cotton, batting, pinhole-photograph, appliquéd, quilted, 34" x 32".

Right page, bottom: **Ruth Tabancay** *Nylon Knee Highs 156X* (detail) 2018, watercolor paper, embroidery floss, scanned electron micrograph digital print, hand-embroidered, 13" x 16".



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Time and weaving

Andrea Donnelly is fascinated by weaving and the strict laws and rigidity of the loom. She challenges these restrictions by unravelling, de- and then re-constructing her handwoven material. I am reminded of the story of **Penelope** where weaving serves as a metaphor for time. In the Greek myth about the travels of **Odysseus**, his wife Penelope is beleaguered by suitors in his absence. In order to keep the unwanted guests at bay Penelope pretends to weave a shroud for her father and declares that she will only choose a new husband once the shroud is finished. At night, by the light of torches, she unravels the magnificent cloth and eventually gets caught and later betrayed by one of her maids. We learn from this allegory and Donnelly's work that weaving can be more than a production method. It is also a means of slowing down and the experience of time itself.

Top: **Andrea Donnelly Portrait of a Recent Storm Cloud** (detail) 2019, cotton thread, dye, PVA, canvas, hand-woven, ikat-dyed thread, immersion-dyed cloth, cut, reassembled, 56" x 80".

Bottom: **Kirsteen Buchanan Borders That Unite: Melting Maps** (front) 2019, silk chiffon caftan, velvet bra, silk habotai pant, digital-printed, indigo-dyed, 45" x 65". Photo: Aaron Ottis, model: Sydney Bia.

As an antidote to a complicated world and a mesh of virtual reality, a profound need to reconnect to the tangible and the material world seems to grow.

Technical realm

Contrary to popular thought, maps and borders have always been fluid. Borders have changed with the movement of tribes, colonial conquest or neighbors expanding their territory. Historically the borders of countries have always been in flux. This is visualized by the *Melting Maps* project by **Kirsteen Buchanan**. Working in a complex and confident way that utilizes a wide range of techniques, tools and software applications, she takes an innovative yet lighter stance on the current alterations of coastlines and geographical delineations. The fluidity of a chiffon dress illustrates an artistic interpretation of an ever-changing global map.

Conclusion

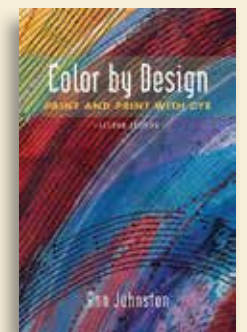
As humans we can cross many borders effortlessly, and even fly to the moon. While we are able to look at the intricacies and see the minutest details of our brains, we are still bound to materiality and our physical limitations. As an antidote to a complicated world and a mesh of virtual reality, a profound need to reconnect to the tangible and the material world seems to grow. The rise in popularity of textiles in the past few years seems to be a rediscovery and an attraction to materials and the act of making. The accessibility of information through the internet has rendered many cultural boundaries in textiles obsolete. There is an ongoing, imminent process of change and cross-fertilization between traditional techniques and new innovative ways of making. Examples include Cad/Cam techniques, 3D printing, laser-cutting, digital photography, and the use of smart materials.

However, as the work of the artists chosen for the *2019 SDA International Exhibition in Print*, emotions, ideas and stories can be expressed in the most mundane materials. Textiles, fiber, and clay have accompanied humans throughout our time on this planet. Whatever shape the future takes, textiles will be a companion for comfort and warmth, a repository for memories.

Thank you to all artists for sharing their inspiring stories and unique, engaging work.

—*Monika Auch has a background in medicine and textile design with a focus on weaving. A hybrid of science and art, she set up Weeflab in Amsterdam to investigate 'The intelligence of the hand'. weeflab.com | monikaauch.nl | stitchyourbrain.com*

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