

## *A Place Where You Can Exist Without Being Useful*

April 20th - May 26th, 2018

Curated by Kate Giles

Textiles and fiber based media has always been mired in a craft versus art debate. It is a dichotomy that has stuck on fiber art since it first shifted in the early to mid 1900's. Using terms like fiber art is an uprooting of craft, an attempt to take it to a place where we must consider its history; artisan products, handmade objects in times of industrial production, and ultimately, something that is functional. Yet it pushes it beyond and absorbs it into artistic practices and ambiguity. In one of the most predominant shifts, Bauhaus student, Anni Albers, called it 'pictorial weaving' to demonstrate its turn to favour self expression over function. A new epoch for fiber based media to shed it's determinacy to domestic functions. Often times these functions were supplementary to architecture—useful for architecture. To become art, they must shed their determinacy to function in domestic spaces. That these motions are always identified between functional and nonfunctional, useful or useless, is similar to our societal habit of reducing and quantifying ones worth to their capacities of production and productivity. In other words, the rhetoric of textile and fiber art becomes a metaphor apt for the use of those who have long endured their identities captive under singular categorization and value determined by their ability to be useful.

Fiber art presents a space where one can exist within these in between spaces. Their worth and identity no longer defined by use or function, no longer forced into a singular and limiting category. *A Place Where You Can Exist Without Being Useful*, presents multiple ways this can be explored. Sheila Pepe's work, *Research Station for the People*, 2011, grabs your attention as soon as you enter. Her knitted and crocheted forms, paired with found objects, span across the gallery in ambiguous, growth like shapes that invite viewer interaction. In this show, this is the most literal translation of a space presented where one can simply exist within it. As one experiences this show they must dismiss their immediate reactions to question whether it is craft or art and accept that it is both and neither. It would also be favourable to dismiss the common notions of an art gallery and how we are taught to act and to simply look.

The discussion of art or craft is a familiar one when it comes to textile and fiber arts, especially as every time they face a resurgence, the work generally takes on the theme of raising such materials and processes out of their craft relegation and into galleries and other modes of fine art. However despite this progression, fiber arts has still shifted uncomfortably in its position from craft, to art, and back again despite the efforts of innumerable artists. Fiber arts has always remained a bit innocuous to the art world—and so the conversation about art or craft rages on.

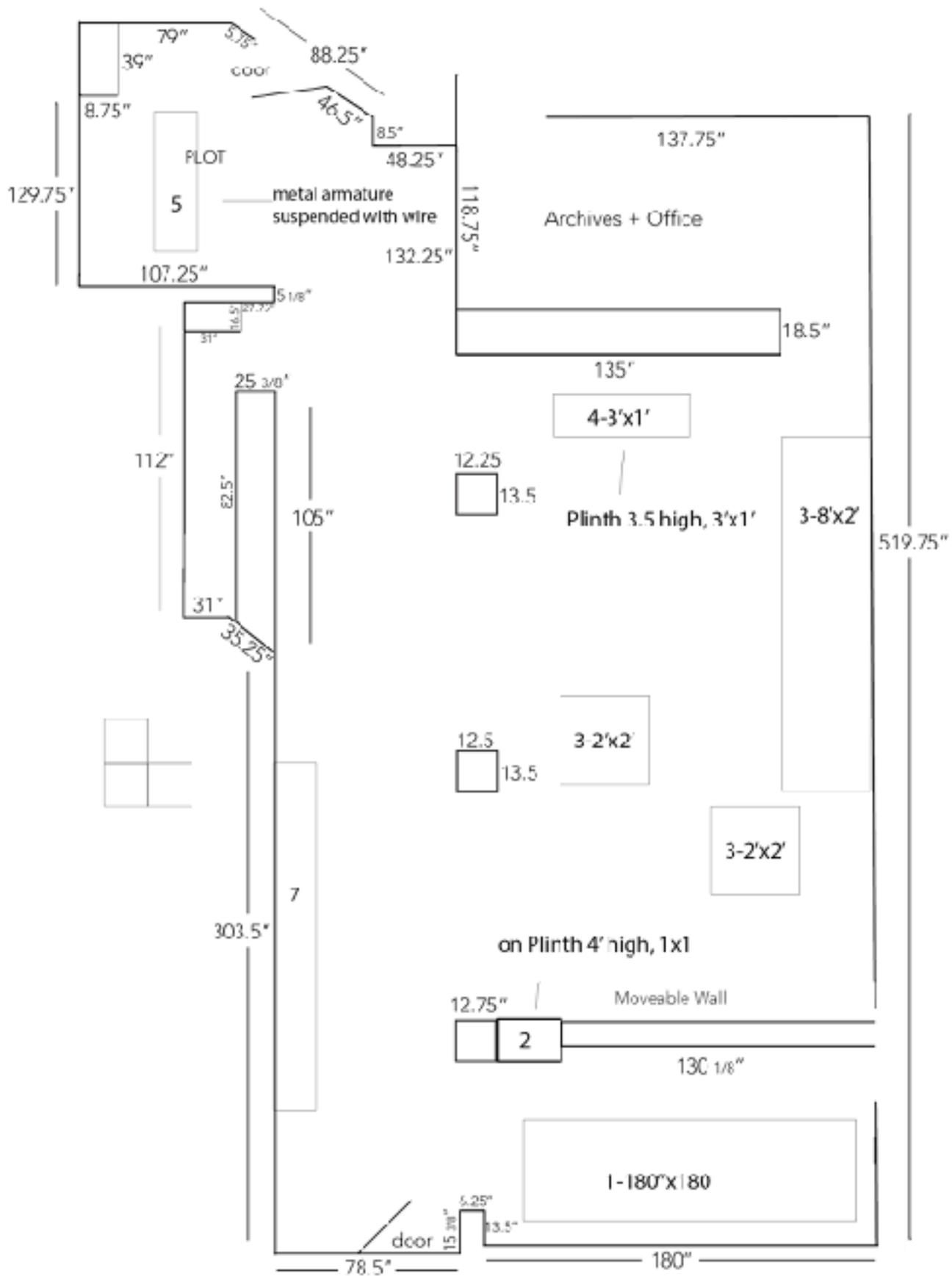
The rudimentary knitting of *Dropping Stitches*, 2002, by LJ Roberts, is a static piece that directly addresses this art/craft dichotomy and describes the performative process of knitting through its prose. And, as a queer artist, more importantly, it takes up space. This knitting isn't a tightly contained mess of loops and knots, nor is it a structure/object meant to contain another body. It unapologetically takes up physical space and produces a voice is poetic, personal, and assertive. This is doubled by the second piece of LJ Roberts that is included, *Super Butch Knitting Needles*, 2003. The sterility and violence imposed by these artist made knitting needles supersede notions of cozy, domestic homemaking that is follow notions of knitting. Robert's gender identity is voiced again in a shifting state that is does not easily rest in stereotypes and rigid identity.

