



Daisy Patton, "Mithra Ratne", 23" Diameter Embroidery, 2016

Daisy Patton: "Put Me Back Like They Found Me"

Opening Reception: Thursday, March 5th from 4:00-7:00pm
Conversation with the Artist & Curator Simon Zalkind at 5:30pm

"I really don't want to sue. I just want them to put me back like they found me."
 —Valerie Cliett, sterilized against her will at age 23 after giving birth to her son

"Put Me Back Like They Found Me" centers the stories of female survivors of horrific, regular practices of forced sterilization in the US. I embroider the portraits of survivors as a nod to domestic labor, "women's work," and thread as a metaphor for life. For living survivors, the work is a collaboration between the women and myself; each portrait is designed to contain a chosen element that has significance in their lives. Hospital gowns display painted text that focus on various survivors and the sufferings they have endured. It is truly impossible to understand the tremendous pain and violation forced upon to so many people at the hands of governments, institutions, and doctors in the name of progress and white supremacy. We as a society owe these survivors and their memories our care and demand for justice by finally ending these cruel violations for present and future generations.

Hours: Monday-Friday from 9:00am-5:00pm

Free and Open to the Public
 Art Gallery at the Fulginiti Pavilion
 13080 E. 19th Ave. Aurora, CO 80045
 303.724.3994

Cover Image: Daisy Patton, "Melvina Hernandez", 23" Diameter Embroidery, 2016

Map and directions at: www.coloradobioethics.org

Monday April 6th

Documentary Film Screening: No más bebés
 Film by Renee Tajima-Peña and directed by Virginia Espino



Center for Bioethics and Humanities
 UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS**

Daisy Patton

"Put Me Back Like They Found Me"



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“I don’t want it. I don’t approve of it, sir. I don’t want a sterilize operation.... Let me go home, see if I get along alright. Have mercy on me and let me do that.”

- A woman pleading with the eugenics board, 1945

A few years ago a colleague suggested that I arrange a studio visit with Daisy Patton who was, at that time, one of the resident artists at RedLine – a major contemporary art center and “incubator” in Denver. Daisy was working on a series of paintings derived from old family photos and anonymous snapshots. An old, anonymous photograph is a powerful memento mori. Because we don’t know the subjects we are not distracted by memories of the particular and are drawn instead, to what the picture says about people, and by extension, about the human condition. This is, in part, what suffuses old family snapshots with such elegiac poignancy: They show us in our most intimate vulnerability. Daisy continues to mine this mesmerizing source in many of her recent paintings. I thought her work was terrific and I was thrilled to have discovered her. Hah! One could no more “discover” Daisy Patton than one could discover an earthquake whose epicenter was in one’s immediate neighborhood. Everyone feels it and the effects ripple out into the surrounding world. Lots of people, it turns out, seemed to have “discovered” Daisy Patton.

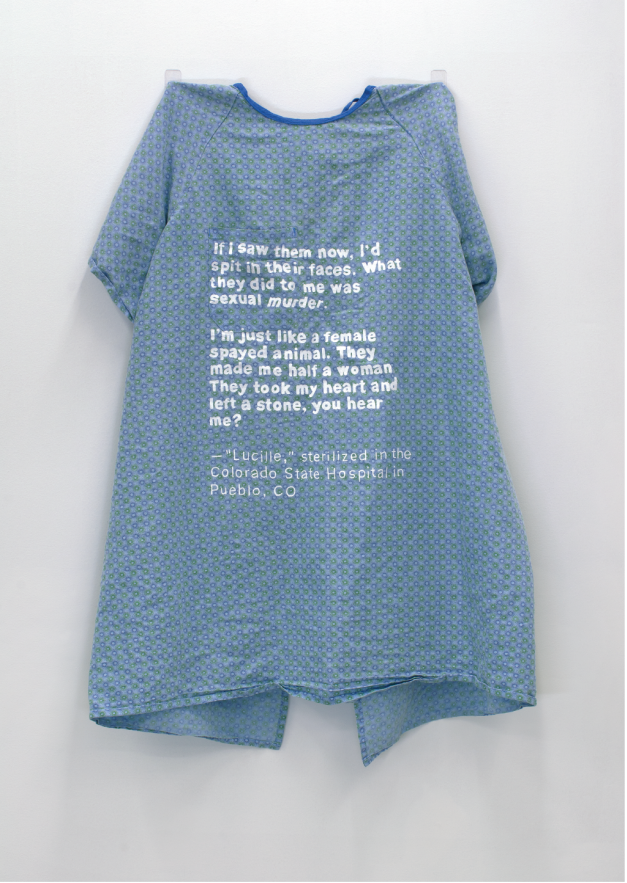
The works that comprise this exhibition – “Put Me Back Like They Found Me” – derive from very different, though not entirely unrelated sources than the work with which Patton

had been so single-mindedly engaged. This series, in its urgency and impact, focuses on the targeted gender and race-related trauma inflicted on women through forced reproductive sterilization. This horrific practice has its origins in the eugenics movement – itself an outgrowth of Social Darwinism – that gained wide traction in late 19th century America and served as a model for the state-sponsored methods of Nazi Germany in its determination to eliminate entire populations of “undesirables.” Apart from the Nazi policy of forced sterilization, in many ghettos and slave-labor camps, the Germans instituted a policy of compulsory abortion. Ultimately, however, abortion ceased to be an option because pregnancy automatically sentenced a woman to execution.

