



# **Anna Torma**

## ***The Eden Project***

6 Feb - 22 March, 2025

Clint Roenisch Gallery



*The stitching itself must be my language, the first—the  
cosy one—similar to my Hungarian.*

*- Anna Torma*

Anna Torma  
The Eden Project  
6 February - 22 March, 2025

"Every garden is the production of an atmosphere.  
Every garden is a technique that has to make breathing possible"  
Emmanuele Coccia, *The Cosmic Garden*, Zurich, 2018



Anna Torma was born in 1952 in Tarnaors, Hungary and 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 has lived and worked in Baie Verte, New Brunswick since 2002.

“Rich in storytelling and powerful in narrative, Anna Torma’s oeuvre intimately embodies uncertain human experiences of kinship, aggression, love, fear, loss, aging and death. Her large-scale embroidered textile works are ambitious and expressive, detailed with personal symbolism and iconography. Rigorous and materially intelligent, her engagement with the history of textiles and their traditional techniques, along with her fearless and emotive use of needle and thread, reflect a personal yet inclusive life journey. For over four decades, Anna Torma’s practice, vision and steadfast commitment to the medium have influenced both the craft and art milieus, moving far beyond the immediate. Torma’s works reach far outward, into the future, the present and the past, enveloping the viewer within the wealth of their material language, their layered interpretation and powerful human connections.”

- Peer assessment committee, Governor General’s Award, 2020



*Colouring Book Details II*

2025

Mixed media on paper; unique

50 x 40 inches, framed

\$6,500 plus tax











Clint Roenisch Gallery

*Cold Nights*

2025

Textile collage, hand sewing and embroidery on 2  
layers of silk fabrics, silk thread; unique

52 x 75 inches, unframed

Signed, titled and dated

\$18,000 plus tax







WORLD

HIP









*Love*

2024  
Textile collage, hand sewing and embroidery on 2 layers  
of silk fabrics, silk thread; unique  
48 x 49 inches, unframed  
Signed, titled and dated  
\$12,000 plus tax

Clint Roenisch Gallery



*Backyard*

2024

Textile collage, hand sewing and embroidery on

2 layers of silk fabrics, silk thread; unique

48 x 49 inches

Signed, titled and dated

\$12,000 plus tax

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Torma has described herself as a "spiritual keeper of memories" and (rightly) believes that "there are endless stories in a little piece of fabric". Her evocative tapestries are vivid, teeming repositories of a life being fully lived, remembered and reimagined through her practice. Torma also draws upon Hungarian folklore, science, ancient mythology, the splendour and fertility of the natural world, family history and domestic life, the fantastical drawings of children, Medieval tapestry, Art Brut and folk art, to name but a few of her sources. "For me, it has always been compelling to observe how seemingly different kinds and forms of knowledge interact with each other. I see similarities, for example, between the explanatory drawings used by young students who struggle to understand and make sense of the world, and a microbiologist's research for virus solutions, and between a child's images and those from myth and legend. These convergences and the infinite hope and dialogue they offer inform much of my work."











*Green Hope I*

2024

Textile collage and hand embroidery on linen  
fabric, silk threads, cotton batting; unique

72 x 54 inches

\$18,000 plus tax





*Green Hope II*

2024  
Textile collage and hand embroidery on linen  
fabric, silk threads, cotton batting; unique  
72 x 54 inches  
\$18,000 plus tax







Clint Roenisch Gallery



*Eden I*

2025

Mixed media on paper; unique

81 x 51 inches, framed

\$10,000 plus tax

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*Eden II*

2025  
Mixed media on paper; unique  
81 x 51 inches, framed  
\$10,000 plus tax









*The Gardener*

2024

Hand embroidery with silk threads on 3 layers of linen fabrics, cotton flannel batting; unique 48 x 33 inches, unframed  
Signed, titled and dated

