

MICHELLE HAMER

I am
part
of a

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LIVING

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city

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Aren't dogs lucky they can't read? They get to walk around oblivious to the barrage of language we humans have to put up with all the time. A cacophony of unwanted words, in our face day in and day out, telling us everything we need to know and do; or not.

Michelle Hamer: Returning the Voice

Professor Julian Goddard

I visited East Berlin in 1987, a few years before 'the wall' came down. The thing that struck me about it was how visually quiet it was. In those days East Berlin was relatively sign-free, making the space of the city resonate with an eerie but highly pleasurable absence. No shop signs, no advertising and very little signage giving instruction. I found it strangely liberating. The space seemed cleaner and clearer – like it does in the country. I imagined it was like being in cities before modernity reconstructed their use as places of production and consumption.

Sometime in the nineteenth century cities started to speak. They began to talk to their inhabitants. Telling them what to buy (advertising), where to go (wayfinding) and how to act (instruction). A new textural/political space emerged full of visual interactions transferring power from the elites of various *ancien regimes*

to the forces of capitalism. The modern city subject became the recipient of an ordered public space; punctuated, enlivened and structured around visual information. The voice of the city became dominant, demanding compliance and servility as 'the mob'

quickly morphed into 'the public'. Today this voice is ubiquitous, permeating our visual public (and private) space. It has spread onto clothing (T-shirts, labels),

onto objects of all sorts and is fast colonizing nature (road signs, internet).

Michelle Hamer's work draws our attention to this condition. By re-presenting seemingly innocuous signs through such a laborious process as tapestry, she gives us reason to stop and consider the bearing of this new language of instruction, command and influence has on everyday life. Her intervention allows for a lull in our unconscious submission to the power of this voice and even challenges it. Michelle seeks out and foregrounds messages of resistance that work against the grain of this voice. Subversive counter-signs that occupy unallowed spaces (old-school graffiti) or use *détournement* to shift meaning against itself.

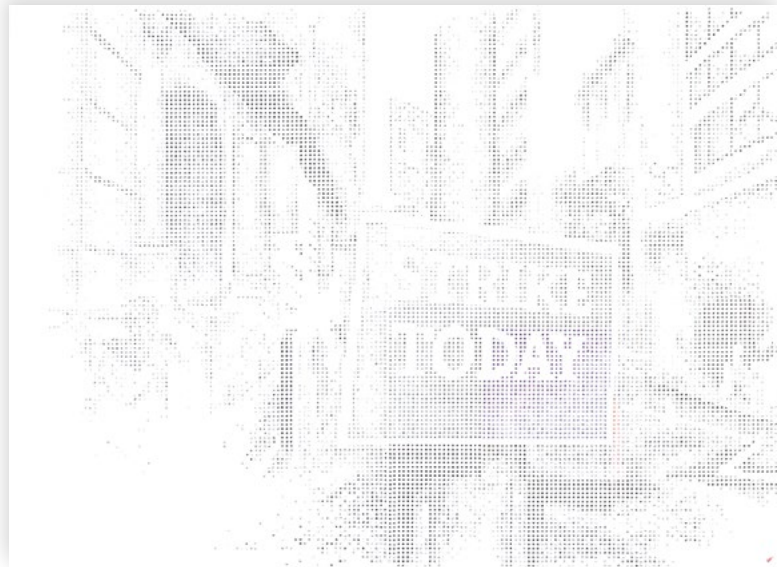
Michelle's own resistance to this culture of command goes beyond recording and interpretation to the use

