

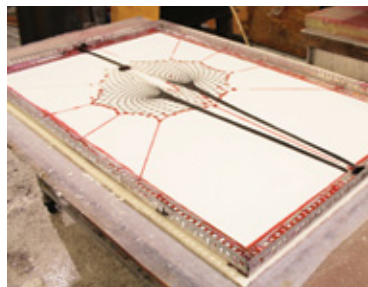
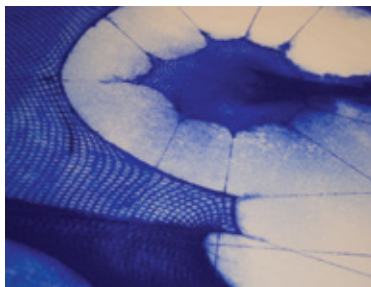
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DIEU DONNÉ LAB GRANT PROGRAM  
PUBLICATION SERIES NO. 13

**E.V. Day**  
*New Works in  
Handmade Paper*





# Flying Without a Net

by Catherine Morris

*I like to think of what I do as deconstruction-positive, and a completed piece as usually realized through some transformation of a sexual or feminized trope into a statement of power and independence.* — E.V. Day, *P.S. 1 Newspaper*, Fall 2006

E.V. Day's primary formal concerns are with the radical alteration of the space typically occupied by such charged cultural signifiers as wedding dresses and Stealth Bombers, and her year-long Lab Grant residency at Dieu Donn  offered a compelling opportunity to translate these ideas into two-dimensional form. Best known for exploding couture—and the occasional passel of thongs—into architecturally significant sculptural forms, Day took advantage of the time she spent with the Dieu Donn  team to hone her experiment down to the use of one culturally loaded visual element—the fishnet stocking. The resulting body of work reflects the artist's experience of working with the handmade paper medium while at the same time maintaining fidelity to her longstanding interest in social, particularly feminist, critique.

Though trained as a painter, Day says she finds working in sculpture more satisfying because of the opportunities it presents for working serially.<sup>1</sup> Adapting and manipulating found objects gives the artist a clear—and, in the example of mass-produced items like Barbie dolls, easily repeatable—starting point for her work and allows for ongoing experimentation. With the artist's mummified Barbie dolls, which she began wrapping in the 1990s, Day took advantage of the doll as a readymade long identified as the embodiment of the sexual clich s imposed on the female body by the dominant culture. As an icon touted as epitomizing everything that is wrong with the type of female image perpetuated through pop culture, the Barbie doll can easily be seen to have run its course as a negative symbol. This is what challenged Day—precisely because the transformation of the Barbie doll into a sort of reverse clich  for the intelligentsia didn't ultimately change its original power to captivate and manipulate its target audience. In this

way, the readymade Day chose to adapt is so sociologically encumbered that it can only be a joke—except it isn't.

At Dieu Donn , Day came equipped to work similarly—employing a hackneyed icon of sexual proclivity as the basis for an experiment in serial manipulation. Using fishnet stockings as a sort of template in the printing process (and luckily for her, the studio's location in the garment district allowed easy access to fishnet bodystockings, when that idea for a variation on the theme came up), Day began rejuvenating a mundane and arguably pathetic fetish item into a tool for formal experimentation and social critique.

In working to emboss an image of a pigmented bodystocking into the pulp paper, Day first established a clear set of parameters and then allowed for the controlled yet chance results that come from altering them when imprinting each new work. Stretching the stockings onto frames made templates that could be reused—re-pigmented with different colors and hues—so that Day ultimately created several series of monotypes, as well as an overall body of work that develops a complex visual pattern of repetitions and variations. The embedding and pressing process allowed for choices about distinctions in color tonalities while also encouraging chance pigmentation occurrences. Other production choices—different sizes of paper, the adapted torquing of the stockings, the use of glow-in-the-dark pigments, and the careful cropping of the template—offer the viewer sometimes overt and sometimes more subtly implied narrative content: a running figure, the suspension wires of a bridge, the open legs of a crotchless pair of hose, or the glowing filament lines of an astrological map. So for Day, who had not worked extensively in two-dimensions before this immersion in the handmade, the

unique opportunities the medium offered for seriality were very much in keeping with her formal concerns.