Bukola Koiki's work also references a familial tradition and a shifting of identities, albeit one that is more physical and geographical. *I Claim That Which Was Never Mine*, 2014, manifests the *gele*, a large piece of cloth that is wrapped and worn on the head of Nigerian women as part of their special occasion dress. These objects themselves, along with the video documentation of Koiki's attempts at trying them around her head, are acts of acknowledging and trying to understand this in-between state that has arose out of memory and cultural displacement. Koiki quite literally reaches into her family's past, learning from old pictures of family members wearing geles and memories of her mother tying them along with online tutorials. The materials Koiki used are themselves placed in between as the Tyvek used is neither cloth, nor paper, yet retains qualities of both.

Both of Kelly Ruth's works integrate audio interactive practices. In *Loom+Cello*, 2014, the sounds of the loom begin as a quite literal translation of the process that many fiber artists take. As it is run through the whole gallery it becomes a background of noise that is meditative. It is simultaneously bringing an ephemeral demonstrative of the process of fiber arts while amplifying the meditative and physical aspects that become absorbed by the body during the making. Also connecting with the bodies inherent pull towards rhythm and pattern connections. Ruth presents a multi-sensory encounter with weaving. Purely ephemeral and invisible, such as *Loom+Cello*, the work exists in the action of weaving itself and allows such a full-body action to enter a space of re-interpretation.

