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September 2007

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## ELLIPSE ARTS CENTER

Arlington Cultural Affairs

4350 North Fairfax Drive, Arlington Virginia 22203

Located 1 block west of the Ballston Metro

[ellipseartscenter@arlingtonva.us](mailto:ellipseartscenter@arlingtonva.us)

<http://www.arlingtonarts.org/ellipseartscenter.htm>

Garage parking available for \$3 during weekday gallery hours

Garage parking open late and FREE during Opening Reception

Gallery Hours: Wednesday, Thursday, Friday 11am–7pm & Saturday 11am–2pm

## PRESS CONTACTS:

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# THE THREAD AS THE LINE

## CONTEMPORARY SEWN ART

Friday, May 2 – Saturday, July 12, 2008

OPENING RECEPTION: Thursday, May 1, 6–9pm

*Parking is free and open late the night of the reception*

CURATOR: Cynthia Connolly, Ellipse Arts Center Director



**Rachel Bernstein**, North Carolina  
**Natalia Blanch**, Argentinean lives in France  
**Jennifer Boe**, Missouri  
**Thomas Campbell**, California  
**Natalie Chanin**, Alabama  
**Graham Childs**, Washington DC  
**Steve Frost**, Washington DC  
**Sabrina Gschwandtner**, New York

**Caroline Hwang**, New York  
**Brece Honeycutt**, Washington, DC  
**Jennifer Muskopf**, Massachusetts  
**Valerie Molnar**, Virginia  
**Zac Monday**, California  
**Matt Nelson**, Virginia  
**Anila Rubiku**, Albanian lives in Italy  
**Megan Whitmarsh**, California

Exhibiting the work of sixteen local, national and international artists, "The Thread as the Line" exposes the expanding interest in using traditional sewing and embroidery in contemporary fine art. THE STORY: In 1999, Cynthia Connolly\* went to New York City to hock her postcards at various stores. One was Patch 155, on Rivington. Instead of establishing a business relationship, she ended up making a friend of whom she would visit every time she went to New York: Cal Patch. Cal's store sold hand made clothes by artists and designers. Patch 155 was a bee hive of activity of people wanting to sew and create. It was here that Cynthia was inspired to sew her photographs and create a new direction in her artwork. After this time, Cynthia noticed that the medium of sewing in fine art continually grew. This exhibition is a document to this movement.

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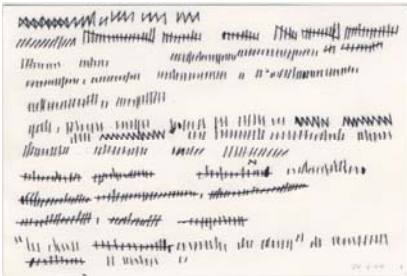
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**Rachel Bernstein** (b. 1970 La Jolla, California) grew up surrounded by medicine and visual art. Her parents professions and her time spent volunteering in a children's ward of a hospital greatly influenced her art making. After receiving a BA in Philosophy from NYU, she studied figure, animation and sculpture at Washington University in St. Louis Missouri. Her sculptural work envelopes the skill of creating life like renditions of human anatomy parts that explore the borderline between the beautiful and the grotesque "Inner organs are often presented as a subject of horror or perhaps clinical interest but organs are as beautiful as the contours of

our exteriors." She uses organic materials such as handmade felt and needlepoint to depict components of the digestive, circulatory and muscular systems. She explains that these materials "have been denigrated as craft media, rather than media of fine art. I reclaim these marginalized mediums by using them to depict things that have traditionally been displayed in medical academies rather than ladies' dressing rooms." In *The Thread as the Line* Rachel will show a human foot, thigh and compositions of human intestines.



**Natalia Blanch** (b. Argentina) earned her BFA from the National University of Córdoba, Argentina in 1996 and an MFA from the University of Maryland at College Park in 2000. She now lives in Grenoble, France. She shows internationally and has recently exhibited at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington DC. In *The Thread as the Line* she exhibits a steel filing cabinet containing a collection of 4x6" cards of various papers which she uses paint, thread, vellum paper and

photographs to create her *Minimum Drawings*. Natalia describes this work as "an ongoing project I started in March 2003 in Prague, where I was participating in an artist residency in the Center for Contemporary Art, Jeleni Studio. The first drawings (first three months of work) are notes about the Iraq war. The following ones are representations of everyday events that impress me and that belong both to my own personal reality and to the world's." The viewer is welcome to go through the filing card box and examine them.



**Jennifer Boe** (b. 1978 Niles, Michigan) has a BFA in painting and Creative Writing from the Kansas City Art Institute and lives in Kansas City, Missouri. After graduating, she "fell out of love from painting". She felt it too fast for her, and moved into embroidery. In spite of having wholly abandoned painting for over five years now she still refers to herself as a painter. Her new work is heavily influenced by her mother's craft projects and her grandmother's gifts of embroidered linens. Jennifer states that "there is a distinction between and a hierarchical ordering of fine art over craft, which solidified about the time of the renaissance; 'Art' being strong, masculine and educated; 'craft' being weak, feminine, domestic and amateur." In *The Thread as the Line* Jennifer will exhibit a life sized embroidered vacuum with attachments and other embroideries of contemporary food and its packaging. Her work focuses on everyday

life. She states that, "in spite of feminism, the rugs still need to be vacuumed, the dishes washed and the groceries bought... cleanliness is akin to godliness. I am very conscious that, for better or for worse, I am a consumer and advertising firms are our modern day snake-oil salesmen."

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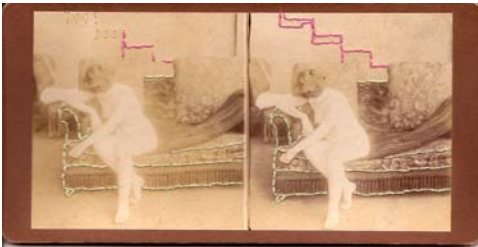
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using broad fast strokes with layering of small detailed intricacy including "combined scribbles and scriptures, taking slogans and anecdotes from a unique vocabulary and juxtaposing them with a profound look at human nature." In 2004, Cynthia found out that Thomas was now using sewing as a medium in his work. In *The Thread as the Line* Thomas will show his newer work of sewn together paintings pieces.



**Natalie Chanin** (b. 1961 Florence, Alabama) in 2000 re-established her studio in Alabama after 22 years of living and working abroad as a costume designer. She has a degree in Environmental Design from North Carolina State University and works as a designer, manufacturer, consultant, stylist, filmmaker, mother, artisan, cook and collector of stories. Her past clothing line, *Project Alabama*, was sold in national and international high-end retail stores. She recently founded *Alabama Chanin*, where artisans from small Alabaman communities construct her clothing, home furnishing and accessory designs by combining new, organic and recycled materials. In *The Thread as the Line* Natalie contributes a repaired and preserved vintage quilt that she has embellished and embroidered to illustrate the bond between our past, our present and our future. This work serves as canvas for oral histories – collected from local textile workers over the last eight years. (photo by Peter Stangelmeyr)



**Graham Childs** (b. 1979 Manhattan, Kansas) lives and works in Washington, DC and recently graduated with a MFA from American University. His work deals with the societal expectations of gender distinction. Childs confronts, accepts and takes ownership of stereotypical roles by combining the elegant craft of embroidery and the grace of the artifact. "My work is a celebration; it becomes icons of innocence and strength struggling against time to stay frozen in memory and is about rejoicing the truths that we all share as human beings." In *The Thread as a Line* Graham will exhibit original stereograms (circa 1895-1920) of French risqué nudes embellished with his embroidery.

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**Steve Frost** (b. Woodsville, NH) lives and works in Washington, D.C. In 2004, as Frost completed his BFA thesis at Alfred University's New York State College of Ceramics, work from his *Merit Badge Series* became part of a free speech controversy in Krakow, Poland. Frost and other members of the feminist collective, The Evolutionary Girl's Club, launched an exhibition as part of Poland's Festival of Tolerance. The festival and exhibition drew crowds of anti-queer protesters and resulted in the destruction of many of Frost's works which confront themes of gender, heritage and the history of materials. When creating his new series, Steve visualized that he was a drag queen in a 70's print dress. In *The Thread as the Line* Steve will exhibit wall mounted fabric panels and a reupholstered couch which tell "tales of heartache" constructed from the "socks, underwear and t-shirts from men he may or may not have had break his heart."



**Sabrina Gschwandtner** (b. 1977 Washington DC) is a New York City based artist who works with film, video, photography, performance, sewing, crochet and knitting. She has a BA in Art/Semiotics from Brown University, an MFA from Bard College and has exhibited internationally. In 2002 she founded *Knitknit*, a limited edition arts journal dedicated to the intersection of fine art and handcraft. Since she has curated numerous shows and events around performative and political textiles, effectively creating a community of artists, artisans and crafters whose work defies categories of fine art or craft. Her 2007 book *Knitknit: Profiles and Projects from Knitting's New Wave* bring together a community of 27 knitters under an expanded definition of what art is. Sabrina's work in *The Thread as the Line* explores themes of tactility and community while engaging the spaces between craft and art, hobbyist and professional, artist and curator.



**Brece Honeycutt** (b. 1960 Hickory, North Carolina) makes history-based drawings, sculptures and installations. She received an undergraduate degree in Art History from Skidmore College and a MFA in sculpture from Columbia University. Honeycutt's recent exhibitions include *Emily Dickinson Rendered* at Wave Hill in Bronx, New York; *husks* at Broadway Windows in New York, New York; *silence* at Evergreen House (now permanently sited on the grounds of Bryn Mawr School in Baltimore) and at *Table* installed for two years on the grounds of Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia. Her works are often collaborative installations placed in public spaces such as university campuses, historical houses, non-profit spaces and inner-city parks. Currently Brece is spinning yarn in Arlington, Virginia and recording the memories of fiber, thread and spinning told to her by passers-by. For *The Thread as the Line* her installation will include digitally recorded stories as well as yards and yards of produced homespun.

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**Caroline Hwang** (b. 1979 Minneapolis, Minnesota) lives and works in Brooklyn New York. Her work was most recently highlighted in Juxtapoz Magazine. Recent solo exhibitions include *Wounded, But Not Broken* at Giant Robot Gallery in New York, New York and *Drifters, Drift* at New Image Art in Los Angeles, California. Caroline's craft steams from hours spent with her grandmother watching and learning about embroidered and quilted works. This homegrown familiarity with her process contributes to the work's sense of comfort. In *The Thread as the Line* Caroline appropriates the shapes of international nautical code/signaling flags. These flags, in their original state, use bright primary colors to

communicate between sea ships and the shore. In Caroline's sewn cloth works the shapes of these flags remain but the colors are subdued to illustrate that communication is not always clear between humans. She then paints images of female figures atop the subdued flags to explore the danger and miscommunication that happens within personal relationships.



**Valerie Molnar** (b. 1983 Ohio) lives in Richmond, Virginia and will complete her MFA in painting at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in May 2008. Deviating from using paint as her main medium Valerie's main focus has become knitting. Although, using the wall as her canvas, she still paints "overlaps" of color on her tacked on knitted compositions. Valerie states, "The way these two constructs work together as a team is that the brightly colored images and forward scale grab the attention and the familiar and non-threatening nature of the material (yarn and knitting) pulls people in

closer, whoever they might be... Ideally the two, paint and knitting, should flux between being inseparable and separate. "



**Zac Monday** (b.1985 Meadville, Pennsylvania) is a Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) sculpture program graduate and is currently enrolled in the University of California at San Diego's MFA program. The year before he entered VCU, his mother taught him to crochet. He began crocheting face coverings that ultimately became "masks that covered the entire body". When his actors wear his costumes they invade the viewers' physical space. Zac states that "I get really bored entering an art show with all of the art caged to the wall or on the floor- making it totally inaccessible to our physical presence. I want to challenge the viewers experience with the art, making it somehow not as safe." In *The Thread as the Line* Zac will present five full body crochet costumes exhibited in their "vacant" state.

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**Jennifer Muskopf** (b. 1971 Millstadt, Illinois) since 2003 has lived in Washington, DC; Barbados, West Indies; Brooklyn, New York and Carrboro, North Carolina with her anthropologist husband. She has exhibited internationally and studied at Kansas City Art Institute. Jennifer creates "soft sculptures" of handmade stuffed animals interacting within their environment. She describes her works as "quiet, detailed scenes depicting the strangeness of ordinary objects around us. Plants stand sentinel. Clouds communicate with their grounded shadows. Animals escape our boundaries."

When discussing her fascination with the sea she explains that, "I want to represent the creatures that really exist there. I am making life-sized stuffed animal versions of these *monsters* in an attempt to know them. To have them share our space. To know how big they are next to me. To imagine what it is like in their space. To look closely at what is in our world but still beyond our understanding." For *The Thread is the Line* Jennifer will install her soft sculptures of life-sized deep sea fish in a closed off, dimly lit space in the gallery in order to emulate and transport the viewer to the deep sea where these *monsters* lurk.



**Matt Nelson** (b. 1972 Fairfax, Virginia) grew up in Arlington, Virginia, and entered art school at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in 1990. While studying painting and printmaking at VCU, Matt started working with fabric. When he saw a photo of singer Perry Farrell of the band Jane's Addiction with a fabric doll in his pocket, he wanted to make one for himself. Matt began with anonymous voodoo dolls, but soon began making doll-portraits of his friends. Not being flush with cash and sick of breathing paint fumes is when Matt moved back to Arlington and started working on his first two-dimensional sewn piece in 1998. A love of American folk art and quilts led him to experiment "painting"

with fabric thus crafting his first 10 x10" square. Two years later, Matt completed a quilt of 30 squares featuring images pulled from the worlds of music, pop culture and his own life. *The Thread as the Line* features Matt's recent work influenced by his 1998 quilt of 30 squares.



**Anila Rubiku** (b. Albania) left her home country of Albania in 1994 to study in Milan at the Brera Academy. This new beginning caused her to examine many aspects of her life, including her identity as an Albanian female artist. She developed a growing consciousness of her core values and roots. Though she continued to visit home ever year, as Albania changed she became a foreigner in her homeland and remained a foreigner as an Albanian in Italy. She writes, "Embroidery is a simple and humble medium practically forgotten in Albania, but which has for generations been a

part of my roots and family history, which is made up of women and feminine sensibility in a society where men call all the shots. " Anila has been exhibiting internationally since the mid 1990's and in 2004 began using thread as a way to identify with her homeland. *The Thread as the Line* exhibits her 2006 work *Mastering Freedom* which depicts a horse — representing power, freedom and the male world — with a woman in designer clothes standing atop. The woman is inappropriately dressed to ride the horse, as if to tame the male power and spirit in the stereotypical feminine way.

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**Megan Whitmarsh** (b.1972 Cambridge, Massachusetts) has a MFA from the University of New Orleans and a BFA from Kansas City Art Institute. She has recently exhibited in the United States, Spain, Belgium, Iceland, Canada, Korea, Germany and Switzerland. She lives in Los Angeles: a place where nature and the constructs of man collide with rawness as buildings, trash and pavement confront the sandy dry Southern Californian soil. This conflicted space feeds Megan's form. She transforms "the multiplicity of ordinary life into magical yet accessible moments. My work displays scenes of fantasy characters existing amongst the detritus of the modern world." In *The Thread as the Line* Megan will exhibit small canvasses consisting of brightly colored fabric

squares embroidered with tiny girls, boys and yetis on spare backgrounds dotted with iconic landscape features such as icebergs, crystals and forests.

*High resolution images are available upon request*

**\*Cynthia Connolly** is a Washington, DC area photographer and artist who became known as a photographer of the DC punk music scene in the 1980's. She created and published the book, Banned in DC in 1988 which documented that movement. She has over the years found it her life long ambition to continually document many things that are movements or "things that are disappearing". She continues to photograph and print silver gelatin prints, as an artist, of wide open American landscapes, telephone booths, roadside arrow signs, "inca" markers on the ground for aerial photography and mapping, and ice machines. Her ice machines appeared in an exhibit that was reviewed in *Art in America* with over 30 artists including Thomas Campbell, that opened at the Center for Contemporary Art in Cincinnati in March 2004 entitled "Beautiful Losers" curated by Aaron Rose and Christian Strike. This exhibit is presently touring Europe. She also self toured her photographs in the late 90's for five years of "People from DC in bands with their Cars" in venues all over the United States, with the final exhibit in London at the Contemporary Arts Center. Her most recent work appears in the Winter 2007/08 issue of the magazine, *Fretboard Journal*, documenting the seeming new trend of punk musicians who play Old Time music. This exhibit, "The Thread as the Line" is another form of documenting what she sees as another movement.

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