

# ArtReview

Gavlak, Los Angeles 13 September – 18 October

I haven't read half the books on my shelves. Besides hefty catalogues and library borrows, read books, if loved, get gifted on. Only the unread linger. My bookshelf doesn't collect acquired knowledge, only failed intention and impulsive, unconsummated desire. While I tinkle ice and whiskey into glasses in the kitchen, dates cruise my shelves, trying to design who I am by the culture I consume, silently deciding if I deserve the mercy of their affections.

Lisa Anne Auerbach first documented her own bookshelves in one of the sundry zines in her one-woman publishing house. Here, in *Spells*, she weaves the titles and position of her books into elaborate tapestries. So we read and play the game of guessing who the artist might be by her books and their juxtapositions (*Soapmaking: A Magical Guide* near *The Tao of Meow*) in these elaborate knitworks. Early and iconically, knitting in her work took the form of sweatery outfits, marked with pronouncements and protests, ribald jokes and radical sloganeering first meant to be read by passing motorists as she bicycled across the city. A few spooky

effigies of the artist clad in her own knitwear linger around the empty floors of this show.

Stretched into rectangular wallworks, the first woolly tapestries I saw offered a spread-out list of resolutions, the New Year's variety. Mostly affirmative, a few dangerous, all firmly made intentions for the unknown future. Here hang a few similar lists. On one tapestry, the artist collected advice from psychics, crafting a map of self-helpish advice that hardly foretells a future. Other knitworks obsess over cats or fuck around with meme hashtagery, a mix of political commentary (*#IraqtheNewIraq*, *#gazastrippers*), personal statements (*#equaltotheloveyoumake*, *#freetobeme*) and, well, other (*#adderallsummer*, *#trannyhookercorner*).

In a side gallery hide hypersharp photographs of a BDSM porn mag Auerbach found shredded in an airport parking lot in 1989 and kept, treasured even, for decades. Massively blown-up in tightly focused closeups, Auerbach exposes the full force of these scraps' battered sexual longing, just snatches of nipples and slips of tautly drawn leather. And just a few feet away,

let's not forget those two beautiful women at the opening in the centre of the gallery, who turn, with gloved hands, the pages of *American Megazine* (2013), a massive 150cm-tall publication documenting megachurches in an appropriate Costco family-size.

A survey of sorts for the Los Angeles-based artist unshown in her hometown since 2007, these varied works all locate hope or desire made manifest: sexuality as a form of liberation, crafting a better world rather than just buying it, marking others' attempts to purchase their ways out of a fearful future through supersize religion and entrepreneurial mysticism. It appears for the artist that our real struggles can be alleviated through individual and collective action, but they are more often assuaged by dubious preachers, for-hire soothsayers and creep-job politicians. We can summarise our conditions in hashtag newspeak, but what, if anything, can we actually do about them? One smaller tapestry offers not an answer but perhaps a direction. Writing across a sweater in bold white letters, Auerbach has knitted: 'Bad Ideas Are Better Than No Ideas'. *Andrew Berardini*



*The Natural World*, 2014, knitted wool on linen, 203 × 160 cm.  
Photo: Jeff McLane. Courtesy Gavlak, Los Angeles