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# The New York Times

## Inside Art

### Art of the Wear and Tear

By Robin Pogrebin

Jan 28, 2016

Sit with the artist N. Dash in her studio in Long Island City, Queens, and you'll notice that she is constantly worrying a tiny piece of cloth in her hand, working over the fabric with her fingers.

This is not a nervous habit; this is her art.

For 15 years, Ms. Dash, 35, has photographed fabric sculptures made of cotton swatches that she carries around — “what people use to buff their cars” — until the pieces resemble scraps from a baby blanket a child could not bear to surrender.

“I think of it as an alternative recording device, where the body has the capacity to register information through touch onto the material,” she said. “It prioritizes physical experience and is outside of language.”

Ms. Dash then arranges the weathered scraps in various configurations and photographs them in her studio. Now some of those works, along with her paintings, will be on view at the Casey Kaplan gallery on West 27th Street in Chelsea starting on May 3.

Her paintings are composed of adobe earth that she brings back from New Mexico — where she lived for a time — sifting debris from the dirt to make her own paint.

Ms. Dash always carries the fabric with her — three pieces at a time in different stages of deterioration.

“I stop working on each one when they can't handle the wear anymore and will simply disintegrate,” she said.

“Words can be limiting,” Ms. Dash continued. “This is one of the most effective ways in which I communicate.”

“It's my responsibility to make this work,” she said. “So I don't question it.”



An untitled work by N. Dash. Credit Courtesy of the artist and Jean Vong/Casey Kaplan, New York

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# ARTFORUM

## N. Dash

HAMMER MUSEUM

N. Dash's first solo museum exhibition was staged in the Hammer's distinctive Vault Gallery; with its diminutive, bullet-shaped floor plan and arched ceiling, the chamber is one of the museum's more unusual spaces, and the room's obdurate layout underscored the role of architecture within Dash's incisive painting practice. Here the artist mounted five untitled paintings, all 2014. A series of unframed photographs depicting frayed, curling fabric were interspersed between the seductive planar compositions, and similar images were embedded, marquee-like, within the backlit panels dotting the colonnade of the Hammer's interior courtyard.

A visible seam wraps around the walls of the Vault Gallery where they meet the room's arched ceiling. In one work, Dash anchored along this line the horizontal joint where two indigo-painted panels abut; the installation strategy emphasized the division between the room's upper and lower segments. A third, smaller rectangular piece was mounted atop the two joined panels, and a sinewy twine cord dangling from the upper edge of the front polygon down the center of the work led the eye toward the room's baseboard. All of the artist's paintings- an inadequate term here, as sculptural elements abound- possess, to varying extents, dry, cracked facades made from adobe sourced from the New Mexican desert. One fine composition consists of a swarthy, arid rectangular plane partially hinged over another plane of a similarly grand scale (enormous roof shingles come to mind). A fold of cerulean linen peeks from between the overlaid adobe-on-jute quadrilaterals. The wall work's upper and lower sections evince vertical and horizontal striations, respectively, and recall the work of another painter indebted to the New Mexican landscape Agnes Martin. But Dash's lines aren't produced via accretions of paint; rather, the striations are inlaid twine strands positioned flush with the adobe surface.



View of "N. Dash," 2014-15. From left: Untitled, 2014; Untitled, 2014.

Formal purity and spatial logic intermingled serenely between the five panel compositions mounted here. Dash's materials are consistently preindustrial: adobe, linen, and jute, among others. Edges and lines often maintain visual continuity across discrete works, as spreads of linen fold and wrap between and through the painted quadrilaterals. While the artist's artisanal impulses align her labor with Arte Povera's cultivation of raw materials (albeit omitting the overtly political tone taken by the postwar Italian movement), her wall-mounted objects' exacting geometric delineations echo Minimalism's efforts to cut through three-dimensional space (as demonstrated in work by Fred Sandback and Richard Serra, among others).

