



Erin McAllister – Fiber as Genome

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Words by Blair Schulman

The fiber art of Kansas City artist **Erin McAllister** is influenced by the unpredictability of relationships between men and women. Organic, static or everlasting, it's all a chance meeting. She chooses the colors at will, cuts their shape with no concerns about exactitude, and puts them together to see how, or if, it works. What guides her process is the promise that these random placements will leave a lasting impression.

Erin's use of colors and patterns overlap, like shared remembrances. The vintage fabrics she chooses are cut down to the smallest detail, reinventing their original meaning. She combines them with bold cotton colors,

textured leathers or blazing mylars, meant to define matter and relationships.



They're held together with either a colored thread of a "temperamental", easily breakable quality, or a black upholstery thread so strong it's used to hold together sofa fabric.

In her larger canvases (averaging around 25" x 25") the circles are surrounded by a white space, airy and light, so you can imagine them floating off again. The threads holding them together act as "channels" sometimes falling over the edge of the canvas, to give one a lingering hope of being guided out of free fall.



The smaller canvases (around 4" x 5") show these circles tightly bound to one another with no blank space. Looking at such an intimate piece, with no breathing room, it epitomizes the compromise of a difficult relationship.



Erin likes circles - "they're organic". She doesn't care for

hard-edged corners and hates triangles, with an immediate dislike of their mundane symmetry. Those shapes have no spontaneity. "Circles have no end, they're a continuous line."

Preferring to work free form, she doesn't sketch and uses a free motion embroidery foot on her sewing machine, allowing the fabric to move at will. Admitting to a short attention span, Erin will often have four or five pieces going at once, each textured work not completed until she perceives a tactile relationship has emerged.



A 2006 graduate of the Kansas City Art Institute, Erin first showed her innate desire for interaction in a 2008 solo exhibition called "synapse" at the Opie Gallery in the Leedy-Voulkus Art Center, also in Kansas City.

Gallery Director Holly Swangstu says, "Erin plays with stories within her designs of shapes and found fabrics...she is not bashful about simply enjoying the work with vintage and contemporary fabrics...(and) the endless possibilities to use them as "paint" in her palette".



She discusses our relationship with life, using fabric as the facilitator. McAllister continues, "We look past fabric as an item that has no value, because it is so valuable. It's with us from the moment we are born until the day we die." The choices this artist makes are a study in human relationships whittled down its very essence.

Erin's carefree attitude about form and control is an open book to the biology of emotion. Her work asks us to give up this restraint to just simply "let it be."



For more on Erin's work, visit her website [here](#).