

Tatjana Bergelt / **The Texture of Existence**

By Beth S. Gersh-Nesic, Ph.D., Director, New York Arts Exchange

Tatjana Bergelt seems to be searching for the essence of existence – the connecting tissues that verify reality in an increasingly complex world. To this end, she sets up tensions between images and words, bodies and shapes, figure and ground, reminiscent of Cubist collage and Dada photomontage. These various types of collages are arresting in their beauty. However, for all their visual delicacy (like gossamer-woven dreams), they resonate with disturbing pain and sadness as ghostly visions of dissonance.

Take, for example, *regret, remorse, sacrifice* (2013), a poetic vision of the human hand, bound by several multi-colored strands of yarn or thread, made inert and useless. The words “regret,” “remorse,” and “sacrifice” are almost imperceptible – so tiny and delicate – as if they are subconscious ruminations, discarded along seams and the margins. This collage seems to address the feminist struggle between duty and desire, the constraints that curtail a woman’s true self-actualization. The hand looks aged, puffy with excess work, probably at a stage in life when regrets come to pass.

ihminen-mensch [human] and *shortsighted* feature female figures clothed in late nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century fashion – the former appears rather “modern” in her hat, blouse and skirt, resting her left arm on a lectern; the latter sits in a typical Victorian pose, dignified in her high-collared frock. Yet, both bodies dissolve softly into transparent planes of flat abstraction, their faces obliterated by the title’s text. Again, we might consider a feminist concern with marginalizing women through psychological self-destruction.

Once more vulnerable, a young woman confronts five policemen in *power grid*. The words “self inflicted division” overlap and interact across the blurred uniforms of this contemporary riot squad. The young lady, photographed in profile, looks from the extreme left side of the composition to the right, where a depicted image of a helmeted policeman meets her gaze. The atmosphere is fraught with tension and fear. What will become of this militant encounter between one female civilian and five male cops? Dozens and dozens of lines drawn in bright or light hues energize the surface. The combination of elements feels highly-charged. Again, we consider existential vulnerability.

Bergelt said: “The very fundamental basis for my philosophy is we are all more similar than different. We are all afraid of death, eager to live, somehow more or less conscious, eager to love, to be loved.” It is this awareness of universals that brings such potency to her art.

Tatjana Bergelt was born in East Berlin in 1966. Educated in Germany, Estonia, France, and Spain, she now calls Finland her family home. According to her interviews and writing, she considers herself a collage, a product of various cultural elements that intersect and overlap in numerous ways. Bergelt’s work reflects her multinational existence and rigorous training, which has produced a high-caliber of artistic expression. But it is her provocative subject matter that captures our attention. Quietly powerful and elegantly rendered, Bergelt dares to confront us with our secret anxieties and existential concerns.

Mrs. Bergelt’s work belongs to many illustrious permanent collections, most notably the New York Public Library, New York; Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, Germany; Amos Anderson Art Museum, Helsinki, Finland; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; Helsinki City Library, Finland; and Bibliothèque Nationale, Luxembourg.