Installed among her paintings, the muted images of frayed fabric bits affirmed Dash's fixation on materials and structure. The artist photographed each worn relic after working it with her fingers to the edge of deterioration. A text accompanying the exhibition asserted that, in spite of their indexical status as documentary photographs, the prints additionally approach the status of "primary source material" (in the artist's words), as unmediated and tactile as the textile artifacts they represent, by virtue of the damage accrued to each photograph as it is stapled and removed, then reaffixed-its hole-punched corners visible to the wall. This ontological claim to primary status is a tenuous one if we

consider that the haptic manipulation evident in the shredded fabrics is grossly disproportionate in both formal and temporal scale to the momentary damage done by the minute perforations that mark the corners of these gelatin silver prints. And though the assertion is seductive, both documentary and primary claims are hampered by characteristics that cement the prints' status as highly calculated images whose subjects are manipulated and posed in the artist's studio, then processed into aesthetically precious serial works. If the artist's paintings point elsewhere-whether to adobe architecture, the New Mexican desert, or some similar sense of the works' material origins-these untitled photographs position themselves as supporting evidence of Dash's studio artistry. They also lent a sleek representational counterpoint to the otherwise abstract elements that graced the gallery's expansive walls and reached toward its vaulted canopy.

- Nicolas Linnert

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# Art in America

JANUARY 2015

EXHIBITION REVIEWS

LOS ANGELES

N. DASH

Hammer Museum

ON VIEW THROUGH JAN. 25

N. Dash's debut solo show, at New York's Untitled gallery in 2012, included monochromatic, clay-painted, fabric-draped canvases and small photographs of tiny, frayed bits of cloth. Dash is preoccupied with material, and, more precisely, with making tactile interventions upon it. For her ongoing "Commuter" drawings series, she obsessively folds and creases pieces of paper during her daily subway rides, and then, back in her studio, coats the well-worn paper in graphite powder. At the Hammer Museum, for her first one-person institutional show, Dash offers a familiar array of canvases and black-and-white photographs (all untitled and dated 2014). This new body of work remains grounded in the territory she explored in her debut show, though the ritualistic, serial aspects of her practice now aim for higher ground and approach a sense of the divine.

Five multi-paneled paintings hang in one gallery of the museum. One of them, pigmented with graphite powder, is made up of two vertical canvas-mounted wood panels laid atop a larger one, the arrangement suggesting an altarpiece with hinged doors. Employing various combinations of adobe clay, string, linen and jute, the works display uncomplicated yet highly orchestrated layers, folds and tucks. In one example, two panels mounted with adobecovered jute, placed side by side, hold in place three accordion folds in the large indigo-dyed fabric on which they hang.



N . Dash: Untitled, 2014, adobe, aerylie, oil, pigment, jute, linen and twine on wood support, 87 by 60 inches; at the Hammer Museum.

The inspiration for much of the work on view comes from a quasi-religious, spiritual experience that Dash had during an initial visit, in 2003, to New Mexico, a locale that she now frequently makes pilgrimage to when not at her Long Island studio. Exploring an adobe dwelling, she found herself standing in a hole where the dirt had been removed to form the rammed-earth structure of the building. In an essay in the exhibition pamphlet, Dash recounts the moment, saying she was affected in some mysterious way by the displacement of the dirt.

The artist's respect for humble materials is evident throughout the show. In one work, a panel mounted with adobe-on-jute is placed atop a larger panel bearing fabric colored with indigo dye and graphite; an unassuming length of string, similar to butcher's twine, dangles down from the top of the smaller panel, reaching almost to the gallery floor. With such delicate, choreographed arrangements, Dash's works are easy to anthropomorphize.

The photographs further elevate her materials. A series of nine black-and-white images of fabric scraps are placed on one wall of the gallery. These are what Dash calls "primary source material," as stated in her essay. She gleans ideas from the act of constantly carrying and touching these little pieces of fabric. When they are worn out and irrevocably frayed, she photographs them in memoriam. The bits of curled fabric look and act like embryos, developing into the final works.

Placed in a procession on one wall of the museum courtyard are four black-and-white photos of cloth scraps, enlarged and printed on transparencies, and then mounted on light boxes about 6 feet tall. The unraveling scraps of fabric here appear colossal, meditative and luminous-transcendent like Rothko's paintings.

