

**KARINA BERGMANS ARTIST STATEMENT:**

Our most basic concerns as human beings are communication and the body. A ligature refers to the typographic concept of two letters fused together to form a new letter (æ). Ligaments are connective tissue in the body, joining bone to bone to form a joint. The exhibition, *Ligaments and Ligatures*, connects textile organ sculptures with word association to common diseases. A tension is created by the seriousness of the subject matter and the tangibility of the materials.

*Lungs, Bloodletting* and *HeartAttack* sculptures represent the basis of our human organism: a beating heart, circulating blood and breathing. These highly efficient bodily functions operate without our conscious thought. Derived from textiles materials, viewer is confronted with oversized soft sculptures of our internal organs, demonstrating the mechanisms and complexities of our biological systems, usually unseen. I am inspired by the intersection between art and science. By converging the themes of communication and the body, I create cross disciplinary installations merging art and science. Themes in my work are based on our collective experiences of language, communication, text and play. I thrive on redirecting the original purpose of material and recontextualizing it through a conceptual idea. My work presents a didactic opportunity exploring human fallibility and the infinite malleability of textiles in sculpture making. It also connotes a significant affect on a visceral level through the senses of sight and touch. The use of textiles, material that is omnipresent in our every day, offers an instant tactile connection.

**KARINA BERGMANS BIOGRAPHY:**

As a multi-disciplinary artist, Karina Bergmans works in sculpture, installation, performance, public art and public interventions. What unifies her diverse artistic practice is the use of reclaimed textiles. An installation of inflatable sculptures entitled *Airborne Allergens/Allergènes Aéroportés* was presented at Art-Image in Gatineau in 2016. Large scale textile organs converged with disease words, *Ligaments and Ligatures*, was shown at Ottawa's City Hall Art Gallery and Edmonton's Harcourt House (2013). Bergmans' work has been exhibited at the Ontario Science Centre, Fieldwork, Perth, ON, the Mississippi Mills Textile Museum, Almonte, ON, Stride Gallery +15 Window Space, Calgary, AM, the Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles, and the Dumbo Arts Festival, Brooklyn, NY. Karina has participated in residencies at the Banff Centre and the Moon Rain Textile Biennial, Val-des-Monts, QC. She has received grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council and the City of Ottawa. Bergmans' work has been featured in the *Vies des Arts* (Quebec), the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, *Ottawa Magazine Art of Fashion* issue and *FibreArts*. Karina resides in Ottawa, Ontario. Karina's work can be found online at [KarinaBergmans.com](http://KarinaBergmans.com)

This publication accompanies the exhibition *Ligaments and Ligatures* presented at the Estevan Art Gallery & Museum, from **January 24 – March 20, 2020**.

**Cover Image:** *Bloodletting*, wire, wool, string, assorted textiles, Styrofoam, and tulle, Karina Bergmans, 2008

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## KARINA BERGMANS: AN INTERVIEW

**The following is an e-mail interview conducted between Director/Curator Amber Andersen and Karina Bergmans regarding *Ligaments and Ligatures*. This interview took place on via e-mail on January 22, 2020.**

**AMBER ANDERSEN) I suspect your use of varied textiles and craft media is intended to make frightening subjects, such as heart and lung disease, approachable. What experience, or atmosphere, are you trying to generate for your viewers when looking at these tactile oversized diseases/traumas? Is your desire to create conversation amongst viewers regarding these diseases?**

**KARINA BERGMANS) I** am trying to create an appreciation and an emotion towards our unseen organs. Working without our conscious thought, day in and day out, pumping, beating, breathing all the while we do all these things out there in the world.

I find the number of complex processes that our bodies undergo fascinating. At the same time, one of the most ubiquitous and indispensable materials in our daily lives is textiles. Textiles are everywhere. We could not function without them: clothes, furniture, linens, footwear, carpets, filters, tents, industrial lifting straps, biomedical fabric for surgeries and many, many more. Pairing these two concepts in an artwork, creates an atmosphere of familiarity and irresistibility.

**AA) Not all of the pieces in the exhibition can be readily identified as a disease and some pieces, such as “blood clot”, can work as either a positive or negative function within the body. Is it your desire to have them viewed as negative functions? Or for the viewer to get transfixed at the vaguely familiar simultaneously alien sculptures in the exhibition?**

**KB) *Bloodletting*** might be one of my oldest works and I made it before I got focused on making organs. It’s one of those pieces that got made and I had really no intention for it, just a drive for the materials and colour and shapes. Then it sat around for a while and I made a whole bunch of other things, organs and letter pillows, and I came back to it with then seeing it was rather the colour of dried blood, but also fuzzy and friendly. Like you want to hug it. It fit in with the other *Ligaments and Ligatures* sculptures even though it wasn’t a failing heart, or diabetic pancreas and I felt it stood on its own without a word coming out of it. This way it could have a positive connotation (it’s good that our blood clots) or negative as in a stroke or thrombosis.

I am drawn to making art works in bright colours and creating a fun atmosphere which in some ways made my work seem like a children playground. But I just t didn’t want to make make art for kids, I wanted to use that as hook to draw in everyone, young or old. It’s our basic level of perception: colours and textures. At some point in my practice, I wanted to create work that offered a serious message, that sometime things aren’t so fun, there’s life challenges and health failures and we all share these same struggles. I am not trained as an artist, I studied psychology, so am interested in what unites as a humanity, a collective unconscious of sorts.

