

# Lyons Wier Gallery

175 Seventh Ave @ 20th St • NYC • 10011

PRESS RELEASE

## CAYCE ZAVAGLIA

### *Painting with Wool: New Embroidered Portraits*

20 March – 20 April, 2009

Lyons Wier Gallery is pleased to announce Cayce Zavaglia's solo exhibition, *Painting with Wool: New Embroidered Portraits*.

Over the past 15 years, Cayce Zavaglia's paintings have focused exclusively on the portraits of friends, family, and fellow artists. The gaze of the portrait toward the viewer has remained constant, as has her search for a narrative based on both faces and facture. The presence of actual paint, however, has slowly been disappearing from her paintings. Initial works on canvas, painted so thickly they often resembled cake frosting, transitioned into works on panel that employed thin layers of medium-laden oil paint.

These works subsequently led to her current series, in which the portraits are sewn with crewel embroidery wool and the use of paint is limited to the background only. From a distance the portraits continue to read as photo-realistic paintings and only a closer inspection reveals the work's true construction.

The birth of her daughter eight years ago prompted her to establish a non-toxic studio. As she removed turpentine, varnish, and oil paint from her studio, she found herself replacing these mediums with materials with which she had little history. Remembering back to a crewel embroidery piece she did as a child gave her the idea to incorporate all of her current interests into portraits of wool. As she tried to re-learn the traditional stitches of crewel embroidery, she realized it was the medium alone that she was wishing to employ. The technique needed to borrow from her study of and experience with drawing and painting. The process needed to develop as she worked from portrait to portrait and experimented with the material. Working with an established range of wool colors proved frustrating at first because she was unable to mix the colors by hand. Consequently, she created a system of sewing the threads in a sequence that would ultimately give the allusion of a certain color or tone. The direction in which the threads were sewn had to mimic the way lines are layered in a drawing to give the allusion of depth, volume, and form. Over time the stitches have become tighter and more complex but ultimately more evocative of flesh and hair and cloth.

Cayce Zavaglia's work unabashedly nods its head to the tradition of tapestry and her own lifetime exposure to and love of craft. Using wool has allowed her to make more of a long-term commitment to each piece, as well as broaden the dialogue between portrait and process. It is her hope that each work would initiate a journey - one that causes the viewer to advance and retreat as they are introduced to a family portrait and a re-interpretation of traditional embroidery.