- Jennifer S. Li

**ART IN AMERICA 96**

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**HAMMER**



**N. Dash**  
September 13, 2014 – January 25, 2015

# HAMMER PROJECTS

## N. Dash

September 13, 2014 - January 25, 2015

There is where there  
Corrina Peipon



For as long as she can remember, N. Dash (who goes by her surname) has occupied her hands by working small bits of fabric between her fingers. This idiosyncratic activity results in what Dash refers to as “primary source material,” from which all her ideas emerge. While thinking in her studio, talking with friends, watching a movie, standing in line at the grocery store—during most of her waking hours—she rolls and folds and otherwise works a small piece of white cotton between her fingers. When the grayed, fraying fabric is just short of losing all structural integrity, she sets it aside and takes up a new piece of fabric to begin the process again. These bits of fabric are artifacts of an intentional process of channeling energy into form. Dash began to photograph these artifacts in 2002, and in a sense they are an index of her life and work ever since. To make what she calls her “constructions,” she arranges the artifacts in groups. Set against white, gray, or black backgrounds, the constructions are typically lit brightly and evenly, photographed from above, and then printed on silver gelatin paper. Ranging from diminutive to monumental in scale, the photographs communicate the artifacts’ presence and meaning as manifestations of process, labor, thought, movement, and time: they are the tangible evidence of ephemeral phenomena.

Dash’s exhibition at the Hammer Museum includes unique black-and-white photographs—“portraits” of individual artifacts and constructions—as well as Duratrans transparencies presented in architectural light boxes. The black-and-white photographs are attached directly to the walls with staples, and when the staples are removed, the damage that is incurred becomes part of the work. The evidence of the works’ previous display becomes an indexical mark laid atop the photograph of the original artifact. The photograph then becomes an analogue for the artifact—both a representation of the artifact and an object unto itself—and its objecthood is underscored by its unmediated relationship to the wall. If the fabric artifacts are primary sources, then the photographs seem to be secondary sources, functioning like documentation or reference material in historical or archaeological research. But through their proximity to architecture and the evidence of their display, they also become primary sources.

Dash explained her impulse to allow for the accumulation of staple marks with a simple statement: “There is wear there.” On reading the notes that I had taken during a visit to her Long Island City studio, I saw that I had written down this sentence in quotation marks and then added on the next line, “(There is where there).” My turn of



Dash's phrase refers to Gertrude Stein's famous lament "There is no there there," a melancholic but also somehow fanciful description of how she arrived at the address of her childhood home in Oakland and found that it no longer existed. This idea that a place can be unreliable or impermanent also recalls Robert Smithson's Nonsites. Smithson, who had moved much of his practice beyond the confines of his New York studio and into a broad geographic field by the mid-1960s, developed the Nonsites as a way to represent the elements and forms associated with a specific place (site-specific earthworks) within a gallery or museum: the Nonsites, then, are indoor earthworks. A Nonsite is a portable proxy for a fixed location that is both a representation of an artwork located in that original site and a work unto itself. This simultaneity and itinerant energy are also found in Dash's work; it can and does occur in more than one place.

Dash visited New Mexico for the first time in 2003 and goes there several times each year. On her first visit she went to the site of an adobe building, where she noticed a pit in the earth adjacent to it. Once inside, she realized that this was the negative space left after the dirt used to construct the building had been excavated. She had the presumably disorienting but pleasurable sensation of standing inside the earth while remaining aboveground. The impression of this experience was so distinct that its reverberations are still evident in her work. Dash uses this same New Mexican earth in an ongoing body of work, including the paintings in this exhibition. The dirt is mailed to her studio, where she repeatedly sifts it until it is fine enough to mix into a variation of traditional adobe. The tooth of the jute fabric support holds the adobe in place. In addition to adobe and jute, Dash uses indigo and graphite as well as prepared oil and acrylic paints on canvas or linen. Both the materials and their application (she uses her fingers, hands, and rags more often than she uses brushes) lend tactility to the surfaces. The works derive much of their color and materiality directly from the earth, and her extensive underpainting creates luminosity. She combines stretched and unstretched elements in carefully arranged compositions that refer to both landscape (in their palette, their reference to expansive space, their formless elements) and architecture (via their materiality, their structure and geometry). The works' large scale envelops the viewer and evokes Dash's first visit to an adobe structure.

