



In the past year, the tech, entertainment, and art industries gave rise to the social media movements #metoo, #timesup, and #notsurprised underscoring the long-term abuse and pervasive gender inequity that have been all-too-common in those and other professional sectors of society. The breadth and momentum of these movements has been driven by the unfortunate reality that many women have suffered experiences similar to those recounted by many in Silicon Valley, Hollywood, Chelsea, and beyond. It appears that the female experience goes hand in hand

with abuse, shame, and degradation. Paradoxically, along with those negative attributions, “female” and “feminine” connote behavior and appearance that are delicate, graceful, and pretty. It is not that the issues that have arisen in media over the past year are new; these topics have been discussed by feminists for decades. They continue to be relevant, and are now at the forefront of public debate. There is a generation of women that grew up with access to feminist vocabulary (in art, music, film, literature, and theory) who are now at an age where these ideas are becoming crystallized in their own politics and work.

**Alex McQuilkin, Erin M. Riley, and Martha Tuttle** create work that delves into the complicated territory of a specific kind of female identity, psychology, and navigation of life. Each artist takes on a contemporary approach to traditionally feminine subjects and forms — interiors, domesticity, self-reflection; florals, pastels, handicraft — to explore and critique this identity.

Recent work by **Alex McQuilkin** draws upon the visual language of mass-produced wallpapers (such as those by Laura Ashley) to comment on gender roles and class structures. Created in highly detailed, fastidious painting rendered by hand in vinyl-based Flashe paint on paper mounted on panel, the wallpaper patterns of flowers, bows, quilting, and stripes have ruptures and pattern glitches that simultaneously meld the interior of mind with external physical space.

Her designs are distinctive of class (or at least the aspirations of class), of social structures, and social expectations. The palette of soft pinks, purples, and blues are pleasing, non-confrontational, and nostalgic.



**Alex McQuilkin** *Untitled (Wainscott Floral Porcelain)*, 2017



**Alex McQuilkin** *Untitled (Lavender Bouttoniere)*, 2017



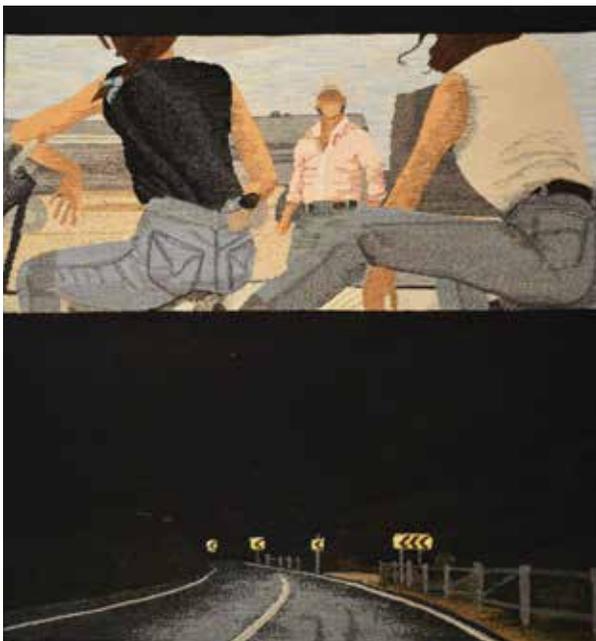
**Alex McQuilkin** *Untitled (Purple Zip)*, 2016

Yet the viewer's eye catches the imperfections where a repeat ends abruptly or where there is a rupture in the pattern. Things are pushed up against each other in a forced, uncomfortable way, beneath the veneer of perfection and gentility.

Compositionally, these works stem from mid-century modernist painters like Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt, with equal attention to the whole canvas and lack of representational figures, though they conceptually share more in common with Francesca

Woodman's self-reflective images of interiors where the body is consumed by architecture. In McQuilkin's work, domestic architecture similarly serves as a surrogate for structures of (Western) female identity. These structures, both physical and symbolic, are so implicit that they are difficult to see. Expectations of behaviors and appearances for women are ingrained in culture, but for many women, their personal experience does not always fit the mold. This glitch is manifested in the work through ruptures in the patterns, suggesting an internal realization that society is a tenuous construction and its limitations are only as real as one allows them to be.