The large, whole-body stocking works called *Shazam* succinctly encapsulate the process, the critical content, and the overall interrelationships among works in the group. For this set of images, Day was interested in embossing the bodystocking into the paper so that a literal imprint of the object remained in the final product. An initial attempt to actually embed the stockings into the paper was not successful, but embossing revealed its own benefit, allowing for a ghost-like reminder of the stocking—a clear one-to-one relationship between the original and the resulting work of art. In this way, the handmade paper medium allowed for sculptural experimentation wherein Day's ongoing three-dimensional project of exploding clothing becomes a closely related two-dimensional exploration—all without losing the dynamics of action and an almost performative spatial engagement. In the energized images of the *Shazam* works, the classical tools of recessionary space and single-point perspective become a concentrated representation of sculptural forms running off the page and directly at the viewer at full speed. That there is no actual body represented is a non-issue. The impression is of an action hero caught at the decisive narrative moment, an invisible wonder woman whose outline is defined by the fishnet, a material that defines contours but doesn't actually cover flesh. So, again with Day, we come back to the politics. If the formal project here is one of wrestling her sculptural forms onto paper, the conceptual aspect of Day's work remains firmly rooted in her commitment to feminist thinking and to manipulating the social and cultural clichés of gender and power.

In addition to championing the unappreciated and not-so-obvious implications found in cultural clichés that we thought we were through deconstructing, Day also likes to team up these "Island of Misfit Toys" socio-political signifiers and then pit them against each other. The thongs and fighter jets mentioned above are one example; the expanding universe and the ovum is another. And in both these cases, as in others, Day is committed to examining the significance these symbols continue to flout in the face of two decades of theoretical critique. For Day, joining these extreme representations of culturally determined sexuality and power presents a tongue-in-cheek opportunity for a cultural analysis.

In an interview published on the occasion of a ten-year retrospective of her work in 2004, Day stated that the notion of "Post-Feminism" made her "want to gag."<sup>2</sup> The idea that the need for the equal rights that women do not yet legally possess has somehow been supplanted through some undefined and unlegislated development of universal social consciousness is, of course, both laughable and

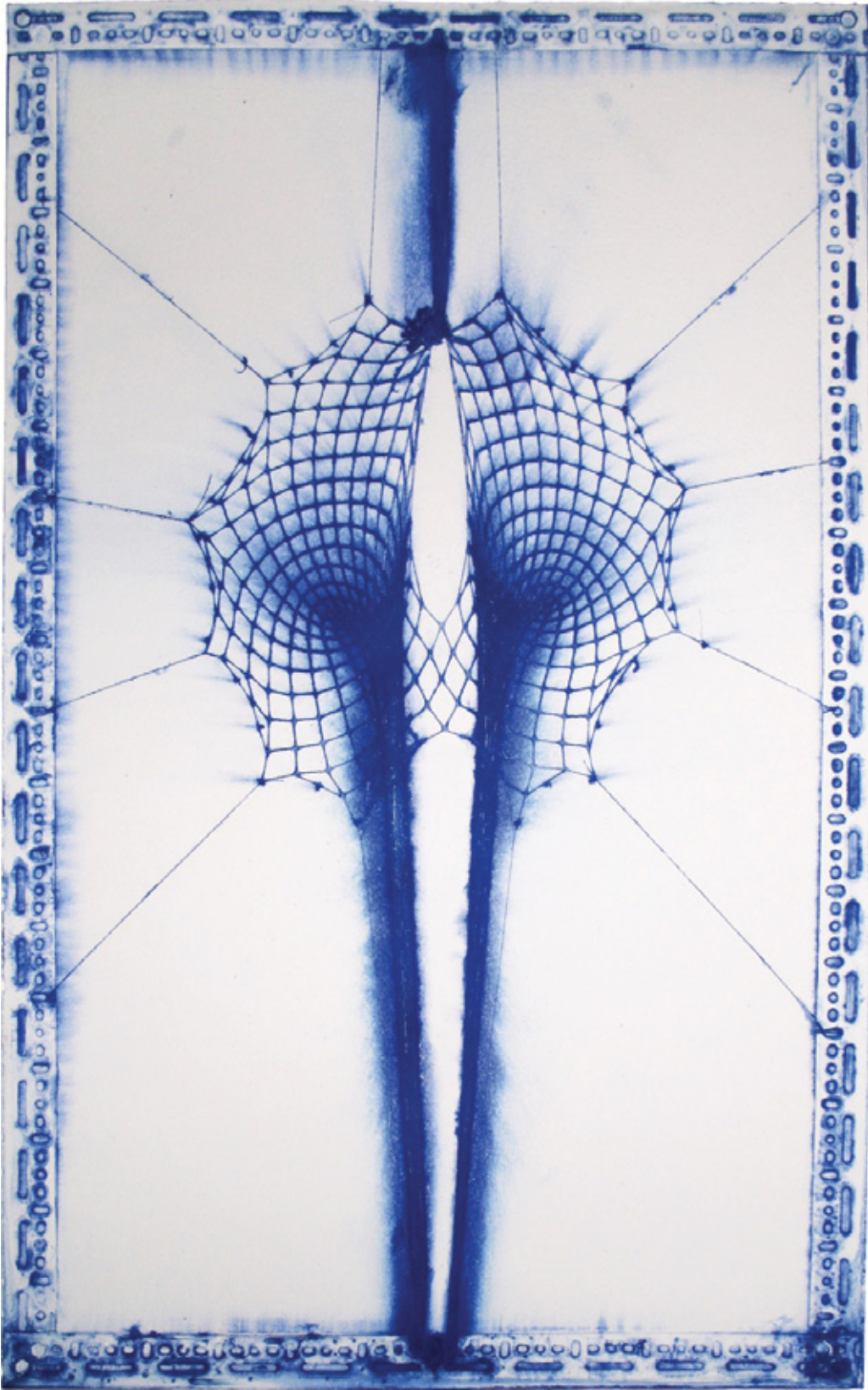
infuriating. In this respect, Day's dialectical project neatly encapsulates both the truth of the political moment and the most effective tools women of her generation have at their disposal for addressing that truth. Straddling the line between the objective and the objectified may prove to be one of third-wave feminism's most abiding tropes, and when employed as deftly as Day does, it demonstrates that despite the wariness about applying the term feminism, it is not a concept humanity can yet do without.