For an artist to address the nightmare of this lethal strategy of agony and ruin is simultaneously an extraordinary challenge and an opportunity. Images of atrocity have become commonplace, and many have argued that we have become inured to depictions of cruelty – our perception of reality eroded by the daily, camera-mediated barrage of such images. I can think of very few artists who, in their attempt to convey the reality of suffering inflicted upon others, are able to avoid successfully either the banalization of their subject or a descent into a kind

of shrill moralizing. Those postures may be tempting to embrace but they do not serve to illuminate or affectively transmit the ungraspable trauma of the original event. What seems to be required is the kind of “witnessing” that is more than an identification with “victimhood” but which works through and beyond victimhood to catalyze the continuity of a community of memory that can tolerate the absence of closure – the abyss that will never be bridged. Patton highlights the faces and amplifies the voices, as well as gives historical context to the women who endured the horror of forced sterilization in a strategy that evidences a distinct awareness of the limitations of a realist approach. She retains representational armatures (portraiture) while eschewing conventional modes of representation. Patton’s strategies tell the story while also telling the story of the telling of the story.

This body of work connects Patton to a number of art historical themes and movements. Her decision to use embroidery as the medium through which to portray her subjects evidences a conscious linkage on Patton’s part to the history of a domestic handicraft that has always been associated with women’s work, and as such, not considered “high” or “fine” art. The aesthetic hierarchy that privileges certain forms of art over others based on gender associations has historically devalued “women’s work” specifically because it was associated with the domestic and the “feminine.” However, in the past few decades, feminist artists (Judy Chicago, Faith Ringgold, and Elaine Reichek come to mind immediately) have sought to resurrect women’s craft and decorative art as a viable artistic means to express female experience, thereby pointing to its political and subversive potential. A domestic skill traditionally used as a way for women to make their home more “charming” could now be reclaimed as an expression of political resistance and as testimony to the grim realities of



“Lucille” Quote, 36x30, Painting on Worn Hospital Gown, 2019

many women’s lives. Patton is clearly aware of this art-historical legacy, and her embroidered portraits offer fresh confirmation of its enduring power and potency.

In a cruelly ironic twist – because their role as potential mothers has been violently stolen from them – the women in Patton’s embroidered portraits are also associated with the history of images of the maternal. The iconography of maternity in art and visual culture from the Venuses of the Stone Age to the “bad girls” of the postfeminist era is fused with symbols of and metaphors for fecundity, creativity, nurturance, and intimate bonding. The infant that can never be is a poignantly spectral presence in these portraits. As feminists active during the 1970s would have claimed it, it is on the battlefield of motherhood that the patriarchal edifice was constructed.

One of the most significant developments in the art world of the past fifty years has been the rise to prominence of art made by and about minority and/or marginalized peoples. Art that addresses issues of racial identity, sexual orientation, and gender politics may still appear “transgressive” to many people but it has formed a secure alliance with the avant-garde. The result, for those of us who are “art-workers”, is that minority art has become one of our major concerns. The concern here is that the “revolutionary” in art can easily slide into the denunciatory, ignoring the affirmative. Patton, in this project brilliantly integrates both those possibilities. Through open-eyed observation, integrated experience, intense participation with her subjects and painstaking research she is able to expose and “denounce” the historical phenomena of forced sterilization. Ultimately, Patton’s project is, I believe, an intensely affirmative one. She reconstructs and revitalizes the voices, faces, the lived experience and the humanity to a

handful of these women and by extension to all of those who suffered similarly. Patton’s art is revolutionary art as well – its provenance is not due to any arbitrary or isolated decree but is a consequence of particular historic events that unfold in particular moments in time. I think Patton is very aware of the historically encompassing aspect of her project.

I am so grateful to Daisy Patton for her willingness to allow me to bring this work into a conventional exhibition space – one however whose primary focus is on bio-ethical issues. It is a perfect fit. I am also aware that this exhibition will be on view during Holocaust Awareness Month – another auspicious connection for those who are willing to make it. Throughout the process of organizing this exhibition, my chats with Daisy were highlights and her capacity to maintain the kind of affirmative cheer that she radiates in the midst of working so personally and intensely with such distressing material was a welcome antidote to the gloom that on occasion threatened to overtake me. As always, Dr. Tess Jones expertly “midwived” this project to its fruition. Many thanks to K Contemporary Gallery for sponsoring this publication.

Simon Zalkind, Exhibitions Curator
February 2020



(Left) "Maria Hurtado", 23” Diameter Embroidery, 2018



(Right) "Lucille", 23” Diameter Embroidery, 2018