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TEXTILE SOCIETY *of* AMERICA

Blog

Aesthetics of Pleasure

By Dr. Yolanda Sánchez

Born in Havana, Cuba, Dr. Sánchez immigrated to the United States in February 1960. She obtained a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Florida State University and has practiced and taught psychology at the graduate level for over 30 years. In her mid-thirties, Dr. Sánchez returned to school, obtaining a BFA and subsequently, an MFA from Yale University in painting. She is a Fulbright scholar, completing her fellowship as a painter in Spain. Dr. Sánchez has taught at Florida International University, the University of Miami, Nova University and Yale University. Currently, Dr. Sánchez is a working artist, exhibiting nationally and internationally in numerous venues. In New York, she is represented by Kathryn Markel Fine Arts and Kenise Barnes Fine Art. She is also a curator and writer, and Director of Fine Arts & Cultural Affairs at Miami International Airport.



Yolanda Sánchez, *Peace Is Entering the River*, detail, 2011, silk and thread

Aside from knowledge of Korean ceramics, the full range of Korean art and folk arts is not very well-known in the West. British art historian Jane Portal states that “Korean folk art is unique in that it is an art of all classes of people – the same themes, formats and styles being employed ... for the royal family, aristocrats, merchants and peasants.” (1) Korean craft culture reflects folk customs and folk beliefs, and their inherent values continue to be expressed and embedded in contemporary reinterpretations. There is a rich relationship between tradition and new approaches to art forms.



Yolanda Sánchez, *Communion*, partial view, 2011, silk and thread; each panel, 96 x 36 inches

In Korea, Bojagi has been used in daily life and in ceremonial acts for centuries. Humble in its origins, traditional pieces, used to wrap, store and transport goods, were made of scraps of common, left-over fabric, but over time, finer and delicate fabrics were introduced by the nobility, offering variations in transparency, flow and depth in the finished works. The place of Bojagi in Korean culture was established through folk beliefs that suggested that to have something wrapped is equal to having good

fortune, and that the act of sewing scraps of cloth together symbolized a wish for a long life. In its traditional form, various sewing constructions are employed, using natural fabrics such as hemp, ramie and silk. The transparency offered by silk, for example, allows the stitching and seams to create linear elements that become a distinctive part of the design and are what distinguishes Bojagi from patchwork textiles found in other traditions such as the quilts from Gee's Bend, Alabama, or Japanese boro made from scraps of old cotton indigo clothing.



Yolanda Sánchez, *Communion*, partial view, 2011, silk and thread

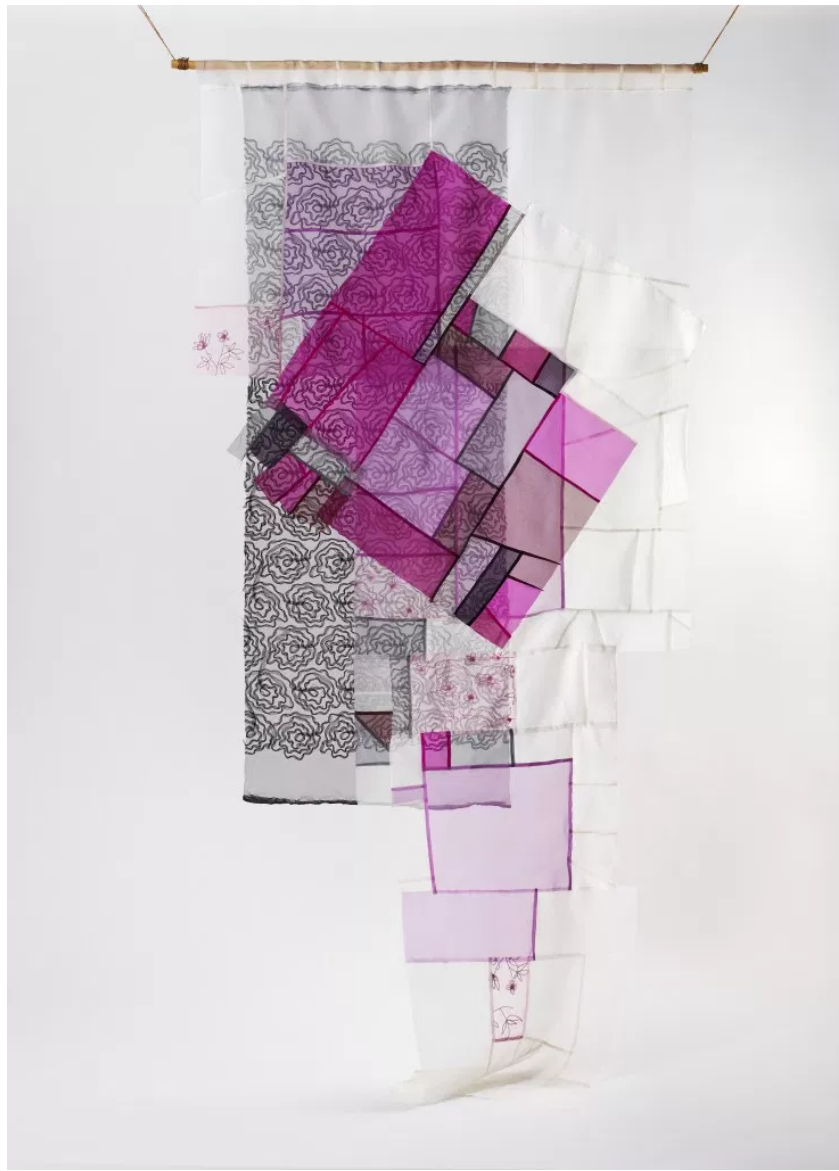
Amazingly, Bojagi patchwork reflects patterns and qualities of improvisation and geometric simplicity that are found in contemporary art. It has a modernist aesthetic similar to, for example, a painting by Piet Mondrian, Paul Klee or Richard Diebenkorn, or a Frank Lloyd Wright window. In my Bojagi-inspired textile work, I am extending and interpreting the basic structure of Bojagi to a form that is more contemporary, varying in medium and size, and utilizing color compositions and stitching techniques that are less anchored to traditional methods.

