



THREE DIMENSIONS: **WORKS BY ANALIA SABAN, MATTHEW LARSON, AND STEVEN AND WILLIAM LADD**



ANALIA SABAN:
THE IDEA WITHIN

by Joyce Beckenstein

Artists are adept at sensing shifts in cultural consciousness and are often quick to respond. They stretch the limits of their materials. They invent new processes. When their instincts prove correct, their deviations from prevailing norms—as startling as they may first appear—capture the spirit of a new age. Consider how **Caravaggio** made visual the vernacular spirit of the Baroque counter reformation, by breaking with Renaissance linear perspective and its single vantage point. He instead merged illusionist and real space by bringing his subjects close to the surface, a nose away from the viewer. His portrayal of *The Madonna of Loreto* (1604–06), for

example, depicts the Virgin with child in arms, emerging from a dark tenement into an aura of light. Two passing pilgrims see her, drop to their knees, their dirty feet inches from the viewer's gaze. The message: God is accessible to all, without clerical intervention.

Analia Saban, Matthew Larson, and Steven and William Ladd are among a new generation of artists maturing in an era that experiences phenomena through the fog of virtual reality, Photoshop, Facebook posts and fake news. These artists' works may well provide this generation's visual equivalent of

the disconnect between what we look at, what we see, and the conundrums of making sense of it all.

For example, **Analia Saban** explores the mercurial nature of something as “simple” as a drawn line, a visual element we tend to regard as flat. This line is in fact three dimensional when its graphite particles are viewed under a microscope. *Modular Drawing* reveals this double identity. Saban began the piece by printing a single line on transparent tape and making multiples of it. She then amassed and adhered these lines-on-tape to a paper-mounted panel; securing parts to a paper surface and allowing the remaining segments to extend off the surface into space. The resulting work (on and off paper) effectively conflates this “simple” drawn line with the complexities of a three dimensional form.

As she blurs the lines between drawing and sculpture, Saban subjects other traditional art media to tough re-education. She “folds” slabs of marble by cracking them down the center and reinforcing them with steel plates so that they drape like wet towels over saw horses. She questions why paint and canvas must equal *painting on canvas*. For *Trough (Flesh)*, Saban constructed and covered a painting stretcher with voluminous yards of canvas which formed a pouch at the base of the frame and was filled with an amount of flesh-colored paint equal to her own body weight. Paint on canvas became a “pregnant” sculptural container for gloppy pigment, a tongue-in-cheek reference to the gestating ideas of a woman artist deconstructing a male-driven artistic tradition.

For her exhibition *Punched Card* at **Tanya Bonakdar Gallery** in New York, Saban appropriated defunct circuit board designs for a series of tapestries and related *Pleated Ink* paintings,

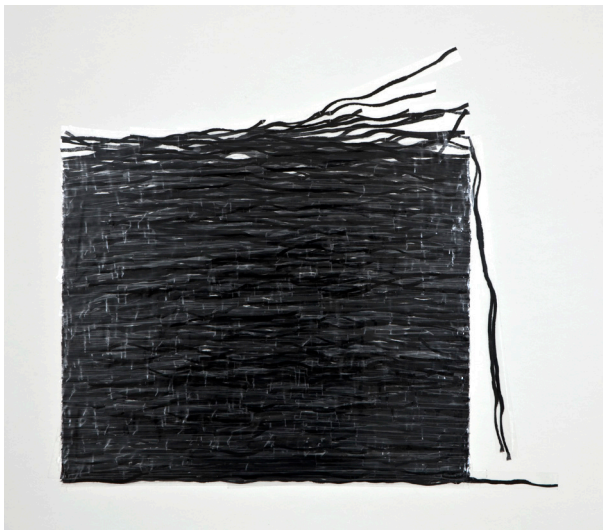


Left page: **Analia Saban *Draped Marble (Jade, St. Laurant, Fior di Pesco, Emperor Gold)*** 2015, marble, steel, wooden sawhorse, mounted, 151½" x 36" x 35¾". Image courtesy of Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.

Top: **Analia Saban *Tapestry (Computer Chip, TMS 1000, Texas Instruments, 1974)*** 2018, acrylic paint, linen thread, woven, 72¼" x 68¼". Image courtesy of Tanya Bonakdar Gallery

Bottom left: **Analia Saban *Modular Drawing (One 14-inch Line Printed on Tape, Applied in Whole or in Parts): Stack*** 2008, printed archival clear tape, paper-mounted panel, 28" x 28". Image courtesy of Thomas Solomon Gallery, Los Angeles.