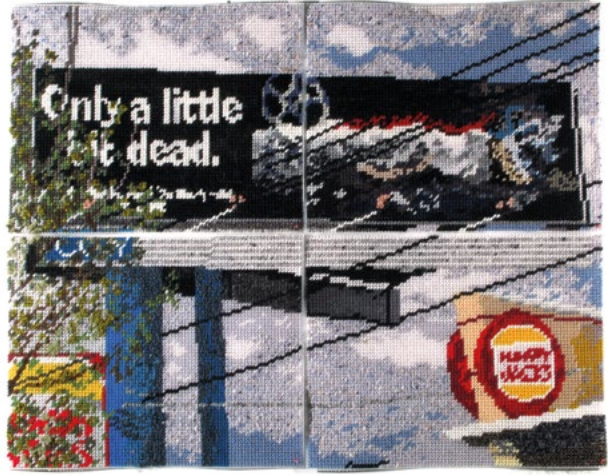


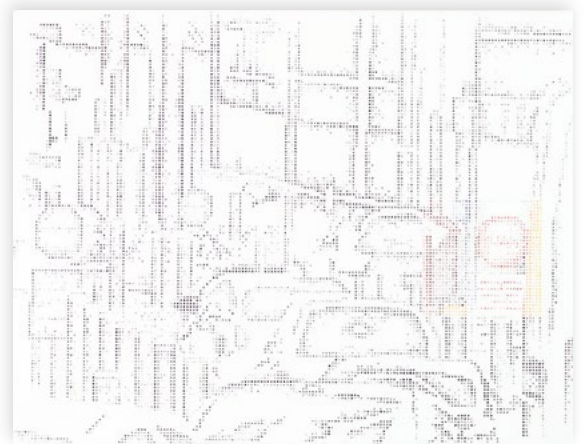
of a craft practice that is slow and low. By interpreting her photographic record through tapestry Michelle subverts the immediacy of photography and its veil of objectivity. Her hand-made photo-tapestries speak with their own voice of authenticity and vulnerability, in opposition to a culture of disenfranchised subjectivity and status. While Michelle's use of a craft practice may well challenge the dominance of 'sophisticated art' it also creates a possibility for a new critique. One based in the subversive pleasure of making as opposed to the compliance of consuming and one redolent with social engagement and political dissent.

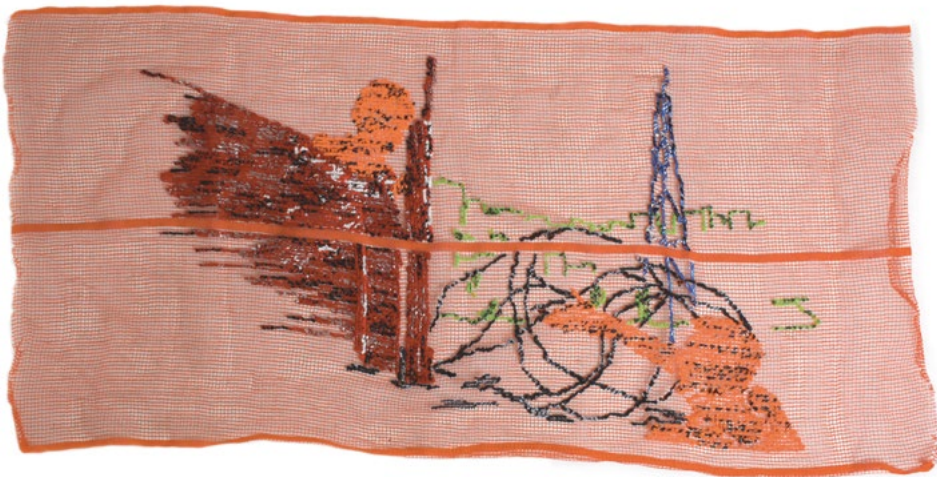
Professor Julian Goddard is Dean, School of Art at RMIT University.











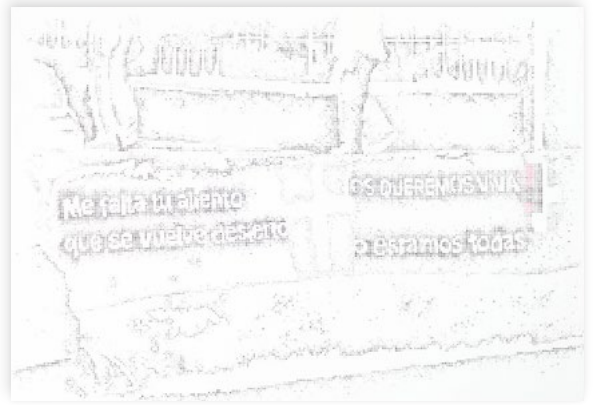
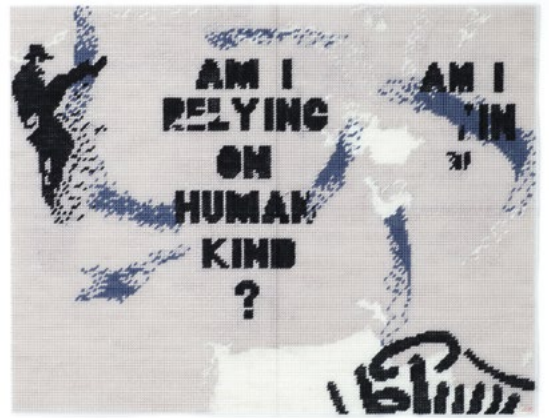




