



ART REVIEW: Marina Font Remakes Female Nudes with Vintage Textiles

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by Elisa Turner

Ironically, [Marina Font](#)'s skills with digital photography led her to discover a decidedly low-tech material: vintage doilies. With digital transforming so much of photography, Font discovered she was missing the tactile sensations of working with her hands while developing film in the darkroom.

Her dilemma: How to create art again by including the purely physical pleasure of touch?

The answer: Teach herself embroidery.

By recovering the sweet charms of crocheted doilies—the ones your grandmother might have used for fussy decoration or to protect furniture from scratches and watermarks—these slight, vintage textiles created by hand now enhance and amplify the effect of Font's photography, transferred via digital technology to various surfaces, both large and small. In devising the brilliant paradox, Font uses vintage textiles to remake photographic traditions of female nudes.



"Marina Font: Mental Maps" at [Dina Mitrani Gallery](#), on view through March 18, 2017. Courtesy of the artist, Marina Font, and Dina Mitrani Gallery, Miami.

For her show "Mental Maps" at [Dina Mitrani Gallery](#) in Miami's Wynwood Art District, Font's worked, for the most part, with a single black and white photograph of a female nude to create over 40 distinct works on canvas and paper, ranging in size from 8" x 6" to 80" x 100." It's her most recent series mixing photography with textiles. There's a strong feminist sensibility at play here.

The art includes smaller works such as *Untitled (ojos)*, in which the nude is cropped just above the breasts and the face is obscured by two white round doilies with red fringe at the center of each. The doilies are clearly a wry, tenderly humorous stand-in for the absent breasts, even though they are placed over the eyes. Like breasts, they are constructed with an intricate delicacy. But as the identity-shielding element in this woman's photograph, the fringed doilies also make an undeniable statement about the absurdity of gazing at a woman by focusing solely on her body's sex appeal.



“Untitled (ojos)” by Marina Font, 2016. Archival pigment print on Poly-Cotton, gesso and yarn, 17.25 x 17.25 inches (framed). Courtesy of the artist, Marina Font, and Dina Mitrani Gallery, Miami.

Another smaller work shows the body covered by a gilded set of interconnected triangles, almost disappearing behind the hard edges and sharp angles of this golden cage. Font has created an intriguing metaphor for rigid traditions about women’s professional and social roles and what they are worth, in terms of financial value.

One of the largest works is *Untitled (biological)*. With only hands and feet visible, this body is covered with dozens of small patches of white fabric shaped like cells, each patch embroidered with a mass of blood-red French knots. It’s an arresting image, inspired by stem cells seen through a microscope. In a curious collusion of linguistics and art emphasizing the female body’s womb as the source of life, the Spanish word for stem cells is “células madres,” or “mother cells. ”



“Untitled, (celulas madres)” by Marina Font, 2014-16. Archival pigment on Poly-Cotton, thread, 84 x 56 inches. Courtesy of the artist, Marina Font, and Dina Mitrani Gallery, Miami.

Another large work, *Untitled (psychological)*, is almost brutally direct in its bloody, visceral imagery. Still, it remains undeniably touching for the painstakingly delicate embroidery outlining the flow of blood from the brain to the womb. It also brings to mind iconic self-portraits by [Frida Kahlo](#), like [The Two Fridas](#).



“Untitled, (psychological)” by Marina Font, 2014-16. Archival pigment on Poly-Cotton, thread, found doilies, 84 x 56 inches. Courtesy of the artist, Marina Font, and Dina Mitrani Gallery, Miami.

Such work confronts the eye with imagery attesting to the female body’s frank, fleshy vulnerability and persistent strength. It briefly recalls clinical photographs in medical textbooks, but is modified

with the artist's hands to probe notions about what it means to mature as a woman in the 21st Century.

Font inventively stitches together a complex array of possibilities, looking forward and back through time, inviting comparisons to history as well to Ana Mendieta's performances and photography. In "Mental Maps," the female body appears to have worn the tests of time with grace and patience. Moreover, in the various ways Font has embellished this figure, the face is never completely visible. The naked woman is anonymous, a humble archetype perhaps, intimately revealed and psychologically concealed.



"Marina Font: Mental Maps" at Dina Mitrani Gallery, on view through March 18, 2017. Courtesy of the artist, Marina Font, and Dina Mitrani Gallery, Miami.

Given all the hot-button political issues swirling around this year's Women's March in Washington, DC, Font's show is unexpectedly timely. It even brings to mind the crowds of knitted and crocheted "pussy hats" blooming throughout photographs of demonstrations in chilly weather, surely recalling spring flowers poking through snow.

While "Mental Maps" may reflect pop culture's growing interest in "subversive knitting" and "radical crocheting," to borrow Alexxa Gotthardt's terms in her January 25, 2017, Artsy editorial, it's also timely in more artcentric ways. As Gotthardt explains, a number of contemporary artists are adopting techniques of knitting and crocheting—no longer "just" women's work—for their "boundary-pushing, politically charged" possibilities in art. These artists are expanding upon feminist themes evoked by knitting and crocheting found in art by [Louise Bourgeois](#) and [Rosemarie Trockel](#) and others back in the 1970s and 1980s.

As Font explains in her artist's statement, the "central axis" of this work is to show how the female body is "perceived, mainly through three planes: the biological, the psychological and the social, as well as the juxtapositions and connections among them." The doilies and embroidery Marina Font combines with her photography are meant to serve a different function than your grandmother's craft: to be a lightning rod for realizations on the state of the feminine.

To this point, *Untitled (melting)* has well-kept traditions unraveling—if not exploding—in hunks of multi-colored yarn apparently erupting from this woman's brain, completely veiling her face. Some drip down her chest.



"Untitled" by Marina Font, 2016. Archival pigment on poly-cotton, yarn,

found doilies, 36 x 36 inches framed. Courtesy of the artist, Marina Font, and Dina Mitrani Gallery, Miami.

The textiles the artist melds with her photography layer the art with rich associations of the patient, too often ignored, intricate, time-consuming, and hands-on labor. This labor has traditionally been expended in the service of shielding and decorating the home and female body.

The endlessly controversial meaning of a “woman’s place” is represented in several of her works on view with a simple geometric form, akin to a child’s drawing of a house. In the context of this show, Font gracefully endows this simple shape with interwoven suggestions of many women’s domestic and social obligations, traditionally expended in the service of shielding and decorating the home and female body.

In “Mental Maps,” Font is charting vibrant new territories for reflecting upon, rather than gazing at, a woman’s body in the 21st Century.

BASIC FACTS: “Marina Font: Mental Maps” is on view January 12 to March 18, 2017 at Dina Mitrani Gallery, 2620 NW 2nd Avenue, Miami FL 33127. www.dinamitranigallery.com.

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