\$10,000 plus tax



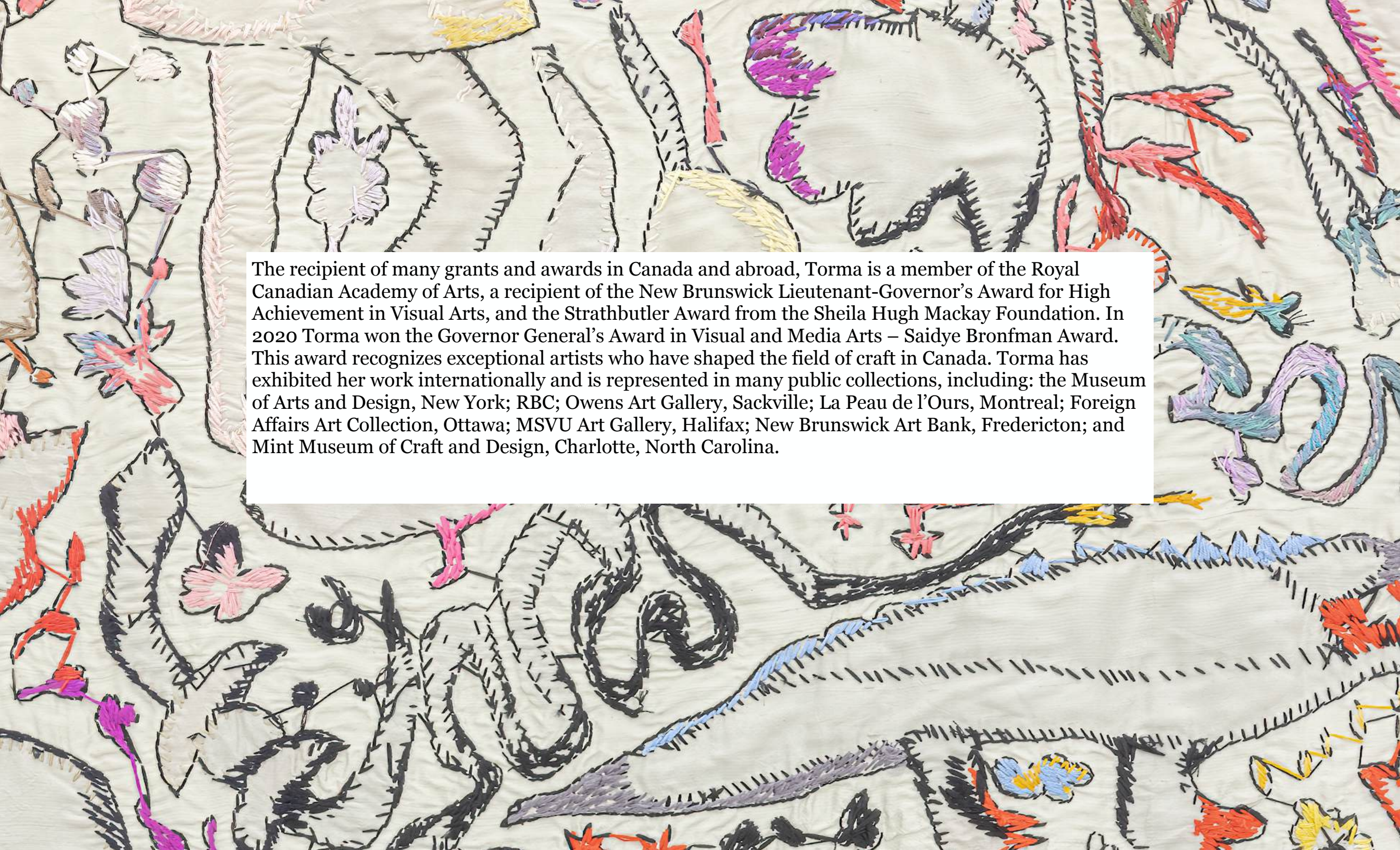






In mounting Torma's extraordinary 2018 show at the Esker Foundation, curator Shauna Thompson noted, "As a descendant of generations of skilled needleworkers and embroiderers, Anna Torma produces work that is both rooted in a deep Hungarian textile tradition and is also part of a vibrant contemporary practice connected to radical feminist avant-garde movements of the 1960s and 70s, which reclaimed craft and fibre-based work as urgent and political fine art practices."





