

ROSEMARY MAYER

*RODS BENT INTO BOWS
FABRIC SCULPTURES AND
DRAWINGS, 1972-1973*

INTRODUCTION

Rosemary Mayer (1943-2014) was a significant figure in the New York art scene beginning in the late 1960s and throughout the seventies and eighties.

A prolific artist and writer as well as active participant in feminist artistic discourses, Mayer was intimately involved within a close-knit network of fellow artists, scholars and gallerists, including artist Adrian Piper; her sister and poet Bernadette Mayer; former spouse and artist Vito Acconci; artist Ree Morton; writer, art critic and curator Lawrence Alloway, and many others.

Mayer was also a writer and art critic and was engaged in numerous art writing, literary, and publishing projects throughout her career. In addition to the text that accompanied or was integrated into much of her work, she translated *Pontormo's Diary*, a 16th century Italian Mannerist artist's diary, which was published with a catalogue of her work. She produced an issue of *Art Rite*, the New York-based proto-punk zine that defined postconceptualism and contributed to several issues of *0 to 9*, a journal of experimental art and writing edited by Bernadette Mayer and Vito Acconci. In her later years as an art professor, she worked on projects illustrating epics, such as *Beowulf* and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Mayer kept a journal for most of her life, which elucidates the intricate relationships she had with her cohort and provides insight into her art-making and writing projects.

In 1972, Mayer, along with 19 other women artists, founded A.L.R. Gallery on Wooster St., Manhattan: the first nonprofit, artist-directed and maintained gallery for women artists in the United States. With the purpose of showcasing and supporting work by women in order to change the prevalent attitudes towards women artists, A.L.R. Gallery exhibited a wide range of artistic styles and provided artist fellowships and community art programs. Rather than constituting an aesthetic movement, the gallery became a platform for a diverse range of art processes, materials, and voices. Mayer participated in the inaugural exhibition with half of the gallery's members, including Nancy Spero and Judith Bernstein, and opened a solo exhibition there in 1973.

Between 1969 and 1973, Mayer's art developed from primarily text-based works influenced by conceptual art into sculptures primarily using fabric. Her 1971 series, *Veils*, which no longer exists, incorporated layers of colored tricot and nylon painted with watercolor or oil paint. Her 1972-73 work, *The Catherines*, and other sculptures named after individual or groups of women, are wood-and-textile sculptures consisting of translucent swathes of colorful fabrics, evocative of the visceral and feminine, as well as the historical women after which they are named. The works recalled myth and history in a manner radically distinct from the fashion of minimalist male artists, who favored durable materials such as steel and concrete. Mayer was also influenced by the work of Jacopo da Pontormo and other Italian Mannerist painters, particularly their use of color, as well as the overall qualities of fragility and unease that pervades their work.

Although she is mostly known for her billowing fabric sculptures, Mayer's oeuvre extends far beyond these signature works. Between 1977 and 1982, Mayer created works that explored site-specificity, temporality and community involvement, which she called "Temporary Monuments".

Works such as *Some Days in April* (1978) broached notions of memorializing, transience and myth following the deaths of her parents and friend Ree Morton, who had been born and died in the month of April, respectively. Tying helium-filled balloons -a motif used by Mayer to indicate the grasping of fleeting time- with ribbons and inscribing them with emblematic names of spring flowers, numbers and stars, Mayer tethered them onto wooden stakes in a field during a day in April.

In 1977, Mayer produced a work called *Spell*, a public art project funded by the Creative Arts Public Service grant from the New York State Council featuring large weather balloons to celebrate the opening of a flower market in Jamaica, Queens. The balloons had words written on them evoking the return of spring. The ephemeral work, which relied on collective memory, social engagement and site specificity for its activation,

contributed to a shift in contemporary notions of public art. Her 1979 series, *Snow People*, was another temporary installation, made of snow, similarly dedicated to community members and their forgotten presence. Naming each sculpture after common names, the snow figures were anti-monuments in their fragility, yet reflective of the mutability of time. During the early 1980s, Mayer continued experimenting with her *Temporary Monuments* series, producing drawings for festive tents that were never realized and creating a series of works called *Ghosts*, ephemeral sculptures made out of materials such as plastic, glassine, and ribbons. (Reenactments of these were exhibited at Kunsthalle Basel early this year). She went on to revisit her interest in the classics and art history, investigating the forms of classical Greek vases and Chinese ceramics to produce a series of vessels, large scale sculptures made of wood, cheesecloth, and rabbit skin glue.

At the beginning of the 1990s, she became more focused on teaching art, and this informed her last major body of work. For the last fifteen years of her life, she worked on a series of watercolor illustrations of epic literature, as well as illustrations of the history of the women of the Roman empire. These projects brought together her lifelong investigation of the relationship between text and image, and her interest in the history of women.

Throughout her artistic career, Mayer's work was exhibited at numerous alternative art spaces in New York, including The Clocktower, Sculpture Center and Franklin Furnace, as well as several university galleries. In 2016, Southfirst Gallery in Brooklyn held a major exhibition of her work, igniting a renewed interest in her work. In 2017, the Museum of Modern Art acquired some of Mayer's drawings and artist books from the 1970s. Her work is currently on view in a group exhibition, *Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc.*, curated by Nick Mauss at Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland. Mayer's work will be exhibited in a solo exhibition for the first time in Europe at ChertLüdde in 2020, and another a solo exhibition at the Swiss Institute, New York in 2021.

Rosemary Mayer

Rods Bent Into Bows: Fabric Sculptures and Drawings, 1972-1973

Solo exhibition

ChertLüdde, Berlin

4 September – 31 October 2020

Rods Bent Into Bows – Fabric Sculptures and Drawings 1972-1973 is the first solo exhibition of Rosemary Mayer (b.1943, New York – 2014) in Europe. The title takes its name from notes found on one of Mayer's sketches, one of many drawings she made for the planning and documenting of her sculptures. This exhibition is the first time since the 1970s that much of this work is being shown and includes some drawings which will be on display for the first time. The show focuses on a critical point in her production, 1972–1973, during which Mayer actualized her fabric sculptures and related drawings, a body of work for which she is most known.

Between 1969 and 1973, Mayer's art developed from conceptual works, including abstract studies of color, into sculptures experimenting with the medium of fabric and its mutable possibilities of form. She began working with fabric in 1970, initially by deconstructing paintings, removing the canvas from stretchers and exploring the possibilities of canvas on its own. By 1972 she was working with various fabrics, determining new combinations and modes of display. *Balancing* (1972) epitomizes this important period of experimentation. It is composed of two bent acrylic rods, suspended by cords to create sail-like shapes upon which Mayer has draped and attached fabric in shades of pink.

In an unpublished article from 1973, Mayer explains her attraction to the material: "Like liquids and natural phenomenon, fabric too is subject to gravity and natural forces. Its forms are accidental and inevitable. Like waves in water or leaves on trees, in reality fabric forms are never the same. Only when reproduced in a two dimensional medium can fabric forms be seen still and definite. Fabric is a man-made substance which shares the visual characteristics of natural phenomena." (*1)

By 1973, she had further developed her practice formally and conceptually. Her 1973 work, *Hroswitha* was named after the medieval German poet and dramatist, reflecting her growing interest in various historical women who became the inspiration for a series of sculptures (*2). These works consist of translucent swathes of colorful fabrics – silks, cheesecloths, and nylons – adhered to a largely concealed wooden structure. Through the use of bent wooden bows, these works move away from the wall and project into space, as well as indicate a symbolic departure from painting.

These works evoke myth and history in a manner radically distinct from the approach of minimalist male artists, who favored durable materials such as steel and concrete. In the employment of draped, layered, and suspended fabric, Mayer implicates the visceral and the unseen, or, in her words, a "presence caught in thin veils, films of color on color." Through her historical evocations and use of traditionally feminine materials, Mayer shines new light upon these overlooked women, while inserting herself into a historically male tradition of commemoration and monument-making.

Her fascination with the history of women was informed by her involvement in a feminist consciousness-raising group as well as A.I.R. Gallery (*3), the first artist- directed and maintained gallery for and by women artists in the United States. In 1972, Mayer, along with 19 other artists, founded the space as a platform for artistic opportunity and inclusivity, during a period dominated by male artists. Mayer participated in the inaugural exhibition (*4) and had a solo show there the next year. *Rods Bent Into Bows* includes archival documentation of this seminal exhibition, which included three of her sculptures: *Hroswitha* (1973), *Galla Placidia* (1973), *The Catherines* (1973).

Drawings hold a significant place in Mayer's oeuvre as expressions of inspiration, meticulous studies of shape and color, as well as precise renderings of her sculptures. *Rods Bent into Bows* includes several of Mayer's drawings, many of them depicting sculptures that are now lost, and a series called *Endless Work* (1972),

envisioned for an installation at A.I.R. Gallery. The drawings reflect her ongoing exploration of the tension between painting and sculpture. In her 1972 artist statement, Mayer details the relationship of drawings to permanence, "Drawings as permanent records, reminders for small spaces."

The exhibition is realized in close collaboration with the Estate of Rosemary Mayer, New York. We would like to thank James Walsh and Amanda Friedman for their indispensable help throughout the process.

Notes:

*1

The article was dedicated to the work of Morris Louis, specifically his series of works *The Veils*.

*2

Mayer's works referencing historical woman include the following, as described by her:

Hroswitha, 1973: "The title refers to Hroswitha, a German Latin poet of Gandersheim in Saxony. The nuns of Hroswitha's convent performed her plays for the court of Theophano (of Byzantium) and Otto I, c. 980. Hroswitha originated the themes of Faust and Romeo and Juliet."

Galla Placidia, 1973: Galla Placidia is the name of a Roman empress, who was born into nepotism as the daughter of an emperor and was involved in political strategizing and arrangements her whole life. After short marriages to a Visigothic king and the Roman co-emperor Constantius III, the empress became the virtual ruler of the western world for 12 years as regent for her young son Valentinian III. Mayer wrote, "The title refers to Galla Placidia, who from 425 A.D. until her death in 450, ruled the Western Roman Empire, from Rome and later Ravenna, for her incompetent son Valentinian III, the last more or less legitimate Emperor of the West."

The Catherines, 1973: "The title refers to the many Catherines in recorded history, including: Catherine Sforza, Lady of Forli and Imola, who was a rival of Lorenzo dei Medici for power in Tuscany, c. 1475; Catherine dei Medici, Queen of France, who ruled during the minorities of her many sons until her death in 1589; Catherine of Aragon, Queen of England, who is considered the cause of Henry VIII's conversion of England to Protestantism; Catherine Cornaro, a Venetian noblewoman known for her beauty, who ruled as Queen of Cyprus from 1473 to 1489; Catherine I of Russia, born into a family of servants, who ruled Russia after the death of her husband, Peter the Great; Catherine II the Great, Empress of Russia from 1762 until her death in 1796, who was responsible for much of the expansion of Russia; Catherine of Sienna, a fourteenth century mystic and author of religious dialogues and treatises, who brought about the return of the Pope to Rome and was influential during the Great Schism."

Other sculptures by Mayer inspired by historic women included: *Hypsipyle*, 1973: Hypsipyle is the name of a mythological Greek princess, who becomes queen of Lemnos after the women of the city, upon Aphrodite's scheming, killed all the men on their island except Hypsipyle's father, who she saves by helping him escape unto sea. Variations of the tale exist in several accounts, including: the 3rd century BC Argonautica by Apollonius of Rhodes, the 1st century AD Argonautica by Latin poet Valerius Flaccus, and 1st/2nd AD Greek mythographer Apollodorus. *Hypatia*, 1972: Hypatia was a Greek philosopher, astronomer and mathematician who lived from ca. 350- 415 AD.

*3

A.I.R. Gallery founding members: Dotty Attie, Judith Bernstein, Blythe Bohnen, Maude Boltz, Rachel bas-Cohain, Agnes Denes, Daria Dorosh, Loretta Dunkelman, Mary Grigoriadis, Harmony Hammond, Laurace James, Nancy Kitchell, Louise Kramer, Anne Healy, Rosemary Mayer, Patsy Norvell, Howardena Pindell, Nancy Spero, Susan Williams, Barbara Zucker.

*4

A.I.R. Gallery inaugural exhibition, with: Judith Bernstein, Maude Boltz, Rachel bas-Cohain, Daria Dorosh, Loretta Dunkelman, Laurace James, Nancy Kitchell, Rosemary Mayer, Patsy Norvell, Nancy Spero.



Balancing, 1972
Rayons, cheesecloth, cord, and acrylic rods
320 × 275 × 10 cm



One of the comparatively minimal fabric works by Mayer, *Balancing* is a sculpture consisting of two suspended bent rods, upon which draped fabric in shades of fleshy tones fold and hang. The curved shape of the rods, weighed down by the fabric, give the impression of a balancing scale.

In May 1972 Mayer creates *Balancing*, one of only two extant sculptures from this year.

At one point, the work had been titled *Sails*, and the drawing called *Abacadabra Sail Boat*, dated in April 1972, seems to be a preliminary sketch for this. This seems to be the first time Mayer incorporated rods to create an armature for draping fabric, in this case hollow plastic rods, and it illustrates the growing complexity with which she combines various materials and her ongoing experimentation with finding new ways to hang fabric from the wall.





Abracadabra Sailboat, 1972
Colored pencil and graphite on paper
27.9 × 35 cm

Abracadabra Sailboat, 1972
Colored pencil and graphite on paper
27.9 x 35 cm





Hroswitha, 1973

Flannel, rayon, nylon netting, fiberglass

rayon, wood, acrylic paint

295 x 175 x 28 cm

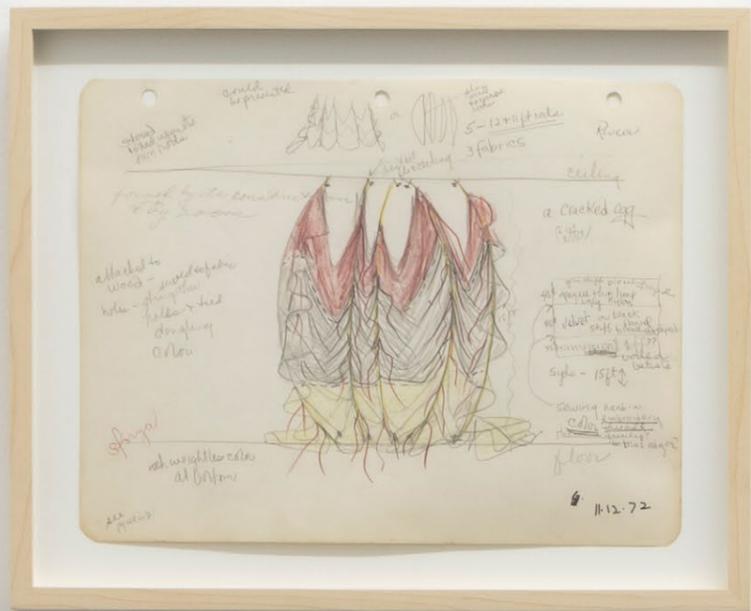
Hroswitha is a large, sweeping fabric sculpture that hangs like a curtain from the ceiling. Richly hued in scarlet, black, and trimmed in gold and red, the work inevitably evokes the theatrical stage. Mayer wrote, "The title refers to Hroswitha, a German Latin poet of Gandersheim in Saxony. The nuns of Hroswitha's convent performed her plays for the court of Theophano (of Byzantium) and Otto I, c. 980. Hroswitha originated the themes of Faust and Romeo and Juliet."



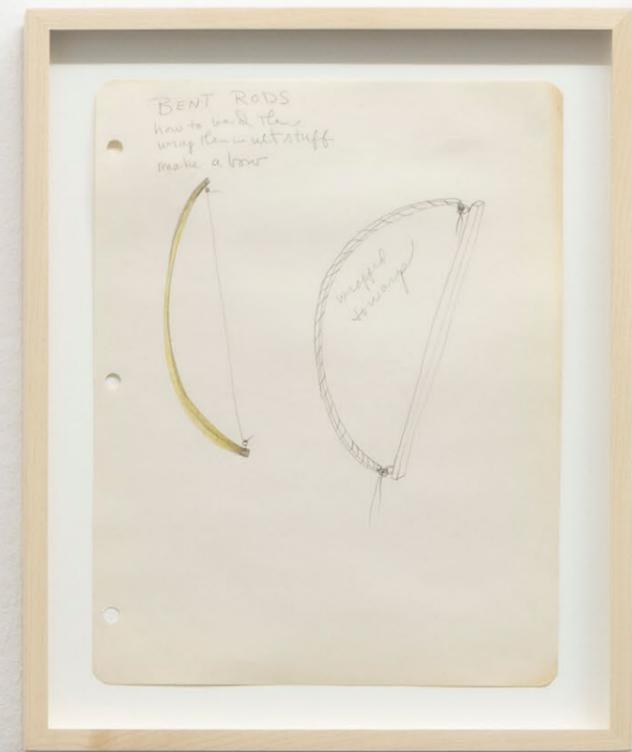


top:
Rosemary Mayer with *Hroswitha*, 1973

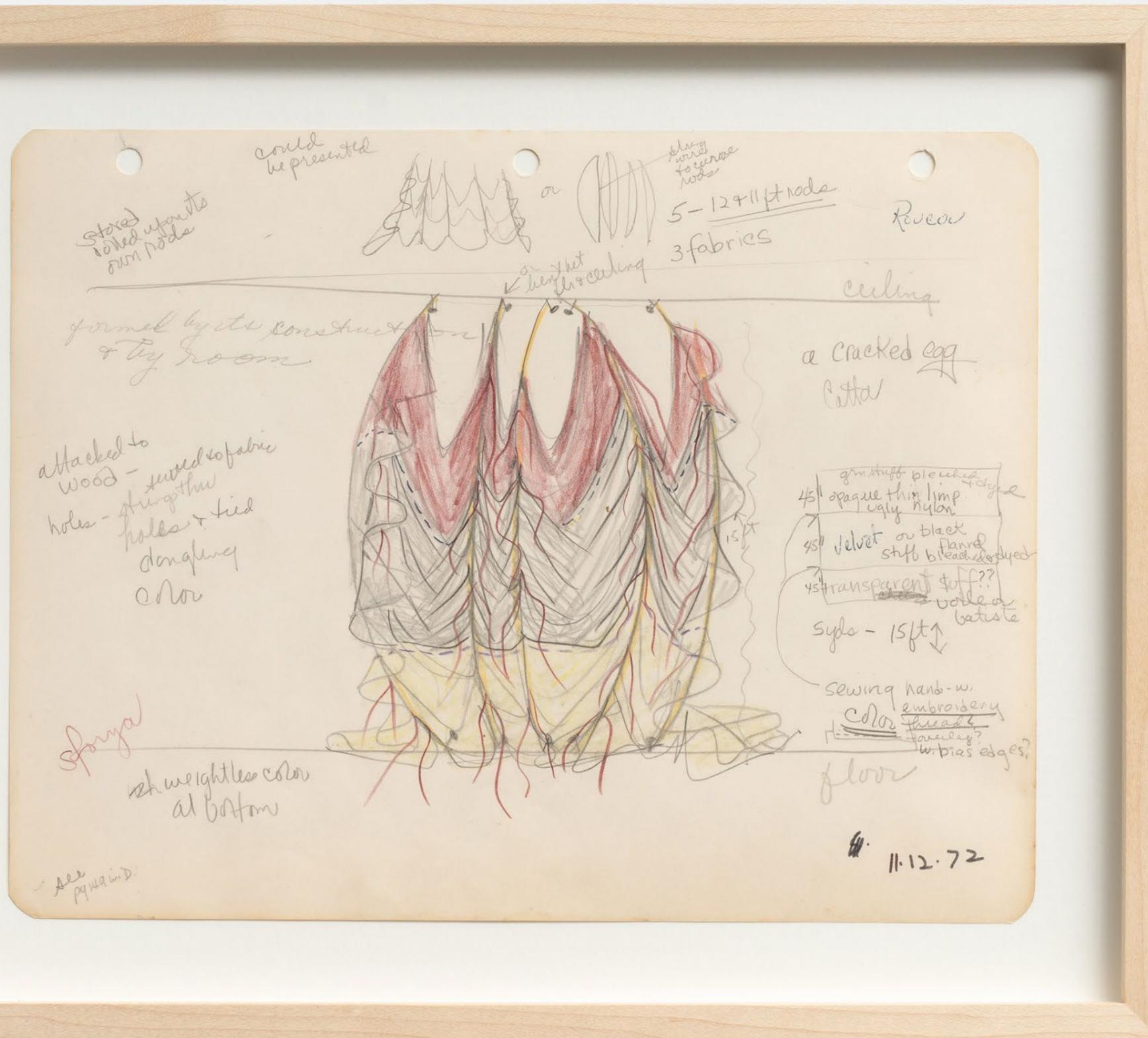




Study for Hroswitha, 1972
 Colored pencil and graphite on paper
 21.6 × 28.1 cm



Bent Rods, 1972
 Colored pencil and graphite on paper
 28.1 × 21.6 cm





Installation view

De Medici, 1972
Colored pencil and graphite on paper
43.1 × 35.5 cm



De Medici, February 1972
Rayons, lace, nettings and cords
305 x 244 cm
Nonextant work



The title references the famous Italian noble family, known in part for its patronage of the arts. During this year, Mayer begins to research various royal families. She fills her notebooks with their history and family trees.