While McQuilkin's work depicts the structures of society as superficially perfect but integrally incongruous, **Erin M. Riley's** woven images revel in this subversion. The female nude appears in her work frequently, though it is a newer take on the form that recurs throughout all of art history. The artist's gaze is her own, and the figure is often herself or related to her own physical form. These images appear in works that can be considered still lifes in the *trompe l'oeil vanitas* tradition of Evert Collier. The work *No Such Luck* (2017), brings together a stem of roses, condoms in and out of packaging, a matchbook, jewelry, notes folded up like the kind passed in a high school classroom, a guitar pick, can tab, a Black Sabbath button, a straight blade razor, and a couple of nude photos. A collection of seemingly disjointed objects imply certain meanings or narratives based on a viewer's own associations.



**Erin M. Riley** *The Darkness*, 2018



**Erin M. Riley** *The End*, 2018

Central to Riley's work is the selection, juxtaposition, and presentation of specific images. Often culled from the internet (a rapidly gentrifying space that is less wild and free now than it was during the late 90s and early 00s of the artist's formative years), these compositions are rendered as traditional weaving created on a Macomber loom. *The Darkness*, *The End*, and *Unsolicted* (2017-18) are three separate works that feature, respectively, a blue crumpled car, a still from the film *Thelma & Louise*, and a superimposed one-sided iChat conversation. Each has a nighttime scene of a desolate stretch of highway, imagery recalling the cinematic language of David Lynch, equal parts familiar and eerie. There is an aesthetic allure of the highway at night — twinkling lights, the promise of the open road — but this optimistic sense is undermined by the source imagery coming from the horror of automobile accidents.

Riley's subjects are confessional, provocative, and personal. Her work continues in the vein of an artist like Ana Mendieta, whose performances dealing with both the subjectification and objectification of women were as radical, emancipatory, and shocking nearly half a century ago as they are today — perhaps because it still remains radical, emancipatory, and shocking for women to be self-possessed about their own bodies and experiences, and to speak bluntly about them on their own terms. While many gains have been made for women in the century since the passage of the 19th amendment, the fight of earlier generations for gender equality and autonomy remains



**Erin M. Riley** *Unsolicted*, 2017

ongoing in the present political and social climate. Topics that dominated debates in the 1970s are again in the forefront of the zeitgeist: identity, sexual and gender politics; environmentalism and sustainability; equality and civil rights issues. The question of why as a culture we come back to these concerns points to the notion of progress as a cyclical rather than a linear phenomenon.



**Martha Tuttle** *A landscape or region*, 2018



**Martha Tuttle** *Teeth*, 2018

Contemporary artists make work that reflects the time in which they live, and these subjects are continually fruitful because they continue to be relevant to everyday lives. Looking back has also precipitated reinvestigation into the materials and artistic tropes of the past. Like Riley's weaving, **Martha Tuttle's** work embraces the interest in handmade materials prevalent among the artists of feminism's second wave who left behind the vernacular of large scale heroic painting and industrial sculpture. Tuttle's work in textile are made of wool, silk, and pigment and follow the tradition of what may have at one point been considered "women's work." At the same time, she uses the language of Minimalism, an art movement that is often associated with its male practitioners, but embraces qualities that exist beyond gender definitions such as subtlety, clarity of material, and relationship with space.

The subversion of rigid boundaries applies to other aspects of Tuttle's artwork as well. Works that may be described as paintings are made primarily from fabric. Starting with raw wool, Tuttle spins her own thread, weaves, and dyes her own fabrics, rather than working with found or commercially produced materials. The artist's touch is not just on the surface of the work, but embedded into its very being. This transference of energy from the artist's own



**Martha Tuttle** *Untitled*, 2017



**Martha Tuttle** *Untitled (detail)*, 2017

body into the artworks materiality are further illustrated between the stillness when the fabric is stretched, and movement when it is freely pinned to the wall.

