

SABRINA GSCHWANDTNER

Sabrina Gschwandtner materializes the interconnected histories of areas of cultural production that have traditionally been cordoned off from one another due to boundaries imposed by academics, curators, and critics. These categories—labeled craft, fine art, and time-based media—have long been received and appreciated in separate domains. In her activist, editorial, and artistic output (which all intersect and inform one another), Gschwandtner has created zines, performances, and “quilts” that—in the words of the art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson, bring “together feminist film theory and appraisals of craft.”¹

Gschwandtner has certainly been informed by tendencies in feminist film, in particular by its challenges to narrative structure and critiques of stereotypical representations of gender and sexuality. Her early film quilts used prints of so-called orphan films once in use as teaching tools at the Fashion Institute of Technology (given to her by the archivist Andrew Lampert). Although she learned to sew from her mother, Gschwandtner has never made a fabric quilt, and she gleaned her compositional skills from film editing. For these early film quilts, she drew from familiar quilt patterns and selected film strips of dynamic color and texture while also training our eyes on the labor of the hand.

The term *expanded cinema* has typically been used to describe a historical period in the mid-twentieth century when artists began to explore the off-screen potential of the projected image. Gschwandtner's is a more materials-based expansion, as she literally spools out celluloid and creates patterns that foreground its seriality. She excerpts sequences from films and works from familiar quilting patterns to create a domestically scaled composition, typically framed in a light box and mounted on the wall, that invites a more intimate mode of spectatorship.

Recently Gschwandtner's film quilts have taken on a more direct dialogue with cinema history as portraits of underrepresented women in the industry. The three quilts on display in the COLA exhibition (conceived by the artist as “material studies”) are designed for a forthcoming project, *Cinema Sanctuary*, which will provide a meditative and programmatic space to honor women cinematic pioneers. Whereas in the past Gschwandtner used orphan film prints to construct her quilts, she now uses digital transfers from original exhibition prints (preserved and stabilized through computer software) and then transfers them back to film stock. As she has in the past, she then uses quilting tools to thread together the pieces of polyester film stock.

The project is fueled by the Women Film Pioneers Project, started in 1993 by the film scholar Jane Gaines, a global and collective enterprise that has consolidated and made public this growing area of film scholarship. Gschwandtner's first quilt in this series is devoted to the Chinese American filmmaker Marion E. Wong, whose film *The Curse of Quon Gwon: When the Far East Mingles with the West* (1917) is considered to be the first to feature an all-Chinese (and Chinese American) cast. Working with the black-and-white stock of this recently preserved film, Gschwandtner created quilt patterns that condense Wong's representational concerns. Selected sequences radiate out in a spiral, giving us a rough sense of the narrative. But as in her previous quilts, Gschwandtner's real focus is to highlight women's labor and to spotlight that which has been relegated to the margins.

— Rita Gonzalez

Notes

1. Julia Bryan-Wilson, “Tactility and Transparency: An Interview with Sabrina Gschwandtner,” in *Sabrina Gschwandtner: Sunshine and Shadow* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Art Alliance, 2013), 45.