In a letter to her friend Clara she writes about her fascination, which combines her interest in historic women and art history,

“I’ve [sic] gotten fascinated with Renaissance Italy and the beginnings of art as something other than craft. Also the women in the Medici family were fascinating. Then there is Cristine de Pisan who lived in France in the 1300s and wrote feminist manifestos along with history and poetry and lots of other ladies.”

In this period she furthers the development of a coordinated practice of drawing and making sculpture. In 1971 she made drawings of imaginary fabric works, seemingly impossible to actualize. In 1972 she began to work on drawings of her finished sculptures. Other drawings related to sculpture include diagrams and studies in order to decode the construction of the sculpture and provide guides for installing it. (Her notes indicate that she also made three-dimensional models, and one still exists for the work *Balancing*.)

Net Section, 1972
Colored pencil and graphite on paper
35.5 × 43.1 cm





Net Section, 1972
Fiberglass, nylon, rayon,
cheesecloth, paint, and ribbon
335 x 400 cm
Nonextant work

The work, which does not exist today, is one of several sculptures made in the spring of 1972.

Net Section articulates Mayer's experimentation with new ways of using rope and cords, in order to drape fabric on the wall. This particular work mimics the threading of a spiderweb, and an excerpt from her journal appears to sketch a plan for the sculpture:

NEXT STARS TENTS LAUNDRY

Pulled diagonal on wall

All drapery crushed under strings like spiderweb tent



Untitled, 1972
Colored pencil and graphite on paper
35.5 × 43.1 cm



Installation view



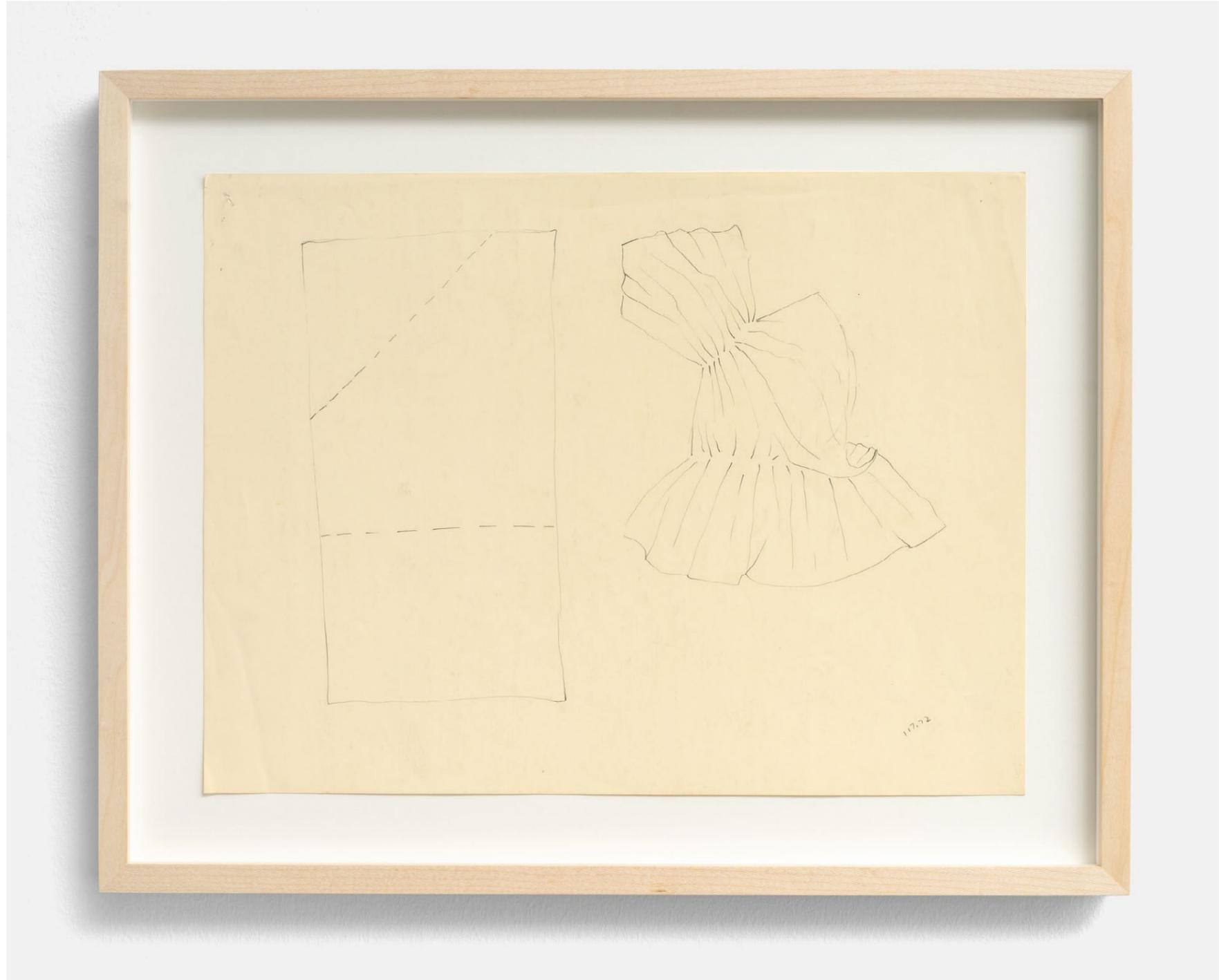
Study for Hypatia, 1972
Graphite on paper
35.5 × 27.9 cm



Study for Hypatia, 1972
Graphite on paper
35.5 × 27.9 cm



Study for Hypatia, 1972
Graphite on paper
27.9 × 35.5 cm



Study for Hypatia, 1972
Graphite on paper
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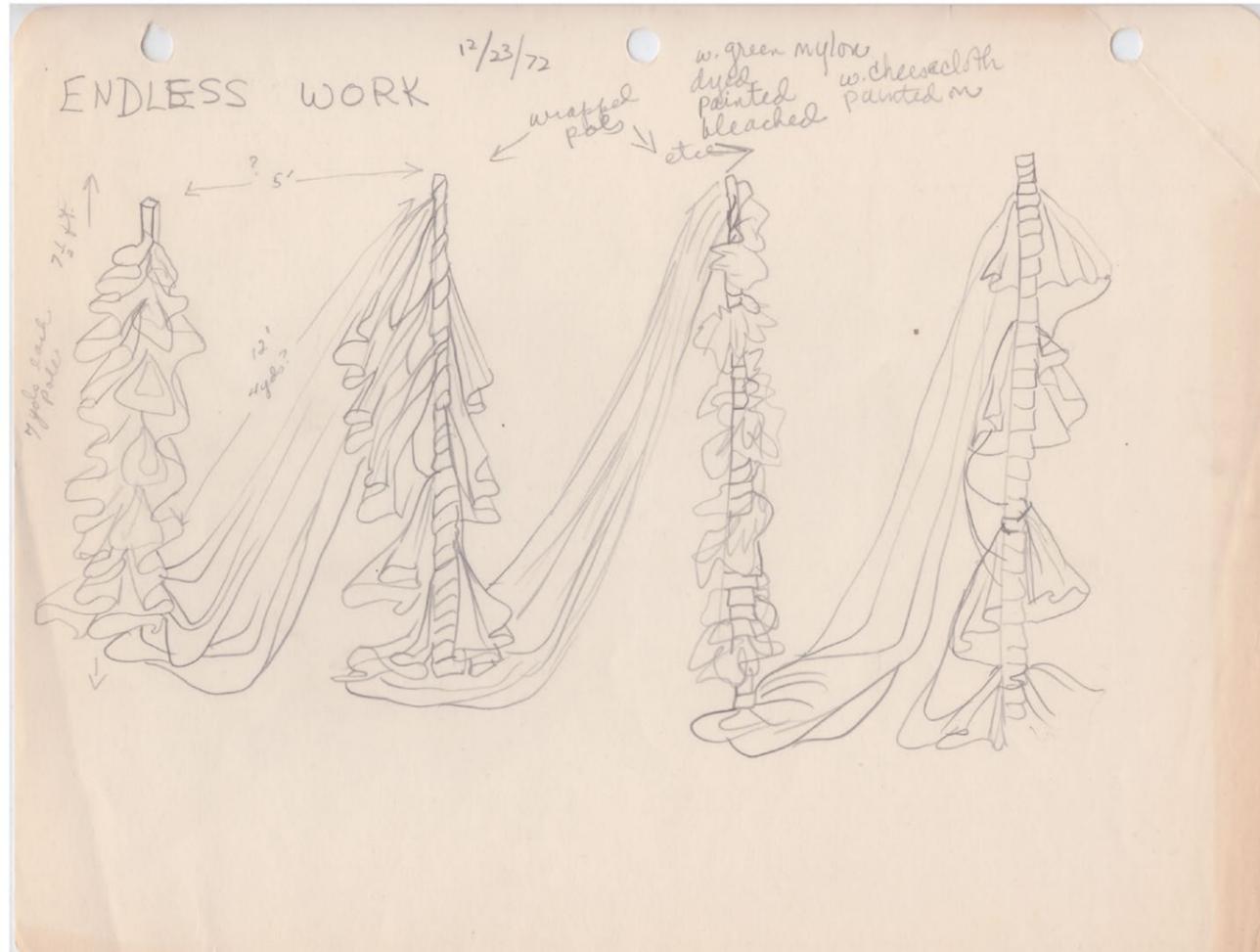


Hypatia, 1972
Satin, cheesecloth, rope, and wire
290 x 185 cm
Nonextant work

Hypatia was shown in the inaugural exhibition of A.I.R. Gallery in 1972. In her journal, she wrote, "I'm in the women's gallery—hope it works—I feel full of possibilities."

During this period, she maps out ideas for sculptures in her journal, "tents spider webs stars flowers ravines curtains light windows veils mosquito nets masts sails sheets out to dry banners flags robes ruffles ropes chains paint lava vaulted ceilings".

Endless Work (version 1 or 2), 1971
Colored pencil and graphite on paper
several drawings
each: 21.6 × 28 cm



Endless Work is an unrealized piece, which notes from Mayer's journals suggest was originally meant to be shown in an installation at A.I.R. Gallery.

There were two versions of *Endless Work*. In her journal she writes about how she changed the idea for the work. The first idea involved poles to which were attached dyed and ruffled fabrics. These fabrics then extended to another pole and were similarly wrapped. This may have been related to or influenced by a sculpture she recently had completed in November, *Semiramis*, which incorporated a pole wrapped with gauzy fabric. Soon after, she changed her idea for *Endless Work* into what she called a series of "sort of paintings made out of fabric." A diagram shows two walls covered with different sections, made up of various fabrics that were painted or manipulated. She made a basic sketch of each of these sections. The work reflects her ongoing exploration of the tension between painting and sculpture. In her journal she tried to articulate what she was doing, wondering if it was "a commentary on the equal importance of presented visual schemes. A making literal of paintings. A Joke?" The work was never exhibited.