The recipient of many grants and awards in Canada and abroad, Torma 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. In 2020 Torma won the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts – Saidye Bronfman Award. This award recognizes exceptional artists who have shaped the field of craft in Canada. Torma has exhibited her work internationally and is represented in many public collections, including: the Museum of Arts and Design, New York; RBC; Owens Art Gallery, Sackville; La Peau de l'Ours, Montreal; Foreign Affairs Art Collection, Ottawa; MSVU Art Gallery, Halifax; New Brunswick Art Bank, Fredericton; and Mint Museum of Craft and Design, Charlotte, North Carolina.



## A Garden Diary

The embroidery lessons that Anna Torma learned from her mother and grandmothers seeded large, complex textile artworks



Anna Torma, *Party with Dionysos 2*, 2020. Hand embroidery on silk, 105 cm x 1.8 m. Photo: Istvan Zsako.

My inspirations are woven carpets depicting gardens with great mastery. Centuries or millennia old, these are far from romanticized landscapes: they suggest balanced microcosms with flora, fauna, myths and legends of their specific times. And here, looking out through large glass windows of my studio, is my own garden, shaped over 18 years' labour. I have a chance here to contemplate the landscape in every season—see birds moving, cats hunting, deer visiting. I have a small greenhouse to help lengthen the short growing season.

The foundation of my gardening practice is what I brought from Hungary when I immigrated to Canada in 1988. When I work on the land, I am inspired by my ancestors' farmer lives, their hunger to grow food. When I was young, I loved biology and used to picture myself in a research lab making new discoveries with plants, cells, molecules and genes. My life made different turns, however. Instead of being a scientist, I now, at 68 years of age, earn my living as an independent visual artist—and I also became a gardener. Is there such a thing as just “becoming” a gardener, though? At root, I have an obsession for horticulture: tree-planting and food-growing. I like to visit great gardens, real and virtual. I exchange seeds and ideas locally and visit botanical gardens internationally, taking pictures, making drawings from this subject all the time. Gardening comes close to my professional artistic life in subject and scale. At this point I would not know, really, which comes first.

My garden contains three equally important parts, connected by a walkway network. Each part is approximately two acres: The first part is the undisturbed territory of wildlife, that which we do not visit often. Our 18 years of presence here is enough time to see the change, to see how the previously domesticated area became bushland, then a forest with spruces, white pines, silver poplars and birches. It is a reverse action to the early settlers' “clearing” of the land. The second part is a meadow with a small creek. Green lawn patches, mowed a few times a year, marshland trees and bushes make the scenery. This rich place gives us a chance to hear birds and frogs, meet bees and other insects—the little helpers. Pollinators love the wildflower meadow, full of goldenrod, dandelion and other plants, which are rarely qualified as more than weeds. The third part gives me the most work, but pays back handsomely: the studio and greenhouse. This is where the tender seedlings begin to acclimatize and gain strength to endure the cold early-spring months with hurricane-grade winds.



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The gardening year begins when the days with sunshine hours grow longer and the seeds germinate fast. My edible garden starts with seedlings: traditional and unique, heritage and hybrid, and sometimes surprise ones. I also grow plants from flower seeds, which I collect with passion everywhere. I learned how to propagate cuttings, make topiaries, duplicate plants by dividing their roots. These are my new skills learned as a gardener. When I started, I wanted to build a physical relationship with the earth, wanted to feel abundance, to surround myself in the sea of flowers and the unequalled colours that their petals give us. When we found this property on the East Coast of Canada and moved from Ontario 18 years ago, there was much we did not know about it. We continue to learn.

