

2024 Was the Year of the Art World's High Fiber Diet

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Julia Bland: *Helper*, 2024.

This year, the art world went on a high fiber diet. Abstract weavings, knotted sculptures, expressive basketry, shaggy wall hangings: all are coming out of artists' studios and museum storerooms, lending much-needed warmth and complexity to

exhibition spaces. The moment has been a long time coming. Textile, of course, is among the most ancient of human endeavors; tapestry once outranked painting in the hierarchy of the arts. But modern fiber art has rarely gotten much respect. It's one period of ascendancy came in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the Lausanne Tapestry Biennale was at its height, and the American counterculture, with its earnestly handcrafted aesthetics, was in full bloom. That was only a brief episode, though. A genre rooted in ancient techniques, adjacent to amateur pursuits, and—above all—mainly practiced by women and people of color? That was never going to command elite institutional attention for long.

Art history has a way of correcting its mistakes, though, and those aspects of fiber art that once marginalized the medium now make it feel relevant. Just like ceramics, which has enjoyed a parallel rise to prominence, textiles offer much of what the art world wants right now: under-explored histories, personal narrative, material intelligence, and demographic diversity.

The revival has taken ten years to gather strength. Arguably, it was initiated by curator Janelle Porter's pioneering exhibition "Fiber Sculpture 1960-Present," held at the ICA Boston in 2014. Since then, curator Ann Coxon has mounted well-received retrospectives of Anni Albers and Magdalena Abakanowicz at Tate Modern, and the discipline's grande dame, Sheila Hicks, has been the subject of several major shows. (She has one this year, too, in Dusseldorf.)

2024 has been truly unprecedented though, with a thick pile of projects to unpick. Here are ten of the best.

5 "Julia Bland: Rivers on the Inside," Derek Eller Gallery, New York City

Julia Bland also looks to the past, if not quite as far back as ancient Peru. She returns us, instead, to the visionary paintings of the early twentieth century, with their diagrammatic transcendentalism; and to the 1960s, releasing the era's hippie tie-dye from its cocoon of cliché, then allowing it to emerge a big, beautiful butterfly.

Her exhibition at Derek Eller Gallery in New York was her finest to date, populated by compositions of great contrapuntal sophistication, openwork alternating with density, tracteries of cord describing figures within the kaleidoscope of color and pattern. In Bland's gorgeous hangings, terms normally thought to be oppositional—craft and fine art, opticality and materiality—are held in suspension, as if in a dream state.