Semiramis, November 1972
Nylons, netting, wood, dye, cords
457 x 305 x 122 cm
Nonextant work



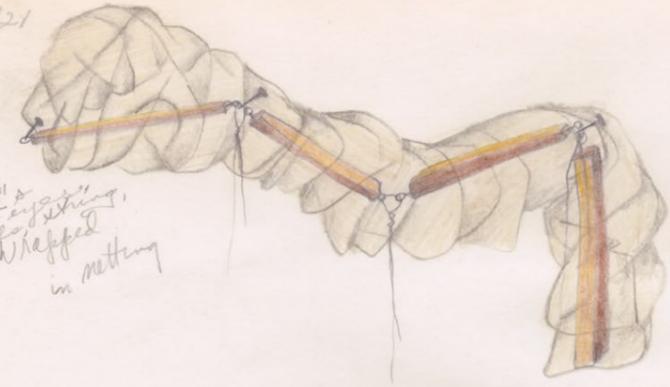
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stack	bleached to yellow	green	purple to yellow to yellow
	nylon		
	clumpel		



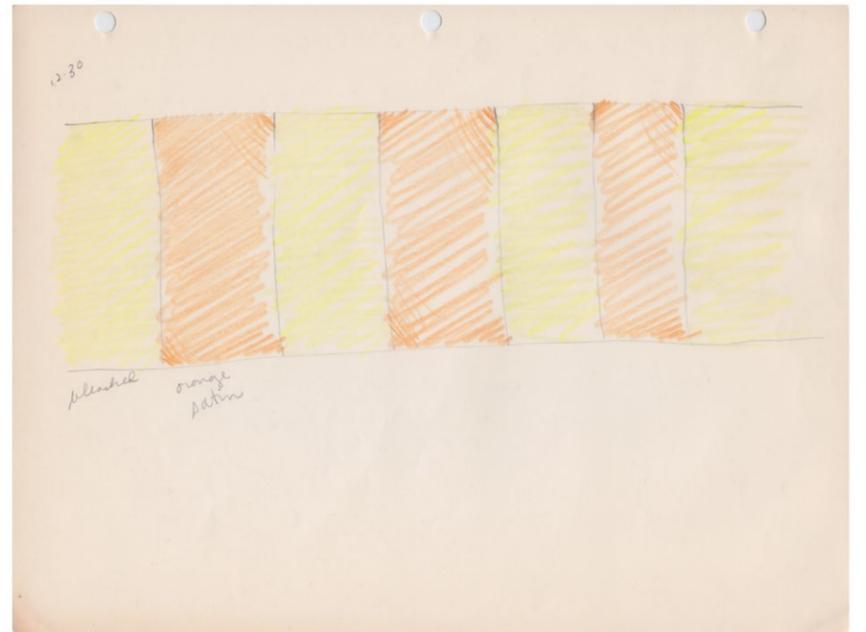
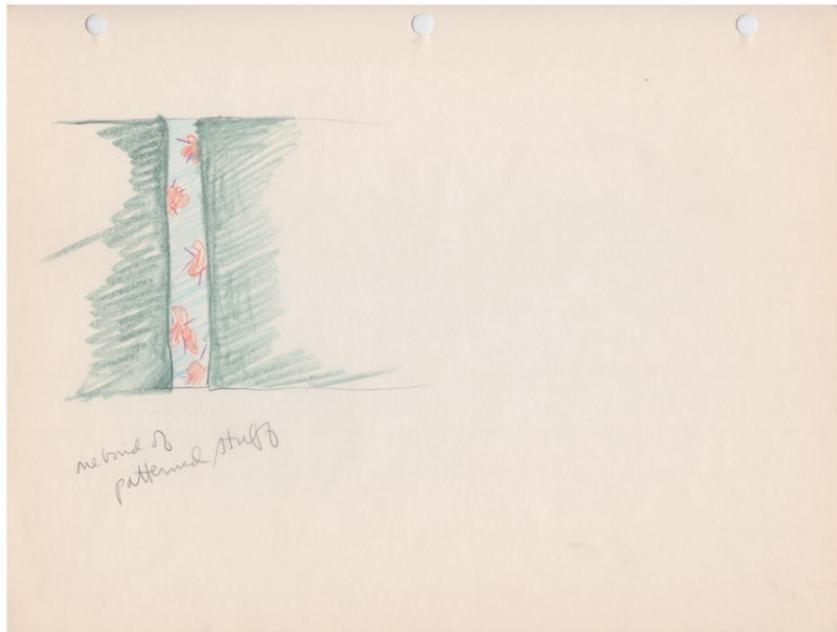
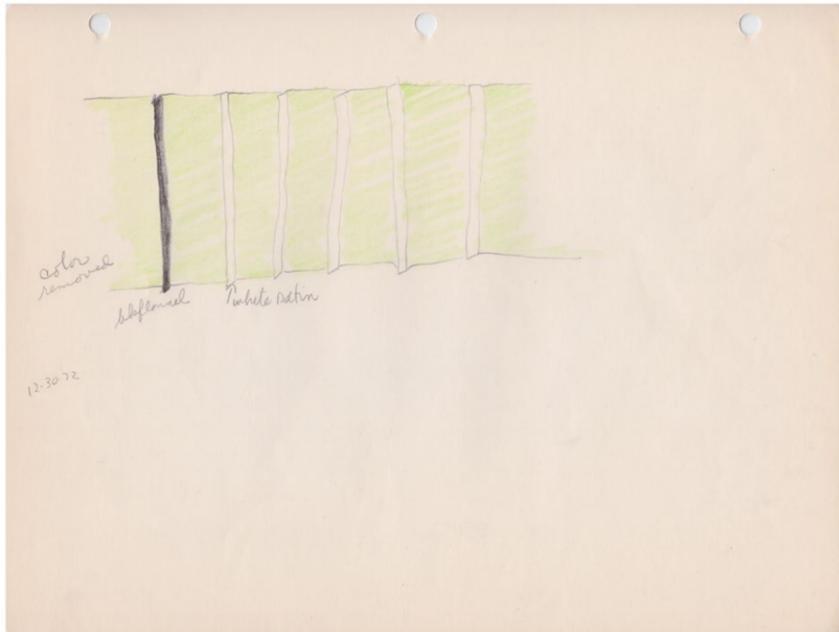
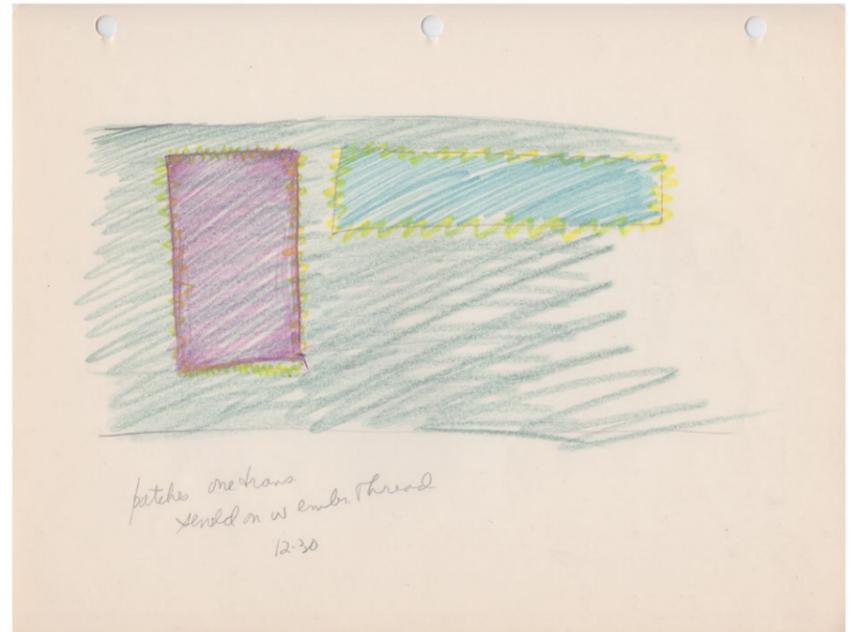
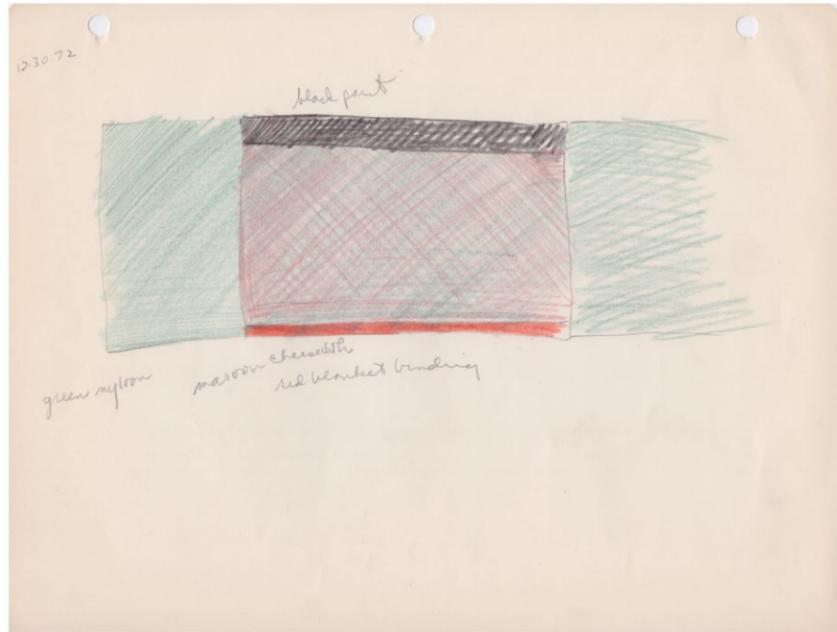
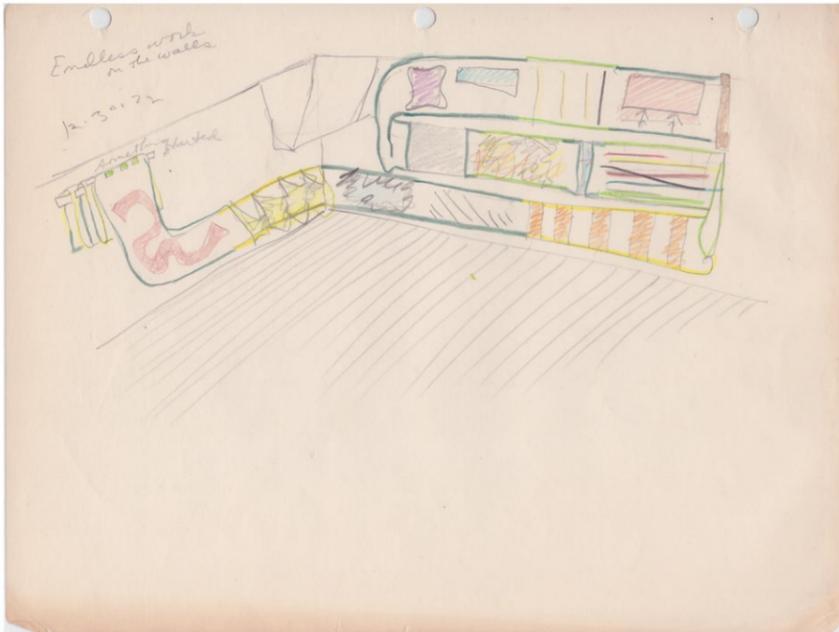
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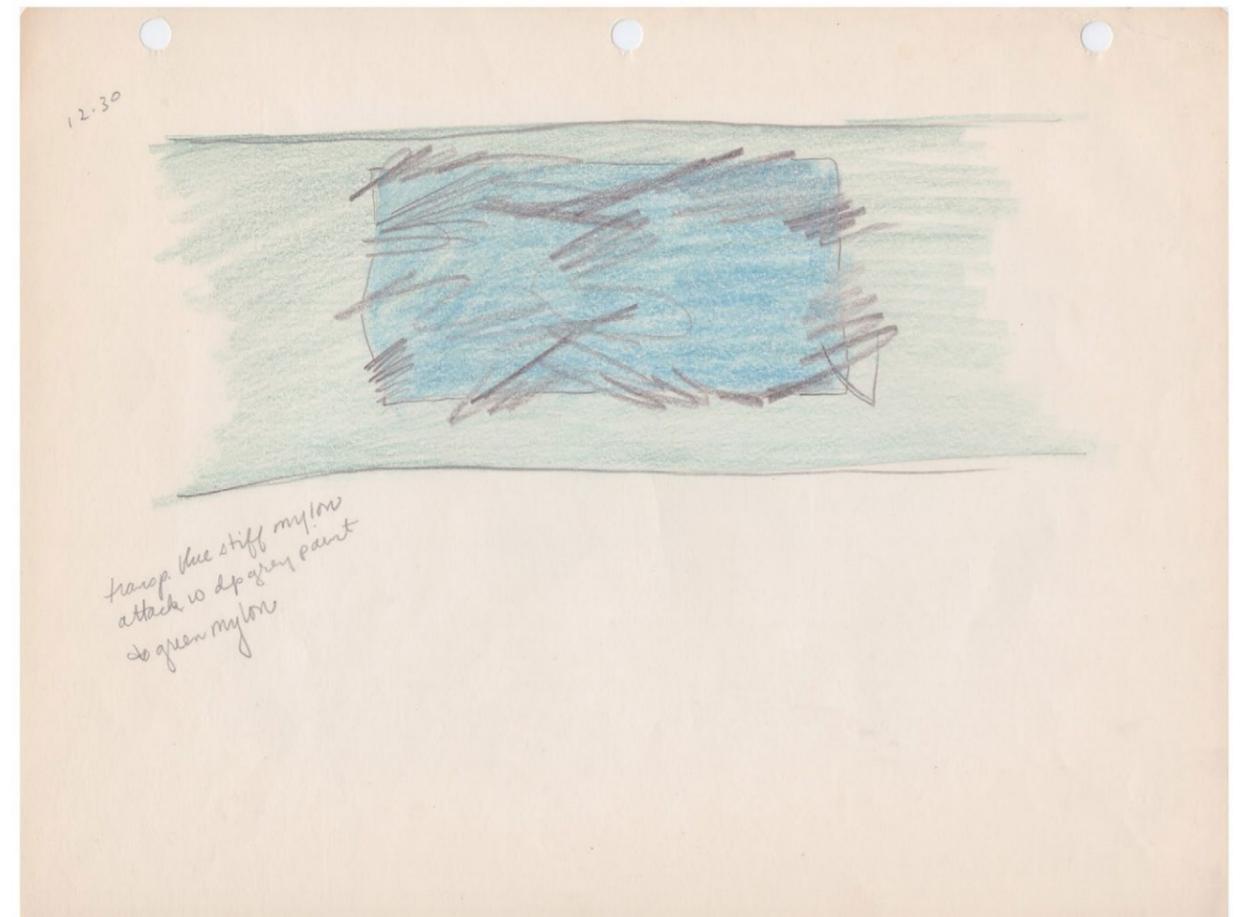
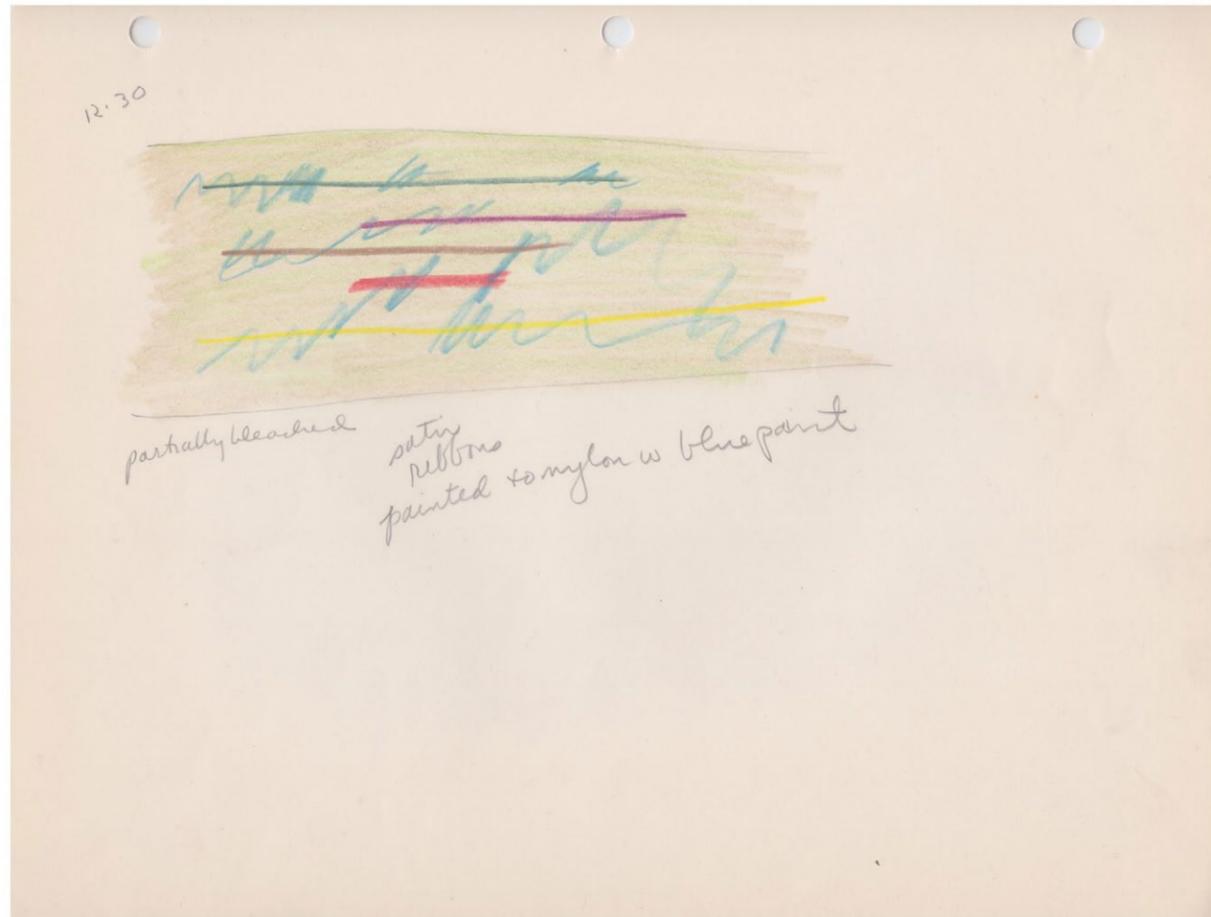
1 1/2" x
screw
nails
wrapped
in netting