This is the unceded territory of the Wolastoqiyik and Mi'kmaq Peoples, skilled in hunting, fishery and basket-making. Also known to some as Baie Verte, this place was once an Acadian village of only a few families, colonized by French explorers in the late 17th century, among other settlements in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The low coastal tide here allowed farmers to make an effective dyke system and produce sweetgrass pastures and salt-marsh hay. They had cattle-raising and fishing practices. After the Expulsion of the Acadians began in 1755, parts of this place were handed out to English soldiers as granted lands. According to local historian Jean-Luc Chasse, the village was also used as a refugee camp for Acadians after the nearby Fort Beauséjour fell to the British. Those soldiers wanted to reach Prince Edward Island, still a French colony for several more years, and spent the waiting time in Baie Verte while en route. This complicated local history is, inevitably, another foundation of my gardening practice.

The artworks I make in my garden-side studio are textile objects, embroidered by hand. I often use a linen base and silk threads, the best materials to complete fine needlework. Strong narrative elements with darker undertones usually dominate the surface of my pieces: I work with the idea of Dionysian feelings, portraying male and female figures interlaced by real and

imagined vegetation, suggesting connectedness in an earthly microcosm. I also want to show the enjoyment and appreciation of myths and legends of different cultures, sexualities, flowers, fruits, colours, and living and imagined creatures, seeing the environment and human identity as a whole but fragile, and always changing, subject.

This year's harvests have also been defined by change. In early spring of 2020, because of pandemic isolation, I had more time to establish my gardening season. I made practical decisions. I enlarged the vegetable paths, made a separate, elevated place for the tomatoes, planted 16 trees and collected seaweeds for next year's mulching. The impact of the slow pandemic time on the garden has not ended there. I went back to reading and researching about climate, the atmosphere and plant life, and was interested to know more about the relationship between humanity and nature. I learned that in this age of extraction and consumption of hydrocarbons, nature and culture are no longer distinguishable. Our oxygen-rich atmosphere, made by plants, is in danger. Our very existence is in danger. Infinite living beings, our cohabitants, rely on the plants' metabolic excretion—oxygen—and are in danger as well. Our living conditions, our ability to survive, depend on ecological thinking: the realization that the earth is a closed system, that everything is connected. All our intellectual and artistic attention on a micro- and macrocosmic scale is needed to stop the magnitude of disaster.

Here is something I read this spring, from philosopher Emanuele Coccia's 2018 text "The Cosmic Garden," that has stayed with me: "Every garden is the production of an atmosphere. Every garden is a technique that has to make breathing possible." In winter, my garden diary is a good help. I can look back on my successes and disasters, learn from the facts, then follow my instincts to imagine the next year's adventures. I follow in my grandparents' footsteps when I believe that gardening is meaningful—that it rejuvenates the soul and germinates, again and again, a kind of hope.



CRITICS' PICKS CALGARY

## Anna Torma

Esker Foundation

Esker Foundation | 1011 – 9th Avenue S.E. Fourth Floor

May 26, 2018 - September 2, 2018

By **Lucas Matheson** ✎



View of "Anna Torma: Book of Abandoned Details."



Clint Roenisch Gallery

**Anna Torma: Book of Abandoned Details**

Esker Foundation, Calgary

May 26 - September 2, 2018

As a descendant of generations of skilled needleworkers and embroiderers, Anna Torma produces work that is both rooted in a deep Hungarian textile tradition and is also part of a vibrant contemporary practice connected to radical feminist avant-garde movements of the 1960s and 70s, which reclaimed craft and fibre-based work as urgent and political fine art practices. Through the synthesis of techniques such as embroidery, drawing, collaging, dyeing, free-hand quilting, appliqué, and photo transfer, Torma's work offers us an extraordinary world in which the domestic and the fantastic collide in lush imagery drawn from familial history, books and literature, real and imagined places, mythology and folklore, flora and fauna, and personal and cultural memory. *Book of Abandoned Details* presents major work produced over the past five years, much of which speaks to the complex nature of diasporic identity and experience; the desire to remember and preserve the details of a past, while also adapting to and articulating a new present. Torma describes herself as a storyteller and a "spiritual keeper of memories."<sup>1</sup> The expressive needlework of her textiles communicates stories—fragmented and non-linear—that alternate between the figurative and the abstract. Torma's needle inscribes the surface of these materials with a language that speaks simultaneously to past and present, and the resulting works act as documents, ledgers, or catalogues of memories—of

both grand and important as well as small and intimate things meant to be preserved and remembered. The form of the work often references the nature of memory: sharp and clear at one moment; fragmented and tangled at the next.

