

PROTEXT!

When fabric becomes a manifesto

Pia Camil, Otobong Nkanga, Tschabalala Self, Marinella Senatore,
Serapis Maritime Corporation, Vladislav Shapovalov, Güneş Terkol

**Recycled, symbolic, protective, fashionable, democratic:
An exhibition dedicated to the use of textiles as a means of protest.**

curated by **Camilla Mozzato** and **Marta Papini**

24 October 2020 – 14 February 2021

Centro per l'arte contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato

Fabrics protect us from heat and cold, they symbolise traditions and reveal social status, they are produced following traditional processes, the diktats of fast fashion or the logics of recycling, and furnish our homes: fabrics democratically concern everyone, even today.

With the exhibition ***PROTEXT! When fabric becomes a manifesto***, curated by **Camilla Mozzato** and **Marta Papini**, from **24 October 2020** to **14 February 2021**, the **Centro per l'arte contemporanea Luigi Pecci in Prato** explores its role not only in critical debate on **authorship, work, identity, production and environmental change**, but also as a medium par excellence in the **representation of dissent. Banners, pennants, t-shirts, hand-crafted tapestries and quilting** are tools that have given voice to spontaneous protests in the world, and ***PROTEXT!*** investigates how the most **recent generation of artists** considers **the use of fabric** and its different formal settings **as a transgressive artistic practice**.

We follow *a logical thread*, we walk on a *tightrope*, we speak with a *thread of a voice*, we still have a *thread of hope*, all we need is a *thread of light* but we lose the *thread of the conversation*: **the language deriving from textile practices is deeply linked to philosophy, history, literature, and therefore to being human**. In the twentieth century, many artists were introduced to the use of textiles, driven by the wish to experiment but also to recover materials and traditional techniques. In the Seventies, their association with the feminine, domestic and artisan seemed to reduce their artistic value, but instead it encouraged experimentation by **female artists** who turned **textiles into manifestos of emancipation policies**.

Through works by **Pia Camil, Otobong Nkanga, Tschabalala Self, Marinella Senatore, Serapis Maritime Corporation, Vladislav Shapovalov, Güneş Terkol**, the exhibition ***PROTEXT!*** gives

voice to an artistic practice that uses fabric as an instrument capable of channelling and expressing **instances of protest, identity and belonging.**

The exhibition path alternates between **installations, sculptures, pennants, tapestries, drawings and embroideries**, and opens with the **site-specific area** created by the Greek collective **Serapis Maritime Corporation** (Athens, 2014) made up of a large **mural** painted on a **curtain**, which also protrudes **on to the wall**, and a series of **large cushions** created with **recycled materials** resting on the ground. The **images** used, reproduced in a language covering **art, fashion and design**, come from the archives of **Serapis** and of **Manteco**, and reference humans and their physical relationship to work.

It continues with *Bara, Bara, Bara* and *Vicky's Blue Jeans Hammock*, a **textile sculpture** created by **Pia Camil** (Mexico City, 1980) with **second hand t-shirts and jeans**: garments produced in Latin America for the United States, which return to their places of origin following the **unjust routes of migration and global commerce**. In the markets of her country the artist searches for the most iconic symbols of our time: **old political slogans, adverts, posters** of the most recent street protests. The outcome is a **patchwork of messages**, the result of globalisation and the manifesto of its propaganda, a **snapshot of contemporary collective consciousness**.

Otobong Nkanga (Kano, Nigeria, 1974) presents the **tapestries** *The Leftovers, Infinite Yield, In Pursuit of Bling* and *Steel to Rust – Meltdown* together with an installation of the same name, in a set designed with the artist for the exhibition. Her research explores social and topographic changes, highlighting the **historical impact and collective memory of the relationship between Humans and Nature**. In her works, everything is in the process of being analysed: terrestrial stratigraphies, dissected plants, and *posthuman* versions of people.