a rod
wrapped
w/ stuff
attached
under
wrapping





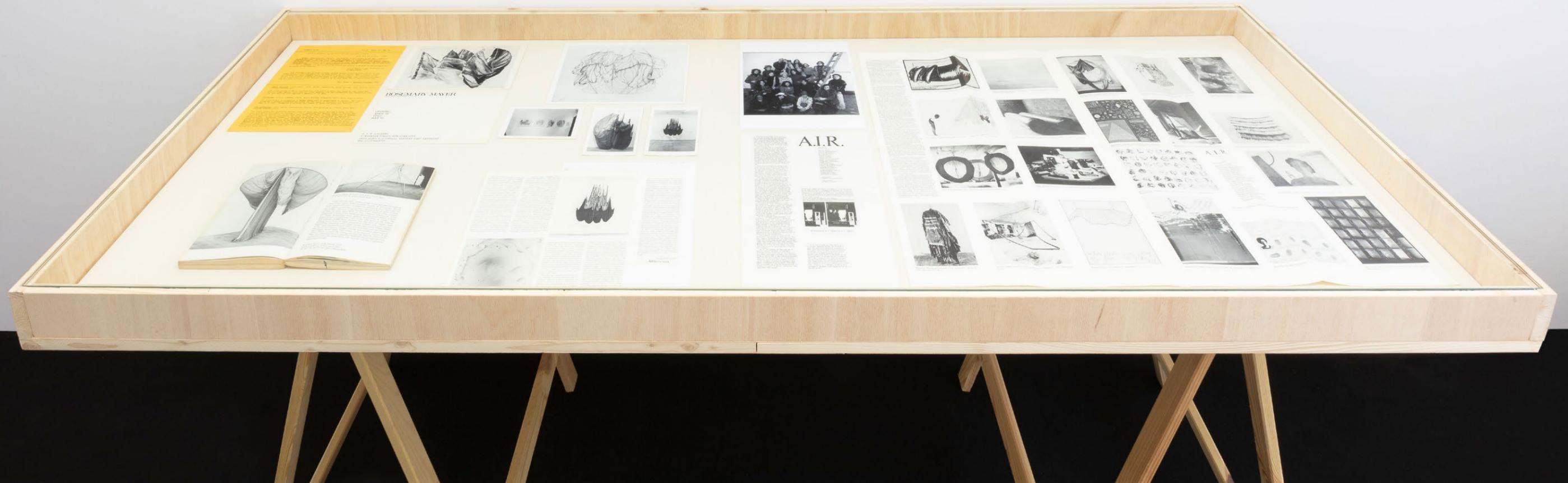


Endless Work, 1972
series of 14 drawings
pencil, colored pencil, graphite on paper
each: 21.59 × 27.94 cm

CHANGE & CHANCE

Different every time they're hung though I have a way I prefer them.
But next time another way might be OK and better. Possibilities. Colors fade. A door opens or someone passes
and the folds chance. Large works which can be rolled up on a bolt - stored in little space - easily transported.