Dash's paintings spring from an experience of going to a place, reckoning with the character of that place, and then attempting to represent the experience. The objective is not so much to illustrate what the place looks like but to give a sense of what it feels like to be there, of what that place actually is. Again Smithson comes to mind. In their incorporation of earth transported from one place to another, Dash's

paintings are like Nonsites relating their origins in the New Mexican desert. Smithson's Nonsites and Dash's paintings exist in two places at once, and we as viewers experience two "places" at once: the external world (the physical object that we are encountering in the present moment) and the internal world (our intellectual capacity to imagine the place where the object originated).

In all her work Dash uses prescribed, labor-intensive processes to translate haptic experience into representational objects that are also abstract. These works appear to be intentionally composed colors and forms, and indeed they are. But while she strives to make an aesthetic object, pure abstraction is not her primary interest. And though the processes she engages are fundamental to the making of her work, process as a concept is also not her main focus. Rather, it is the attempt to represent labor and experience that is paramount. That the works achieve this is the result of their dependence on touch as a means to transfer and communicate energy. Positioning herself as a medium, Dash travels between the outside world and an inside world where amorphous elements are given form.



## Biography

N. Dash was born in Miami Beach, Florida, in 1980. She earned a BA from New York University in 2003 and an MFA from Columbia University in 2010. In 2013 Dash's work was presented in a oneperson exhibition at White Flag Projects in Saint Louis. Her work has been featured in thematic exhibitions such as *The Possible*, Berkeley Art Museum (2014); *The Independent: Dreams That Money Can't Buy*, MAXXI (Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo), Rome (2014); *Painting in Place, Farmers and Merchants Bank*, presented by Los Angeles Nomadic Division, Los Angeles (2013); *My Crippled Friend*, Columbus College of Art and Design, Columbus, Ohio (2013); *Notations: Contemporary Drawing as Idea and Process*, Kemper Art Museum, Washington University, Saint Louis (2012); and *Transient Response / Land Tender, High Desert Test Sites, Joshua Tree, California* (2011).

All images are courtesy of the artist.

Above: The artist's studio. Photograph by N. Dash.

Front cover: Untitled, 2014. Adobe, acrylic, pigment, jute, linen, wood support. 55 1/2 x 72 1/4 in. (141 x 183.5 cm). Photo by NWphoto.

Back cover: Untitled, 2014. Adobe, acrylic, pigment, jute, linen, twine, wood support. 69 x 60 in. (175.3 x 152.4 cm). Photo by NWphoto.

Interior left panel: Untitled, 2014. Gelatin silver print. 8 x 10 in. (20.3 x 25.4 cm). Photo by NWphoto.

Interior center: Untitled, 2014. Adobe, graphite, gesso, oil, jute, linen, twine, wood support. 68 x 27 in. (172.7 x 68.6 cm). Photo by NWphoto.

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April 6, 2015

### **Jewish Museum “Repetition and Difference”**

To play up their theme of change through recurrence in this millennia-spanning showcase of Judaica and contemporary art, the curators Susan L. Braunstein and Jens Hoffmann rewrote their introductory text four times, in registers that range from cheery P.R. to artspeak. Forgoing any Platonic distinction between original and copy, the curators place dozens of fertility goddesses, ancient shekels, mezuzahs, and intricate floral ketubahs from Isfahan alongside similarly iterative contemporary projects. N. Dash and John Houck both create abstractions from repeated folds; Abraham Cruzvillegas paints hundreds of found papers of various sizes a unifying gold. One section combines twenty-eight skullcaps, from an intricate Ottoman version in red velvet to Cary Leibowitz’s “Stonewall Yarmulke,” in silks of pink, white, and blue. Some of the contemporary projects are underwhelming (Koo Jeong-a’s stacks of magnets), but on the whole the show succeeds, again and again. Through Aug. 9.