Through humor and a sort of gender equity that allows for the human rights nature of feminism to take precedence over a more dated understanding of the term (often understood to have focused on establishing a territory for the female voice outside of the dominant culture), Day's work effectively denounces the backlash against an activist form of feminist engagement. Her battleground is clearly drawn within that culture, forefronting classic heterocentric stereotypes but adding the complexity of our sexual age. The fishnet stocking has long been equally the territory of the drag queen, the hooker, and the soccer mom on date night. Day defends her use of clichés and camp with their continued relevancy—their constant recycling and reissuing, in both unselfconscious and ironic forms, within a culture that invariably proves their perverse vitality. Perhaps this is what Day means by "deconstructive positive" in the quote that opens this essay: using the conceptual tool of deconstruction as the art world equivalent of the knowing wink doesn't always neutralize the power of the cliché (think Jeff Koons' *Made in Heaven* series or Richard Prince's *Girlfriends*). It can, in fact, serve to reinforce it in a particularly ugly way. So for Day, an attempt at a positive deconstruction does not make her Don Quixote tipping hopelessly at windmills but rather proves that she has set for herself the reasonable goal of having her say by using a vocabulary she would be the first to admit is tired but, she would add, still resonates.

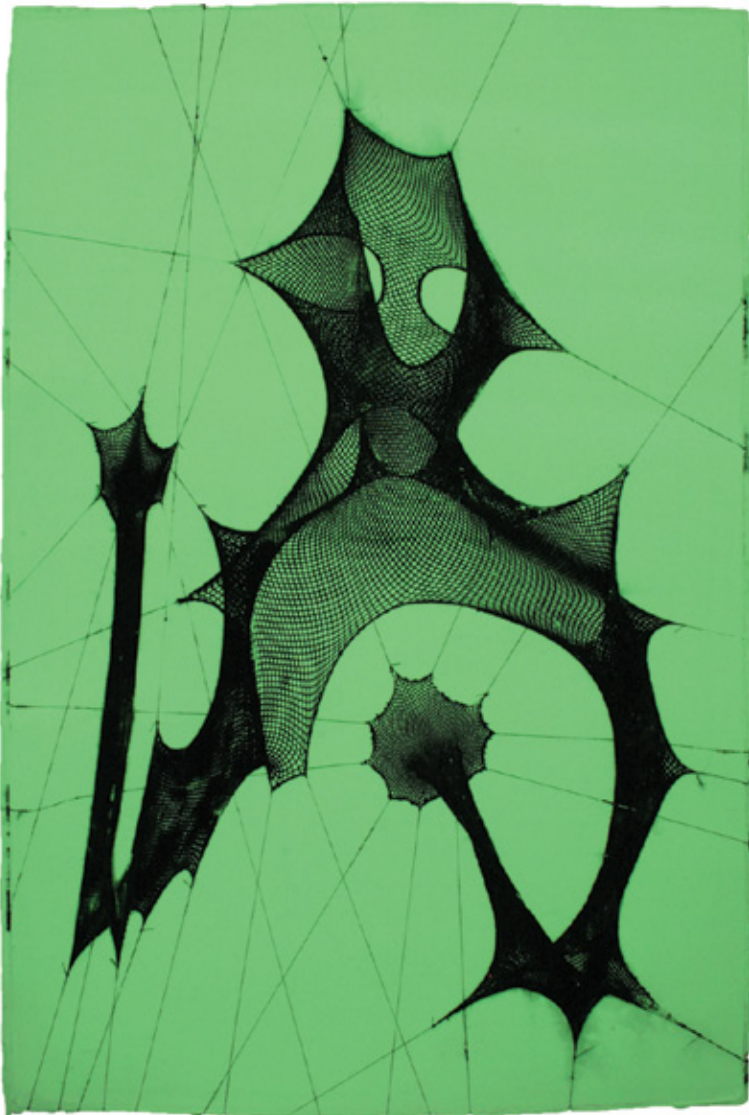
*Catherine Morris was named Curator of The Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art in March 2009. Prior to her appointment, Ms. Morris was an independent curator and Adjunct Curator of Contemporary Art at The Philbrook Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Her recent curatorial projects include: "Hans Hofmann Circa 1950" (Rose Art Museum, Massachusetts, 2009), "Decoys, Complexes and Triggers: Feminism and Land Art in the 1970s" (Sculpture Center, New York, 2008), and "9 Evenings Reconsidered: Art, Theatre and Engineering, 1966" (MIT List Visual Art Center, Massachusetts, 2006); and she is currently curating "Kiki Smith: Sojourn" which opens at the Sackler Center in February 2010. Ms. Morris has also written on Cindy Sherman, Yvonne Rainer, and Willem de Kooning.*

