

ARTNEWS

Visions for Pantyhose and Sand: Senga Nengudi's Booth at the Armory Show

BY [Andy Battaglia](#) POSTED 03/02/17 10:00 AM



Work by Senga Nengudi at the booth shared by Lévy Gorvy and Thomas Erben Gallery, in the Focus Section at the 2017 Armory Show.

MAXIMILIANO DURÓN/ARTNEWS

Senga Nengudi, who started her career in the fertile African-American art scene of 1960s and '70s Los Angeles before settling in the more remote outpost of Colorado Springs, appears in a Focus booth at the Armory Show that is presented by Thomas Erben Gallery and Lévy Gorvy. Splayed across the space are two of the artist's

sculptures of pantyhose and sand, with a mix of familiar, freighted materials and abstract stretched-ness making them ephemeral monuments that appear somehow both weighted and suspended in air.

“When she started to create these, she would go to thrift stores because it was important that the material was worn so it has the energy of women being subjected to dress codes,” said Thomas Erben, who has represented Nengudi since 1995. Remnants of pressure exerted by seemingly sensuous material suggest the presence of unseen forces.

Nengudi, who figures prominently in *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s*, a book by Kellie Jones forthcoming in April from Duke University Press—and who will appear in the Venice Biennale in May—rose up in L.A. alongside the likes of Betye Saar, Charles White, Noah Purifoy, and David Hammons, with whom she collaborated extensively.

Erben said Nengudi was less than duly known when he first visited her more than 20 years ago in Colorado Springs, after learning of her work via raves from Lorraine O’Grady. “She has a big garage at her house,” he said. “She did installations there, but of course nobody saw those.”



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The artist took him to her favorite spot while he was there: a vista across from a solitary mountain. “This image represents her so well,” Erben said of *Study for ‘Mesh Mirage’* (1977), a photo print in the booth of Nengudi hidden behind flowing, blocky, formidable garb that doubles as sculpture. “Like a mountain—but very mysterious.”

The collaboration between Erben and Lévy Gorvy began in 2015, when the latter gallery (then Dominique Lévy) presented a show of Nengudi’s work in New York. As Erben was talking about the recent swell of attention the artist has been receiving, his phone rang. At the other end of the line was Nengudi, at home far away from the frenzy of the fair, in Colorado.

Asked how she was after the call reached its end, Erben said, “She’s fine—she’s preparing for Venice.”

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