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The logo for the Jewish Museum, featuring the words "Jewish Museum" in a white, stylized, cursive font centered on a solid blue rectangular background.

Repetition and Difference  
The Jewish Museum, New York  
March 13 - August 9, 2015

The notions of difference and repetition have been part of philosophy and art practices for thousands of years. Artists have commonly employed repetition – the creation of artworks in series or the making of multiples and copies – in their work for a variety of reasons, ranging from the commercial to the subversive. Yet, crucial differences are often embedded within the process of iteration. Repetition and Difference brings together objects from the Museum’s collection and works by contemporary artists that examine how differences and derivations can reveal significant meaning. The exhibition is titled after Gilles Deleuze’s seminal text *Difference and Repetition*, first published in French in 1968, a landmark book that fundamentally questioned concepts of identity and representation to propose how multiplicity replaces the ideas of essence, substance and possibility.

Repetition and Difference artists:

Walead Beshty  
Sarah Crowner  
Abraham Cruzvillegas  
N. Dash  
John Houck  
Koo Jeong A  
Kris Martin  
Amalia Pica  
Hank Willis Thomas

Repetition and Difference is curated by Susan L. Braunstein, Henry J. Leir Curator, and Jens Hoffmann, Deputy Director, Exhibitions and Public Programs, with Daniel S. Palmer, Leon Levy Assistant Curator.

Repetition and Difference is generously supported by the Jewish Museum Centennial Exhibition Fund, the Barbara S. Horowitz Contemporary Art Fund, and the Joan Rosenbaum Exhibition Fund.

Additional support is provided by the Leir Charitable Foundations and the Leon Levy Foundation.

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# ARTNEWS

## N. DASH JOINS CASEY KAPLAN IN NEW YORK

New York's Casey Kaplan gallery now represents the artist N. Dash, who is known for her muted post-minimal paintings, which she typically makes by applying water mixed with adobe to linen. They are resolutely spare. Kaplan, which is moving to Manhattan's Flower District on West 27th Street next month, said that it will do a solo show with Dash next year.

Dash's first solo museum show in the United States, at the Hammer in Los Angeles, closed on Sunday. Dash, who also works in photography, has recently been in group shows with the High Line (the impressive "Pier 54," curated by Cecilia Alemani), and at the Maxxi Museum in Rome and the Berkeley Art Museum in Berkeley, California. In 2013 she had a solo show at the closely watched St. Louis nonprofit White Flag Projects. The artist had previously shown with the Untitled gallery in New York.

Dash's work will appear next in "Repetition and Difference" at New York's Jewish Museum, which is being organized by Jens Hoffman and Daniel Palmer. It opens March 13.



N. Dash, *Untitled*, 2014, adobe, oil, pigment, graphite, string, acrylic, gesso, jute and wood support.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND CASEY KAPLAN

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## THE BELIEVER

### THE PROCESS IN WHICH AN ARTIST DISCUSSES MAKING A PARTICULAR WORK

N. Dash, Untitled, 2014



**W**orking within and beyond the confines of her studio, N. Dash creates works that range vastly in size and medium, while remaining deeply rooted in the landscape of New Mexico, where she discovered earth as a material for her paintings and where, when possible, she works in the open air. The intense relationship between her works—the small swaths of cotton she works in her hands until they have all but disintegrated, the black-and-white photographic documentation of these pieces, and her large-scale paintings made with adobe on jute—was quickly revealed in our conversation about Untitled in her studio in Long Island City, New York.  
—Sara Roffino

THE BELIEVER: You're a painter, right? How do you see yourself within the context of painting?

N. DASH: I do consider myself a painter. Sometimes the methods and materials that I use to make the work are outside the traditional bounds of what painting is. Having said that, I use oil, linen, canvas, and other standard means that have been a part of the history of painting. Perhaps the most unconventional material that I use is mud, yet even that is an ancient painting material.

BLVR: I've read that you always carry small pieces of cotton, and work on them throughout the day. How are these pieces a part of everything else you do?