The work by **Vladislav Shapovalov** (Rostov on Don, Russia, 1981), *Flags*, stems from the artist's research at the Documentation Centre of the Chamber of Labour in **Biella**, a city with a rich industrial history linked to wool manufacturing, in many ways similar to that of Prato. In a **collection of flags** used in workers' demonstrations at textile factories from the nineteenth-century to the present day, the artist finds two of particular interest, made up of **lots of small pieces of fabric embroidered with the names of women – the names of the workers – and sewn together**. Shapovalov's work offers a rare testimony of a group of **workers presented as active individuals**, and captures the **political parabola of Italy**, from fascism to the workers' movement of the Sixties/Seventies, with women playing the leading roles.

In her works, **Güneş Terkol** (Ankara, 1981) takes inspiration from the surrounding context, collecting materials and stories that interweave in her **tapestries, videos, sketches and musical compositions**. In general, **women** play the leading roles in her stories, **adapting or refusing to adapt** to the social and cultural transformations of contemporary Turkey. The act of **sewing** becomes

an **act of resistance** narrating voices that would otherwise go unheard. In the exhibition we find some of her **embroideries on gauze** in a light and floating installation, together with *Dreams on the River* and *Desire Passed by Land*, **flags** created during a **participatory workshop**. During the exhibition, the artist will produce a new flag together with a group of women involved with the “La Nara” Anti-Violence Centre.

The exhibition continues with the works of **Marinella Senatore** (Cava de' Tirreni, Italy, 1977): **highly colourful hand-embroidered banners** from the series *Forms of protest: memory and celebration* and **50 drawings** from the series *It's Time to Go Back to Street*, in part **produced for the Centro Pecci**. The artist explores **numerous aspects of the topic of protest** in different geographic contexts, and the **manners and systems of community aggregation**: symbols like the banner for ceremonies in South Italy, South American political carnivals, the hand-painted banners of Anglo-Saxon workers, and the performing and musical arts as a means of expressing protests.

Tschabalala Self (New York City, 1990) constructs **deliberately exaggerated representations linked to images of black female bodies** using a combination of **highly colourful materials that are sewn, printed and painted**, making reference to artisan artistic traditions. One of the most famous artists of recent generations, who grew up watching her mother sew, presents some iconic works in this exhibition: **fabrics recovered** from shops in Harlem, the **three-dimensional nature** of her works, and the **voyeurism** sparked by the black female body manage to disorient the viewer, but pave the way for **new methods of relating** to others.

The exhibition concludes with **a room dedicated to worships, residences and events**, which, during the exhibition, will foster the investigation into the use of fabrics to express dissent. The first event is by the Parisian duo, **About A Worker (Kim Hou and Paul Boulenger)**, who offer **those working in fashion** the possibility to unveil their vision of the sector through the design of a collection. The duo have worked in **contexts where fashion has profound social, economic and environmental impacts**, contributing to the sharing of knowledge between workers and factories. Following a residence carried out in collaboration with Lottozero Textile Laboratories, About A Worker will present a special collection at the Centro Pecci created in a museum during a participatory workshop, with the support of Manteco and in collaboration with Istituto Marangoni Firenze; from 2 November, some of the most iconic works by About A Worker will be on view in a retrospective exhibition in Lottozero's Kunsthalle. This will be followed by the workshop **Canedicoda**, created in collaboration with Dynamo Camp.

For the full duration of the exhibition there will be an accompanying **rich public programme** with workshops, talks and residences carried out in collaboration with the artists and local organisations.

PROTEXT! When fabric becomes a manifesto is accompanied by a **Nero Editions** publication in **two volumes**: the exhibition **catalogue** with a critical text by the curators **Camilla Mozzato** and **Marta**

Papini, interviews with the artists, biographies and photographs of the works, and a **second volume**, an **artist's book** by **Marinella Senatore**, introduced by **Cristiana Perrella**, Director of the Centro Pecci.

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