

San Francisco Chronicle

Margo Wolowiec: "San Francisco gallery offers meditative escape through woven textile landscapes"

By Letha Ch'ien

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"Margo Wolowiec: Midnight Sun" is on display at Jessica Silverman Gallery through July 19.
Phillip Maisel/Courtesy the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco

Talk about art can often resemble the way people talk about wine — jargon-heavy, pretentious, a swirl of adjectives attributed to nebulous concepts that obscure rather than clarify. But just as you can enjoy a glass of wine without visiting a vineyard to learn about terroir, you can appreciate Margo Wolowiec's newest textile works without parsing lofty descriptions.

My advice: don't overthink it and drink up the art.

"Margo Wolowiec: Midnight Sun," the Detroit artist's third solo show at Jessica Silverman, fills the San Francisco gallery with 12 woven circular textile landscapes. Several horizontal strips of juxtaposed images of landscapes, flowers and insects make up each composition. The effect is similar to a photomontage, though the technique is more tactile.

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Artist Margo Wolowiec's meditative show "Margo Wolowiec: Midnight Sun" is on display at Jessica Silverman Gallery.
Lauren Montgomery

To create these image-based textiles, Wolowiec begins by printing a digital photograph onto loose threads combed out horizontally. Using a sublimation dye process, the ink bonds to the fibers and stains the polyester threads. Wolowiec then rotates the threads so the printed side is visible and weaves them by hand on a loom. During weaving, Wolowiec can manipulate the image to distort it for an effect that renders the images slightly hazy, like glimpses of memories you can't quite piece together.

"I wanted this show to be so very meditative," Wolowiec told the Chronicle, explaining she chose imagery of parts of the natural world "that need conservation or are vulnerable or changing due to climate change or human intervention."

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Though a few people at the gallery use the word “portals” to describe Wolowiec’s works, it’s really the surface that captures your attention. Woven and textured, the textiles suggest running your hands over them. The vertical undyed warp threads are visibly white, standing out in contrast with the printed digital image. There are also Japanese silver-leafed threads and crinkly mylar emergency blankets, sourced from disaster preparedness kits, that catch the light in a way that creates an unphotographable shimmer. Her works aren’t openings to an alternate planet; they’re invitations to stay present here.

As a metaphor for a world Wolowiec sees as interconnected, her medium of weaving is unparalleled.



“Margo Wolowiec: Midnight Sun” is on display at Jessica Silverman Gallery.
Phillip Maisel/Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco

Wolowiec, born in Detroit in 1985, earned a BFA in 2007 from the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. In 2013, she earned an MFA from the California College of the Arts in San Francisco, through which she met gallery owner Jessica Silverman, also an alumna of the school.

Silverman sees the work as originating in the artist’s interest in environment, changing landscape and the “degradation of and catastrophic kind of pollution in certain areas of the world.” She emphasized, however, that “this show is not starting from a negative place.”

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"It's more about ecological renewal," Silverman explained, noting the use of silver and indigo, antimicrobial materials, refer to healing.

The phrase "Midnight Sun" comes from the arctic phenomenon also known as polar day, when the sun neither sets nor rises but appears to move across the sky horizontally. In the show's title piece, the natural event is visualized by six suns that dot the middle of three landscape strips. The top portion features a larger incandescent sun setting, while below is a snowy mountainscape.



Margo Wolowiec's "Midnight Sun," 2025.
Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman. Photo: Tim Johnson

This is Wolowiec's first show entirely of round works. Because looms typically produce rectangular weavings, her larger 80-inch pieces feature a vertical seam — a result of her loom's width which limits how wide each section can be woven.

Kathryn Wade, senior director at Jessica Silverman, sees the circular format as symbolic of natural cycles: the earth, the moon, the sun, seeds. The show's description, written by Sarah Thornton (a writer married to Silverman), links the circles to the Italian Renaissance tondo, a round format not traditionally used for landscapes. But Wolowiec offers a more personal meaning; she sees the circle related to birth and "a lack of a beginning and an end."

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Indeed, the main idea of the show varies depending on who was talking. And that's OK. We run into trouble when we load artwork with concepts and words that are less about what the art says and more about what we think sounds important.

All of this is to say, go see the show, meditate on the threads and decide for yourself.

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