



Hang Together

A Denver artist subverts layers of utilitarian materials into soft wall sculptures.

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The first of Derrick Velasquez's vinyl wall pieces was a serendipitous accident. The Denver-based artist had been working as a bookbinder in 2011, making leather and vinyl journals to sell at craft fairs around the country. As part of his labor-intensive process, he would cut inch-wide straps to fasten his books. "I was just sloppily hanging them on a screw in the wall," the artist recalls. Yet the visual buildup of this soft material in a wide range of colors—cerulean blue, bright orange, lemon yellow—was striking. "I'd been working with ideas of accumulation and bulk nominal material," the artist recalls. "Vinyl was an unexpected revelation."

The draped utilitarian fabric evolved into the wall-mounted sculptures of his "Untitled" series, in which strips of upholstery vinyl hang over wooden pegs shaped like long narrow wedges. Unseen inside, a metal rod holds the strips in place.

Such vinyl is typically meant for furniture, and that's in part what makes it attractive to Velasquez, who enjoys upending expectations in his work. "It's a specific surface that you're supposed to sit on," he explains, "but the accumulation of strips makes a new form on the wall that denies its original purpose."

Velasquez is an active member of the Denver creative community who strives to foster opportunities for young and diverse artists. In his pieces, too, he is drawn to "the way things hold together." Indeed, layering—of fabric, images, architectural ornamentation or themes of societal hierarchies—is central across his body of work. Other pieces featuring trim molding, for example, subdue the material's innate socioeconomic connotations by casting it in silicone and twisting it into knots.

The abstract forms recall a variety of images—a cross section of the Earth's layers, a wig or even a headdress—and the artist's works range in size, from 2 to over 5 feet wide, featuring a rainbow's worth of hues arranged in aesthetically pleasing stripes or subtle ombres. But Velasquez looks at them in relation to the human body. "I think of the way they stack as something like shoulders. There's bone that serves as armature, then you have muscle, tendon and skin layered on top of it," he explains. "The more you add to it, the softer those curves become." ■



In his studio, artist Derrick Velasquez (left) fabricates wall sculptures by methodically layering strips of upholstery vinyl (opposite) into gently drooping abstract forms (below).