For Tuttle, there is a direct connection between textile and text, much like in the performances, installations, and objects by Ann Hamilton. Tuttle shares with this artist the ability to create artworks connecting the physical body to the sublime that manage to be both contemplative and powerful.

Tuttle's artwork simply explores the condition of possessing a corporeal body — in this artist's case one that identifies as female — by making a declaration of existence with utterance that is aesthetic, linguistic or otherwise.

Alex McQuilkin, Erin M. Riley, and Martha Tuttle have often been included in exhibitions that focus on circumstantial identifications, such as gender or on their use of certain materials. *Complicated Territory* is an opportunity to bring them together identified simply as artists — people who use visual means to communicate experience. As each generation

learns from the previous, materials, subjects, and conventions are re-invented, re-purposed, re-examined, rejected or re-affirmed, creating a new landscape for the next to improve upon. ■

— *Bridget Donlon*, 2018

## BIOGRAPHY

**Bridget Donlon** is a Brooklyn-based contemporary art professional with experience in curating and arts administration and institutions including the Tang Museum, the Guerrilla Girls, Galerie Lelong, Tate Modern, the Fabric Workshop and Museum, and Dieu Donné. Recent curatorial projects have included *On Reflection* at UrbanGlass in Brooklyn and *Confluence/Influence in Contemporary Abstraction* at Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs in Long Island City. She curated *Pure Pulp: Contemporary Artists Working in Paper*, a 15 year retrospective of works from Dieu Donné's residency programs for the Wellin Museum at Hamilton College, which traveled to the Robert C. Williams Museum of Papermaking at Georgia Tech and the Dedalus Foundation at Industry City, Brooklyn, and was accompanied by a catalog published by Demonic/Prestel. Bridget is a project manager at a public art organization in New York City.

## CHECKLIST

### ALEX MCQUILKIN

*UNTITLED (LAVENDER BOUTTONIERE)*, 2017  
Triptych: 50" x 116"  
Flashe on paper on panel  
Courtesy of the Artist

*UNTITLED (WAINSCOTT FLORAL PORCELAIN)*, 2017  
48" x 40"  
Flashe on paper on panel  
Courtesy of the Artist

*UNTITLED (PURPLE ZIP)*, 2016  
44" x 44"  
Flashe on paper on panel  
Courtesy of the Artist

*UNTITLED (SENSE AND SENSIBILITY)*, 2018  
Diptych: 50" x 73"  
Flashe on paper on panel  
Courtesy of the Artist

### ERIN M. RILEY

*THE DARKNESS*, 2018  
48" x 50"  
Wool and cotton  
Courtesy of the Artist and P.P.O.W. Gallery, NY

*THE END*, 2018  
49" x 56"  
Wool and cotton  
Courtesy of the Artist and P.P.O.W. Gallery, NY

*UNSOLICITED*, 2017  
48" x 65"  
Wool and cotton  
Courtesy of the Artist and P.P.O.W. Gallery, NY

*NO SUCH LUCK*, 2017  
48" x 71"  
Wool and cotton  
Courtesy of the Artist and P.P.O.W. Gallery, NY

### MARTHA TUTTLE

*A LANDSCAPE OR REGION*, 2018  
14" x 12"  
Wool, silk, pigment  
Courtesy of the Artist and Tilton Gallery, NY

*TEETH*, 2018  
14" x 12"  
Wool, silk, pigment  
Courtesy of the Artist and Tilton Gallery, NY

*UNTITLED*, 2017  
34.5" x 31"  
Wool, silk, graphite, steel  
Courtesy of the Artist and Tilton Gallery, NY

Cover: Erin M. Riley, *No Such Luck*, 2017

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