The new series of works from which this exhibition takes its name offers a register of words, shapes, and forms—some that we might recognize, others that we might not; some that are marvelous, others that are mundane. For Torma, the small and seemingly unexceptional are equally as important as the large and easily recognizable. In this series of work, as in life, Torma urges us to value and treasure the minute and the everyday, because it is through the accumulation of these minor details that one can often access greater and more important facets of life as well. The diptych *Carpet of Many Hands* (2012-18), is a powerful manifestation of Torma's emphasis on the potential of the small or quotidian to add up to more than the sum of its parts. Comprised of two long, vertical panels, it is a monumental collage of found and collected fabrics and original embroideries. Hundreds of textile pieces sit next to and on top of one another—printed fabrics, crochet and lace samples, embellished swatches, and needlepoint sourced from domestic linens such as curtains, sheets, tablecloths, and protective Hungarian *falvédő* (a decorative and/or protective wall covering that often features embroidered inscriptions or proverbs)—all examples of women's handwork brought together in a remarkable reflection on domestic space, labour, and value. Collected, treasured, and respected by Torma over many years, these common, domestic



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textiles are united in an act of reclamation and tribute to the value of women's domestic work.

Torma's wider practice has long included the gathering and sharing of stories through many voices, histories, and materials. She will often incorporate the creative work of others, such as drawings or texts based on the work of her husband and two sons, each artists themselves. The series *Transverbal* was inspired by her children's early drawings, which were produced at a time in which communication between mother and child was based on visual signs, gestures, and empathetic guesswork. *Red*

*Fragments* (2017) features the work of Torma's late mother-in-law, a skillful needleworker who had suffered a stroke. Seeking to connect with her and to nurture mental and emotional healing, Torma encouraged her to create new redwork embroidery pieces using traditional Hungarian cross-stitch patterns. Brought together with Torma's own fragmented and reworked pieces, the progressively empty cross-stitch squares offer a beautiful and melancholy rumination on aging, loss, and resilience.

Working slowly and labour-intensively, through time and with immaculate attention and skill, Torma invites us into her wild, many-layered imaginary. Her practice gives weight and value to humble objects and materials—the overlooked and undervalued. She invites us to enjoy the sensuality of texture and surface and offers us a glimpse into the spaces that she, herself, inhabits— her inner and outer worlds.

<sup>1</sup>Anne Koval, *Anna Torma: Needleworks*, Halifax: MSVU Art Gallery, 2007.



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Exhibition view, Anna Torma at Esker Foundation, 2018

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Textile Museum of Canada Announces Major Solo Exhibition of works by Anna Torma, Winner of a 2020 Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts

Anna Torma: Permanent Danger

February 19, 2020 Toronto, Ontario – The Textile Museum of Canada is pleased to announce a major solo exhibition of work by Anna Torma, winner of the prestigious 2020 Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts – Saidye Bronfman Award.

The exhibition takes its title –Permanent Danger – from a 2017 artwork of the same name, making reference to human strife and vulnerability, threatened natural environments, and the highs and lows of daily life. Anna Torma's unique drawing style is an expression of her complex experiences of family, identity, joy, and artistic creation. The artist sources her materials from all over the world; linen, cotton, silk, thread, and found materials are selected for their distinct physical qualities as well as cultural references from popular culture to traditional Hungarian embroidery and thrift shop aesthetics. "Anna Torma has dedicated her professional life to an astonishingly singular studio practice that has emerged from an early, deep understanding of embroidery traditions and their place in global, contemporary visual culture."  
– Sarah Quinton, exhibition curator and Curatorial Director, Textile Museum of Canada.

The Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts – Saidye Bronfman Award recognizes exceptional artists who have shaped the field of craft in Canada. The Museum is thrilled to have nominated Anna Torma for this award, and to celebrate her 40-year commitment to an innovative practice in contemporary textiles with this exhibition

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Anna Torma: Permanent Danger is a key project of the Textile Museum of Canada's 45th Anniversary celebrations. It consists of a major solo exhibition, publication, tour, and a series of public programs that will run over a six-month period.

PRESENTING SPONSOR: BMO Financial Group | SUPPORTING PARTNER: The Sheila Hugh Mackay Foundation | SUPPORTING DONOR: Carole Tanenbaum





WHITEHOT MAGAZINE  
"THE BEST ART IN THE WORLD"  
FEBRUARY 2025

## Running with Wolves: Anna Torma's Rhizomatic Wanderlust



Anna Torma's fearlessly stitched and radiant cartographies are anchored in her own lived experience but afford viewers a sense of universal truths. Her craft-based creative practice has a long history of incubation in the production of large-scale hands-on embroideries that are powerfully new and even radical in mien.

This Hungarian-Canadian fibre artist (b. 1952) is a born storyteller who draws upon a wide array of textile traditions and techniques, including appliqué, felting, photo transfer, collage, and quilting. She has come far from the rag dolls of her childhood in rural Hungary, scavenging imagery from diverse sources such as medical anatomical drawings, folk art, and even her own children's drawings. Whether working with fine silk, raw hemp, mercerized cotton, man made fabric or found needlework, Torma makes all those materials irremediably and recognizably her own.

I recently experienced a terrifically engaging Torma embroidery of a wolf pack on the prowl, with a coven of snakes all about entitled Snakes (2013, embroidery on silk, 42 x 51"). Their feral profiles, open jaws and suggested loping gaits left a powerful impression upon me. The dovetailing, the map-like unfurling of the narrative and the latent sense of menace, gave a whole new meaning to the European fairy tale Little Red Riding Hood. It is as though she is channelling the ghost of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Torma, this woman who runs with wolves both literal and figural, has executed something of a masterwork here. If you were to arrest her stitching at any given single point, you would never achieve a clear sense of where she is heading. Until she has reached the threshold, that is, and then her logic seems pellucid and unassailable. Rigorously worked layers build towards a seamless whole where image and text speak in flux, unison and poetry. What seemed inchoate or disconnected upon first inspection suddenly finds resolution as the expansive cartography reaches its outward limit, and a visually indissoluble and pristine work is born.

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Perhaps this is because drawing has always been integral to her embroidery work. Torma is a highly proficient draughtsperson and she delineates sundry entities, their circumstances and surrounds, with spirited industry.

Employing densely layered fabrics, images and patterns, her work makes a strong statement about both materiality and the support. In evoking a wide array of references from folktales and anatomical drawings to children's art and art brut, Torma touches on topical themes of alienation and anomie with a delicate, surreal, and often darkly inflected humorous touch. Stitch by stitch, she marks out the latitudes and longitudes of her world with abandon and resolve.

Anna Torma, *Bestiary III*, 2001, embroidery on cotton, La Peau de Ours Collection

Torma, based in Baie Verte, New Brunswick., immigrated to Canada in 1988 after earning a degree in textile art and design from the Hungarian University of Applied Arts in Budapest. She was introduced to textile art at a young age. Her mother and grandmother tutored her in sewing and embroidery. She casts in high relief there themes and issues of femininity, domesticity, and ethnicity.

Influenced by artists as diverse as Jean-Michel Basquiat and Kiki Smith and her own partner, the sculptor István Zsakó, Torma's visual language is raw, expressive and experimental. One might also call it elemental. She brings a maverick vision to works that have varying levels of accessibility and multiple entry-points. Stitching the wisdom and wherewithal of a life lived into her compositions, she offers her viewers an experience that can be profoundly moving. Her night thoughts and surreal juxtapositions yield a sense of the uncanny and unforeseen.

