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Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

JOSH FAUGHT

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by catherine kron

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In "While the Light Lasts," Josh Faught's New York solo debut, the artist mines textile's homespun origins, employing traditional craft techniques like crochet, loom weaving and ikat, and working with raw fibers. Referencing the queer and feminist deployment of traditionally domestic crafts during the 70's and after, Faught's sculpture undercuts the memory of revelatory political agency with a meditation on contemporary anxiety. The works are displayed on freestanding armatures or else hung from four-by-six-foot linen canvases, such that the textiles resemble garments draped over mannequins. Both armature and frame support create the effect of frontality, even as their technique and orientation nudges them toward sculpture. The afghan-like Signs of Life (all works, 2009) wraps around its support to reveal a crocheted brown backside, alluding to the unseen back of the stretched canvas.

Asymmetrically but methodically composed, Faught's textiles appear to have accrued in a piecemeal fashion. To the surface he's appended labels, nail polish and sequins, all materials culled from the purview of the amateur crafter. Attached to Claiming What's Yours, a flyer presumably stripped from some coffee shop bulletin board asks, "Overwhelmed?" and offers tear-off contact numbers for assistance. A strip of ribbons screen-printed with the repeated phrase "MY BAG-MY BAG..." etc, presents a competing voice vying for the piece's (and the viewer's) attention. If one allows the claim which interprets these works as "characters," their signage might point to the multiple agendas a single character juggles. Both Claiming What's Yours and Claiming What's Not Yours are presented on stretcher bars, and both employ these iterative ribbons. In Claiming What's Not Yours a series of ribbons bearing the phrase "NOT YOUR BAG—NOT YOUR BAG ..." is cleverly ensconced between crocheted swatches, which graft onto each other such that the vertical strip is stitched into an awkward bowed curve, its text muffled in the now primarily graphic impression the fabric affords. The patchwork-like House Plant's upbeat gay pride-themed buttons proclaim a nostalgic "anything goes" attitude, but these works reveal deeper-seated worries over money, the future, and keeping things together. Despite the works' allusions to bodily form, Faught's work does not effectively reference the body as massed presence, as, say, Robert Morris's plywood forms had before them. Nor does Faught perform presence literally, by resemblance, as do the costume-sculptures of artist Nick Cave.

The humanity of these structures is in the sublimated desires articulated by the evident manipulation of fiber, which finds its foil in the slack decorativeness and simplistic assertions of queer pride on the appliqué and buttons. This contrast between the exuberantly performed surface and the ambulatory, sprawling labor of the stitchwork aptly best captures the unresolved tensions of the contemporary mind.