Rosemary Mayer 1972





BY MAYER



A.I.R.

- MEMBERS:
- DOTY ATTIE
 - RACHEL BASSCHAIN
 - LUTHE BERNSTEIN
 - BLYNNE BOHNNEN
 - MAUDE BOLTZ
 - AGNES DENES
 - DARIA DOROSHI
 - LORETTA DUNKELMAN
 - MARY GIGGIOLADIS
 - HARMONY HAMMOND
 - ANNE HEALY
 - LAURACE JAMES
 - ROSEMARY MAYER
 - LOUISE WILSON KITCHEL
 - ROSEMARY MAYER
 - PATSY NOVWELL
 - HOWARDENA PINDELL
 - NANCY SPERO
 - SUSAN WILLIAMS
 - SUSAN ZUCKER
- COORDINATOR:
KADIA LINVILLE GULA
- VIDEO DIRECTOR:
HERMINE FREED



97 WOOSTER STREET, N.Y.C. 10012

The difficulties women artists encounter in trying to show their work have often been discussed and documented. There is a pressing and obvious need for work of women artists to be shown, women are students, and the products and encouragement work would provide.

With these thoughts in mind, several of the artist members of A.I.R. decided to start a gallery to show their work. They looked through the Women's Art Registry maintained by the Ad Hoc Committee to find more women artists whose work was of a high quality and whose work was of a high quality and whose work was of a high quality.

After several months of making studio visits, a group of prospective members met. They were allowed to see everyone's work and to discuss it. The work was shown in a non-profit and non-commercial space. It was decided to organize a gallery space to find a space to show the work of women artists.

The legal committee obtained a lawyer who would accept art as payment for her services. The grant committee developed a business plan and a budget. The gallery was opened in 1972. A list of topics will be available to the gallery and will include members' work, the problems of running an independent gallery, the special problems of women artists, etc. The Video Program consists of process tapes at work and talking in their studios. The program to schools and interested groups. To date the New York State Council on the Arts has partially funded both the Video Program and the discussions.

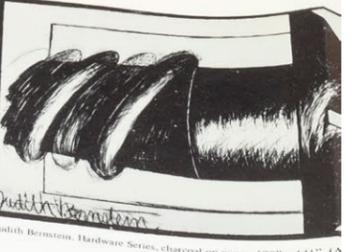
The building committee had perhaps the hardest job - that of maintaining the renovation of the gallery space. All members worked on the actual repairing - electrical wiring, building walls, laying a floor, painting, etc. The publicity committee maintains a mailing list.

A.I.R. members meet whenever it is necessary, i.e., whenever group decisions are rotated and all questions are decided by a two-thirds vote of the members present. Each member is allowed her say in meetings. From committee heads who have no other special function or authority beyond that of reporting to the membership.

The problem of which artist would show when was solved by drawing lots. The year, beginning September 16, 1972, was divided into three week blocks. Each third Saturday two women will start their shows. The gallery will open with a group show representing ten artists and the season will close with a group show including the remaining ten members.

A.I.R. has opened up new avenues of communication between its members, and ideas have begun to change. Information from their former semi-isolation in a male-dominated art world and their present multiplicity of contacts. A group of members have begun to consider using their own money to present the work of women artists who have been overlooked.

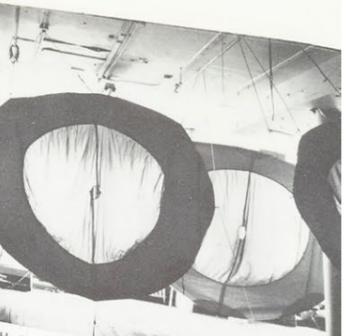
A.I.R. will change attitudes about art by women. Because women artists have all their work with such difficulty in showing, conformers to produce work which women want their work to be shown at all. Thus the work of women artists is made to ever made public. A.I.R. offers women artists a space to show work which is as innovative, transitory or unsealable as the artist's conceptions demand, a rare opportunity for women.



Judith Bernstein, Hardware Series, charcoal on paper, 108" x 141". (C)



Nancy Spero, Codex Artaud I (detail), painting - collage, 1971. (M)



Anne Healy, Big Balls, fabric and nylon rope, 1970. (October 7)

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The most ambitious piece in the show is a large, dark, abstract drawing by Rosemary Mayer. It is a study for a large-scale drawing, possibly a sculpture or a large-scale drawing. The drawing is made of many overlapping and draped sections of fabric or paper, creating a complex, layered structure. The drawing is made of many overlapping and draped sections of fabric or paper, creating a complex, layered structure.



the technique develops, the distance between artist and material is necessarily more and more like an art, less and less like a craft. Mayer's drawings are a study for a large-scale drawing, possibly a sculpture or a large-scale drawing. The drawing is made of many overlapping and draped sections of fabric or paper, creating a complex, layered structure.

—ROBERTA SMITH
Artforum 9/23

fragmented glass and is varied in density. The color is less dense at its in turn modified by the brown color and the texture of the material. Each layer remains distinct and visible, each seen as the way the glass is cut and the way the glass is cut and the way the glass is cut.

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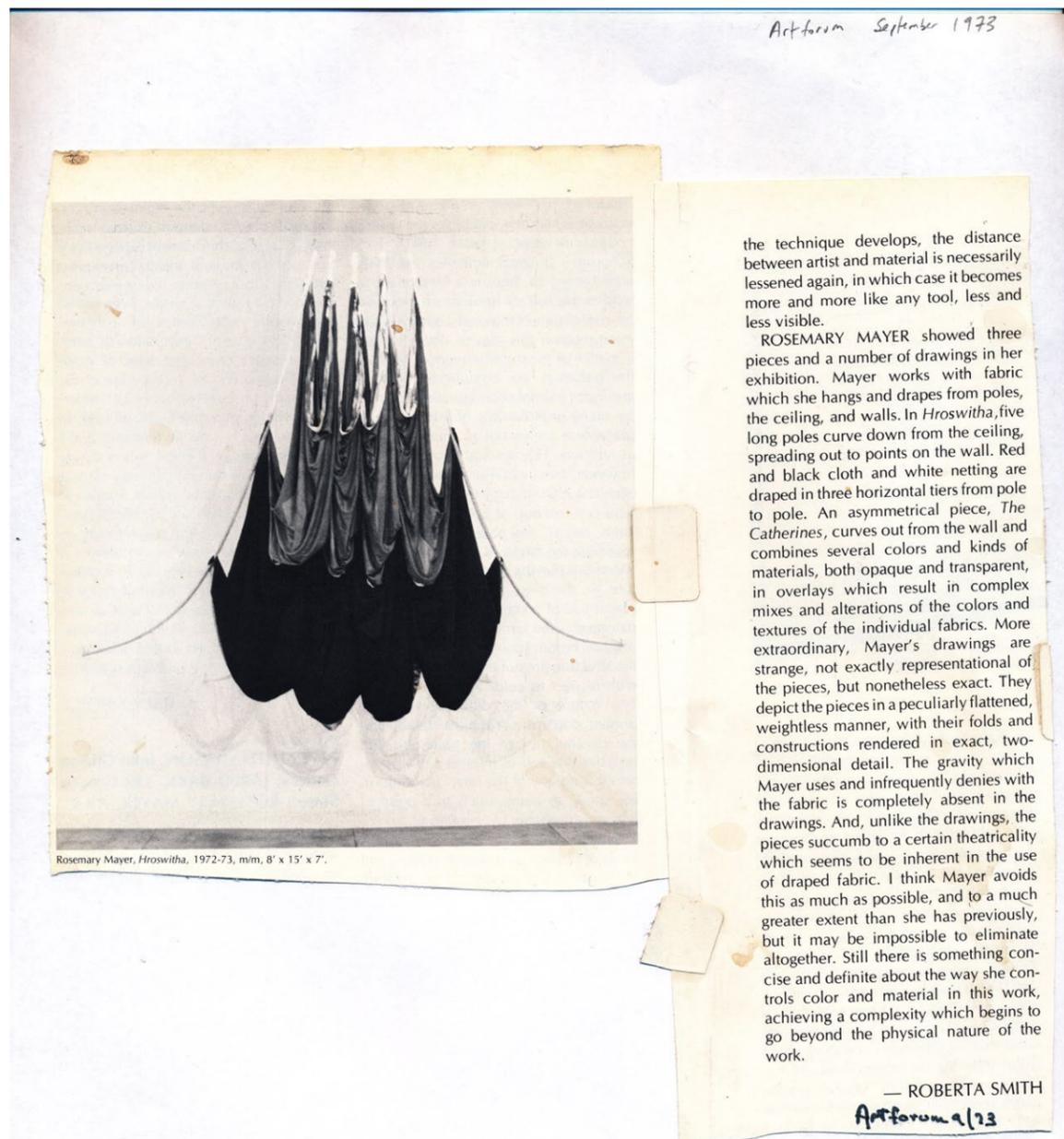
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Solo exhibition
April 28 – May 16, 1973
A.I.R. Gallery, New York City

In 1973, Rosemary Mayer exhibited a solo exhibition at A.I.R. Gallery. Three fabric sculptures and drawings, which depicted detailed sketches of the sculptures, were displayed.

A review of the exhibition by Roberta Smith for Artforum in 1973 elaborates, "...there is something concise and definite about the way she controls color and material in this work, achieving a complexity which begins to go beyond the physical nature of the work."



ROSEMARY MAYER

A.I.R. April 28 - May 16

"I hold in my hands my two eyes, and see only what I touch."

Juana Inez de la Cruz c.1670

"Green...adaptability...deceit...the wish to be all things to all men...sympathy. Crimson and rose...affection; a full clear carmine...a strong healthy affection... pure pale rose...unselfish love. Deep orange...pride or ambition... the various shades of yellow...intellect or intellectual gratification, dull yellow ochre...selfish purposes, clear gamboge...a higher type, pale luminous primrose yellow...unselfish use of intellectual power...violet...affection and devotion...

The brilliancy and the depth of the colors are usually a measure of the strength and activity of the feeling."

Annie Besant & C.W. Leadbeater in Thought Forms, 1901.

"The underskirt may be made of three or more widths of glazed plain chintz to simulate satin, ...for the skirt, of the same fabric as the bodice, Canton flannel, sateen or inexpensive rayon drapery fabric will give a textured effect. The overskirt should be cut from straight lengths of cloth eight to ten inches longer than the petticoat, sewed to a waistband or to the bodice. Loop it up on each side, pin or sew in place and add the bows of ribbon."

Mary Evans in Historic Costumes, 1942.

