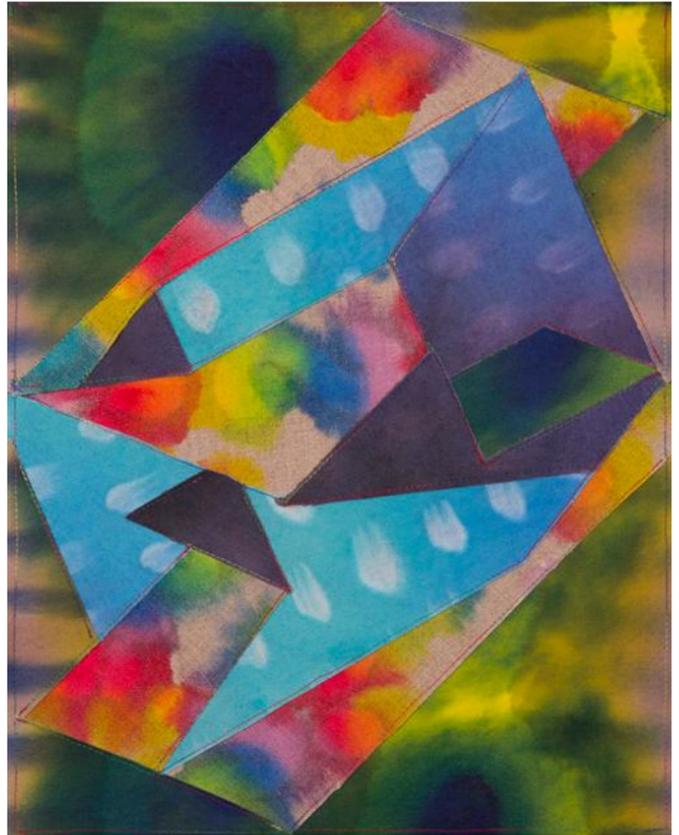




On Indigo Echo

Nichole van Beek

*Starship Flax*  
dye on linen and cotton canvas, thread, 2015



# On Indigo Echo

## Nichole van Beek

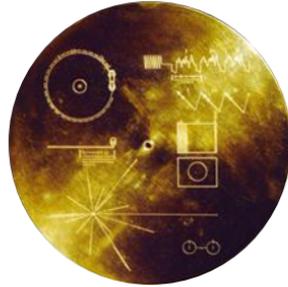
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*On Indigo Echo* presents new textile and mixed media installation work, evoking themes of ritual and technology through the lens of contemporary craft. Artist Nichole van Beek uses a bright palette and geometric forms, typical of internet based art, replicating them in traditional “handmade” mediums such as dyed textiles and macramé.

Wearable objects and prerecorded sound elements serve as aids for visitors to orient themselves as “beings within the cosmos”. The installation incorporates audio recordings from the Voyager Golden Records, phonographic time capsules sent on the two Voyager spacecraft launched in 1977, each containing sounds and images portraying the diversity of life and human cultures on our planet. Through wearable space blankets, the viewer becomes the link between spacefaring technology and the human-scaled activity of textile making.



Cover of the *Voyager Golden Record*  
aluminum and electroplated with uranium-238, 1977

*On Indigo Echo* binds the gallery through visual fibers. Textiles quilt the gallery walls, both as three dimensional sculptural assemblages and as two dimensional pictures hung from the walls. Developed through a combination of painting, pattern making, and photogram, van Beek’s pieces function as a meditation on the act of collecting. In a broader sense, her work may be interpreted as a memorial to the natural world, a contemporary exploration of historical pattern making, and the artist’s attraction to the sensory experience of living in the material world.

Van Beek can be considered part of a new movement of fine artists working towards a redefinition of contemporary craft practices within their own work. The creation of online marketplaces, the emphasis on the handmade and personal, and the ongoing critique of mass-consumerism has created the aesthetic, intellectual, and commercial space necessary for craft makers to



Philip David Stearns, *Fragmented Memory*  
digitally designed and woven cotton textile, 2015

looms. Kang also develops digital textiles that exist in real time through layered projected video

Brenna Murphy creates digitally printed textiles that reference the ritual geometries found in a wide assortment of cultures, as well as the similarity of patterns found in both the natural and digital world. Through an online manufacturing resource, Murphy is able to distance herself from the traditional methods of craft making by removing her hand from the final art object.

Artists and designers Liliana Farber, Rael San Fratello, and Tim Knapen are also finding new methods for defining the unification of craft and technology through 3D printing, digital pottery wheels, and translating code into image, then image into pattern.

As more individual artists are embracing the union of craft and fine arts, institutions are beginning to take notice. *Wonder*, a recent exhibition at the Renwick Gallery in Washington DC, gave nine contemporary artists space

thrive. This in turn has led to the merging of craft with the historically separate fields of fine arts and design.

Philip David Stearns develops textiles compiled from the binary data sourced from his computer's memory. His glitchy woven textiles function as a translation of coding errors into wearable garments, intimate materiality from digital abstraction.

Similarly to Stearns, Robin J Kang makes hand woven textiles that mimic the systems of historical mechanical



Tara Donovan, Untitled (installation for *Wonder*)  
styrene index cards, metal, wood, paint and glue, 2014

to develop site specific installations focused on ritual, collecting, and the use of the multiple in fine arts practice. *Wonder* has drawn crowds and filled Instagram feeds with its immersing and innovative craft based installations.

Interviewed in the New York Times, Elizabeth Broun, the Renwick's director, said "In the past, the museum might have shown the work of highly skilled artists toiling in isolation to create some exquisite object. That is no longer the working concept for us. Instead we want artists even if they use computers in their design process."

