

# FORT GANSEVOORT



## Creative Boom

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By Emily Gosling

How a Radical Christian Sect Inspired Two Very Different Contemporary Artists

Useless Flowers is a new show at Fisher Parrish Gallery in Brooklyn of work by Caitlin MacBride and Sam Stewart; whose work is very different in form, but united by their shared use of the form of a bonnet.

Though MacBride works in oil paintings and Stewart's work is based around sculptural lamps; they both draw from the hats worn by the Shakers, a radical Christian sect formed in the mid 18th century that embraced craft, equality, frenetic worship, and celibacy.

Bonnets were fashionable as a mark of modesty in centuries gone by – but doubled as blinders that impeded the wearers' view of the world. As time went on, wearers often subverted their modest intentions by turning them into ornate, frivolous and attention-grabbing fashion statement pieces.

*Work by Caitlin MacBride*

This wasn't the case for The Shakers though, who maintained strict rules on bonnet designs, to ensure wearers' views were obscured, and that their faces were also partially unseen by others. "The separation of public and private is controlled by the bonnet's wearer, as is the choice to delineate oneself physically and spiritually from others," says the gallery.

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*Work by Sam Stewart*

MacBride's paintings look to explore the juxtaposition between soft sewn fabrics and the implications of binding and containment of twisted ropes. Her use of unusual, bright colours and striking compositions move the archaic objects away from their historical and colonial references and make them feel bold and modern.

"Exploring the space where form abandons function, MacBride's work binds the intimate to the structural," says the gallery. Using the grid as a bridge between the art historical and the everyday, the work engages pleats, gathers, and woven structures to overlay high and low. Texture and construction are analysed in the painting process for a closer look at analogue labour and handmade object-hood."

Sam Stewart's lamp pieces meanwhile are very different: stark, minimal and eerie, the light they emit aims to represent the conjunction of, and the disconnect between, the bonnet wearer's interior life and public presentation. "Using meticulous craftsmanship, Stewart's lamps blur the lines between practicality and absurdity," says Fisher Parrish. "The fabric lampshade retains a

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permeability that elicits a visceral bodily relationship to this household object. Spaced throughout the gallery at a familiar height, Stewart's lamps stand among us, becoming part of our own community."

The show runs until 5 April.