It is tempting and instructive to consider Torma's work as inherently rhizomatic in its thinking as well as in its making and manifestation. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari employed the term "rhizome" and "rhizomatic" to describe a web of heterogenous multiplicities, non-hierarchical entry and exit

points in an acentered and labyrinthine diaspora. Kirsty Bell, in her essay "Reproduction as Genealogy in Anna Torma's Textile Art", says that "Contrary to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's conception of genealogies as linear or arborescent, Torma's heterogeneous interpretation of them resists a tidy hierarchical structure." However, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where they oppose the rhizome to an arborescent (hierarchical, tree-like) conception of knowledge, Deleuze and Guattari further stress that a rhizome works with myriad planar and trans-species connections, while an arborescent model works with vertical and linear connections. Hybridization, interconnectedness and heuristic layering are at the heart of what Torma achieves.

The rhizome is characterized by multiple connections between shifting semiotic chains, and its planar movement resists all overtures of linear chronology and organization, instead embracing a nomadic system of growth and propagation. Such a nomadic system perfectly modellizes Torma's embroideries at all levels, for inside her webs of phenomenally smooth space, she offers a matrix in which every point is connected to every other point, so that each and every centimetre in one of the embroideries enjoys equal voice and status in a state of continual becoming, unfolding and progressive organic development rather than being mired in stasis, redundancy and blockage. The rhizome jettisons tidy notions of linearity in favour of multi-tiered trans-species connections. The rootstalk reigns supreme.

Furthermore, any given work by Torma has, like a rhizome, no clear beginning or end; it always operates "in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo." The narratives are open-ended and never static. Her embroideries suggest a nomadic system of generative intensity and propagation on the go in the depths and at the farthest margins of their extravagant insides. Torma's works are profoundly acentered, diasporic and wholly detachable when understood as maps, animated by a restless circulation of interior signs. She constructs cartographies, not tracings.



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Deleuze labels the rhizome as an anti-genealogical multiplicity in a perennial state of coalescent conjunction. If Torma's work pays homage, either implicitly or explicitly, to Deleuze it also borrows and works from other creators, including that of her own family members, most notably her aforementioned sculptor husband. However, it is through the use of such fabrics that the artist sacralises and radically updates women's domestic work.

Torma's artful scavenging invests her work with tiered associations and a host of affiliations and avenues that lead inwards in spiral-like configurations. Torma rejects tidy hierarchical structure. Hers are hand-stitched anti-genealogies that resist being "read" in a conventional linear manner. She encourages her viewers to assume various station-points in space and to adopt peripatetic reading practices.

Jill Magi, a writer who also stitches, has dilated interestingly on embroidery as a model for subjectivity, and presents the "other" as a subject capable of elaboration. She considers Elizabeth Grosz's brilliant thesis in *Chaos, Territory, Art*, a philosophy that links art and evolution and explores Deleuze's ideas of "sensation"—that art is an intensification of sensation—and, crucially, it is art because it "can detach itself and gain autonomy from its creator and its perceiver . . ." . Here is where she links art to nature. "Art and nature, art in nature, share a common structure: that of excessive and useless production—production for its own sake, production for the sake of profusion and differentiation".

As Magi argues, embroidery is an endeavour raised, sculptural, a kind of braille for the embodied eye. "As a mark-making system, embroidery is capable of lifting up off the surface—with each stitch, it does—and with certain stitches—such as the French knot." [9] She maintains that the sculptural dimension of embroidery in piercing and looping is one of the more arresting angles that returns us to Deleuze and Guattari's notion that

what's most interesting are not the adumbrations of pattern but the interstitial passages between the smooth and striated.

Torma, like Hannah Hoch before her, understands that embroidery occupies both smooth and striated space, and moves between them seamlessly and surreptitiously. As Magi says, it overlays smoothness onto striation but might generate striation: "Embroidery might generate word, image, narrative, and needs to adhere to the limitations of the ground weave, the substrate." Anna Torma's rhizomatic wanderlust and her uncanny familiarity with haptics has resulted in a cornucopia of arresting, interrogatory and even necessary works of art. WM