The evolution of the institutional perception of craft also facilitates a new conversation towards craft in relation to other creative practices. André Gali writes for *Norwegian Craft* stating:



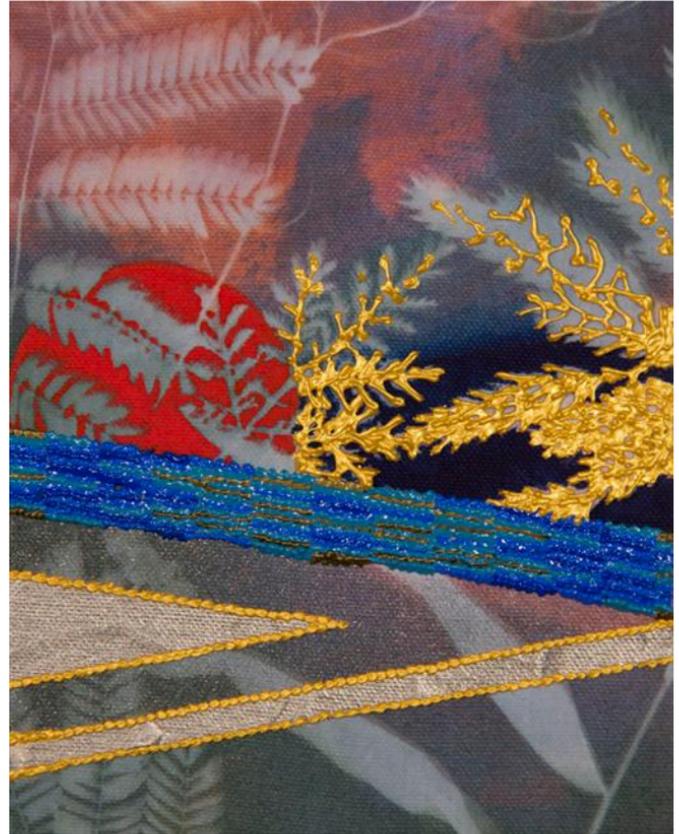
**"Craft-based art practices no longer stand in contrast to the design industry and contemporary art, nor do they appear as a less-valued field from which the other two fields differentiate themselves; these practices now have equal status as part of an undifferentiated aesthetic and cultural field."**

*Splendid Slanted Land*

photo-sensitive dye on canvas, acrylic, 2015

These developments, which seem cutting edge, represent a return to the historical role that crafts played in technological development. Textiles, for instance, serve as one of the original foundations of computer technology. At the turn of the 19th century, the French weaver and merchant Joseph Marie Jacquard developed an innovative loom for making complex patterns such as brocade and damask.

Jacquard's invention became one of the first programmable machines for general use. The loom was controlled using a sequence of punch cards, each card corresponding to a woven pattern. The machine had far-ranging, ambivalent effects. While it allowed complex patterns to be produced more quickly and cost-effectively, the Jacquard loom also reduced the need for skilled human labor. As Sadie Plant observes in *Zeros + Ones*, her cultural history of textiles, mysticism and computation, the loom "effectively withdrew control of the weaving process from human workers and transferred it to the hardware of the machine."



It was this early connection between the loom and the computer that established a strong and ongoing conceptual link between textiles and the further development of high technology. Sadie Plant comments on the technology of weaving; “It is their micro-processes which underlie it all: the spindle and the spinning wheel are the basis of all later axles, wheels, and rotation. It is the interlaced threads of the loom that compose the most abstract processes of fabrication. Textiles themselves are very literally the software linings of all technology.”

Van Beek’s approach creates a weaving between space travel and the mechanics of textile making. Once learned by the maker, this craft language enables the repetition of form in woven material, just as computerized instructions sent to a spacecraft enable those actions to be repeated millions of miles away. It is the consistency of pattern and language within craft that allows for a valuable access point in understanding the process of technology.

Craft is code. Code is technology. And, as we move farther into the digital, craft has the potential to help the world built with science and technology seem more comprehensible, more charged with meaning. Van Beek’s work helps to define the symbiosis between craft and technology, helping to enlarge the definition through the unification of disparate mediums.

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Nichole van Beek is represented by Jeff Bailey Gallery. She attended The Cooper Union and The University of California, Santa Barbara and currently teaches at Pratt Institute. She was the recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts grant in painting in 2012 and the Socrates Sculpture Park Emerging Artist Fellowship in 2011. In 2016 she will be attending the Vermont Studio Center through a grant from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation.



Detail of *The Commensality*

photo-sensitive dye on cotton canvas and denim, 2015

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“She keeps returning to Indigo Echo, growing out of a fear of the infinite disappearance of suns. In her scattered patterns samples sleep. Fingers triangulate frozen leaves until morning blooms magenta. Open Your Silver Heart! is the song that plays, whirring beyond the mountainous haze here at home. Woven into it, to jar extra-terrestrial perception, are mirrored many-times over words. This time, they shine darkly in a worm-holed contraption made of hemp and hair and breath as cold rains knot around a verdant nest.”

— Nichole van Beek

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essay by Julia Greenway  
edited by Matthew Spencer  
photography by Joe Freeman  
design by Shaun Kardinal

cover:

*The Commensality*

installation view

Detail of *Fool's Errand*  
photosensitive dye on cotton fabric. 2015



Prepared by MagCloud for Julia Greenway. Get more at [vaughan101.magcloud.com](http://vaughan101.magcloud.com).