

An Errant Line: Ann Hamilton / Cynthia Schira

An Errant Line represents a mutual engagement with cloth that artists Ann Hamilton and Cynthia Schira have had over several decades, beginning when Hamilton studied textiles with Schira at the University of Kansas in the late 1970s. The exhibition title is inspired by a weaving technique using a supplementary weft, which has long been a unique element in Schira's practice and was passed significantly to Hamilton. In a cloth woven with two (instead of one) horizontal threads interlacing with vertical threads, the second can float free of the ground's structure. In their works and conceptually here in their related installations, the technique reflects a way of thinking about the relationship of part to whole, field to line, chaos to order.

In response to an invitation from the Spencer Museum of Art, the two artists have mined its encyclopedic holdings to create new works of art for the Central Court and adjoining galleries. The result is two separate yet related installations, Hamilton's *figura* and Schira's *Etymon*. Employing an array of photographic and digital tools, the artists found their forms and imagery through a unique investigation of the Spencer Museum's collection. They drew particular inspiration from the works they selected for exhibition in this gallery: 18th-century Italian nativity (*Presepio*) figures from Naples. In the adjacent gallery are a 19th-century Japanese textile sample book and 20th-century objects from the global indigenous arts collection of Spooner Hall that demonstrate the earliest textile materials and processes. Also on view in the gallery is an early work by each artist, a video by Hamilton titled *draw* that shows the movement of a red thread up and down through a piece of paper and a weaving by Schira, *Notations*, that features a supplementary weft, a red errant line.

The designs of the large freely hanging woven panels in Schira's installation *Etymon* are derived from cloth details found on the small *Presepio* figures. The *Presepio* sculptures in their entirety are transformed in Hamilton's prints for *figura*. The Bechstein piano from the Museum's collection as part of *figura* is used by

Hamilton to allusively link it to the *Presepio* figures. This piano was famously played by Franz Liszt during his last tour of Europe in 1886. During Liszt's career he joined the Franciscans, a religious order founded by St. Francis of Assisi. In reaction to the secularization of Christmas, St. Francis popularized the *Presepio* tradition. Also pertinent to this project, St. Francis's father was a successful cloth merchant. When St. Francis committed to a life of poverty, he literally and symbolically renounced the world of his family's wealth by publically shedding the garments he had received through his father's material success.

--Susan Earle, Curator