Maintenance and Operations continues my fascination with industrial functionality. Sculptural installations made primarily of fabric and steel call attention to hidden though ubiquitous infrastructures designed for maintenance, conveyance or protection. The works emphasize an accidental beauty in the compositions of human-made systems, apparently created with no intention of aesthetics. Yet their contrived singularity of purpose, as found in real conduit pathways or imagined circuit patterns, evoke an underlying absurdity in our relentless technological advancement.

The work was started at the Jentel residency in Wyoming in the summer of 2012. Inspired by the region’s geology as well as the markers of industry seen in the landscape on my drive there, references to the geological strata infuse the structures in the exhibition. I want to draw a connection between raw natural resources and the technological innovations that have ultimately spawned from them through human intentions and machinations. I find humor and tenderness in the sometimes randomly customized structures that inspire the works, but also in my own labor in emulating them out of fabric.

Steel frames densely layered with stained burlap, cheesecloth and silk hint at some kind of filtration device, though their randomly spaced grid configuration alludes to a past more effective state with a more current sense of exhaustion. Fabricated boxes with surfaces of organically earth- and rust-stained canvas are detailed with embroidery thread and wire. These in combination with silk-covered cords create a puzzling conduit network. A blanket with embedded circuitry hovers between comforting and menacing. A cargo net piled high with an eccentric assortment of blankets and sacks, hints at geological strata, while the connotations of re-used fabrics also alludes to social strata.

The application of organic staining, dirt and rust on esteemed silk and canvas, subverts the authority of institutional systems and exposes a susceptibility, and eventual impermanence in the calculated infrastructures that our society has come to depend on.
Open Cage, 2011
Spring tempered steel, pins, cotton twill tape, hardware, 144" x 36" x 36"

Conduit study / [f]utility boxes, 2013
canvas, steel, shellac, thread, handmade silk cording, dimensions variable
Installation view

*All maintenance tools will be returned to*, 2013
acrylic on found object, 41" x 36"
The space debris that accumulated in a fraction of the time that Ivan and Vladislav were working on their respective careers, 2013
ink and graphite on paper, found clipboards, 37” x 52”
Sleep induction equipment, 2013
Army blanket, steel, cotton, vintage electrical cord, 24" x 74" x 40"
'May’s bulging Materials Flow Management, consists of bundled fabrics lashed to the wall by a net of cloth straps. A pleasing throwback to the dawn of post-minimalism, it collects sad new resonance from the everyday sight of people asleep on city streets cocooned in whatever wraps they can salvage.’


Materials flow management, 2013
found and treated fabrics, blankets, rubber, webbing, hardware, 81” x 81” x 12”
Pressing instructions, 2011
Found fabrics, canvas, 71” x 12” (orientation variable)
Growing up in the suburbs of Los Angeles, Victoria May’s creative life sparked at the age of ten when she learned how to make her own clothes. Part drawing and part sculptural construction, sewing requires incredible patience and an obsession for detail. This labor-intensive process, however, is ingrained in May. In every body of work, her instinct returns to it; and textiles, thread, mending, stitching, layering, unraveling etc. serve as material, process and metaphor in her sensitive multi-media works. “Sewing has always stayed a part of my practice. Any problem I have I ask, can I sew it? Can I use thread!” Engaging her masterful hand with the soft and malleable fibers, May creatively untangles the personal and cultural associations of her materials through her art and process.

...Along with the diagrams and mass-produced found objects she presents, however, May still revels in the hand-made imperfections of things, as if yearning for a simpler time. In presenting her assemblages, objects and architectural interventions, May seems to be winking at us and saying isn’t all of this so wonderfully beautiful and strange?

From garments to abstract assemblages and to formal “utility panels,” May’s tactile works evoke a sense of effortlessness and familiarity. Inspired by her everyday observations of the world around her, she combines humble materials like hard concrete with supple thread, or the transparent weave of silk organza with the cold surface of steel to illustrate a palpable tension. Life is a balancing act and May distills its moments, emotions and complex systems into objects of oppositional fields. Vibrating between vulnerability and strength; darkness and light; or femininity and masculinity; the works ultimately speak to the tender predicament of the human condition.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

San Francisco Chronicle art critic Kenneth Baker writes of Victoria May’s work: “…an artist to watch, in touch with urgent realities and possessing a lively feel for materials and symbols.” May was profiled on KQED’s “Spark,” show on the arts. Her work has been featured in FiberArts and in the Princeton Architectural Press publication By Hand. She was selected as a Silicon Valley Creates Artist Laureate for 2015, received a Santa Cruz County Rydell Visual Arts Fellowship in 2010 and has been nominated for the Eureka Fellowship several times. She has been an artist in residence at the Jentel Foundation and Kala. Her work is in numerous private collections, and her objects and installations have been exhibited extensively throughout the San Francisco Bay Area as well as nationally and internationally. She lives and works in the San Francisco Bay Area.