

Frieze

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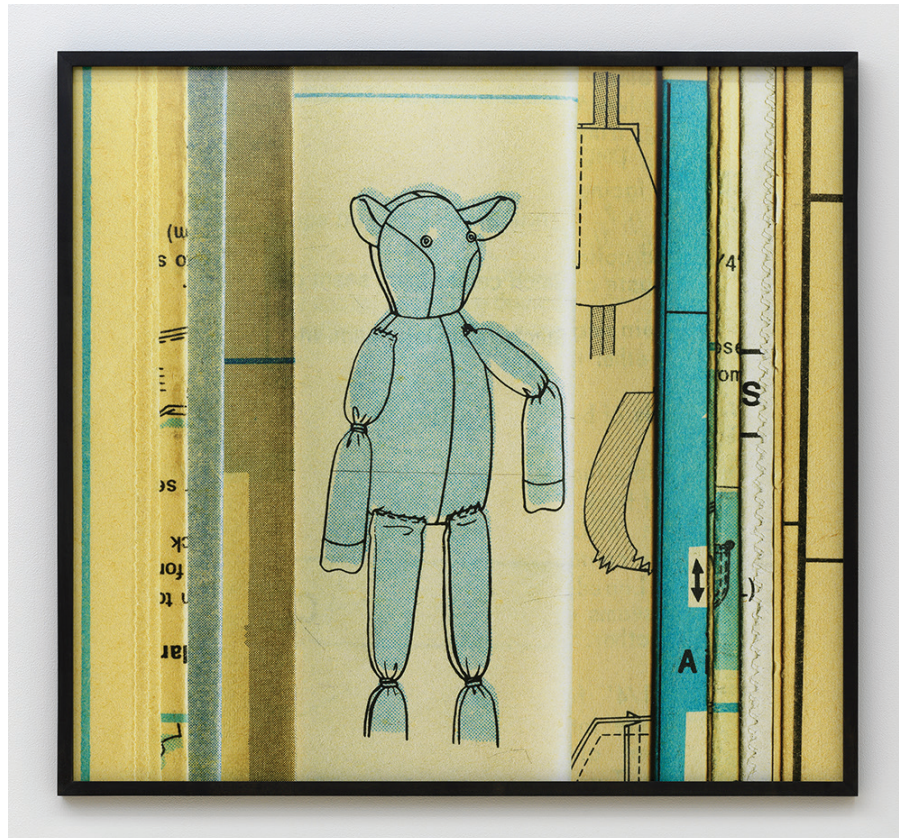
BY MEGAN N. LIBERTY
18 FEB 2019

How Photographer Erica Baum Peers Below the Surface of the Faded Page

Baum's work, on view at New York's Bureau Gallery, calls attention to the overlooked hand labour of the textile industry

Erica Baum's photography abstracts language from newspapers, dog-eared book corners, faded chalkboards and card catalogues. Close-up shots create a kind of found poetry; words unnaturally joined generate beautiful and unexpected turns of phrase, like: 'The lace was my laceless shoe? Caught' (from the 'Dog Ear' series, 2011) or 'There is an air of Greek tragedy the men laughed' (from the 'Newspaper Clippings' series, 2010-ongoing). With each body of work, Baum systematically highlights the materiality of the outdated and analogue, magnifying the creases, yellowing pages and bleeding ink.

With her latest series, 'Patterns' (2018), on view in her solo show 'A Long Dress' at Bureau Gallery, New York, Baum adds dress pattern booklets to this list of source material. The new pigment prints enlarge small squares of the books, layering the thin sheets atop one another to produce her signature collage style. With a colour palette of yellowed background with red, green, blue and black lines, the prints look like the geometric diagrams of Ad Reinhardt or Sol Lewitt. *Hem Allowed* (2018) depicts a semicircle bisected by a diagonal line with the titular text printed in bold sans serif font in the bottom left corner. These guiding lines are faded, visible through the translucent paper. The works are multilingual: *Eye* (2018) includes the English word above its French and Spanish translations (*oeil* and *ojo*). The Spanish word for waist '*cintura*' appears in red along the top edge of another eponymous print, the sheets' below forming a faded 'x' from corner to corner.



Erica Baum, 'Sewing Cow', 2018,
archival pigment print, 91 x 99 cm.
Courtesy: the artist and Bureau,
New York

'Patterns' emphasizes the textures of the forgotten guides used by home tailors and seamstresses. Although the strings of excerpted texts ('fold edges fold') share the poetic quality of Baum's previous work, their linguistic diversity calls to mind current politics – particularly debates over immigration and labour in the United States, United Kingdom and Europe. The series stresses the gap between objects and their makers, invisible labour often done by immigrants. If this connection were unintentional, it might be even more fitting for Baum's practice, which revels in the chance aspect of collage.

Not all the works are so strictly minimalist: *Sewing Cow* (2018) and *Bunny* (2018) each depict patterns for stuffed animals, collaged on either edge with slices of other pages, recalling the style of Baum's filmic photographs of flipping pages in the *Naked Eye* (2008-present) series, which capture slivers of images in rows of page edges. In the only 'Pattern' work illustrating a figure, *Shoulders* (2018), a sketched woman hunches over, her body broken into numbered pattern pieces, measurements to be interpreted: an eerily dehumanized image of the female body.



Erica Baum, *Underarm Dessous*, 2018, archival pigment print, 41 x 38 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Bureau, New York

The title of the show, 'A Long Dress,' comes from Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* (1914), an ode to inanimate objects: 'What is the current that makes machinery, that makes it crackle, what is the current that presents a long line and a necessary waist. What is this current.' Baum's work always peers below the surface of the faded page. Her 'Patterns,' strangely beautiful pages masquerading as fabric, call attention to the overlooked hand labour of the textile industry, 'the current that presents a long line.'

Erica Baum, 'A Long Dress', was on view at [Bureau, New York](#), from 6 January to 17 February 2019.

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