



PLAYERS CONSTITUTE THE PIECES
LOUISE EASTMAN & JANIS STEMMERMANN

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BY JULIA SILVERMAN

“A GAME WHERE THE PLAYERS CONSTITUTE the pieces.” This was how the game, now called *Twister*, was initially described in its 1969 patent. Not simply a sheet with a dotted grid or spinning device that dictated a player’s moves, the game asserted its innovation as being no less than the complete inversion of the relationship between player and game. Instead of being a proxy for face-offs between humans, the physical game board had become an active agent, dictating the motions of participants. Chance, enacted through the game’s spinner, placed people and objects on—quite literally—the same playing field.

For Louise Eastman and Janis Stemmermann, the game’s dotted grid becomes an organizational structure that supports their ongoing collaborative practice. *Players Constitute the Pieces*, an exhibition comprising mono-print textiles, a silkscreened edition on linen, and ceramic tiles, constructs an immersive environment that explores the expansive nature of artistic authorship—how objects, tools, spaces, and users act as co-creators. Each work combines game board imagery, a recurring motif in Eastman’s independent practice, and a stylized daisy form from Stemmermann’s, melding effortlessly to create an ecosystem in which form and media become the basis for artistic experimentation, exploration, and play. Together, the works prompt viewers to identify visual relationships both within and across pieces: by holding, wearing, arranging, and rearranging.

This work builds upon both artists’ sustained interest in collaborative visual production, including their work with the Victory Garden Collective, a group of six women

artists, curators, and gallerists. Inspired by 20th-century war gardens, which served as a supplementary food supply during World War II and as a form of civic engagement, the collective created politically-engaged artworks, objects, and installations. Together they eschew individual authorship to champion the collective and disbursed nature of political participation. *Players* pushes this ethos further, considering how materials, processes, and tools assert their own forms of agency and energy.

Just as *Twister* inverts the relationship between object and subject—the board dictating the moves of the players rather than vice-versa—so too do the works in *Players* showcase novel relationships between people, objects, and processes. Many works hint at the physical constraints of their production: one linoleum-printed textile, an otherwise all-over design separated itself into quadrants, dictated by creases in the textile’s folds. On the bottom left of the textile, blue petals are truncated by the crease, as the fabric was folded to fit through the printing press. In other places, the textiles complicate a presumed relationship between the matrix as an active agent, imprinting a design onto a (presumably passive) substrate; as paint accumulates on the surface of a cloth, for example, the textile’s physical grid emerges as a visible element through the ink. No longer a neutral backing, the substrate asserts its presence as its own matrix, imprinting its weave into the ink.

Each textile, in other words, underscores the inherently collaborative and capacious nature of print processes. Recent art historical scholarship has emphasized

artists’ use of the press not simply as a tool of replication, but as an agent of surprise and empathy. In printmaking, artists translate their desired product into a “language” of texture and color that a press can understand; in turn, the press can sometimes mistranslate, presenting a product that differs from an artist’s original intention. For Eastman and Stemmermann, this is a welcome—even desired—outcome. The press itself becomes a third collaborator. As the two (human) artists exchange ideas quickly, often over calls and texts, when they enter the studio, materials, and processes force them to accommodate their inbuilt timescales. Experimentation, waiting, and anticipation rely upon the clockwork of materials.

The ability to translate between media, therefore, becomes critical. Each artist possesses technical training in a particular medium—Stemmermann in printmaking, Eastman in ceramic. Their combined attention to a strictly delimited set of forms and motifs, therefore, orients a viewer’s attention to the process of translation and movement itself. For the edition, Stemmermann and Eastman brought in another collaborator, Sara Gates of Kingsland Printing, to translate the linoleum forms from their monoprints into more easily replicable screenprints. The final linen edition references the newfound mobility of daisy and dot, introducing a sense of modularity and movement. At first glance, white daisies seem to dance across a strict *Twister* grid. In some areas, the white daisy eclipses the *Twister* dot. In others, a colored dot grows white petals. Sometimes, the white daisy loses its petals altogether, becoming almost interchangeable with the *Twister* grid itself. Daisy and dot lose their identity as distinct motifs, instead dancing together in a visual evocation of Stemmermann’s and Eastman’s collaboration, a process they describe as emphatically “ego-less.”

A set of ceramic tiles literalizes this sense of playful modularity. Dots and petals constitute two distinct ceramic elements that can be separated, reunited, and rearranged. Coated with a glaze evoking the viscosity of printers’ ink, the ceramics seem almost like a three-dimensional materialization of those on the textile, newly independent of their substrate. Viewers are invited into a participatory role and prompted to reconsider the default of visual contemplation as a mode of spectatorship. Just as Stemmermann and Eastman arrange forms in their studio, viewers are encouraged to arrange ceramic tiles, touch or wear or use textiles, and revel in the form’s haptic and functional aspects. And with touch comes a new set of marks: fingerprints on the glaze, creases in the fabric. These works invite viewers to be players, collaborators in a game yet to be invented.

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