

A Sense of Place

Title Magazine, February 22, 2012

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Fiber art is difficult to define: from cross-stitching to woven palm fronds, nearly any manually manipulated natural or synthetic material can fall under its banner, and therein lies its openness. A Sense of Place embraces the diverse potential of fiber art to examine the relationship between identity and location. Currently on display at the Philadelphia Art Alliance—and part of the FiberPhiladelphia initiative—the exhibit includes works by eight female textile artists who have created pieces directly connected to a specific locale, either in physicality or in memory.

Upon entering you are confronted by Pat Hickman's *Circumambulate*, a symmetrical progression of "wood teeth" (pieces of preserved wood that result when a tree falls in a river) covered in hog casings. The piece occupies three walls, forcing the viewer to explore the space in order to appreciate the intricate way in which the wood teeth converge upon and explode from the center wall. Wendeanne Ke'aka Stitt's striking collection *Niho Mano* is a modern interpretation of kappa cloth, a traditional Hawaiian fabric made from tree bark. She uses dyes from California to bring intense color to the bark, integrating her current location in the Bay Area with her past in Hawaii.

Ke-Sook Lee's *Green Hammock* is particularly moving: US Army nurses' uniforms are deconstructed and repurposed to form a hammock, from which thin, colorful threads hang to the floor. The piece evokes the care and hard work of war nurses, who help create a safe and caring haven for wounded soldiers, and it also recalls Lee's experience of having lived through the Korean War. It presents the 'aradox of the compassionate female placed in a space of armed conflict—trying to provide comfort and care—and the impossibility of truly doing so while at war. Amy Orr's approach to social commentary is dramatically different but equally engaging. In *House of Cards* Orr uses a myriad of credit cards, gift cards and IDs to create an intricate dollhouse, showing us how the home in the United States has been built on consumerism, and debt in particular. The exhibit also includes work by Marian Bijlanga, Marcia Docter, Barbara Lee Smith and Bhati Ziek.