

Houston Chronicle (TX) - January 17, 2023 - page 25

January 17, 2023 | Houston Chronicle (TX) | Houston, Texas | Page 25

## ART

# Rice's Moody Center has a new free exhibit showcasing touch and feel fiber art

By **Amber Elliott**  
STAFF WRITER

Non-fungible tokens, better known as NFTs, and conversations about art in virtual realities, or web3, have dominated headlines in recent years. For those who haven't fully grasped the digital asset industry, don't worry. You're not alone, and it might not matter anyway.

If "Narrative Threads: Fiber Art Today" is any indication, the future is old school. Rice Universi-

ty's Moody Center for the Arts tapped 22 artists to create more than 40 works for the exhibition now on view through May 13. The survey is almost entirely tactile. Visitors are encouraged to touch and even pass through some of the pieces. Try doing that with an iPhone.

"Why are artists working in a very modern moment using a very historic art form as a medium?" asks Alison Weaver, founding executive director of the



Melissa Phillip/Staff Photographer

**Artist Sagarika Sundaram used felt-making, dyeing and craft techniques to make "Flame of the Forest."**

Moody Center.

Curator Frauke V. Josenhans poses another. "And what is our relationship to textiles and fiber?"

Put simply, fiber art is one of the oldest art forms. Embroidering, felting, knitting, sewing and weaving are often associated with craft, fashion and decorative objects. It's sometimes reduced to domesticity. A flourish for the back-

ground. In that sense, "Narrative Threads" is surpris-

ingly extra. Most of the works have main character energy, as the kids say.

Like many Moody Center exhibitions, "Narrative Threads" begins outside. "The Admirer," a site-specific installation by Austin-based sculptor Orly Genger, cascades in ripples and deep blue waves down the building's front lawn. Using recycled fishing rope and paint, the artist rejects traditional outdoor materials such as steel or bronze. Instead, she in-

**Art continues on D6**



## ART

From page D1

vites the viewer to reconsider the endurance of processes such as knotting and weaving, which are socially categorized “women’s work.”

Inside, Ana María Hernando follows suit. The Argentine native hails from a long line of textile workers. As a teenager, she worked in a textile factory owned by her grandparents. Hernando’s art career began in painting before she swapped canvases for sculpture using textiles as a medium to signal the “invisible work women have done.”

“Cloud” (2018) hangs overhead in delightful twists of tulle and metal. It’s the first time the bird-inspired installation has appeared indoors.

“These are the colors birds love,” she says of the orange and white puffs. “It brings the sky to us and us to the sky.”

On the adjacent wall, more blue fabric spills onto the floor like the train of a ballgown in “We Cannot Weep Without Vibrating the Waters” (2022). The excess celebrates female abundance and the ability to create life despite circumstance.

“It’s an homage to the perseverance of women,” Hernando explains. “No matter what, women keep moving forward.”

A rainbow awaits in the Brown Foundation Gallery. World, an architecture and graphic design studio that designed the exhibition, aimed to create a holistic experience.

“Certain qualities come through in here: intimacy, openness and weaving techniques,” says found-



“Late by Myself,” by Hangama Amiri, is on view at the “Narrative Threads: Fiber Art Today” exhibit in the Moody Center for the Arts at Rice University.

Photos by Melissa Phillip/Staff photographer



“A Little Domestic Waste I” was created by artist Sarah Zapata.

ding partner Alejandro Stein.

Panels of floor-to-ceiling fringe in pink, marigold, green and lilac split the space into two long bands. Visitors

weave through the threads like needles. In there, the artists’ humor and self-reflection abound.

Hangama Amiri’s “Late by Myself” from the se-



Artist Patrick Quarm created “Parallel Index” for the exhibition.

ries “Mirrors and Faces” (2021) depicts her living space and emotional state during the pandemic. An overflowing wine glass and cheese board hangs on chiffon, muslin, cot-

ton, polyester, silk and suede. On a far wall, Qualeasha Wood’s “Madonna and Child” (2021) is a meta self-portrait. The artist illustrates herself as a haloed figure, holding a

### ‘NARRATIVE THREADS: FIBER ART TODAY’

**When:** Through May 13

**Where:** Rice University Moody Center for the Arts, entrance 8

**Details:** Free; moody.rice.edu

book of selfies. Text across the jacquard-woven cotton reads “Black women don’t owe you s—” and “The audacity of Black women to provide all of the content on the Internet but exist beyond the boundaries of your consumption.”

Sagarika Sundaram described her neighboring works as “not precious.” She utilized ancient felt-making, dyeing and craft techniques from India to make “Flame of the Forest” (2022). Wetting the wool and kicking the fabric to create friction — and subsequently, matting — inspired “Passage Along the Edge of the Earth” (2022).

“Touching ‘Flame’ led to the other one that you can walk through,” Sundaram says.

A third gallery, “Drawing With Thread,” hides discreetly within a cave-like space near the Moody Center’s main entrance and exit.

Josenhans hopes that after “Narrative Threads,” visitors will see fiber everywhere. The medium is less ancient than timeless and still relevant today. Colorful, joyful and uplifting, the exhibition is best experienced in real life. Though in 2023, there’s enough shock value (lite) worthy of a social media post, too.

[amber.elliott@chron.com](mailto:amber.elliott@chron.com)