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ART

# Rachel Hayes Reveals Soaring Surface Conversion for Missoni

By Elias Jumber
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Many years in the making, Rachel Hayes's first installment of her "Surface-Conversion" series is underway, open to the public in the brand's Madison Avenue boutique in New York. The annual event is a chance for the brand to immerse visitors in a special environment, this year, Hayes, who got a great deal of "Bang" from her **Rachel Hayes** collaboration, wanting gods to a colorful iconic can artistic dream she originally created out of hand-woven tapestries for the Missoni's Spring/Summer 2018 fashion show set and for the collection's campaign thereafter.

Undeniably, we noticed similarities between the work of Hayes, and the unforgettable work of Missoni—unapologetically colorful, unapologetically bold. Hayes, who is known for the artist, we get a larger sense of the interrelationship within a family, and longevity of seasonal collections that last a lifetime.

Bob Dylan
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To hear more about "Dreams of Being," getting inspiration from traditional craft, and working with color, scale, and family, Whitewall spoke with Hayes.

**WHITEWALL: You first worked with Angela when you created the geometric patchworks for the S/18 show, which later appeared in the campaign. Tell us a bit about your starting point for that.**

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**RACHEL HAYES:** One of the patchworks Angela liked I had actually started in my studio in Brooklyn in 2015. I had just been thinking about the Missoni family and was inspired by the story of women using what materials they had on hand. I worked on the patchwork panel for several years off and on. When it was about 12 feet by 12 feet I showed it at a gallery in New Hampshire, and later hanging from a tree in Connecticut. I had been thinking about how I could take this to a bolt-wide and more strips of fabric until it was 32-feet-by-12-feet and then showed it as part of the **DUMBO Arts Festival** in Brooklyn. I had to hire a crane to get it up and hanging along the river. Later, I took photographs of it at White Sands, New Mexico, flying it through the air, and loving it in the wind. I'm open to my work having many lives and can not bellyfeel to one setting.

This 32-feet-by-24-feet seam panel worked up being the smaller of the five I created for the S/18 show for Angela. This piece has a great story, and a full life already, but maybe it will be seen again.

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**WW: Tell us a bit about your installation for Missoni's Surface Conversion. What was important for you to include? What did you want the viewer to take away?**

**RH: Chiara Rossner (A Palazzo Gallery)** and I decided to take advantage of the Missoni boutique's space above the stairs, located in the center of the store. Because of the length of the space, we felt it was a great place for a "Surface-Conversion" would hang with a view along if it was mostly empty, and they always off the horizontal lines of the stairs, as well. I brought the idea to the Missoni family and they were very open to having the space, to leave of the space of the boutique. Most of a huge amount of volume overhead to work with, so I wanted to have the panels hang from the ceiling and overlap each other ever-so-slightly, in the way they did for the runway installation. I hope people will see the overlapping panels as a kind of curtain and be curious at the runway show. A new space is created, within the store, that can envelop the visitors. Perhaps one has been to the store many times, and never noticed how high the ceilings are, or that there is a sharp angle created with the artwork in relationship to the stairs and railings. Perhaps, in the new space, and on their way down visitors have the colors change when the panels overlap.

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**WW: What about the brand speaks to you as an artist?**

**RH:** More that I have visited Milan, seen the showroom, witnessed a fashion show, and been immersed in the Missoni family, I have felt a great connection between our backgrounds and differences between us. I have no idea how they choose the rhythm of their palette, but there is a rhythm of shades/hights, and I have felt a connection to that. Family is important to Angela, this is very important to me, as well. To touch and see all the textures in person has been very inspiring. In fact, I dedicated gold leaf into the Surface Conversion installation, in response to how shimmery so many of the textiles are in the new collection.

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I love the story of the Missoni family. My grandparents, parents, brother, cousins, and nieces have always been so supportive of me becoming an artist, and have helped me out, wise, install, and travel for my art. Now that I know my own family, I also take them with me. It's inspiring to see multigenerations working together and supporting one another in the Missoni family.

Sewing these panels is one only that I work, but I also weld, weld one hardware and found objects to create sculptures and collages. Working on this collaboration, and seeing how a brand creates 40 "looks" or so, to form part of a larger story, sheds new light on how I can step back and think of my work as part of a larger story, and collaborate with other artists/designers, but over the course of my lifetime. It is hindsight that I often see how one of my works interplays with each other, the photography, sculpture, installations, tapestries... how will the work/series pieces unfold? It sending to think about for myself and for Missoni, too, I'm sure.

