

Sophia NARRETT

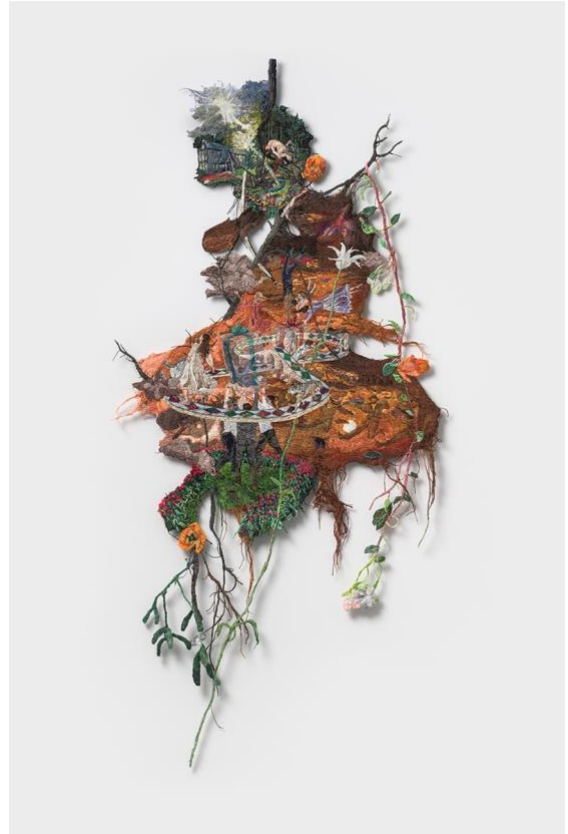
The Brooklyn Rail,
Sophia Narrett: Carried by Wonder

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ArtSeen

Sophia Narrett: *Carried by Wonder*

By Andrew Paul Woolbright



Sophia Narrett, *Carried by Wonder*, 2022–23.
Embroidery thread, fabric, acrylic and aluminum,
56 x 28 inches. Courtesy the artist and Perrotin.
Photo: Stan Narten.

Sophia Narrett's *Carried by Wonder* interlaces desire and material frisson to address the hyper circulation and free flow of images. Within the slippery context-collapse of scrolling feeds and multiple tabs, Narrett uses embroidery to question where materialism forms within screens. By coding a language of intense looking through phantasmagoric annotation, Narrett addresses desire with a type of sighting through citing. The streaming bodies and spaces of screens and search engine returns are conflated with personal images and threaded into loose narrative structures rife with ironic tensions and affects. Each space frustrates the distinction between montage and narrative gestalt, cohering at the speed and delay produced within digital sublime.

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Carried by Wonder

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Although embroidery is the medium, the conceptual strategy feels closer to the painters attempting to exit the picture after the Pictures Generation. As John Kelsey notes, a painting in the gallery is now a record of circulation, the permanent resolution of its more recognized existence as a TIFF. Narrett uses the stitch of the needle to realize the impermanent images of the screen and trap our vision within them; an act of storing time as Joselit would say. Each embroidery inscribes the images as transmissions of circulated love and eroticism while interweaving them with the flower fields of Rochegrosse or the valences of the Romantics, forming dreamscapes that linger somewhere in between art history and subscription services. Holding together the montage is the stitch of embroidery, and our own recognition of it as a language of adornment. Typically kept at the margins, Narrett uses its language to flood the center with pearlescent threads; producing nacreous worlds where emotions land with the unbearable registers of dreams. The detail becomes the Baroque overload. The lace flows to the edge until it produces frays, winding back on itself to form poppy fields of saudade and critical seduction; each producing critical suspicion when the circuit breaks.



Sophia Narrett, *As One*, 2023. Embroidery thread, fabric, acrylic and aluminum, 22 x 22 inches. Courtesy the artist and Perrotin. Photo: Stan Narten.

Self reflection and parallax become motifs in works like *As One* (2023). Figures explore different ways of drawing by grinding on the mirror of the painted canvas, with the familiar petals of *The Roses of Heliogabalus* returned to us as a loose veil, implicating us in a kind of Romantic gaze to view an allegory of a wedding. Instead of slipping through a mirror in Cocteau's *Orpheus*, the naked femme avatars fingerprint and perform within it. The image surface becomes a site of transgression. Whatever it is that we are through and beyond as digital-natives, initiates us into endless simulacral turns within the medium. Perhaps when it comes to representation, and our reflexivity to being recorded, we are all Moderns again, critiquing ourselves in the mirror while organizing and exploiting our own recursive abilities; understanding on some level that what Youngblood refers to as the intermedia network has replaced our concept of nature.

The embroidery obscures the image relations and desire that Narrett is concerned with. Her work holds the tension between sincere longing and critical repulsion, in a space where subjects have a sympathetic lack of agency, but also are complicit as architects of their own exploitation. They operate best when they produce the sensation of overlapping windows, multiple vantage points, scrolling speed and competing intensities—restaging the feeling of watching reality tv while listening to a podcast about surveillance. In *Charms* (2022), figures stare into a portal in the ground, implying multiplicity and that there are other arcs beyond the edge. The bricolage and sampling of video feeds and the flows they produce, are stitched into a permanent language of wuthering and gnarling seams. The bricolage has the ability to form gestalt when the referees are standing outside the roller rink and the black helicopters pass overhead, as seen in *Truth* (2021–2022); but also can remain a series of archipelagic tonalities in the case of *Carried by Wonder* (2022–2023) where figures feel more like avatars that together produce lines of an affective poem. Importantly, the pathos is capable of breaking into critical bathos. It is aware of its own complicated production of desire similar to avant-garde cinema; to vaseline on the lens of the camera, to the critical spectacle of Charles Atlas's installations; to Fassbinder lamenting that he would never concede color and desire to Folger's commercials and kitsch; to Peter Weir's gauzy *Picnic at Hanging Rock* channeled through Ryan Trecartin's interests in the aggregate personas that can only be teased out of stacked mediation; and to the fraught identity reality of performing as yourself, knowing that reality contestants now study the successful strategies of past reality contestants to inscribe it into their own manufactured sense of sincerity and self.



Sophia Narrett, *As One* (detail), 2023. Embroidery thread, fabric, acrylic and aluminum, 22 x 22 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin. Photo: Stan Narten.

When everything is adornment it becomes a critical gesture, a self-negation, a reflexive desire that suspends us forever in the moment of the close Victorian look. When the dream becomes too romantic or too *dreamy*, it shakes us awake. Narrett is able to generate a transcendent interiority on the scale of Emily Dickinson, where self confinement becomes transgressed, drawn and redrawn, to inscribe it within fantasy before breaking its illusion. Narrett wants the fantasy to be real, while critically reperforming and acting out its exhaustion and our exhaustion of self-image as resource. As Carolee Schneeman reminded us "vision is not a fact, but an aggregate of sensations." Narrett luxuriates in this aggregate, reforming vision and redirecting the production of media's desires to make them visible while finding what can be generated in the stamina of sincere desire.