ND: I am constantly working them with my hands and therefore I take them with me wherever I go, but there isn't a direct translation between the fabric works and the paintings. It is something that I have been involved with my entire life. The fabric pieces have an indirect influence on the rest of my work; they are at the root of everything. They function as source material.

BLVR: How did Untitled develop in the studio?

BLVR: What about the physical content of some of the other paintings?

ND: I don't consider the paintings to be a singular fact. No one material has more significance than the other. The paintings are made up of separate elements, either isolated or in combination.

BLVR: When did you begin working with earth in your paintings?

ND: I began working with dirt the moment I began fabric pieces. The dirt and oil from my hands accumulate and create a patina on the material. I began working specifically with mud when I traveled to New Mexico for the first time. I visited a traditional piece of adobe architecture and noticed a pit behind the structure. When I walked into the building,

I realized the hole was the excavation site for the material used to make the building, and I had the overwhelming sensation of being swallowed by the ground beneath my feet.

BLVR: In hearing you talk about adobe or earth, it feels to me like you are exploring ways in which working with natural elements is a process of refining raw materials, such as adobe.

ND: I wouldn't say that it is a process of refining, but working with. In the case of the fabric sculptures, I start with cotton that has already been processed into a grid. I break down the woven framework over a long period of time. I am actually very physical with these things. Although they are small, they are not precious. They are dirty and rugged and the only reason why they are ultimately delicate is because of their rough handling. It's a process of refinement insofar as it is transformed into a new structure. With the adobe, I remove the larger remains by sifting them out, so that it can function as a paint. Working with natural elements is less about refining nature and more about figuring out ways to tap into nature.

BLVR: How exactly does the earth get from New Mexico to your studio in Long Island City?

ND: The dirt is excavated from a place I go to in northern New Mexico. When it arrives in the studio I sift out the debris. I reconstitute the dirt into mud and apply it to the surface of the jute. After the work leaves the studio, it takes on a life of its own.

BLVR: Working with earth could be seen as a statement on the ephemerality of material. How do you approach that aspect of the works as they are being made, keeping in mind the fact that you are using material not normally used in painting?

ND: I think about the pieces as having a contingent relationship to where they are physically and where their material has come from. Each piece carries with it the history of its source (i.e., the site), and the history of its making (i.e., the studio). And these histories can never be fully known.

BLVR: You live in both New Mexico and New York, right? Is there a city/desert dichotomy in your work?

ND: I don't make a clear distinction between the city and desert. I get different things from the different places, and to me they are both part of nature. The work is born in the desert, which is the best place for me to think, because of its absolute silence. New Mexico is a place that I go back to, but I have worked outdoors all over. In New York, I work indoors in a conventional studio in the sense that there are walls, materials, works in progress, etc. When I work on the land, I work outside and use the attributes of the constantly changing environment. But both environments are places where I live and work. If the desert is generative, then the

city is productive.

BLVR: What about the color of the adobe pieces?

ND: A couple of weeks ago someone described a painting to me as brown, and I am always surprised to hear someone say that, because I think of the adobe as outside of the realm of color. Just like I don't look at linen and think of it as gray, or canvas and think of it as white. What it is is a given. And that just took me by surprise, for someone to not see it as just being. They felt compelled to name it. The color of the adobe is the color of the adobe. And if the tones are different, it is because it is taken from a different place. Whatever is in the land dictates the work.



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 **BROOKLYN RAIL**

## Mingei: Are You Here?

PACE GALLERY | MARCH 7 - APRIL 5, 2014



Unknown, ink stone for calligraphy and painting, 1850-1890 (Late Edo - Early Meiji), slate 1-3/16" x 9-13/16" x 5-7/8". Photo courtesy Pace Gallery.

