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Tabitha Arnold and Tamara Kostianovsky: Weaving a Future

In New York, exhibitions at Field Projects and SLAG&RX, with tapestries about the labor movement and soft sculptures that focus on rebirth, reveal the invigorating state of textile arts.

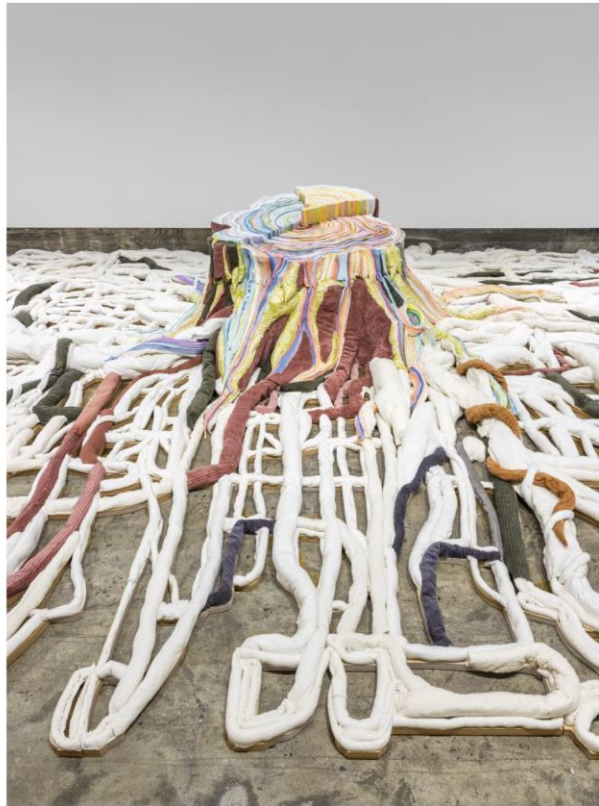
By Brian P. Kelly

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Installation view of 'Tamara Kostianovsky: Moved by Forces' at SLAG&RX. PHOTO: SLAG&RX

Ms. Arnold is one of an ever-growing number of contemporary artists who have rescued textiles from second-class status in the art world. She is part of a larger trend in which media long consigned to the craft bin—or, more offensively, scorned as “women’s work”—have been reappraised, a movement that’s been aided by recent museum shows dedicated to the likes of [Anni Albers](#), [Marta Minujín](#) and [Dorothy Liebes](#). This is a welcome development for myriad reasons, not least because it brings us exhibitions like “**Tamara Kostianovsky: Moved by Forces**” at SLAG&RX.



Tamara Kostianovsky's 'Narcissus.' PHOTO: SLAG&RX

Ms. Kostianovsky’s exhibition is an aviary, acropolis, abattoir and forest floor all in one, her soft sculptures merging life and death in Technicolor assemblages that snake across the floor, lean against walls and dangle from the ceiling.

“Narcissus” is the awe-inspiring centerpiece here: a tree stump whose root systems, impossibly dense, spread across most of the main gallery’s ground. Like all of Ms. Kostianovsky’s work, it is made from recycled clothing, and the stump’s hues, though found in nature—periwinkle, cornflower, rose, plum, lemongrass—give it an alien quality. While some of its roots are also colored, most of the branching

network is stark white. Grid-like in arrangement, it subtly implies cartography, but also makes one ponder time: The bleached limbs strike one as potential paths not taken by the hewed tree, each representing a future never realized as its rhizomes charted a different course. Though this could leave viewers feeling fatalistic, peering around the back of the stump we are given hope in the form of a small leaf emerging from the wood cadaver.

Rebirth is a recurring theme throughout Ms. Kostianovsky's work. A side of beef, at once morbid and campy thanks to its brightly colored fabrics, dangles from a meat hook and bares its innards, out of which a jade-plumed bird grows, death once again begetting new life. In another work, a split-open cow carcass sprouts vines, while elsewhere a slab of wood and a cross-section of a tree appear to still be growing despite the saw work that's been done to them.

A pair of freestanding sculptures the artist calls caryatids amalgamate all the other elements found in the show. Nature, meat, decay, creation—all are collapsed into these densely packed forms that twist in on themselves and seem, like the architectural supports that inspired them, capable of bearing any load. They are frightening, welcoming and utterly captivating—each a testament to the power of textiles, a medium that continues to enjoy its own rebirth.

Tamara Kostianovsky: Moved by Forces

SLAG&RX, through Oct. 25

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