"Uncommon Threads" Shows Convergence of Craft and Art

The exhibition remains open at Seton Hall’s Walsh Gallery through Dec. 11.

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The Seton Hall Walsh Gallery’s current exhibition, “Uncommon Threads,” includes needlework, quilting and crocheting. The idea behind the show is to explore the potential of fabric as an artistic medium and to dispel the notion that traditional forms using fabric are women’s work.

“We didn’t see there to be any reason for craft to be at odds with art,” explained the gallery’s director Jeanne Brasile, who co-curated the current exhibition—open through Dec. 11—with Howard Hurst.

Participating artists hail from Scotland and Illinois as well as closer locales like Brooklyn, Jersey City and Montclair. Many of the pieces are site-specific like “Plants” by Brooklyn-based artist Megan Piontkowski, for which a drywall room was erected in the center of the gallery and adorned with flowerpots and plants hand-stitched out of felt, silk and wool. According to Brasile, the idea was to create a contemplative space. In previous iterations of the work, the plants had simply gone on shelves in the exhibition space; however, the thought was that adding the architectural detail of the drywall would be an interesting complement to the fiber work.

Other works include "Spaghetti," in which fabric scraps shaped like forks, knives and spoons are hung from the ceiling. There’s also "Things Fall Apart," a quilt in which the layers of fabric have a sculptural quality, and "No Mustard," a feathery sculpture of a dog with a sandwich for a head.

Scottish artist Darren Jones’s "Scavenger," composed out of silk and woodstain on concrete, represents a play on notions of masculinity and femininity. While concrete and woodstain are stereotypically male materials, a softer and more feminine orange silk is imposed over them. Silk also happens to be among the strongest materials on Earth, Brasile noted.

Some of the pieces contain overtly political themes. Jersey City artist Doris Cacoilo’s "Tweet Revolution" is a crocheted banner bearing those words, and it’s a depiction of how Iranians used Twitter to communicate during the recent presidential election when the government imposed a media lock-down. The spaces in the crocheting resemble pixels, referring back to the digital format of influential social media.
“These artists are playing with traditional forms but bringing them to a new level,” said Brasile.