

Anna Torma

Permanent Danger

Anna Torma's large embroidered artworks show her deep concern for the world we live in. She is known for her expressive needlework that captures complex experiences of identity, family, and personal acts of artistic creation. Her richly layered narratives engage with the environment, the home, and well-being. With a practice that is deeply embedded in her mother's and grandmothers' traditional embroidered Hungarian textiles, Torma takes her predecessors' materials, motifs, and techniques into new personal, social, and cultural terrain.

Permanent Danger brings together works made since 2011. The exhibition captures the artist's act of coming to terms with the world through boldly stitched statements. In the artist's words: "...the most important things that the work must suggest are passion, freshness, and a new discovery every time for a viewer."

Curated by Sarah Quinton

Organized by the Textile Museum of Canada

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About the Artist

Anna Torma is the winner of the prestigious 2020 Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts – Saidye Bronfman Award. She is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, a recipient of the New Brunswick Lieutenant-Governor's Award for High Achievement in Visual Arts, and the Strathbutler Award from the Sheila Hugh Mackay Foundation. For over 40 years, Torma has exhibited her work in Canada and internationally and is represented in public and private collections around the world.

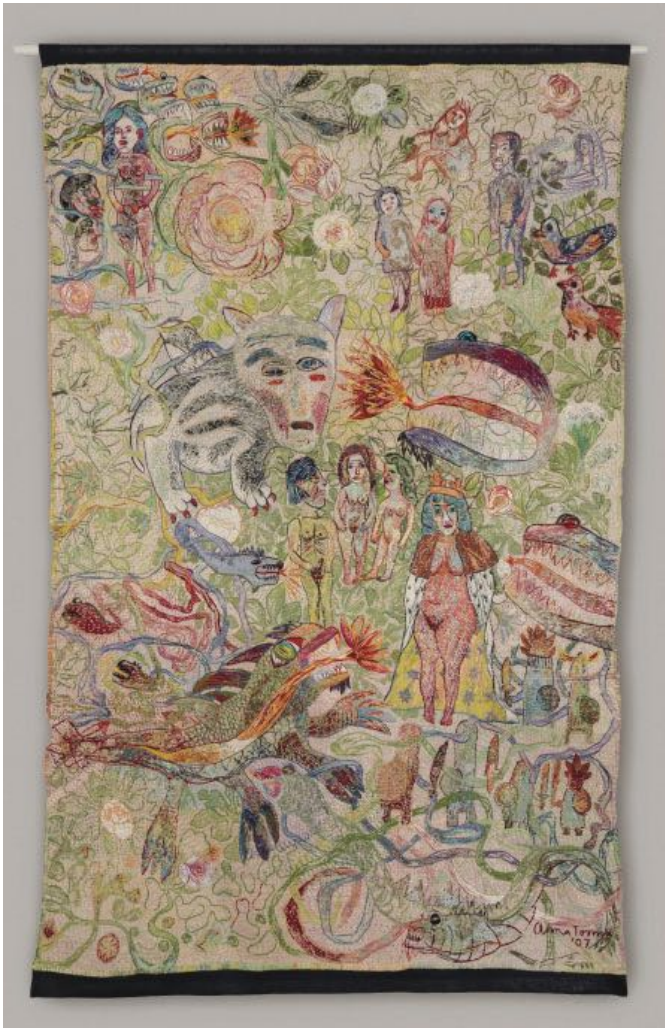
Born in Tarnaors, Hungary, in 1952, Torma graduated with a degree in Textile Art and Design from the Hungarian University of Applied Arts, Budapest in 1979. She immigrated to Canada in 1988 and now lives in Baie Verte, New Brunswick.

The artist would like to thank the Canada Council for the Arts and the Sheila Hugh Mackay Foundation for financial support of this exhibition.

Danger

In her desire to develop a personal, symbolic and pictorial language that also documents the life of her immediate family, Anna Torma has created a figurative lexicon of fire-breathing monsters, charmingly fantastic creatures, human figures, lush vegetation, and representations of her husband's sculptures of virile warriors. These images jostle for space on chaotic, congested picture planes that present a visual stream of consciousness.

The title piece, *Permanent Danger*, comes from an ongoing series of the same name. Life's perils abound; there is a deep need to protect others from unspeakable threats from the natural world, political discord, and humankind's underbelly-or perhaps even to do battle on behalf of others, as Torma suggests in *Fight 1* and *Fight 2*. Torma reveals inner thoughts about an unknown hostile presence, articulated from a point of view that values handcrafted textiles as integral to a family's ecology of mutual care.



Permanent Danger (2017)

Hand embroidery and reverse applique
on three layers of linen fabric, silk thread
206 x 125 cm

Courtesy the artist

This double-sided embroidery embodies the tension between structure and surface that defines the innate dimensionality of cloth. Anna Torma's stitches penetrate three layers of fabric, embroidering both sides at once; images on one side mirror the other. The artwork's suspension in space reinforces the depths of the surfaces and the cloth's sculptural attributes.