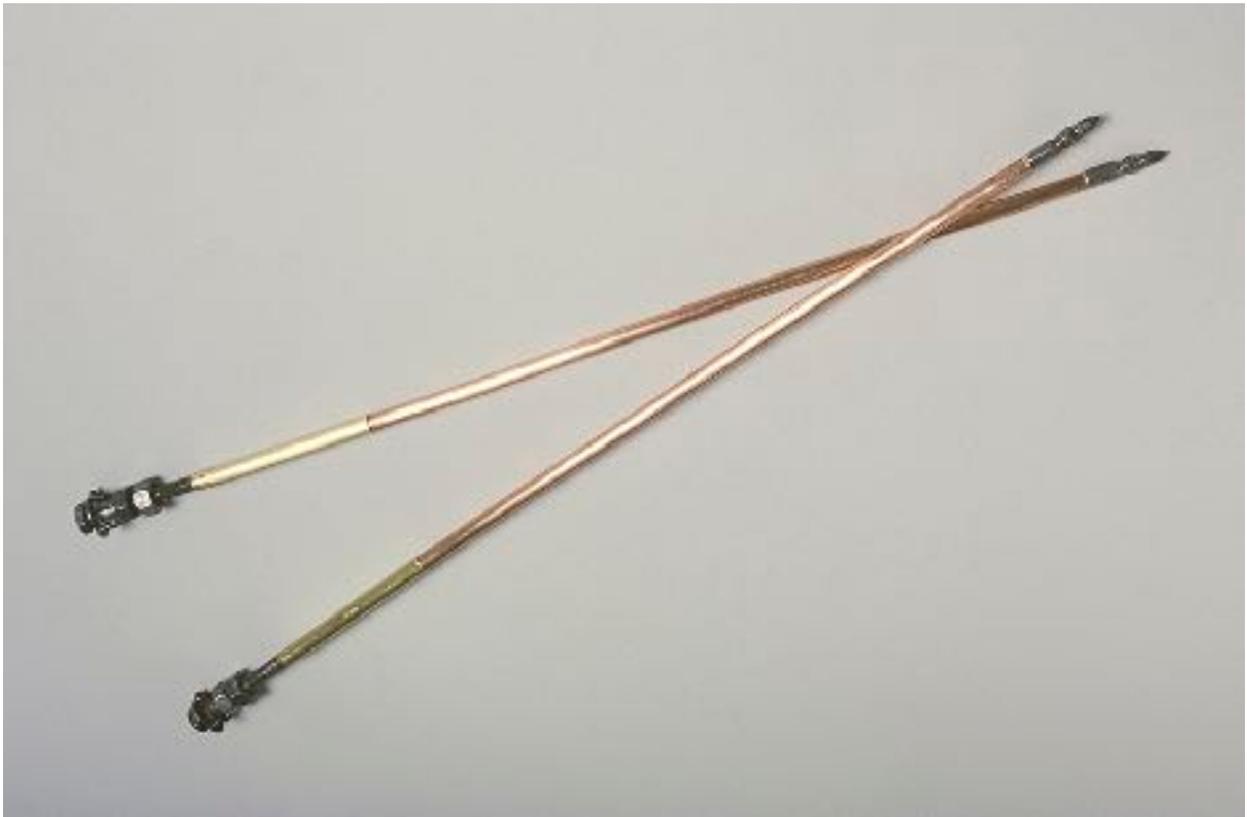
The biggest power that fiber art has is its efficacy in confronting us with the reality of multiplicitious and expansive identities. The context of fiber art here is that it simultaneously acknowledges its materiality and history while refuting its boundaries and categorization. Fiber art presents the potential for simultaneity. It is always both and neither, constantly moving and adapting to its environment and context, a shifting identity always in flux.

| No | Artist         | Title                                    | Date | Medium   | Dimensions          |
|----|----------------|--|------|--|---------------------|
| 1  | LJ Roberts     | <i>Dropping Stitches</i>                 | 2002 | Hand-Knit Yarn, Single Channel Video   | 20'x15'             |
| 2  | LJ Roberts     | <i>Super Butch Knitting Needles</i>      | 2003 | Copper Tubing, Brass Tubing, Phillips Head Drill Bits, Assorted Nuts and Bolts | 1' long             |
| 3  | Sheila Pepe    | <i>Research Station: For the People</i>  | 2014 | locally resourced readymades with handmade textiles within a steel structure.  | Dimensions Variable |
| 4  | Bukola Koiki   | <i>I Claim That Which Was Never Mine</i> | 2014 | Tyvek, Cotton Canvas, Indigo Dye, charcoal from train tracks                   | 3'x1'               |
| 5  | Kelly Ruth     | <i>Polyphonic Tides of Progress</i>      | NA   | Wool, ultrasonic sensors, audio  | 3'x5'               |
| 6  | Christy Matson | <i>Movements</i>                         | 2008 | Woven form, touch sensitive sensors, audio                                     | 1'x8'               |
| 7  | Kelly Ruth     | <i>Loom+Cello</i>                        | 2014 | Audio  | NA                  |





LJ Roberts, *Dropping Stitches*, 2002



LJ Roberts, *Super Butch Knitting Needles*, 2003



Shelia Pepe, *Research Station: For the People*, 2014



Shelia Pepe, *Research Station: For the People*, 2014



Shelia Pepe, *Research Station: For the People*, 2014



Bukola Koiki, *I Claim That Which Was Never Mine*, 2014



Kelly Ruth, *Polyponic Tides of Progress, NA*



Christy Matson, *Movements*, 2008

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/22617372>

Kelly Ruth, *Loom+Cello*, 2014

Audio Link: <https://soundcloud.com/loom-cello/loom-sounds>