

Held Together By Idols

Blair Schulman

Lauren McEntire does not deny her connection to two worlds – discordant punk rock music alongside the mellow-eyed circle of embroidery. McIntire shares their history, each with its own value system and levels of respect. Rather than create a conflict from this dichotomy, Lauren fuses them whole. The result is *Blanket*, her one-woman show at Fahrenheit Gallery.

Self-taught in the traditions of embroidery, McIntire was influenced early on by her grandmother who taught her to crochet. Her great-grandmother knew

cross-stitch and Lauren still has one of those pieces as an inspiration. Her very first stitched piece was a patchwork skirt, made from whatever could be found around the house — ripping, tearing, cutting, and finally, creating.

Having earned a second education working in the record stores of her hometown of Houston, Texas, for many years, McEntire found a home amongst the Punks. Outwardly being thought of as confrontational outcasts is only part of the Punk story. Punks identify

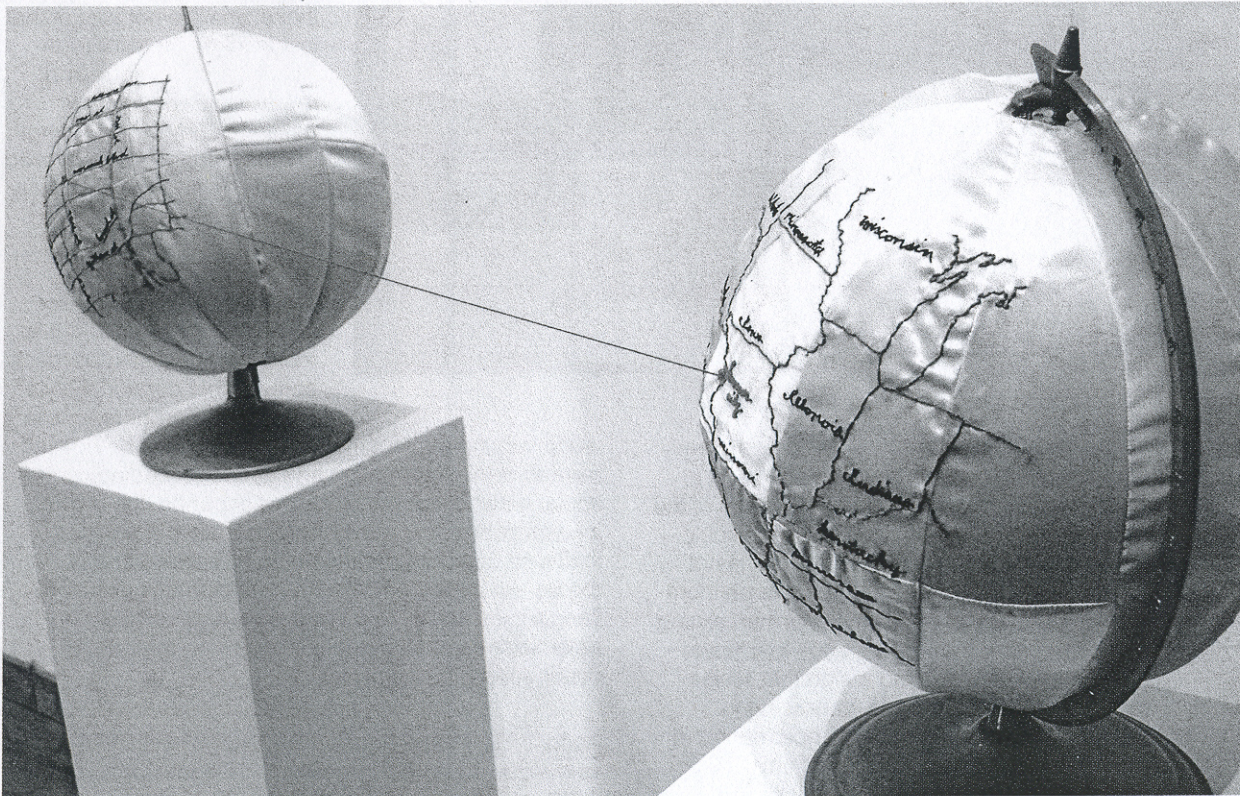
Blanket: Lauren McEntire
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themselves as a clique that abhors their own cliqueishness, but they also welcome and acknowledge their own without question. Age makes no difference in that scene. Everyone is there for the music. Lauren was accepted by an older crowd — their common link was the very happening Punk landscape in Houston. Seeing bands like Really Red, Butthole Surfers, and Big Boys, it was a natural leap forward for Lauren to inaugurate her first record player at age 14 with a Bikini Kill album, although her parents' presented the gift along with Lou Reed's *Animal*. Her very first concert was The B-52's. Her older sister read *Assassin* magazine, so Lauren swiped a copy and things started making sense. These are the sources of McIntire's inspiration.