I first explored the Bojagi form when I took a class from Korean fiber artist Chunghie Lee. I signed up for this class soon after my mother died, hoping to engage in something new that didn't have all the expectations for performance that I would have in a residency about painting, my main medium. I quickly found that Bojagi allowed me to work with the same "tools" that I use in my painting: color, line (mark), light and space. But it also provided something else: the sensuousness of handling fabric, of working with a material presence, quite different from the material of paint.



Yolanda Sánchez, *Communion*, 2011, Installation at the Suwon Hwaseong International Theatre and Arts Festival, Hwaseong Fortress UNESCO World Heritage Site, Seoul, South Korea

Since then I have been invited to participate in various exhibitions, some purely Bojagi-related. My first large-scale Bojagi work, *Communion*, was an outdoor installation piece created for the Suwon Hwaseong International Theatre and Arts Festival in Suwon, South Korea, a UNESCO World Heritage site. In the initial image, taken in the backyard of my studio against the backdrop of the Port of Miami, you see the project in progress, portraying five of the seven panels. I called the work *Communion* as I felt I was joining Korean culture with my own, as it united physically, it united spiritually. As a Cuban-American exhibiting work in Korea, I felt suddenly that the world was much closer to me.



Yolanda Sánchez, *In the Mood for Love*, 2014, silk and thread, studio view; exhibited at the Korea Bojagi Forum, *From Traditional Bojagi to Contemporary Sustainable Textile*, Jeju Island, South Korea

A second piece shown here was made for the 2014 Bojagi Forum held in Jeju Island, South Korea. In this work, titled, *In the Mood for Love*, I isolated the color relationships and worked with various levels of transparency. Pink had been a dominant color in my recent paintings at the time. *El agua y sus sueños* was shown in Murcia, Spain, at the Museo Siyâsa, within the walls of full-scale reproductions of Hispanic-Islamic dwellings from the medieval Islamic era that had been excavated in the region.



Yolanda Sánchez, *There is Only the Dance*, 2015, oil on canvas (triptych), 70 x 96 inches

The shape of *With a Full Heart* was inspired by an image of a Korean ceremonial garment, known as a “wonsam.” The wide, outstretched sleeves provided many associations for me – medieval triptych altarpieces, strong arms that are ready to protect and envelop, even something that is ready to fly! All spiritual, nourishing images that inspire the heart. I think of this work as an offering, imparting joy and love. The work is completely made of strips of silk fabric leftover from previous Bojagi projects, thus remaining true to the concept of reuse and conservation. Bojagi has reminded me to value the remnant.



Yolanda Sánchez, *With a Full Heart*, 2016, silk remnants, thread, studio view; 52 x 32 inches, exhibited at the Korea Bojagi Forum, *Bojagi: The Living Tradition*, Suwon/Hwaseong Museum, Suwon, South Korea

Since I am primarily a painter, with limited time to make art, I constantly question the value of making textile. What I remind myself is that the act of handling the texture of cloth, of using my hands in a different way and creating an object – all contribute to making me more aware of the importance of touch. It reminds me that touch is about flesh, about our humanity. In our digital age, to be able to disconnect from our disembodied technologies and to meet tactilely, is to “love in the flesh”, as one writer put it. I think this is one reason why we love objects made by hand and why there is currently a movement back to the handmade. Indeed, the tactile quality of paint is an element that energizes me and is important in my work, but it does not compare to the feeling of texture of cloth. We are all touched by cloth.



Yolanda Sánchez, *The Paradox of Love*, 2016, oil on canvas (triptych), 60 x 108 inches

With these examples, I hope to present a particular world view that focuses on interrelationships through tactile forms, a view that encompasses the interaction of various cultures and peoples. Bojagi is about celebrating what is good in the world – celebrating life – through color, pattern – literally, a matrix of pieces of fabric – that communicates beauty, culture, humanity. The quality of being handmade so clearly suggests presence – the hand – being alive, but also desire, history and memory. The tactile makes us more tender and human; it can be restorative, and contribute to a sense of well-being. My intention is to make work that is celebratory, expanding, opening and about offering pleasure.

1. Portal, Jane, 2000, Korea: Art and Archaeology, London: British Museum Press, p. 143.

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