After a full week of helter-skelter sprints through eye-numbing mounds of maze-like fairs blistering not only my feet but also my admittedly limited ability to grasp the myriad aesthetic sensibilities of artists young, old, and dead, I had a Keatsian moment of Pacific pure serenity when silent, within a Chelsea gallery, I stared at Nicolas Trembley's perfectly curated show, *Mingei: Are You Here?* I would like to exercise the ad hoc critic's prerogative of identifying some outlying decision, mediocre choice, modest object, or other disruption in the Force of the show, but I cannot. In its essence, this intensely installed presentation of 80 works by 30 artists placed in a u-shaped, multi-tiered, and relatively small side gallery within the Pace Empire tonically embodies a refreshing counterpoint to exhibitions over-laden with theory.

While there is, of course, a unifying theme to the show—concisely stated to be the contrasting interplay between the traditional craftsmanship of the Japanese Mingei movement and the practice of contemporary artists—the theme arises out of the objects themselves rather than being superimposed by the curator. In other words, the installation reflects the same sensibility and indeed the same epistemology found in Allen Ginsburg's observation in *Wales Visitation*: "What did I notice? Particulars! The vision of the great One is myriad—"

Thus Mr. Trembley—who first presented this show at Pace's gallery in London, but with fewer artists—allows us the justice of lingering over each object without the gallery space itself being burdened with labels or explanatory materials; of stepping back to see each object in the context of its immediately adjacent neighbors; of expanding our view up from one stepped-tier to another to the wall and then to all three sides of the installation thus to encompass the multiple rhythms of Mingei and its friends and heirs. And there is no set or fixed starting point to the installation.

So, for example, we might start with the modestly-sized ink stone from the Edo–Meiji Period in the late 19th century, purposed for calligraphy, that sits on one of the horizontal platforms in the show and then turn to Trisha Donnelly's 2013 work, a 7' by 5' slab of blue-green stone that dominates one wall. Either could have been a century old; either could have been newly-crafted; both elicit warmth from cold stone; both are disarmingly peaceful and elegant.

Or we might start with an indigo-dyed cotton textile work from the early or mid-20th century and turn to N. Dash's linen, acrylic, jute, adobe, and wood wall piece from 2014. Again, neither is "dated" and neither is wholly new; both embrace but at the same time reconfigure ancient materials; and yet both are also sustained by care and simplicity, hallmarks of Mingei practice. To take yet another example—and I am being far from exhaustive, just trying to convey

something of the otherwise un conveyable complexity of the installation—we might survey the multitude of ceramic works in the show, ranging from two delicately-glazed, slightly asymmetrical sake containers from the 16th century Momoyama Period, to Bernard Leach's mid-'50s deep-toned black and brown vase, to Valentin Carron's two 2013 concrete pots, or to Peter Müller's 36 porcelain vases designed for Sgrafo Modern's Korallen Series between 1960 and 1980.

The idea of juxtaposing “crafted” works or found objects with those of modern or contemporary artists is not itself novel, of course. Just think of the recent, nicely-chosen pairings of Shaker and contemporary materials at Jeff Bailey Gallery. But there the Shaker pieces were always clearly Shaker pieces and the separation of time periods and artistic touch was evident, even though the one might be redolent of the other or enhance and enable our perceptions of the various works. Think also of the Barnes Collection in that light. What is so rare about Mingei: Are You Here? is that the relationships among the scores of disparate types and textures appear to be so seamless; and that the purported distinction between “art” and “craft” dissolves so easily. Sure, Jasper Morrison would not have been fabricating Alessi tin boxes for family kitchens in the 16th century just as the anonymous Momoyama tray-maker wouldn't have had the tools to construct a plywood chair like that designed by the architect Kenzo Tange in 1957. But that's not the point—it's that a respect for the inherent color, texture, and weight of the materials used and a devotion to formal harmony shine through relentlessly in the haptic genius of each artist working at each of these several moments in time.

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## N. DASH

Despite appearances the photographic work of the New York-based artist N. Dash is a form of performance documentation. Her essentially monochromatic gelatin-silver prints depict accumulations of organic matter: knots of unraveled and entangled threads, whose origins remain elusive. Put another way, in these images it is fundamentally not clear what we are looking at. Despite their apparent fidelity – the photographs possess something of the forensic authority found in, say, Irving Penn's iconic images of discarded cigarette butts – nothing is ultimately revealed about these objects' histories, their previous lives. Instead Dash's images, like scene-of-the-crime photographs, function as a fragmentary form of 'evidence': a partial yet objective account of an ephemeral sculptural 'event.' These are not by any measure abstract photographs, rather they remain determinedly representational images that elect instead to operate at the margins of legibility.