Bottom right: **Analia Saban *Trough (Flesh)*** 2012, oil paint, primed canvas, 56" x 70" x 9". Image courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, NY.





similarly titling the works *Pleated Ink* (*Computer Chip*, TMS 1000, 1974 *Texas Instruments*) and *Tapestry* (*Computer Chip TMS 1000*, *Texas Instruments*, 1974) to emphasize how different processes transform a given pattern or design. She created the tapestries by weaving dried strands of black acrylic pigment with threads of raw linen—translating digital configurations into transparent fabric designs reminiscent of fine oriental silk rugs. For the *Pleated Ink* series, Saban embedded identical digital designs onto a thick pool of printer's ink. What initially appeared to be a flat black minimal painting shifted optically, revealing a dense sculptural surface teeming with calligraphy reminiscent of ancient script.

Saban's work reinvents centuries of trompe l'oeil illusionism as she expands twentieth-century efforts to eliminate the boundaries once separating art genres including weaving, printing, sculpture and painting. Saban's empowering engagement with various media shatters notions of "women's craft" and fragility. As she bends hard stone, so does she impart a glimmer of hope for remaking a world fractured by global and social upheavals.

Matthew Larson weaves his own ambiguities with fiber works that loop in and out of two and three-dimensional space while challenging essential premises of twentieth-century Minimal and Op Art movements. Minimal painters favored unemotional works on canvas: hard edges, limited palettes and geometric shapes stripped to their essentials. Op artists explored the nature of perception by creating optical illusions with striking black/white and color contrasts. Larson confounds their scripts with a unique process that he discovered quite accidentally.

One unassuming day, Larson noticed pocket lint adhered to his Velcro keychain and wondered, *Can you make art from lint and Velcro?* He began by cutting clothing patterns from Velcro sheets and "painting" them with lint salvaged from the dryer. He then began to replicate, without the fluidity of pigment, the visual color effects that Josef Albers achieved in his iconic *Homage to the Square*, a 25 year long painting series. The astonishing tapestries Larson exhibited in his 2018 solo exhibition, *Vice Versa* at **Massey Klein Gallery** in New York, replaced loom, warp

Matthew Larson *Vice Versa* (installation) 2018, at Massey Klein Gallery.

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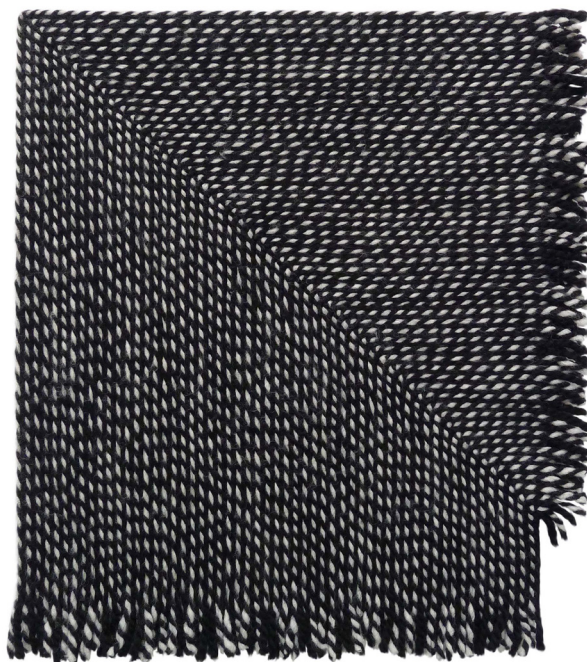
and weft with strips of store-bought yarn inserted within Velcro sheets stretched over board.

Stack, consisting of two isosceles triangles connected to form an asymmetrical hourglass-like shape, optically shifts before the viewer’s eyes. It began with a geometric drawing on Velcro and the soaking of half a section of blue yarn in bleach. Larson painstakingly manipulated continuous strands of this bleached and unbleached yarn to “paint” in the light-colored triangles afloat on a soft heather-blue ground. *Mesh* combines solid-color and marled yarn (different colored strings twisted together to form a single strand) to create the illusion of lines moving up, down, and across the surface simultaneously. A sharp diagonal cuts across these multiple trajectories, keeping the viewer’s eyes jumping to pulsing rhythms that vary according to light and the angle from which one views the work.

Larson’s illusionist effects break rank with art-historical models. He replaces loomed warp and weft with Velcro’s single plane; Minimalism’s flat spare forms with sensuous, tactile, sculptural surfaces; Op Art’s bold contrasts with ethereal variegated hues. And, where Minimalism disdained the artist’s hand, Larson’s tapestries—their fringes functioning as frames—nurture and restore today’s craving for the hand-made object.

Informally trained, **Steven and William Ladd** learned how to sew and recycle materials from their mother. The brothers began their careers in the fashion world, making gorgeous couture jewelry and beaded bags with sumptuously lined boxes to house them. Unabashedly merging decoration and fine art, they revel in a formal language driven by personal experience, *joie d’vivre*, and the desire to extend themselves and their art into the community. Talk about expanding the parameters of space, the Ladd brothers do it all.

