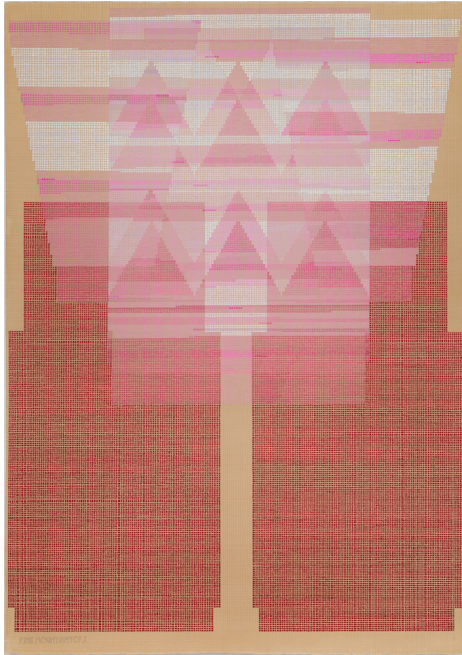


DEREK ELLER GALLERY

ELLEN LESPERANCE

Together we lie in ditches and in front of machines

OCTOBER 15 - NOVEMBER 14, 2020



Derek Eller Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition by Ellen Lesperance entitled *Together we lie in ditches and in front of machines* which explores the intersection of craft, feminism, and civil disobedience. Speaking at once to the current moment, the future, and the historical past, the show will feature a new series of paintings inspired by archival images of hand-knit garments worn by women involved in acts of protest.

Based on her meticulous research of the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, a group of women activists who protested nuclear proliferation in the 1980s and 90s in the U.K., Lesperance has uncovered extensive visual documentation picturing protestors wearing knitted clothing embedded with text and pattern reflective of subversive self expression. She translates the garments within this source material into knitting patterns in Symbolcraft, rendered as layered abstract gouache paintings. Each painting requires improvisation, deviation from the pictured garments, because of the ambiguous

and often incomplete imagery being used. As such, the paintings function as the artist's interpretive portrait of the wearer rather than simply a historical documentation of clothing.

Lesperance frequently titles her work by referencing songs, writing, or other forms of verbal expression from the Greenham protestors. The title, *Together we lie in ditches and in front of machines*, is a line from a 1990s era play called *The Common Chorus*, an adaptation of an ancient Greek drama, which was conceived to take place at the Greenham Camp. The notion of the protestors enacting this script underscores the prophetic or oracular nature of their message. "Forty years ago," Lesperance writes, "we could have better and more responsibly listened to these voices about issues of nuclear proliferation, gendered aggression, and the dire need for a systemic changing of priorities in order to ensure the safety of our shared natural environment for future generations". The clarity and relevance of that message speaks directly to the current crises of pandemic, social unrest, and environmental damage. The titular painting, with its flowers sprouting up through a dark, dirt-like surface, echoes a collective 2020 experience: dread, despair, and fear tempered by a tentative feeling of communal hope and progress. Other works, like *And I Will Remember Your Face* and *Black Gloves, Gods' Eyes* are more ominous and mournful.

There is a bodily quality to Lesperance's paintings, and this show in particular utilizes a palette of fleshy browns and pinks, as well as veiny blues. While this evocation may connect the works to a figurative trajectory, the fact that they simultaneously function as knitwear patterns also align them with conceptualism. The paintings, rendered in a visual language not beholden to the

patriarchal coding of Western art, are literally instructions for garments to be knit at some future time, an expectation of artistry yet to come.

Ellen Lesperance (b.1971) lives and works in Portland, Oregon. She had a recent solo exhibition entitled *Velvet Fist* at the Baltimore Museum of Art, and has been included in group shows at The Frye Museum Seattle, ICA Boston, Bonniers Konsthall Stockholm, and The New Museum of Contemporary Art New York. She is currently included in *Never Done: 100 Years of Women in Politics and Beyond* at The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College. Upcoming exhibitions include *Active Threads* at KAI 10 | ARTHENA FOUNDATION, Düsseldorf, and *Staying with the Trouble* at SMFA / Boston, Tufts University Galleries. This will be her second show at the Gallery.

Derek Eller Gallery is located at 300 Broome Street between Eldridge Street and Forsyth Street. Hours are Tuesday - Saturday 11am to 6pm, and by appointment. For further information please contact the gallery at 212.206.6411 or visit www.derekeller.com