

# FORT GANSEVOORT



## At Frieze Los Angeles, Textiles Are No Longer on the Fringe

Once relegated to craft, fiber—and its influence on contemporary painting and installation—now commands attention and serious prices

Lauren Mechling – April 1, 2026



Artist Yvonne Wells's quilts on display at Frieze LA. © Yvonne Wells. Courtesy of the artist and Fort Gansevoort, New York.

Textiles were everywhere at Frieze Los Angeles—spilling across walls, stitched into sculpture, and, in one case, reimagined as a vintage carpet bazaar tucked inside a standard-issue gallery booth at the Santa Monica Airport, the fair's cavernous venue. Gossamer silks, craggy seams, and densely worked fibers signaled a clear shift: The medium is no longer operating at the margins.

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For decades, textiles were sidelined in the art world, relegated to the realm of craft. Take Louise Bourgeois, who grew up in her parents' tapestry restoration studio outside of Paris, yet kept textiles at arm's length. Though she would later channel their logic into her towering sculptures of spiders (nature's most spellbinding weavers), she dismissed the medium itself as "more engaging and less demanding" than painting or sculpture, reasoning that textiles "rarely liberate themselves from decoration."

In the years since, a groundswell of artists has quietly dismantled the stigma. "Textiles occupy a particularly compelling position right now," says Karina Argudo, cofounder of Helm Contemporary, the Bowery gallery known for its fiber-forward program. "Fiber arts used to be considered a craft, but they're being reengaged for their structural and spatial potential."

That shift has been driven in part by artists like Sheila Hicks and the quilters of Gee's Bend, Alabama, who have recast fiber as a vehicle for abstraction, storytelling, and rigor—collapsing long-held distinctions between art and craft and, not incidentally, driving up prices. At Frieze, that momentum was impossible to miss, with fabric-based works among the fair's most attention-grabbing—and highest earning—presentations, from a sculptural Hicks work that fetched \$350,000 to Christina Fernandez's stitched text panels at Galerie Frank Elbaz, which foreground labor and immigration through embroidery. Below, three artists whose textile-driven works were among the Frieze Los Angeles's most closely watched.

## Yvonne Wells

"Shaggy-raggedy with no direction," is how Yvonne Wells describes her style, with a twinkly-eyed laugh. But her CV tells a markedly different story.

The 86-year-old artist's quilts are held in the collections of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Birmingham Museum of Art, and the International Quilt Museum. And she is currently represented by Fort Gansevoort, the New York gallery that has helped carry her work onto the international stage—most recently with a solo presentation at Frieze.

Working in a signature blend of jagged abstraction and vivid figuration, the self-taught artist renders subjects ranging from the crucifixion and the Civil Rights movement to sea monsters. "I like for my pieces to be full of movement, full of life," she says. "It's the story inside the fabric that matters."

Wells came to quilting later in life, after years as a high school teacher in segregated Tuscaloosa, Alabama, where she was assigned early on to an all-white school. "It wasn't easy," she recalls, "but I'm glad I got a chance to see another side of life." She began making quilts while balancing teaching, raising children, and running a household—often stitching in the narrow window between the end of the school day and the start of dinner.

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Wells's presentation Frieze LA. © Yvonne Wells. Courtesy of the artist and Fort Gansevoort, New York.

"I tried to use a sewing machine, but it didn't give me the satisfaction that stitching does," she says. "I need to feel the fabric—because fabric talks to you." A turning point came in 1985, when local dealer Robert Cargo encouraged her to show her work publicly. From there, word of her narrative "story quilts" began to spread.

In recent years, that recognition has accelerated, with exhibitions in Montgomery and New York leading up to her Frieze debut. Before the fair officially opened, Ari Emanuel—whose company owns the fair—acquired three of Wells's works at the VIP preview.

Now, Wells is at work on a new piece centered on the Statue of Liberty, inspired by recent immigration raids. "I'm slowing down," she says, "but when I pull out my fabric, it gives me energy. My quilts still talk to me."