

We live in a time when artistic boundaries have begun to blur. Categories of art based on their medium, like painting or sculpture, have morphed until the hybrid is as familiar as the pure-bred specimen. Sharon Kagan is an artist who has worked in a range of modes including interactive installations, expressive performances, and inventive drawings. She brings to her work an awareness that art can emerge from deep levels of physicality and feeling, and show us the continuity between personal experience and the wider world.

Kagan's drawings originate in tangible, observable reality, but are not simply renderings. Rather, they start with what can be seen, and go on to conjure a kind of alternate, expanded reality. A drawing begins with the artist knitting hemp string or rope into a loose mass that is then photographed in a way that disorients the viewer.

In the black and white drawings, the enlarged photographs have an atmospheric, soft-focus quality that allows us intimate entry into the fibrous interstices of the knitting. At a distance, the image suggests both an open, sculptural form and an animated organism. When we look carefully, we see that the drawing's surface is articulated with many finely inked shapes, each of which encapsulates a specific tonality.

The effect is to bring the viewer close to an unfamiliar graphic reality, which is both strongly dimensional and mapped in a way that emphasizes its digital pixels. In this double consciousness we recognize our contemporary life in which images are constantly available yet equally unreliable.

In Kagan's more recent drawings and paintings on canvas, she uses close-up details of drawings of knitted stitches and transforms them using color pencil. The resulting work moves far beyond the tonal subtlety of the black and white images into a realm that is psychedelic in the intensity of its color and patterning. The gridding of the image, a traditional method for artists to transfer images, becomes in Kagan's hands a graphical fantasia, a quilted euphoric Eden where everything is animated.

By revealing what was once invisible, Kagan's work embodies a life transmogrified into art, starting with her early installations and performances. Kagan began knitting to mourn the loss of her mother, an unbroken link evoked in yarn. She has cited perceiving the world around her as vibratory energy as a formative artistic experience. The drawings and paintings she creates suggest the image of the net, a fabric made of knots and emptiness, endlessly capable of growth, movement, and connection.

**John Mendelsohn**