Permanent Danger 4 (2019)

Hand stitching and reverse applique
on three layers of linen fabric, silk thread
201 x 130 cm

Courtesy the artist



Permanent Danger 5 (2019)

Hand stitching and reverse applique
on three layers of linen fabric, silk thread
201 x 130 cm

Courtesy the artist



Fight 1 (2018)

Hand stitching and reverse applique
on two layers of linen fabric, silk thread and
commercial prints
130 x 140 cm

Courtesy the artist



Fight 2 (2018)

Hand stitching and reverse applique
on two layers of linen fabric, silk thread and
commercial prints
130 x 140 cm

Courtesy the artist

Celebration

Anna Torma gives shape to ideas of childhood innocence, loss, and sensuous experiences that surround the human life cycle. Her celebratory depictions of the human body and the endless sensuality of nature's flora and fauna are matched only by her undulating stitches.

Party with Dionysos is titled after the ancient Greco-Roman god Dionysos, who is associated with lust for life and ecstatic behaviour. *Dionysia* is named after the centuries-old festival of theatre of comedy, tragedy, and poetry from the same deep tradition. Torma often extrapolates from longstanding myths and teachings, and her flirtatious relationship with materiality and excess supports a bawdy chorus of animal, human, and plant life. The scene is set: Torma upends cloth's role as a veil of idealized modesty and feminine decorum to destabilize fixed ideas of conventional femininity.



Dionysia (2020)

Hand embroidery on several layers of transparent
silk fabric, silk thread
105 x 180 cm

Courtesy the artist



Party with Dionysos (2008-2015)

Hand embroidered collage on linen fabric,
silk thread
185 x 150 cm

Collection of Patrick Cady/ Musee d'Art
Contemporain Singulier



Gardens 1 (2018)

Hand embroidery and applique
on silk fabric, silk thread
100 x 100 cm

Courtesy the artist

Gardens 2 (2018)

Hand embroidery and applique
on silk fabric, silk thread
100 x 100 cm

Courtesy the artist



Torso (2011)

Hand embroidery on cotton fabric, silkscreen
print, found embroidery and applique
60 x 60 cm

Courtesy the artist

Order and Chaos

Anna Torma's art has always been a type of diary, and since the 1980s has included adaptations of artworks by her husband and sons. Such representations of her immediate family underscore the persistence of the artist's personal life as a subject of exploration.

In the *Pedagogical Charts* series, Torma's family is represented by their written names and depictions of their artwork with excerpts from textbooks and philosophical treatises that hint at "the meaning of life." Using words, numbers, and images that reference day-to-day annotations of memories and events, Torma reveals her fascination with the sciences of botany, anatomy, and evolution. Her series title suggests that a rational diagram can tidily classify the human condition, yet her chaotic, densely layered composition refutes this possibility.



Pedagogical Charts 1 (2016)

Hand embroidered collage
on linen fabric, silk thread
143 x 166 cm

Collection of Michel L'Heureux

Courtesy Galerie Laroche/Joncas

Inheritance

Anna Torma's early studio practice exudes unmistakable, deliberate stylistic and material references to regional and family embroidery traditions. As a child, she learned how to execute Hungarian patterns and stitches from her mother and grandmothers. This early formation has evolved to shape an interest in an unlimited range of textiles that are metaphorically and physically folded into her explorations of identity and belonging.

Personal Ribbon 1 and *Personal Ribbon 2* integrate fragments from the artist's personal textile collection with pieces of her own repurposed artworks. Panoramic stretches of raw hemp provide a backdrop for items of handwork assembled into a collage of memories and a poetic record of needlework by women in places and times unknown. A self portrait of sorts, this series links her experiences as an artist, a keeper of memories, and a recorder of women's timeless investment in making things by hand. She connects the power of an inherited, collective culture to that of personal expression through eclectic and evolving craft traditions.



Personal Ribbon 1 (2020)

Handwoven hemp base with found textile objects
50 x 450 cm

Courtesy the artist

This compendium of techniques - cross stitch; satin stitch and running stitch embroidery; crochet; knitting; small loom domestic weaving; silkscreen; and digital prints on fabric - is rich with the residue of worn cloth and the hands of unknown makers. Fragments and samples of Hungarian and Chinese folk textiles, a Marimekko print from Finland, Canadian thrift store finds, and her own work from earlier periods have been collected and saved for many years. Many of these treasured fragments have deteriorated beyond repair, yet they continue to exemplify gifts of affection, rites of passage, and whimsical tokens in their cycles of decay and renewal.



Personal Ribbon 2 (2020)

Handwoven hemp base with found textile objects
50 x 350 cm

Courtesy the artist

These long and narrow ribbons suggest a sequential journey, and are a nod to the legendary Bayeux Tapestry, an 11th-century embroidery that commemorates William of Normandy's conquest of England in 1066. The tapestry, both a work of art and an historical document, depicts violent and destructive events of war alongside traces of private lives - themes Torma explores in *Fight 1* and *Fight 2* elsewhere in this exhibition.

Process and Materials

Anna Torma sources her materials from all over the world - linen, cotton, hemp, silk, synthetics, and found materials are selected for their distinct physical qualities as well as cultural references.

Torma has amassed an archive of material that is her palette and her source of texture, pattern, and image. World travel to examine historic textiles informs her compositions, techniques, and material choices. Some of her fabrics and threads are hand dyed with synthetic or natural colourants, others are dyed commercially. She makes drawings and notations onto paper patterns, jots into sketchbooks, and stitches directly into cloth with needle and thread.



Assortment of objects from the artist's studio

Sketchbooks, silk thread and 3 pieces of hand embroidered sketches

Courtesy the artist