

ART

Nature-Inspired Artworks Tap Into the Dark Side of the Psyche

Rebecca Brewer's complex and dynamic compositions hint at the murky depths of psychological and emotional experience.



Lindsay Costello April 10, 2020



Installation view, *Rebecca Brewer: Natural Horror*, January 25–April 19, 2020, Frye Art Museum (photo by Jueqian Fang, all images courtesy the Frye Art Museum)

SEATTLE — A vertical silk textile hangs from the ceiling of a gallery in the Frye Art Museum, felted with bright wool shapes that seem to snake toward the gallery floor. Canadian artist Rebecca Brewer refers to these works as “scrim”; alongside her sculptural resin paintings, they explore the relationships between the organic and the human psyche. The title of Brewer’s first solo museum exhibition, *Natural Horror*, references a genre of horror films featuring threatening natural forces or creatures. Her work is inspired by her research in the fields of

psychoanalysis and art therapy, as well as somatization. Her complex and dynamic compositions hint at the murky depths of psychological and emotional experience.

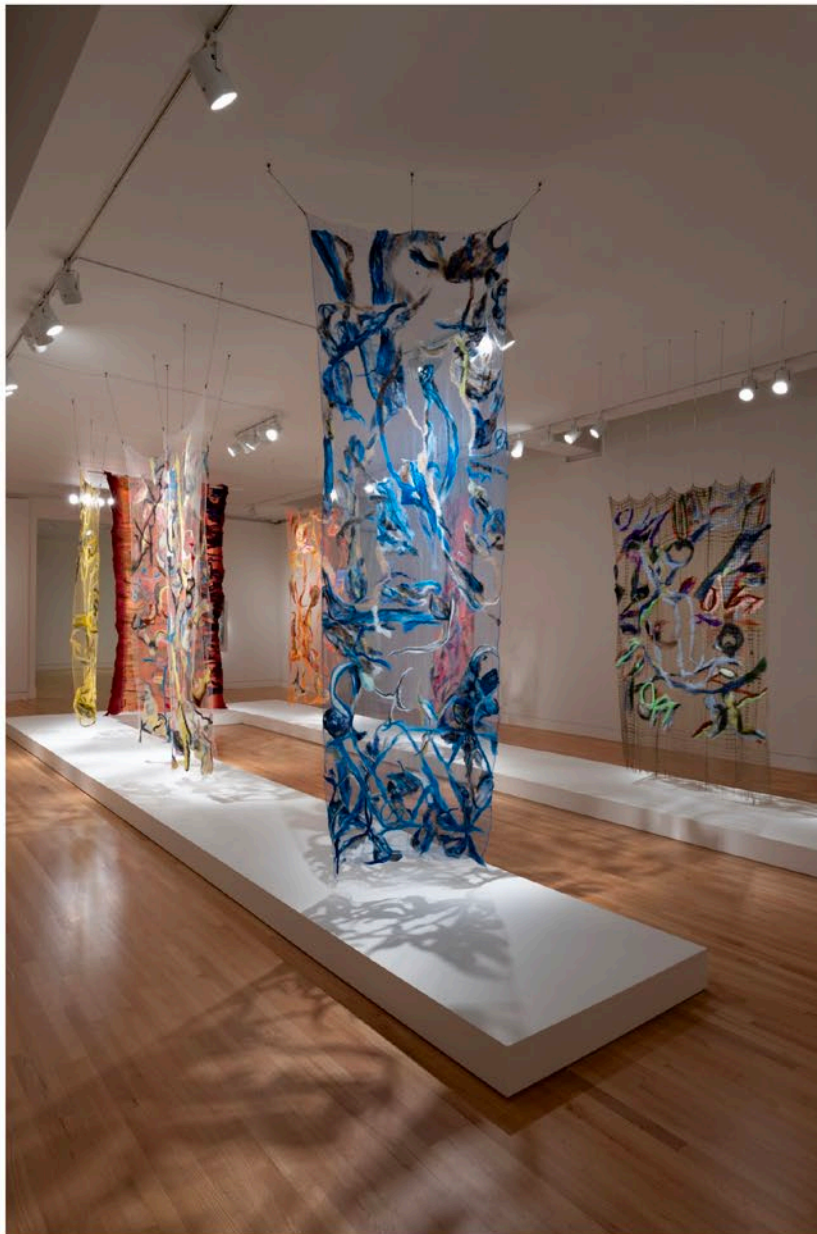
Brewer's *Live Resin* series lines the gallery walls, surrounding her hanging scrim. The abstract embossing powder paintings on vellum are adhered to sculptural cast-resin trays. Like reversed canvases, the edges of these works jut out from the wall, framing a recessed image. The rough texture of the resin pieces brings out the organic softness of the scrim, sparking a dialogue between the two series. The vibrant, gestural brushstrokes characterizing the *Live Resin* pieces echo the strokes of multicolored wool in the scrim.



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Both series feel improvisational, but the artist employs formal visual systems and involved techniques to allude to nature. The gridded silk lengths of the scrimms resemble spiderwebs or fishing nets. Brewer's inventive mark-making method for the *Live Resin* works involves continually scattering, then heating, embossing powder until it hardens. While she allows her unconscious to roam freely in the compositions, she retains a measure of control over her image through these techniques.

Brewer uses an arduous wet-felting method on a gauzy silk backing cloth to create all of the scrimms except for the largest, "En F" (2016), which is solely wool felt. Viewers can walk around the panels to experience both the felted compositions and their inverses. Wool ribbons evoke floating seaweed, algae, moss, and watery paint. Titles like "Scrim: Tweaker" and "Scrim: Carnage" (both 2019) hint at mystery and violence in these wandering, painterly lines of color-blended wool; embedded in the compositions are such images as an anarchy symbol (in "Scrim: Mutiny," 2019) and psychedelic floral patterns (in "En F").



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While the scrim titles and symbols can suggest internal conflict or distress, the visuals are often lively, energized with streaks of iridescent thread and sour-candy colors. Brewer's interests in psychoanalysis and art therapy seem most relevant to her studio process. The scrim felting method is slow and repetitive, lulling the artist into a contemplative state from which she creates intuitive, extemporized compositions. Inspired by Surrealist automatism and art therapy, she strives for direct expression of her inner psyche in each work, while pliable organic materials model changing states of consciousness. Brewer's scrim, exhibited alongside the rigid and layered *Live Resin* works, construct a material dichotomy that reflects the complexity of the human psyche.



Rebecca Brewer, "Live Resin: Twin Flame" (2019), urethane resin, aluminum mesh, pigment, Plexiglas, embossing powder on vellum, 41 x 29 inches (image courtesy the artist and Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver)