

CARRIE SECRIST GALLERY

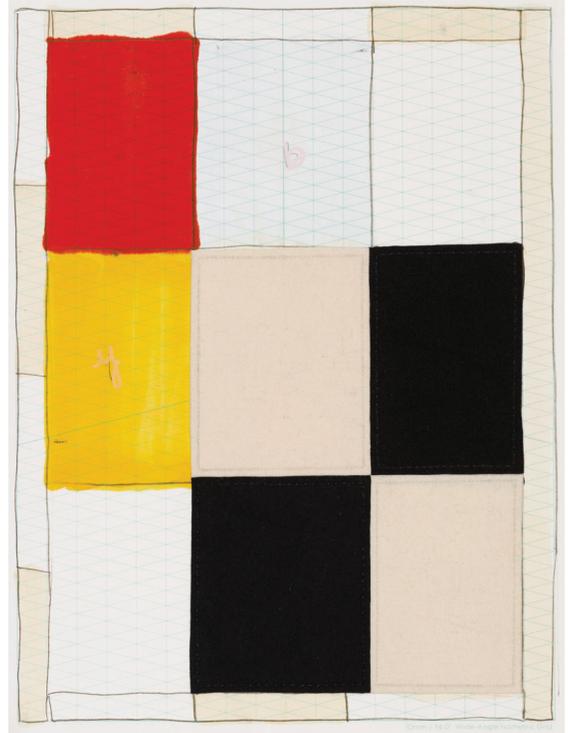
March 28–May 2, 2020

The Devil's Daughter is Getting Married

Diana Guerrero-Maciá

RYB Forever 2020
Collage on Hahnemuhle paper
32" x 27"

Image on cover
Who Loves The Sun 2020
Dye and vintage embroidery on canvas
57" x 49"



The Archaeology of Cloth

Making art for Diana Guerrero-Maciá means shifting through multiple media in a post-disciplinary practice of elastic hybridity. It's how she thinks, it's how she rolls. Perhaps the immigrant culture-jamming inherited from her Cuban parents guides her, or maybe it's the effect of the background noise of today's densely complex information network. Either way, Guerrero-Maciá moves fluidly from drawing to collage to photography to print, and then to larger works of cloth handwork—dyed, shaped and stitched. Within this recent collection of collage on fine paper and monumental gridded fields of cut cloth ornamented with three-dimensional props and familiar motifs—targets, stripes, diamonds, and circles, Guerrero-Maciá traffics in the visual pleasure of the decorative, while yielding subtle narratives on the historic ambitions of abstract painting, needlework and feminism, and the power of myth.

Guerrero-Maciá uses found clothing, a palette of the discarded. Artists before her have done this too: Miriam Shapiro, Robert Rauschenberg, and Faith Ringgold decades ago; and Jeffrey Gibson, Shinique Smith, and Sanford Biggers more recently. Like these artists, she toys with the slippery categories of so-called high art and craft—evoking painting's colored forms bound within rectangular frames, but avoiding any trace of actual paint. Guerrero-Maciá does take great care in dyeing many of the cloth pieces, carefully

calibrating pigment to water in relation to the absorption quality of different fabrics. Like Wassily Kandinsky's use of color and form, there is a sense of synesthesia throughout. One touches the fabric surfaces with one's eyes, tastes their piquant textures, and the colors seem to emit aromas—fresh yellows and sweet oranges. Guerrero-Maciá culls from that which was once useful: army blankets, men's suits, couture dresses, overcoats, and other apparel. Her parents taught her the value of material re-use, "making the most with the least," like Claude Levi-Strauss' famous *bricoleur*, who collects and retains materials, keeping them for when they might come in handy. Guerrero-Maciá uses garments, deconstructed and flattened; and the wearer, their body, has vanished. All that is left is an archaeology of cloth, a *bricolage* of human protection.

