



**"Gerry Trilling: Narrative Atlas," Studios Inc. Exhibition Space**

by Brian Hearn, June 7, 2017

KC Studio

We are a nation of immigrants and refugees. Always have been. Even if we have short memories of who came from where, or for what reasons,

countless stories thread in and out and through the families that have come to this country generation after generation. "Narrative Atlas," Gerry Trilling's final solo exhibition as a resident of Studios Inc., explores the role of material culture as a vehicle for memories: of family, of place, of ethnicity, of class, of community.

Trilling's welcome mat to "Narrative Atlas" is the 2017 piece, "Activated Shelter," a cushy lean-to of woven fabric stretched between two pieces of PVC pipe. Alternating warm wiggly lines in shades of orange, the work is a tactile temptation with op art style. It may be a temporary shelter but it aspires to better furnishings.

Brightening up a nearby concrete corner of the cavernous gallery are the double-stacked panels of "Red.Pink." On the bottom is a gaudy pink-on-pink toile, one of those imaginary pastoral scenes of rustic French country life, with comely maidens and wooing lads, mothers and sons husbanding animals, etc., the sort of pattern that suggests a romantic, bourgeois pretention. Not usually my cup of tea, but Trilling balances it with a transparent vinyl panel over painted with broad, vigorous, red strokes like a flock of birds ascending in flight. Are these her Viennese ancestors leaving behind a comfortable life to flee the Holocaust in the late 1930s? Not necessarily.

Wall-mounted text panels hung at irregular heights throughout the exhibition relate mundane memories of her immigrant parents, aunts and uncles in St. Louis. Instead of offering an expected explanation of the work, her

fragmentary memories provide a socio-cultural and temporal context: that of upwardly mobile, European Jewish immigrants in the United States following World War II.

Trilling's fabric-philia is evident in the ten rectangular stacked panels, "...and then they moved," which, like many of her works, bear the hallmarks of minimalism – but with a sense of humor. Unlike a Donald Judd stack projecting aloofly off the wall, Trilling's neatly uniform panels are a surface riot of contrasting textile patterns that extend onto the floor toward the viewer. Each fabric design serves as a kind of familial marker along an immigrant itinerary of American assimilation.

In her 2016 work, "Installation," the artist successfully assembles a suite of rectangular forms anchored by a large pink square of fake fur. Leaning against it on the floor are two wooden stretchers dressed in painter's plastic sheeting and weed control cloth bunched together in tidy vertical folds, while a semi-transparent orange panel hovers above them. The grouping feels like a family in which the kids are dressed in their finest home-sewn garments. They unapologetically make the best of what little resources they have.

Next door the theme continues with the eponymous "C215 Narrative Atlas of an Evolving Neighborhood." The horizontal assemblage of six panels combines a satisfying range of Trilling's forms tightly adjoined like the rooms of a small apartment. Between an Asian floral textile and a large plush panel of black and gold fake fur, Trilling exposes the sturdy structure of her favored

wooden stretcher forms. We can see through the surface planes of caution fencing and a transparent grid to the support beneath. Though suggestive of barriers to entry, they are surmountable.

In a departure from her patterned panels Trilling displays a very recent series of work entitled "Plaques and Tangles." The 20 small drawings on flooring samples emerged from her experience of losing her father to dementia. Each one contains the unmistakable outline of a smart phone interpenetrated by tubular synaptic forms. The series speaks to the brain-changing interface between the lifetime of memories we make, then lose, and the pervasive electronic gadgets that now store so much of our information and identity. Their display on a slanted, roof-like structure enhances the sense of domestic intimacy.

Picture the first sofa that you can remember in your family's home. Chances are you can conjure up the look and feel of the upholstery and inevitably its decade of origin. For Trilling it was a scratchy green sofa that would be replaced again and again as her family's social and economic mobility improved. The sofa became the signifier of immigrant success. No matter where we've come from Trilling's work would remind us that we've all got a green sofa buried somewhere inside of us.

All images: Studios Inc. Photos by E.G. Schempf.

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Brian Hearn is an interdisciplinary arts writer, curator and consultant active in both film and visual arts. For two decades he has shared his passion and expertise with arts organizations large and small, from art museums to film festivals, galleries to collections. He and his wife Sarah recently collaborated on a new art project, a baby boy.