After Houston, Lauren studied at the Kansas City Art Institute to start pulling together what she was learning and with what she was living. All the while, she has been a collector of images, iconography, line drawings, and 1940's imagery. Her work was becoming an amalgamation of the post-modern and the time-tested.

Turned on by punk's do-it-yourself attitude and nihilistic ideologies, Lauren wanted to create objects with a sense of integrity that would reflect both anchored traditions and her musical aesthetics without isolating people — something traditionally feminine to stand up in a world she feels is overburdened by male objectivity, an object of reassurance that everyone can touch upon. She found the answer in the soft comfort of pillows.

From a residency spent at the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Lauren created a series of small — some tiny — pillows, sweetly embroidered on one side with images of her punk music idols: Exene Cervenka, Richard Hell, Sid Vicious, and Patti Smith to name a few. According to Lauren, making "sculpture on the object of worship, it might have been scary and weird." But when she created idols in this original context, it made them "softer, and not as scary."



Distant Proximity

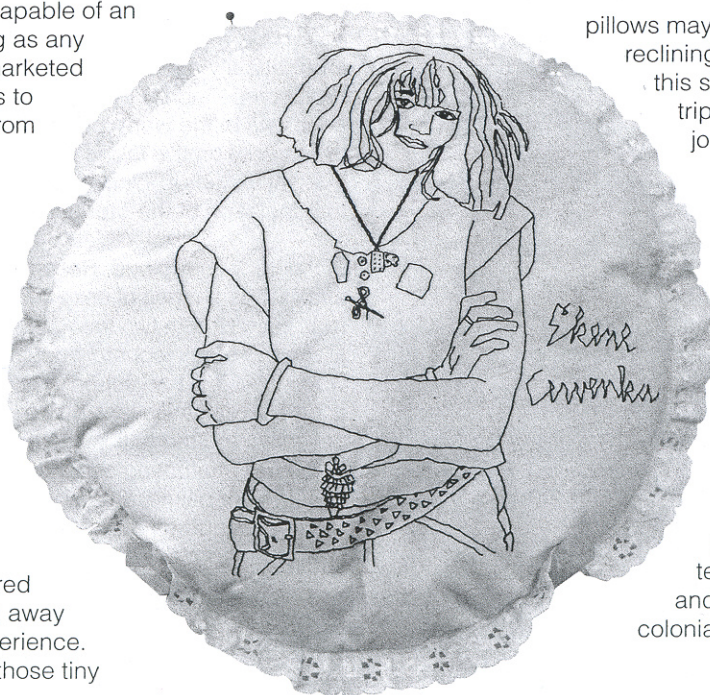
Flip the pillows over, and there are painstakingly embroidered love letters to these idols that run from the heartfelt: "When I listen to your records, I get goosebumps down my spine," down to the core of isolation: "When I was discovering ... Joy Division, I was very depressed and found that it made me feel less alienated." How many of us felt this relief turning on to music that spoke to our own disaffection? McIntire shoots it straight out of the barrel and hits right on target.

Creating these pillows in simple white fabric and black floss, McEntire has taken a group perceived by the uninitiated as gangs of dirty-necked hooligans, and proven that among them are heroes possessing a certain purity. Their integrity is worthy of idolatry, and they are capable of an influence as comforting as any sugar coated, Teflon-marketed pop idol. McEntire says to us, it is where I come from and I am all right. The concept is unique, the effect is brilliant.

A two-seat sofa draped in simple muslin compliments the pillows, entirely embroidered with the message of a fan-struck memory on meeting Ian MacKaye of Minor Threat. She tells us in diary-form of where and how she encountered her hero and of coming away reassured from the experience. Resting one's head on those tiny



Ian McKaye Couch



Exene Cervenka Pillow

pillows may be a nice retreat, but reclining in the full embrace of this sofa is transformative: a trip to the artist's tongue-tied journey.

On a wall, almost alone, but with an obvious connection, is a framed quilt symbolizing Lauren's travels across the country. The key indicates where friends, family, art career, school, etcetera, are found. It is a travelogue for a modern woman, rendered with old-fashion technique still as powerful and comforting as when colonial quilters told their tales.

For what is becoming a hallmark in McIntire's repertoire, there is, lastly, a diptych of embroidered globes in a satin finish depicting two worlds, a strand of red yarn connecting both. One is a localized grid of Kansas City, specifically the Crossroads Arts District, which is an area of importance for the artist. The other is the world at large, with Kansas City standing out in the bigger scheme of things. The globes are identical in scale, but it is obvious the localized version looms large.

McIntire has obviously found her voice honestly and early; the message and the medium ring crystal clear. There is a genuine thrill in encountering someone so early in their career with idealism, technique, and fundamentals superbly looped together. Fans of McIntire ought to take her hand, allow themselves to be led, and rest assured that the journey will be worth it. •

Based in Kansas City, Missouri, Blair Schulman is a screenwriter and author of *Love Letters To Myself*.