The grid is the prevailing structure in the eight large works in the show. In *The Devil's Daughter is Getting Married* a beautiful arrangement of striped, checkerboard, plaid, houndstooth, and other hand-dyed rectangular pieces play off one another, their individual patterns echoed in the design of the overall field. A yellow rope, taken from some fancy dress long forgotten, hangs across the composition. Like Georges Braque's famous single bit of illusionistic rope in his otherwise fractured cubist painting, *Man with a Guitar* (1911), Guerrero-Maciá's rope also reminds

viewers of the origin of her otherwise magical transformation of media. And like Robert Rauschenberg's *Bed* (1955), a work the artist covets as an influence, Guerrero-Maciá's grid bears the marks of its maker. The frayed edges of the fabrics, the particularity of the dyes, how the grid buckles slightly, and the evident softness of the material belie the rigid authority associated with the form. More grids abound in *Who Loves the Sun*, a dazzling array of brilliant yellows squares sporting a single panel of her mother's floral embroidery. One of the yellow squares again makes an appearance in *Sartorial Double Rainbow* in the company of other striped and dyed patches. Three black rectangles are cut from a man's overcoat, its sartorial elegance anchoring the otherwise rowdy roster of squares. And *A Perfect Day* hosts an arrangement of hand-dyed light blue squares punctuated by a single central panel with colorful vertical stripes, like a window into some other dimension. A large gray pebble rests on top of the frame as a souvenir of a peaceful beach day to which the title refers. An interloper of found nature supplementing the abstracted scene—the real and the unreal in an exquisite duet.

In *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Rosiland Krauss writes in 1986 that the grid is "a structure that has remained emblematic of the modernist ambition within the visual arts...the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art...flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal." But Guerrero-Maciá's grids are not entirely geometric, nor entirely flat, and certainly not entirely "antireal." The trace of pliable cloth that references the absent body counters the modernist enterprise of autonomy to which Krauss refers. These are suggestive objects, made even more so by several biomorphic forms that interrupt the architectonic grids. In *The Let Down*, two panels of hot orange diagonals frame the central image of a fertility goddess. With ample bared breasts at both the top and bottom of her torso, the spidery, abstracted form presents an awesome figure of power. The image is based on another commanding female celebrity from the many Spanish colonial paintings of the Virgin Mary, that Guerrero-Maciá finds compelling in their ethnicity, their formal layout, and their spirit. *Night Watch* too displays the same majestic mother floating down above a black rectangle interspersed with white circles and a heraldic set of stripes at the top. Against the many grids in this body of work, these women appear as the queens on the chessboard; their feminist dominion coming plainly into view. Guerrero-Maciá speaks of seeing the 1970s work of the Pattern and Decoration movement while a student in

the 1980s, and her indebtedness to this history of women's work reclaimed as source material for their feminist expressions. The decorative crafts of cultures from around the world informed Joyce Kozloff, Miriam Schapiro, and others. The artists broke with the hierarchical values associated with such crafts and boldly asserted an unrestrained and inclusive use of ornament. This is Guerrero-Maciá's history, a global story of women's production, often for the home, one of the few places where women could express themselves creatively. Indeed, Guerrero-Maciá maintains a home studio by critical choice.

In *Born in the Sixties*, the same triangular composition of *The Let Down* prevails, but the reference to the figure is now quite schematic. Daisies ornament the field, two pink eyes seem to stare out from the center and at the top a colored hexagon, crowned by one of the daisies, lies beneath the word LOVE. It is the only text in the series of large paintings and so significant in its denotation. For those born in the sixties, like Guerrero-Maciá, there remains the possibility of peaceful revolution against the seemingly omnipotent military-industrial complex. Guerrero-Maciá offers the beauty of well-crafted things, reminding us of the weight of these traditions, of creative making as opposed to blind consuming. And she conjures mystic mothers presiding over it all. Many of the smaller collages bear titles referring to the seasons, suggesting private cosmologies, or talismanic diagrams with their targets, flowers, grids, and faces—like pages torn from some esoteric prayer book. The modernists saw the grid as a universal sign of the metaphysical. Guerrero-Maciá acknowledges this enterprise, but inserts the quotidian, flaunting its mythic potential. Using humble fragments of the everyday she steers us towards soothing reflective consciousness, as only great art can do.

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