<sup>1</sup> Artist telephone interview with author, October 18, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Andrea Inselmann published in the catalogue for *E.V. Day* at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum, Cornell University, 2004.



*Double Black Hole*  
*(Blue and White)*, 2009  
fishnet bodysuit pigment  
embossing on cotton base sheet  
58 × 35.75 inches  
(1473 × 90.8 cm)



Installation view;  
*Shazam (Red, Blue, and Phosphorescence)*, *Shazam (Black and Phosphorescence)*, *Shazam (Blue and White)*

View of phosphorescent effect;  
*Shazam (Black and Phosphorescence)*, 2009  
 fishnet bodysuit pigment  
 embossing on phosphorescent  
 cotton base sheet  
 59.5 × 40 inches  
 (151.1 × 101.6 cm)

## Exhibition

E.V. Day

*New Works in Handmade Paper*

October 15–November 25, 2009

Reception: Thursday, October 15, 6–8 PM

## About the artist

E.V. Day was born in 1967 in New York City where she currently lives and works. She attended Hampshire College before receiving her M.F.A. in Sculpture from Yale University. Day began her “exploding couture” series with *Bombshell*, a suspended installation based on an iconic Marilyn Monroe dress. *Bombshell* was included in the 2000 Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art and is now part of the museum’s permanent collection. This was followed by a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum at Altria in 2001, where she installed *G-Force*, a work in which hundreds of thongs were suspended from the ceiling in fighter jet formations. The Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University held a ten-year survey exhibition of Day’s work in 2004, and her exhibition *Intergalactic Installations* was on view at the Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum in 2006, before appearing at Art Basel Miami. Day’s sculpture *Bride Fight*, an installation of two dueling bridal gowns, was exhibited at the Lever House in 2006 and will be installed at the Cincinnati Museum of Art in summer of 2010. In 2009, the artist was commissioned by the New York City Opera and created a site-specific installation using vintage City Opera costumes and accessories in soaring animation; the installation is on view in the theater’s promenade through the spring of 2010.

E.V. Day’s work is in many important public collections, including: the Museum of Modern Art, New York, The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The Brooklyn Museum, The Herbert F. Johnson Museum at Cornell University, the Saatchi Collection, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, The New York Public Library, and the Smithsonian Institution of National Art and Space Museum. E.V. Day is represented by Deitch Projects.

## Dieu Donn 

Founded in 1976, Dieu Donn  is a nonprofit artist workspace dedicated to the creation, promotion, and preservation of contemporary art in the hand-papermaking process. In support of this mission, Dieu Donn  collaborates with artists and partners with the professional visual arts community.

The Lab Grant Program, initiated in 2000, provides mid-career artists with a twelve-day residency to collaborate in hand papermaking at Dieu Donn . Through this program,

Dieu Donn  intends to produce exciting new work with artists who have a mature vision and long-standing commitment to artistic practice, thereby raising the profile of hand papermaking as an artmaking process and breaking new ground in the field. Participants in the program include: Melvin Edwards, Dorthea Rockburne, (2000); Jane Hammond, Jim Hodges, (2001); Robert Cottingham, Polly Apfelbaum, (2002); Glenn Ligon, Kiki Smith (2003); Jessica Stockholder, Arturo Herrera, (2004); Mel Kendrick, Kate Shepherd, (2005); Tony Fitzpatrick, Do-ho Suh, (2006); Jon Kessler, Ursula von Rydingsvard, (2007); E.V. Day (2008); and Ann Hamilton (2009).

This is issue number 13 of the Dieu Donn  Lab Grant Program publication series documenting the residency program for mid-career artists.

## Support for Dieu Donn 

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### Cover

Detail of fishnet pigment embossing in freshly pulled cotton sheet.

### Inside cover

E.V. Day  
*Shazam (Red and Blue)*, 2009  
fishnet bodysuit pigment embossing on cotton base sheet  
59.5 imes 39.25 inches (151.1 imes 99.7 cm)