And they do it seamlessly. The brothers created *Mary Queen of the Universe* for their 2014 exhibition at the **Parrish Art Museum** in Water Mill, New York. *Faith*, the centerpiece of that installation (its title a homage to the Catholic elementary school they attended in St. Louis, Missouri) transitioned within a single exhibition from minimalist sculpture to a performance



Top: **Matthew Larson** *Stack* 2017, bleached wool, velcro, 24" x 17".

Bottom: **Matthew Larson** *Mesh* 2017, acrylic fiber, velcro, linen, panel, 19½" x 17".



Top: **Steven and William Ladd *Faith*** (detail) 2014, archival board, fiber, glass, beads, metal, 61½" x 61½" x 12". Made in collaboration with GlassLab a design program of the Corning Museum of Glass. Photo by the artists. Middle: installation at Parrish Art Museum.

Bottom: **Steven and William Ladd *Faith*** (performance still) 2014. Left: William Ladd, right: Steven Ladd. Made in collaboration with GlassLab a design program of the Corning Museum of Glass. Photo: Nick Lee.

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and multi-media installation. It began with the silent presence of a stacked 36-box tower. During a carefully choreographed museum performance the brothers opened the white boxes—one by one—slowly exposing the dazzling contents as boxes were arranged in a giant grid on the floor. Each newly unveiled box unfurled an expanse of hills and dales made from dyed and coiled dog leashes, thick forests of colored beads, blown glass flames of fire, and armies of gold-tone metal ants. The resulting bejeweled installation, with its surround of *Ant Epidemic*, a series of prints depicting thousands of ants, expanded time and memory. The narrative, teeming with personal symbolism, recalled the Ladd's childhood: the infestation of ants they discovered in a Lego box stored beneath a bed, the dark forest and river they trespassed against parental warning, the flames of the Holy Spirit guiding their faith.

Welcome to Santo Poco!, an exhibit at **Cristina Grajales Gallery** in SoHo, New York continues the narrative and serves as an homage to newly purchased land in Germantown, New York where the Ladds are building a family retreat. This exhibition consisted of twelve large wall-hung constructions—monochrome grids composed of beads and findings embedded in paper mache, each one color-coded to reference some shared experience. *Silver Lining* symbolizes the realization of a dream to own land; *Cockadoodle Drew*, a red landscape, refers to a resident rooster; *Power Tools*, in bright yellow, symbolizes the industrial tools the brothers are learning to use. And there are ants! Blown glass ant sculptures and “cartoon bombs” cover the installation from wall to floor and recall both their squealing delight in discovering unsolicited childhood roommates, and their less sanguine battle against hordes of giant ants now desiccating the trees in the surrounding countryside.

We read the Ladd's running memoir visually, not on Kindle. Like Saban and Larson, their work cries out for and simultaneously affirms human connections, something they generously extend from museum spaces into local communities where their *Scrollathons* help rehabilitate prison inmates and assist child survivors of terrorist attacks heal.



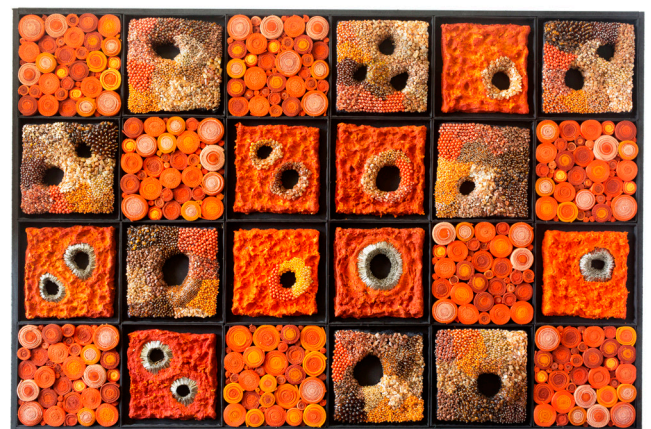
Though their styles are markedly different, Saban, Larson and the Ladds see themselves as humanists who ask us to be open-minded and curious so we may discover the joys of alternative perspectives. Each individual renders the art object newly relevant; its imprint on time's infinite line becomes a spot where real experience, fantasy, hope, faith, and perseverance hold sway—no matter what.

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Top: **Steven and William Ladd *Welcome to Santo Poco!*** (installation). Photo: Cristina Grajales Gallery, New York.

Bottom: **Steven and William Ladd *Cockadoodle Drew*** 2018, archival board, fiber, trinkets, pins, shredded paper, wheat starch, glue, dye, MDF frame, 60 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 40 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 3". Photo by the artists.