

## Reflections On The Work Of Emma Balder

"All that you touch you Change. All that you Change Changes you. The only lasting truth is Change." --Octavia Butler

Emma Balder was attending a residency in Vermont, surrounded by nature, the first time she cut up her own paintings. Shortly thereafter, she stitched those remnants together with the discarded textiles of other residents to make hybrid new forms, untethered to the constraints of traditional geometric painting stretchers. Over the years, her recycled materials have mutated into even quirkier forms, with the texture, weight, and character of the components demanding the specifics of their new construction. Emma is a conduit, revealing the unique personalities of her pieces as their parts are dissected, recombined, painted, stuffed, hand-sewn, and situated on a wall. As the forms grow in every dimension, and fibers spread across the surfaces of paper and canvas, the expectations of painting are recalibrated and the paintings themselves can be understood as embodiments of change.

Mimicking life cycles in nature, Emma embraces a meditative approach to making, allowing her ideas and materials to grow, reproduce, mature, and begin again. Nothing is static or too precious. Waste is minimal: Materials with unique histories are honored, rearranged, and mended together, reincarnated as "Pinglets," fiber paintings, and other softer, larger, and more expansive textile works. The shapes are organic and the vibrant rainbow colors follow the contours of each piece. A slow hand and thoughtful response to her materials results in lively pieces that reach out to the viewer as soon as the viewer leans in.

Through the act of making, there is an energetic transformation that occurs. The forms become creatures mimicking landscapes, microbes, and aliens with amiable personalities. Delicate legs and arms seem to grow in the process. Each piece appears fully formed, yet frozen at a moment of growth when the work was swimming, running, healing, expanding. Though the imagery is entirely abstract, one could swear appendage-like forms and soft bodies breathe and undulate with near-perceptible movement. The colors are vibrant and alive. Lines flow like water. While technically static, the pieces give a lasting impression of motion and serve as a compelling reminder of what it means to be alive--that breaking, mending, rearrangement, and renewal are constant truths. Change sparks energy and resilience. For Emma Balder and her works, change is integral to a life well lived.

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