Photo: www.fox.com





List of Works

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Fatigue Kills, 2005 hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 26.5 x 34 cm

Booze Uses, 2005 hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 26.5 x 34 cm

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I am part of a LIVING city, 2011, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 63 x 101 cm

Dropped Off, 2005 hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 26.5 x 34 cm

Don't Drive Tired, 2005 hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 26.5 x 34 cm

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My hurt hurts, 2013, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 51 x 68 cm

Work what you got, 2013, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 51 x 68 cm

Strike Today, 2015, hand-marking, ink on paper, 50 x 65 cm

Yawning, 2006, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 53 x 68 cm

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Only a little bit over, 2006, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 53 x 68 cm

Only a little bit dead, 2007 hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 53 x 68 cm

Zoning out could save your life, 2007, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 53 x 68 cm

Sleep by day, 2007, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 53 x 68 cm

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On the Road to Nowhere, 2017, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 67.5 x 104 cm

Detour 2, 2015, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 50 x 71 cm

Triumph, 2013, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 68 x 52 cm

Hopes and Delusions, 2017 hand-marking, ink on paper, 50 x 65 cm

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Our Detour, 2015, hand-marking, ink on paper, 50 x 65 cm

Detour 3, 2016, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 50 x 71 cm

Know Hope, 2017, hand-stitched barrier tape on polypropylene debris mesh, 113 x 227 cm

perforated plastic, 82 x 104.5 cm

One Way, 2017, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 52.5 x 67 cm

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Give up your day job, 2009, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 136 x 55 cm

Vivas nos queremos/We want ourselves living, 2017, hand-marking, ink on paper, 70 x 100 cm

de este lado tambien hay sueños/On this side there are dreams too, 2017, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 104 x 67.5 cm

2 grants are better than 1, 2011, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 71 x 103.5 cm

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Tell your boss its not you, its me, 2009, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 105 x 52 cm

Full. Stop., 2017, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 52.5 x 67 cm

Exit only, 2013, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 48 x 67 cm

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Put yourself in a better place, 2011, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on

Am I Relying on Human Kind?, 2017, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 52.5 x 67 cm

Losing empathy, 2015, hand-marking, ink on paper, 70 x 100 cm

Is this your new home?, 2011, hand-stitching, mixed yarn on perforated plastic, 82 x 104.5 cm

Michelle Hamer holds a Bachelor of Architecture with first class honours from RMIT University and has been an exhibiting artist since 2005.

I am part of a LIVING city is Hamer's 21st solo show and first survey show. Her work maps contemporary social beliefs, fears and aspirations through 'everyday' language and place. The boundaries and barriers that she explores oscillate between fast and slow; past and present; personal and political and become markers of rarely captured but revealing moments in time. Her hand-stitched and drawn works occupy a space between 2D and 3D and are based on 'found' text and her own photographs. Hamer continues to be interested in being present in the complexity of in-between moments and the uncertainty of unresolved circumstances.

Hamer was a winner of the inaugural Architecture in Tapestry Prize in 2015. She has received project grants from the Australia Council (x6), Arts Victoria (x1) and City of Melbourne (x2) and undertaken a residency at The Australian Tapestry Workshop. Her work has been featured in print and online publications including *The Atlantic* (USA); *Embroidery UK*; Stephen Banham's *Characters*; Gestalten Press' *Imagine Architecture* (2014); Thames & Hudson's *The Craft Handbook* (2015) and their upcoming *The Book of Word* (2018). Her works are in public collections including the National Gallery of Victoria; Artbank; City of Melbourne and private collections in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, New York, Chicago, Beijing, Los Angeles, London, Oslo and Auckland.

Acknowledgements

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Exhibition

Wagga Wagga Art Gallery

Corner of Baylis & Morrow Streets

Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, Australia

2 June–26 August, 2018

WAGGA WAGGA
ART GALLERY





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