The photographs actually represent the cumulative moment of a sculptural process, or more accurately ritual, that the artist engages in on a daily basis. For the past ten years N. Dash has photographed the small pieces of cloth that she carries with her as she goes about her daily routines – walking through the city, reading, etc. She constantly 'handles' these swatches of fabric, a process that slowly but dramatically changes their nature. The resulting 'sculptures', if that is the right term, are akin to a fetish: objects to which an irrational reverence and of obsessive devotion has been applied – not unlike the final abject form of a child's once beloved 'safety blanket.' (Mike Kelley's 1987 masterpiece *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid And The Wages Of Sin*, a tableaux that incorporates an accumulation of soiled and discarded hand-made stuffed toys also comes to mind.) Through the act of being touched, fingered, crumpled, tugged, tweaked and kneaded, Dash's swatches of fabric are irreversibly transformed from a solid, coherent form into something far less stable: an unruly mass of loose ends. This process – simultaneously a kind of alchemy and a form of entropy – despite unfolding in the public realm remains furtive, unseen and unacknowledged by passers-by, known only to the artist herself.

The resulting photographs are the only public record of this performative process, the only evidence of this otherwise private daily ritual. Through the act of photography, of being documented, the artist establishes a spatial and conceptual distance from the objects' messy autobiographical narratives. In becoming images, these once psychologically and emotionally charged 'sculptures' adopt a more objective character, becoming a part of our shared material culture. Both archeological and anthropological – and perhaps even anthropomorphic - N. Dash's elliptical images, like ancient artifacts whose original intent is now lost, remain open to conjecture and revision, ultimately reveling in their uncertain identity.

TEXT BY MATTHEW HIGGS























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# MODERN PAINTERS

## REVIEWS IN BRIEF

LONDON // PARIS // NEW YORK

N. Dash

Untitled // May 6-June 17

For those who know N. Dash's work from group shows, her first solo outing is a surprise and a delight. There is no color in the assured Postminimalist pieces at Untitled, and the artist's signature indigo is nowhere to be seen. Instead we find objects-paintings that intrude into the realm of sculpture-uniformly in tan and adobe hues. Texture and shape delight the eye, with drapery disrupting, and in some cases suggestively bisecting, the canvas. Unlike her carefully delimited, formal pieces, Dash's future seems limitless.



Groundings (3).2012.

**ARTINFO.COM** SEPTEMBER 2012 **MODERN PAINTERS 99**



## N. Dash



Untitled, through June 17  
(see Lower East Side)

### Art

An already widely exhibited 2010 Columbia grad, the archly named N. Dash makes her solo debut with an assured set of dun-colored wall-mounted works punctuated by a trio of small black-and-white photographs. Repositioning painterly support materials such as unprimed and unstretched linen and jute as the components of a kind of almost-sculpture, Dash slathers layers of adobe to construct panels that could double as walls.

Allowing simple contrasts of structure and surface to take the place of applied color and imagery, she folds, crumples, wraps and drapes her fabric, juxtaposing taut with slack, the planned with the seemingly accidental. In Groundings (3), for example, a folded strip of raw linen plugs the vertical gap between two earthy rectangles.

Of course, there are plenty of precedents for this sort of thing. From Antoni Tàpies's incorporation of mud and rags into paintings to Gedi Sibony's way with architectural raw materials, numerous artists have employed painting's basic physical form as a template for more overtly object-oriented projects. The photos, which depict small clumps of cotton fiber, invest these throwaway doodads with sculptural heft, using the medium to hint at hidden processes and introduce an effective confusion of scale and status. Although Dash should be wary of the preciousness that creeps all too easily into work of this stripe, her blend of unrefined organic ingredients and minimalist form is, like a bowl of good granola, balanced and satisfying.

—Michael Wilson