Galla Placidia, 1973, satin, rayon, nylon, cheesecloth, nylon netting, wood, acrylic paint, ribbon, bleach, dye.

The title refers to Galla Placidia who, from 425 A.D. until her death in 450, ruled the Western Roman Empire, from Rome and later Ravenna, for her incompetent son Valentinian III, the last more or less legitimate Emperor of the West.

Hroswitha, 1972-3, flannel, rayon, nylon netting, fiberglass rayon, wood, acrylic paint.

The title refers to Hroswitha, a German Latin poet of Gandersheim in Saxony. The nuns of Hroswitha's convent performed her plays for the court of Theophano (of Byzantium) and Otto I, c. 980. Hroswitha originated the themes of Faust and Romeo and Juliet.

The Catherines, 1973, nylon, cheesecloth, pella, fiberglass rayon, ribbon, wood, dyes, bleach, acrylic paint.

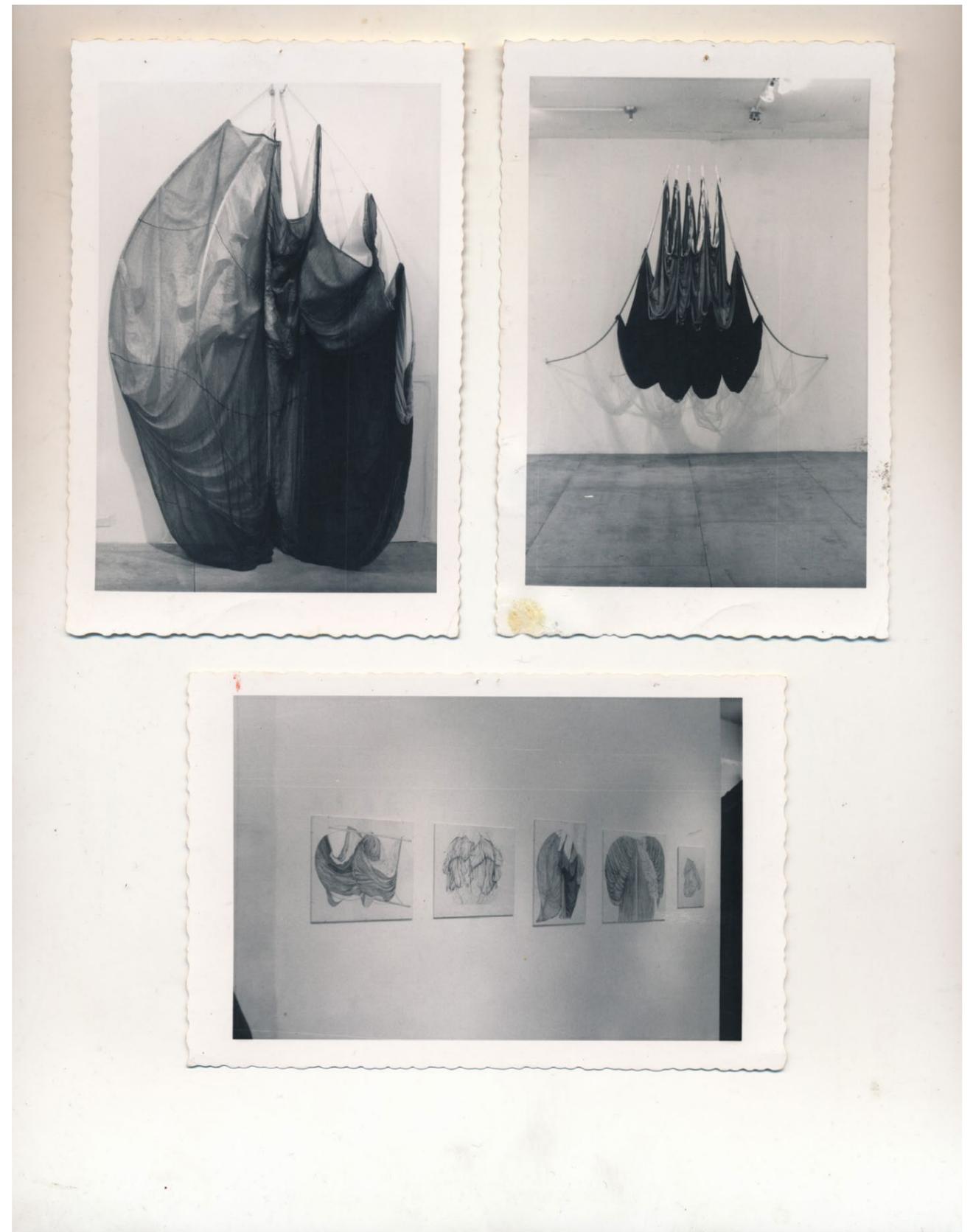
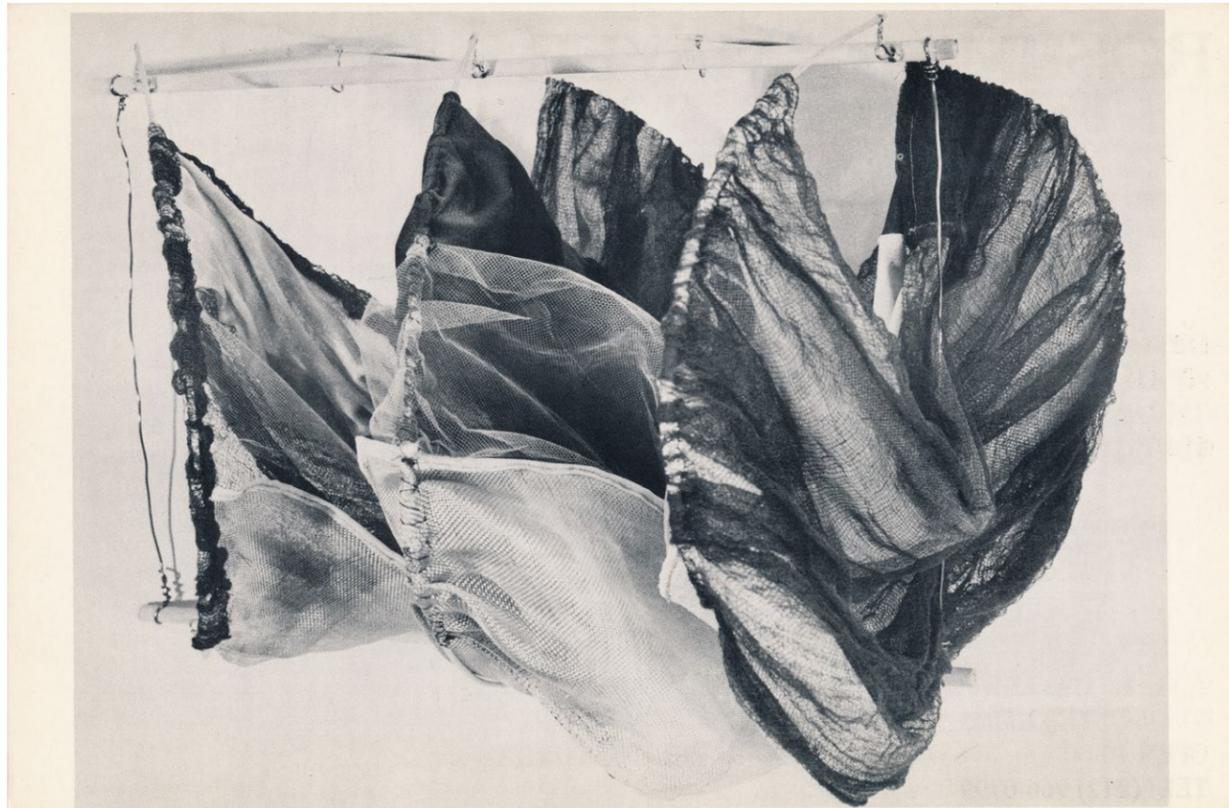
The title refers to: Catherine Sforza, Lady of Forli and Imola, who was a rival of Lorenzo dei Medici for power in Tuscany, c. 1475; Catherine dei Medici, Queen of France, who ruled during the minorities of her many sons until her death in 1589; Catherine of Aragon, Queen of England, who is considered the cause of Henry VIII's conversion of England to Protestantism; Catherine Cornaro, a Venetian noble known for her beauty, who ruled as Queen of Cyprus from 1473 until 1489; Catherine I of Russia, born into a family of servants, who ruled Russia after the death of her husband, Peter the Great; Catherine II the Great, Empress of Russia from 1762 until her death in 1796, who was responsible for much of the expansion of Russia; Catharine of Sienna, a fourteenth century mystic and author of religious dialogues and treatises, who brought about the return of the Pope to Rome and was influential during the Great Schism.

ROSEMARY MAYER

MODEL-FABRIC-WOOD-WIRE 20"x10"x18"

OPENING
APRIL 28
THRU
MAY 16

A. I. R. GALLERY
97 WOOSTER STREET, NEW YORK CITY
OPEN 10.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. TUESDAY THRU SATURDAY
TEL: (212) 966-0799





Galla Placidia, 1973
satin, rayon, nylon, cheesecloth, nylon netting,
wood, acrylic paint, ribbon, bleach, dye
275 × 305 × 150 cm

Galla Placidia is the largest and most ambitious of Mayer's fabric sculptures from the early 1970s. Mayer created it for her first major solo show, at A.I.R. Gallery in 1973 and doesn't appear to be exhibited after that. More recently it has been shown at the Kusthalle Basel.

Galla Placidia is constructed with two bent rods from which are suspended and attached various types and colors of fabrics, whose layering provide new colors and textures. Falling from the center of the sculpture, between two wing-like forms, is an inner layer of dark and light green polyester, covered with a layer of translucent cheesecloth, dyed purple. Mayer wrote that she was interested creating a structure that "would evidence variety within unity," and through draping and hanging fabric, "getting the greatest amount of visual complexity out of the materials."

Although *Galla Placidia* was only exhibited once in the 1970s, it was reproduced several times, including on the cover of the anthology *Individuals: Post Movement Art in America* from 1977.



The Catherines, 1973

Nylon, cheesecloth, pella, fiberglass rayon,
ribbon, wood, dyes, bleach, acrylic paint
295× 122× 122 cm

The work consists of bent wooden rods, to which are secured, draped, and layered, various fabrics. Mayer created the work for her first solo show, at A.I.R. Gallery in 1973, where it was shown along with *Hroswitha* and *Galla Placidia*.

Unlike Mayer's other work from this body of work, *The Catherines* is named not for a single woman but a group of women. Mayer wrote that the work honors, among others, "Catherine Cornaro the queen of Renaissance Cyprus, Catherine I, Empress of Russia, successor of Peter the Great, Catherine of Sienna, mystic writer and advisor to the Pope, Catherine dei Medici, Queen of France..."