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**WW: Your colorful works have ground both small and large spaces, in an array of fabric materials. What was your first piece? What has your practice evolved or stayed the same?**

**RH:** I had a dream about someone asking me this question long ago, and I can describe the first three important works, the first of which I made as a teenager. In high-school I made a self-portrait out of all these vintage leathers and costume jewelry. I was trying to understand how I could be a woman and still be rebel. Looking back, I love how my parents weren't pretentious with these beautiful objects. Then, in college, I made another self-portrait, a second skin that lays out flat on the wall. Don't sweat out of all my old clothes, this more tough-as-love to use the same fabric and sewing it into a new form, and I still have purchased. Then, in 2000, I had to do first gallery installation I remember the works were dictated by the size of the massive wall, and I made a piece that was inspired by the Chinese apartment I had at the time. I had recently visited NYC and came home with several colors of sheer colored vinyl. I had also seen a large Richard Serra installation for the first time, as well as many painting shows in Chelsea with my husband, Ken Hayes. I had a lot of fabric left over from making a dress for my sister-very clothing still works with the sewing machine, but mending the seam rarefy as giant painting compositions. These three works say a lot about my practice still, and it's almost 20 years later...

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**WW: You've mentioned being inspired by the traditions of quilmaking, and the artistry of sculpture, painting, and stained glass. What is it about color, in collection and in power, that you are drawn to?**

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**RH:** Color has the power to catch attention and bring someone into a piece with a gleeful reaction, and it's a building tool for me as well. When I start working, I'm picking one color next to another, and I'm thinking about how it will work in the memoration of a piece. Color is so emotional to me, and I like it for the power that music can have. It is so soothing to me to put a composition together, and I feel that it can be for others, as well. It can be comfortable as well, and fun to mess up the rhythm. I can color very intuitively, and rarely have a piece planned out exactly.



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I acknowledge how color works in different materials, light penetrates glass and plastic, and can throw color throughout a space, giving color volume. I like to take advantage of these different properties, so it is important to let fabric have the swag, let the layers build up, let sun-light shine in, or get dramatic with lighting, let the wind do its thing outside, and not fight it, let shadows happen, let the work have a life.

**WW: Tell us a bit about the residency you most recently participated in, and what you gained from that experience.**

**RH:** My husband and I were both invited to participate in a new residency called the **Tulsa Artist Fellowship**. The residency is incredibly generous with its financial support for artists, and I'm grateful to have the time to devote to projects like this one I did with Missoni.

Tulsa, OK is an old-wealthy, oil-boom town, and a former baron's Italian Villa is now the **Philbrook Museum**, which is where I have an installation up through November. A cornerstone of the museum's collection is Native American art, and we are near the headquarters of several Native American tribes who moved to the region after the Indian Removal Act in 1830. There was a Tulsa Race Massacre here in the 1921, in the heart of Black Wall Street, and pretty close to where the residency is located. I have learned so much from my fellow artists, and am inspired by their activism for equality and artists' rights. This region has a very complicated American tale.

**WW: You said, "Scale and color consume a space, yet there is balance with the delicately sewn stitches and understated shadows, therefore maintaining a strong physical and material presence while remaining sensuous and experiential." How do you create that balance?**

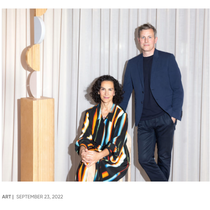
**RH:** In this most recent example of the installation at Surface Conversion, I want to be bold, but I don't want to take over. If something is huge in scale, and bold in color, I find the nuance in the small layering that you may not notice right away. For example, at 3pm the sun shined through both pieces, enhancing the layering, and causing the organza to shimmer beautifully. However, what is the nuance at night? Perhaps it's from across the street, and picking up on all the horizontal lines, or looking down from the second floor. If a jacket is bold in color and catches your eye across the street, isn't it even more awesome if that jacket has three textures, a beautiful button, and a surprising lining? That is the balance, finding the personal moment within a bolder situation.

**WW: You've also applied photographs to various surfaces to create a sensory experience. What are these photographs of? How did you decide to incorporate that unique aspect?**

**RH:** I remember photographing the light coming through the window onto a piece in my studio, getting the film developed, and being able to share that 'view' or moment with friends. I have a box of detail shots from years ago.

Then I started photographing my installations while they were in progress more, and realized that sometimes what would happen during and in between can be way more thrilling than the final product I would set out to create…especially when working outside. When sun and wind add an unpredictable element, it's very exciting.

Eventually, I decided to create more ephemeral installations outside, without the pressure of a dedicated life-span, capture the moments, and fully invite this documentation to be a part of my story. Sometimes these pieces are small weavings catching the sun-light, sometimes it's a giant panel raging in the wind.

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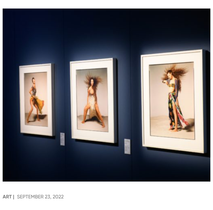

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