

The Enchantment of the Sewing Machine

Tommaso Cartia (September 20, 2017)



This September and October 2017 don't miss the chance to experience the several performances that Italian artist Elena Berriolo will present at the Children's Museum of the Arts in New York. This is a unique opportunity to witness this innovative performer who chose to investigate the world through a fascinating instrument: the sewing machine.

Elena Berriolo is an Italian born, New York-based artist who has made a commitment since 2009 of working exclusively in the book format with the sewing machine.

Elena's Roots

Elena was born in [Savona](#) [2], a small city on the north east coast of Italy, an area of the Italian Riviera where many influential artists used to gravitate up to the 1960's because of the ceramic workshops in the village of Albissola, a few miles from Savona. Berriolo became interested in ceramics, and in 1974, at age of 15, she started interning with a ceramist business in Albissola. At



the time she did not know anything about contemporary art, but that was when she first came across big names such as [Piero Manzoni](#) [3], [Lucio Fontana](#) [4], [Nikolay Diulgheroff](#) [5] and [Bruno Munari](#) [6].

She then decided to study art in Turin at the [Accademia Albertina](#) [7] and after her graduation she moved to Milan. In January 1990 at the opening of her solo show at Studio Marconi 17 Gallery, she met a New Yorker, the person who would eventually become her husband and with whom she moved to NYC in 1994 where she continues to live.

The Sewing Machine Epiphany

After experimenting with sculpting, painting, performing, Elena had an epiphany while thinking about one of the most traditional feminine tools: the sewing machine. She came to the realization that the uninterrupted line that a sewing machine produces can be a response to the Infinite Line series by Piero Manzoni and Lucio Fontana's cuts that break the two dimensional space of the canvas. The cut on the canvas suggests a third dimension, redefining the concepts of space and time.

For Berriolo, the sewing machine is an instrument that can produce an infinite line. This line while embracing the two sides of the page, is visible on the front and on the back of a stitched material. Therefore the front side of the line is in the present and the back side of it is in the future, portraying an infinite and holistic sense of time. As the artist stated - write/sew a book by reading in the second page, the memory of the first one.

Also the sewing machine became for Berriolo a symbol of the feminine energy that is infused throughout her art. "I chose the sewing machine the moment I stopped believing that to be worthy of being considered an artist, a woman needed to delete the word "woman" from her own identity"

Books as Bridges

Ultimately the machine has become for the artist the vehicle with which she gives a voice to social and political statements, from feminist revendications to political ones. As Berriolo said, "the very identity of the machine as an instrument able to link, to repair and to unite, led me in 2015 to start a series of works aimed to mend the world." A vivid example of this was the performance *A Book as a Bridge, Across the Mexican Border*, presented while travelling from San Diego to Tijuana, on December 19th 2016, the day of D. Trump's confirmation, as an act of protest against the wall that the new President of the United States was planning to build.

"In San Diego," the artist recounts, "I placed my machine at the rear end of a Tijuana bound Turismo Express bus next to an accordion book whose length, when unfolded, would equal more or less the length of the bus. I started sewing/tracing the book with an embroidered line at the San Ysidro Station and continued producing it while unfolding the book up to my arrival in Tijuana, Mexico. At the time of arrival, the whole line-book had stretched through the entire length of the bus, having grown the distance from its back to its front while growing from San Diego to Tijuana over the Mexican border, covering about five miles distance within its 35 feet of its length while creating a bridge."

"Since I have committed to limit myself to working within the book format, and therefore excluding most of my work from being displayed on a gallery wall, I need to make a public statement. That is why I started performing," explains the artist.

But not all performances involve political statements or social revendications. Berriolo uses the sewing machine also to investigate the rhythms of nature, sewing in unison with them or with played music. In one of her first performances, *Two Sided Concerto*, back in 2012, she sewed following the rhythm of a piano, in collaboration with pianist [Edith Hirshthal](#) [8].

"Whenever I use my sewing machine next to a musician, soon enough he or she will have no choice but to go along or against my beat. Our interaction produces two outcomes: our music and a visual outcome which is a book. This performance came from the realization that the sewing machine,

sounding as a percussion beat while producing a pattern, is a link among visual art and music."

The Performances at the Children's Museum of the Arts

But these are just some of the visual and conceptual possibilities of the sewing machine, and its enchantments can really be experienced just watching the artist performing or flipping the pages of her books. This is an experience that is very hard to translate and report through words. From the most conceptual notions like when she perforates the [Fibonacci Sequence](#) [9] to the investigation of nature's microbiotic life, as when she recreates the paths of a beetle over a leaf, these are all suggestions that have to be experienced with the full 5 senses and beyond.

If you are interested in knowing more and experiencing the world of this fascinating artist, don't miss the chance to go see her performing this September and October in New York at the [Children's Museum of the Arts](#) [10] in New York.

The Calendar

September 21, 2017

The perforation of the Fibonacci Sequence in a Book which will be a 10 minute performance every 20 minutes from 3:00-4:30PM

September 24, 2017

Feed me The Line, a performance with sewing machine and poetry with poet Sarah Riggs at 3PM

October 1, 2017

A Book as a Bridge Among Diversity, a performance with sewing machine as an act of resistance for DACA. performance at 3PM

October 8, 2017

The Infinite Poem a performance with sewing machine seaming together words and thoughts from the participants and have them fly through space held up by balloons. An interactive performance at 3PM

October 14, 2017

The Sound of Silence, a performance with sewing machine and violin, with violinist Rosi Hertlein at 3PM

October 22, 2017

A Book as a Bridge among time and space.

An interactive performance on the 1 train from Houston Street Station to Cortland Park station in the Bronx. It is an act of resistance to the repeal of Obamacare. The average lifespan of a child born in the Greenwich Village is 5 to 8 years longer than the life of a child from the Bronx, By sewing a line on an accordion book while traveling from the Village to the Bronx and back, a bridge will be built among the two destinations, covering 25 miles within the 40 feet of the book while linking the two communities. Leaving from the Museum at 3PM.

For more info about the artist go visit her website here [>>](#) [11]

Source URL: <http://italy.org/magazine/focus/art-culture/article/enchantment-sewing-machine>

Links

[1] <http://italy.org/files/book-river.jpg>



- [2] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savona>
- [3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piero_Manzonei
- [4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucio_Fontana
- [5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolay_Diulgheroff
- [6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruno_Munari
- [7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accademia_Albertina
- [8] <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/09/14/arts/piano-edith-hirshtal.html?mcubz=0>
- [9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fibonacci_number
- [10] <http://www.cmany.org>
- [11] <http://elenaberriolo.com>