The work means to evoke, according to Rosemary, both their presence and absence: "All their colors, the textures of their garments, the hazy voluminous shapes they leave now hovering. This and her other fabric works were also influenced by the work of Morris Louis, specifically his series called Veils, the drapery in Mannerist paintings, and the sculpture of Eva Hesse.



Installation view at A.I.R. Gallery
© Rosemary Mayer Archive



Hypsipyle, 1973

Satin, rayon, nylon, cheesecloth, nylon netting,
ribbon, dyes, wood, and acrylic paint

120 × 275 × 15 cm

Installation view from Kunsthalle Basel in 2020





Opening of A.I.R. Gallery, 1972

In 1972, Mayer, along with 19 other women artists, founded A.I.R. Gallery (Artists in Residence) on Wooster St., Manhattan: the first nonprofit, artist-directed and maintained gallery for women artists in the United States. With the purpose of showcasing and supporting work by women in order to change the prevalent attitudes towards women artists, A.I.R. Gallery exhibited a wide range of artistic styles and provided artist fellowships and community art programs. Rather than constituting an aesthetic movement, the gallery became a platform for a diverse range of art processes, materials, and voices.

The founders are:

Susan Williams
Barbara Zucker
Dotty Attie
Maude Boltz
Mary Grigoriadis
Nancy Spero
Rachel bas-Cohain
Judith Bernstein
Blythe Bohnen
Agnes Denes
Daria Dorosh
Loretta Dunkelman
Harmony Hammond
Laurace James
Nancy Kitchell
Louise Kramer
Anne Healy
Rosemary Mayer
Patsy Norvell
Howardena Pindell



Photo by David Attie, Collection of Fales Library, New York University.

The difficulties women artists encounter in trying to show their work have often enough been discussed and documented. There is a pressing and obvious need for more exhibition space given over to the work of women artists. In addition, women art students need the models and encouragement which a greater body of women artists' work would provide.

With these thoughts in mind, several of the earliest members of A.I.R. decided to start a gallery to show their own work and that of other women artists. They looked through the Women's Art Registry maintained by the Ad Hoc Committee to find fourteen more women artists whose work merited exhibition. No one sort of art was favored. A.I.R. members' work includes performances, conceptual art, sculpture, painting, drawing and printmaking. Prospective members had to be financially able to contribute to the maintenance of the gallery and willing to work on one of A.I.R.'s committees.

After several months of making studio visits, a group of prospective members met. After viewing slides of everyone's work a few days were allowed for consideration. It was decided to incorporate as a non-profit organization. The work necessary to find and maintain a gallery space was broken down into four areas, each of which was assumed as the job of a committee.

The legal committee obtained a lawyer who would accept art as payment for her services. The grants committee developed the idea of A.I.R.'s functions further. The Monday Program will be discussions conducted by A.I.R.'s members and open to the public. A list of topics will be available at the gallery and will include members' work, the problems of running an independent gallery, the special problems of women artists, etc. The Video Program consists of process tapes of gallery artists and other women artists at work and talking in their studios. The tapes will be shown in the gallery on Sundays and offered along with the Monday Program to schools and interested groups. To date, the New York State Council on the Arts has partially funded both the Video Program and the discussions.

The building committee had perhaps the hardest job -- that of masterminding the renovation of the gallery space. All members of A.I.R. and many of their friends have worked on the actual repairing -- electrical wiring, building walls, laying a floor, painting and plastering. The publicity committee writes press releases, places advertising and maintains a mailing list.

A.I.R.'s members meet whenever it is necessary, i.e., whenever group decisions have to be made. The chairing of meetings is rotated and all questions are decided by a two-thirds vote of the members present. Each member is allowed her say uninterrupted on any point being discussed. At meetings members are brought up to date on the progress of the committees by reports from committee heads who have no other special function or authority beyond that of reporting to the membership.

The problem of which artist would show when was solved by drawing lots. The year, beginning September 16, 1972, was divided into three week blocks. Each third Saturday two women will start their shows. The gallery will open with a group show representing ten artists and the season will close with a group show including the remaining ten members.

A.I.R. has opened up new avenues of communication between its members. Friendships and exchanges of information and ideas have begun between the members, some of whom feel a real difference between their former semi-isolation in a male-dominated art world and their present multiplicity of contacts. A group of members have begun collaborative art projects. One member is considering using her showing time to present the work of women artists she feels have been overlooked.

A.I.R.

representing:

DOTTY ATTIE
RACHEL BAS-COHAIN
JUDITH BERNSTEIN
BLYTHE BOHNE
MAUDE BOLTZ
AGNES DENES
DARIA DOROSH
LORETTA DUNKELMAN
MARY GRIGORIADIS
HARMONY HAMMOND
ANNE HEALY
LAURACE JAMES
NANCY WILSON KITCHEL
LOUISE KRAMER
ROSEMARY MAYER
PATSY NORVELL
HOWARDENA PINDELL
NANCY SPERO
SUSAN WILLIAMS
BARBARA ZUCKER

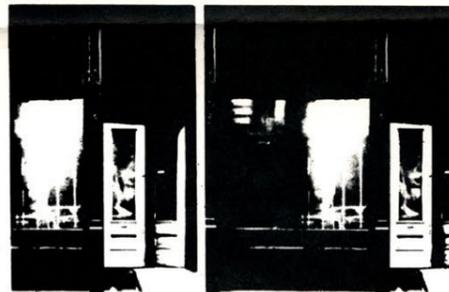
coordinator:

KASHA LINVILLE GULA

video director:

HERMINE FREED

A.I.R. is an independent gallery formed and run by 22 women. A.I.R. does not sell art; it changes attitudes about art by women. A.I.R. offers women artists a space to show work as innovative, transitory or unsaleable as the artists' conceptions demand. A.I.R. offers workshops on the special problems that face women in the arts and is forming a library of videotapes of women at work in their studios. A.I.R. will house the Women's Art Registry. (Partial funding for these education projects is provided by the New York State Council on the Arts).



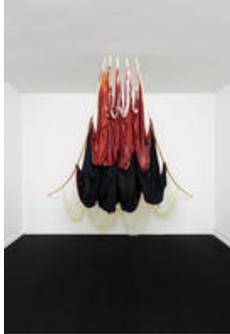
97 WOOSTER STREET, N.Y.C. 10012

A.I.R. will change attitudes about art by women. Because women artists have always met with such difficulty in showing their work there has been a strong pressure on women artists to produce work which conforms to already accepted norms, if women want their work to be shown at all. Thus the work of women artists is made to seem less innovative than that of male artists, as only the more conservative work is ever made public. A.I.R. offers women artists a space to show work which is as innovative, transitory or unsaleable as the artist's conception demand, a rare opportunity for women artists.



EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Rods Bent Into Bows, Rosemary Mayer – *Fabric Sculptures and Drawings 1972-1973*, September 04 - October 31, 2020



Rosemary Mayer

Hroswitha, 1973

Flannel, rayon, nylon netting, fiberglass rayon, ribbon, dyes, wood, acrylic paint
295 × 175 × 30 cm (116 1/8 × 68 7/8 × 11 3/4 inches)

RM/S 7444/U



Rosemary Mayer

Study for Hroswitha, 1972

Colored pencil and graphite on paper

21.6 × 28.1 cm (8 1/2 × 11 1/8 inches)

28.1 × 34.5 × 2.4 cm (11 1/8 × 13 5/8 × 1 inches) (framed)

RM/D 7502/U



Rosemary Mayer

Bent Rods, 1972

Colored pencil and graphite on paper

28.1 × 21.6 cm (11 1/8 × 8 1/2 inches)

34.5 × 28.1 × 2.4 cm (13 5/8 × 11 1/8 × 1 inches) (framed)

RM/D 7464/U



Rosemary Mayer

Balancing, 1972

Rayons, cheesecloth, cord, and acrylic rods

320 × 275 × 10 cm (126 × 108 1/4 × 3 7/8 inches)

RM/S 7446/U



Rosemary Mayer

Abracadabra Sailboat, 1972

Colored pencil and graphite on paper

27.9 × 35 cm (11 × 13 3/4 inches)

34.1 × 41.6 × 2.4 cm (13 3/8 × 16 3/8 × 1 inches) (framed)

RM/D 7465/U



Rosemary Mayer

Net Section, 1972

Colored pencil and graphite on paper

35.5 × 43.1 cm (14 × 17 inches)

42.3 × 49.7 × 2.8 cm (16 5/8 × 19 5/8 × 1 1/8 inches) (framed)

RM/D 7498/U



Rosemary Mayer

Untitled, 1972

Colored pencil and graphite on paper

35.5 × 43.1 cm (14 × 17 inches)

42.3 × 49.7 × 2.8 cm (16 5/8 × 19 5/8 × 1 1/8 inches) (framed)

RM/D 7515/U



Rosemary Mayer

De Medici, 1972

Colored pencil and graphite on paper

43.1 × 35.5 cm (17 × 14 inches)

49.7 × 42.3 × 2.8 cm (19 5/8 × 16 5/8 × 1 1/8 inches) (framed)

RM/D 7467/U



Rosemary Mayer

Study for Hypatia, 1972

Graphite on paper

35.5 × 27.9 cm (14 × 11 inches)

44.1 × 36.6 × 2.4 cm (17 3/8 × 14 3/8 × 1 inches) (framed)

RM/D 7471/U



Rosemary Mayer

Study for Hypatia, 1972

Graphite on paper

35.5 × 27.9 cm (14 × 11 inches)

44.1 × 36.6 × 2.4 cm (17 3/8 × 14 3/8 × 1 inches) (framed)

RM/D 7472/U



Rosemary Mayer

Study for Hypatia, 1972

Graphite on paper

27.9 × 35.5 cm (11 × 14 inches)

36.6 × 44.1 × 2.4 cm (14 3/8 × 17 3/8 × 1 inches) (framed)

RM/D 7470/U



Rosemary Mayer

Study for Hypatia, 1972

Graphite on paper

27.9 × 35.5 cm (11 × 14 inches)

36.6 × 44.1 × 2.4 cm (14 3/8 × 17 3/8 × 1 inches) (framed)

RM/D 7468/U



Rosemary Mayer
Endless Work (version 1), 1972
Colored pencil and graphite on paper
28 × 21.6 cm (11 × 8 1/2 inches)
RM/D 7463/U



Rosemary Mayer
Endless Work (version 1), 1972
Colored pencil and graphite on paper
28 × 21.6 cm (11 × 8 1/2 inches)
RM/D 7506/U



Rosemary Mayer
Endless Work (version 1), 1972
Graphite on paper
21.6 × 28 cm (8 1/2 × 11 inches)
RM/D 7507/U



Rosemary Mayer
Endless Work (version 2) series of 14 drawings, 1972
Pencil, colored pencil, graphite on paper
14 drawings, each: 21.59 × 27.94 cm (8 1/2 × 11 inches)
RM/D 7672/U