

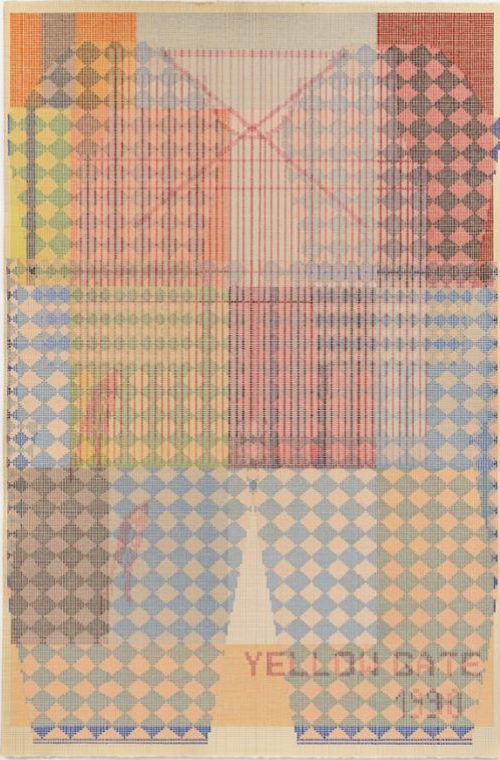
# DEREK ELLER GALLERY

## ELLEN LESPERANCE

*I Am Woman Inflicted with the Burden of Bearing Mankind*

April 18 – May 24, 2025

**Opening Reception: Friday, April 18, 6–8 pm**



*Fighting Amazon (Yellow Gate 1990)*, 2025, gouache and graphite on tea-stained paper, 47.25 x 31.5 inches

Derek Eller Gallery is pleased to present *I Am Woman Inflicted with the Burden of Bearing Mankind*, a solo exhibition of new work by Ellen Lesperance. Continuing her exploration of the intersection of feminism, craft, and activism, Lesperance makes paintings inspired by knitting patterns worn or utilized by women involved in acts of both empowerment and struggle. For this exhibition, Lesperance mines source material related to contemporary women activists and the Amazons of ancient Greece and, as such, speaks to similarities that transcend space and time.

Lesperance's long-standing interest in protest knitwear originates in the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, an anti-nuclear movement which took place in the United Kingdom in the 1980s and '90s. Combining

through archives related to Greenham Common, Lesperance discovered a trove of images of hand-knit material, often embedded with subversive, political, and feminist symbology. As a Fulbright Global Scholar (2022-24), Lesperance had the opportunity to expand upon this research and to explore how Greenham Common galvanized feminists opposed to the nuclear arms race and nuclear war from around the world. It effectively initiated a movement to create peace camps outside of other military bases with nuclear interests, ensuring that these sites also became highly visible and politicized. This coordinated activist strategy became an international women's peace movement. To that end, Lesperance visited Welsh archives, and went to both Italy for La Ragnatela, a Women's Peace Camp in Cosimo, Sicily and Australia for the Pine Gap and Coburn Sound Peace Camps organized by the Australian feminist collective Women for Survival. In tracing the use of visual symbology across international communities, she determined there was a semi-shared "imaginarium" relating to the celebration of the Amazon warrior woman—a way to look back into ancient Western history with a drive towards score-settling and to imagine that there was a time when a female society thrived and was populated by these legendary women. Additionally, Amazon women, like the twentieth-century feminist activists, were traditionally depicted wearing distinctive, heavily patterned handmade garments embedded with symbols.

As she went deeper into her research, Lesperance encountered a strong contrary voice on the subject of feminism and the Amazons. Feminist cultural historian Mandy Merck wrote an essay in 1995 entitled “The Amazons of Ancient Athens” positing that the Amazon is ultimately not a symbol of power or the manifestation of a pre-patriarchal society, but, rather a representation of the idea of ancient women in conflict, women fighting and being slain. She further proposed that the battle scenes between Ancient Greeks and Amazons chronicled in Greek mythology and art functioned as a patriotic device contrived by state leaders to illustrate to the “subjugated, female members of society that may have wished for a reversal of their oppression... that such a rebellion had already occurred and resulted in a deserved defeat.” “Nothing of the real oppression of their sex is challenged by these mythic heroines, it is merely transcended,” writes Merck. “Their weapons and strategy are men's weapons and strategy. They offer a solution which is magical not political.”

It is this notion, as exemplified by the Amazons, that the whole history of womenkind has been one of struggle, which serves as the foundation of Lesperance's exhibition. Eight of Lesperance's new paintings are inspired by a photograph she discovered from 90s era Greenham Common of a large hand-knit blanket strewn across an outdoor sofa in an area called “The Sanctuary”. In these works, she overlays the blanket's pattern on top of eight different costumes worn by Amazon warriors. Compressing these histories into one visual plane, Lesperance highlights the complexity of the struggle: there is at once pain and suffering but also activism and hope.

Ellen Lesperance (b.1971) lives and works in Eugene, Oregon. She is included in the exhibition *Woven Histories: Textiles and Modern Abstraction* which opens on April 20 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and traveled from the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC and Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Recent solo exhibitions include *Stay in the Centre of No-Man's Land* at Hollybush Gardens, London, *Amazonknights* at ICA Miami, and *Velvet Fist* at the Baltimore Museum of Art. She has been included in group shows at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Brooklyn Museum; The Museum of Fine Arts Houston; The Frye Museum Seattle, ICA Boston, Bonniers Konsthall Stockholm, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, and KAI 10 | ARTHENA FOUNDATION, Düsseldorf. Lesperance received a 2022-23 Global Scholar Fulbright Award and a 2020 Guggenheim Fellowship. This will be her fourth solo show at the Gallery. A monograph on Lesperance co-produced by Derek Eller Gallery and Hollybush Gardens is forthcoming.

Derek Eller Gallery is located at 38 Walker Street between Broadway and Church Street. Hours are Tuesday – Saturday, 10am to 6pm, and by appointment. For further information please contact the gallery at 212.206.6411 or visit [www.derekeller.com](http://www.derekeller.com).