**AA) It should be noted that I curated specific works from the complete body of *Ligaments and Ligatures*, choosing specifically blood, heart and lungs as a focus. The entire body of work includes many other internal organs. How did you select which areas of the body to focus on?**

**KB) It** started with this very strange shiny maroon vinyl that my husband pointed out to me on a rare occasion he was with me in a fabric shop. It looked so liver-y and weird I just had to get some. I had been making a few cells sculptures around that time so it wasn’t a stretch to make a giant liver. It’s almost quilt-like and the backing is a clear vinyl so you can see that I’ve stuffed it with all these little bits and scraps from my sewing. That was a practical use of all my scraps, which I find quite attractive, and also replicated what the liver does for us in our bodies, cleaning the blood. I enjoyed this parallel theme. Concurrently, working on *Text-ing*, adding the word ‘failure’ to the liver was a natural progression in using text and words in my art making. From there, I made kidneys with the word ‘disease’, a set of *Thinking Caps*, a neuron, a *ColonCancer*, *StomachUlcer*. Then I learned of the word *pneunoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis* which relates to a lung disease so I made lungs. Along with *GallbladderStones*, *BladderInfection*, *PancreasDiabetes*, *HeartAttack*, these sculptures made up my City Hall exhibition in Ottawa in 2013. I can’t say I have a specific method for selecting the organs I’ve made; they’ve been inspired from different paths.

**AA) Can you discuss the word play, my interpretation of your choice of title, or why you chose *Ligaments and Ligatures* as an exhibition title?**

**KB) I** adore words and language. Communication is the basis of what we do as humans. I’m not so much of a crossword puzzle person, but enjoy a good game of scrabble. An early art project was *Text-ing*, consisting of

over 60 letter shaped pillows, allowed me to ‘write’ any word I wanted. Other art works or projects or performances with word play include:

*Chapeau Gateau*  
*Meat Meet*  
*Organs and Organisms*  
*Lymph Nymph*  
*Airborne Allergens*

The words ligaments and ligatures were so wonderfully related, it really brought the project together in a cohesive title

**AA) Scale plays an important role in your exhibition. Most people will never know what their internal organs look like, but we have a sense of their scale organically in our bodies. To have the size so dramatically exaggerated makes me wonder if you are wanting the effect of the viewer to feel small? The idea of these diseases being so overwhelming to both the body and mind, does the scale feed into this notion?**

**KB) I**’ve made the organs to be oversized sculptures so that you can physically relate to it. You might have to walk around it, or look up at it, or bend down to get a closer look. When I made the *LiverFailure*, I made it quilt like because I wanted to be able to get underneath it, like a blanket, so I could be enveloped by it. With the larger works like lungs and pancreas, I wanted a viewer to be overwhelmed by the works, which is how one feels when you’re sick, it can be all encompassing, keeping you in bed or in the hospital, taking over your life. With the *StomachUlcer*, I made this piece into a giant backpack to intimate the sensation of having to carry it around; which is what we do with our ailments and diseases, we take them with us.

**AA) Are these found textiles? Donated? Scavenged from your own or family and friend’s collections? They have a retro feel to me. Particularly some of the textile elements included in the composition of *Bloodletting*, such as notions that would have been used in wedding veil head pieces in the 80s. How did your source the materials for this exhibition? Where did the idea come from to make these works and with these materials?**

**KB) I** get my material from many different sources. I love thrifted materials and fabric swaps. I sometimes get donated items like a bag of mis manufactured socks, or someone’s tie collection. For several years, I had a clothing line of one of kind clothing that was a mix of castoff and

new fabrics, some of which would also be used for art and sculptures. Although I admit to having a bit of a collection problem, I am also very organized so I like to think I know where things are in the studio when I need them. I have put a moratorium on bringing in materials in without getting rid of stuff. On one memorable trip to the dumpster at my studio, I found a huge bag of silk scraps from the wedding dress manufacturer on the second floor of the building. I am still making my way through these precious off-cuts that have been used in the lungs and dyed for the lining of the stomach ulcer. The retro look is possibly a product of the age of the materials once it finds me, but must also be my affinity for a hippy, old time-y vibe.

**AA) This is an older series and I know you have been working on new works. What are you working on next?**

**KB) After *Ligaments and Ligatures***, I made a set of inflatable lungs called *Take a Deep Breath/Bronchi*. Working with air as a material appealed to me, because once the show is over, the work can be stored very easily. After *Bronchi*, I had an exhibition called *Airborne Allergens*, an installation of *Pollen*, *Mold* and *Virus* cells as large-scale inflatable sculptures. They are made of tyvek and are lit from the inside with a custom rotating light fixture, offering movement and highlighting the tyvek cell-like texture. When I was working on these sculptures I had to crawl around on the inside and I became fascinated with the interior space of these structures. After a few rounds of grant applications and advancing the work in the studio, I was successful with Ontario Arts Council and Canada Council funding to create cell sculptures for inside of these inflatable works. I have sewn clear vinyl windows into the tyvek so a viewer can peer in to see a fantastical landscape of cell structures. This new project is called *Intracellular Landscapes*.