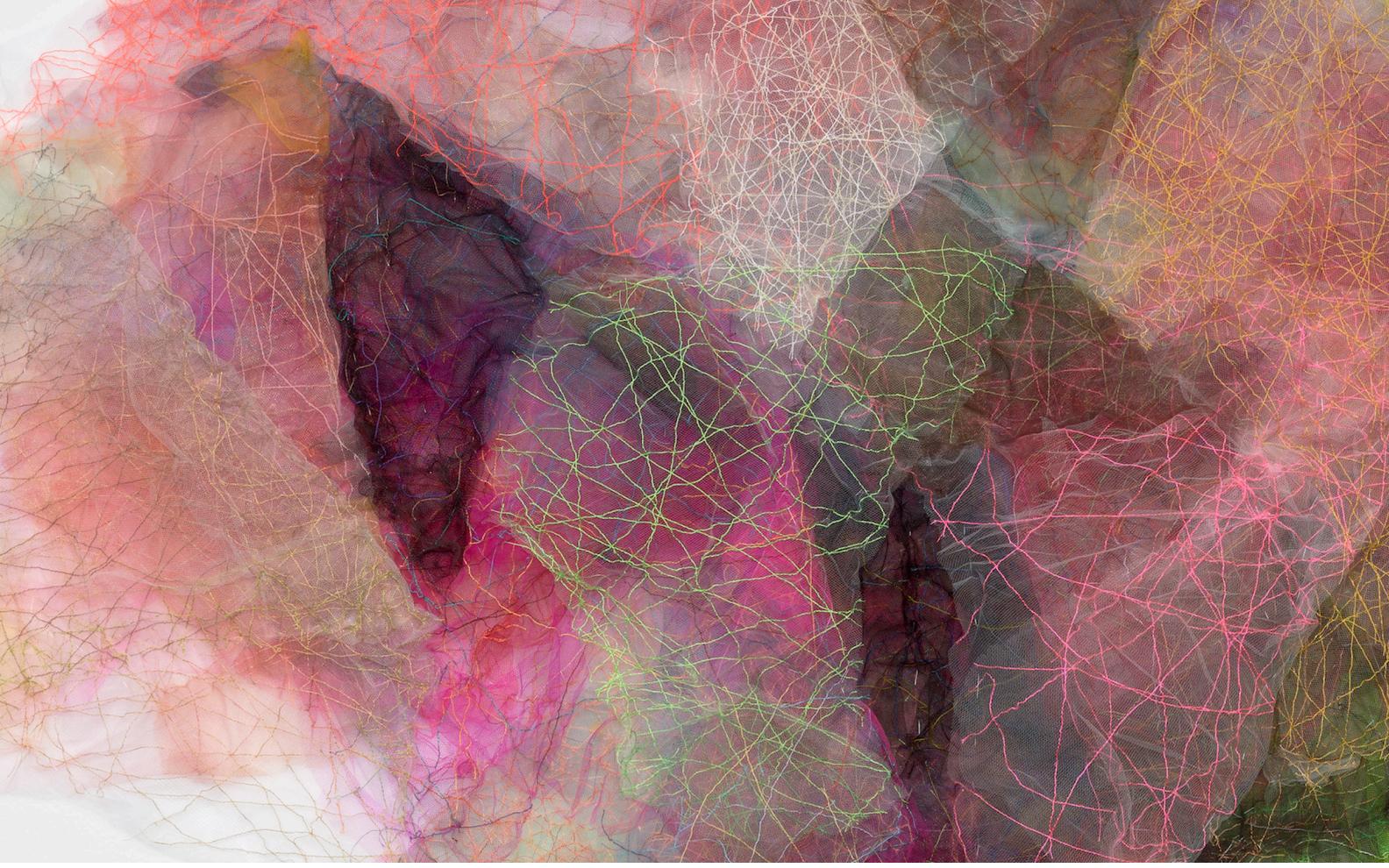

CHROMATIC AWARD

Holly Wong
she/her | San Francisco, California, U.S..

I build the *Nereids* series from layers of nylon tulle, each one nearly weightless and transparent. On its own, a single layer is almost invisible. Stitched together by the dozens, they become dense, luminous and unmistakably present. “Nereid 3” (2025) is the warmest of the five pieces in the series. Its reds and pinks give it a bodily weight. Color is how this figure arrives.

The Nereids were sea nymphs in Greek mythology, fifty daughters who guided sailors through dangerous water and offered protection to those lost at sea. I am drawn to them as figures of transformation, moving between human and divine, between water and air. Each sea nymph was her own distinct figure, and together the fifty formed a single collective devoted to protection and guidance. “Nereid 3” is where that idea lives for me. She is one figure inside a family; the individual body inside a shared story.

My process is slow and physical. I begin at the sewing machine, stitching light-reflective thread across each length of tulle, back and forth, until the lines accumulate into networks, thousands of them, something close to a nervous system in the cloth. I then roll and layer that stitched tulle onto a crinoline substrate,

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pinning it with dressmaker pins and hand-sewing it into place with invisible thread until everything holds as one. The thread catches light, so parts of the surface shimmer while others recede. Standing in front of the work, I never see the same piece twice. The color shifts as I move, and as the light in the room changes throughout the day.

I think of my process as painting with transparency. The saturation in “Nereid 3” is not laid down in a single pass. It gathers. One color of tulle over another, one color of thread over that, until warmth becomes weight and the figure takes on a body. No single layer is solid, and yet layered together they become a whole. The presence of the work is not declared all at once. It accumulates over the long hours of making.

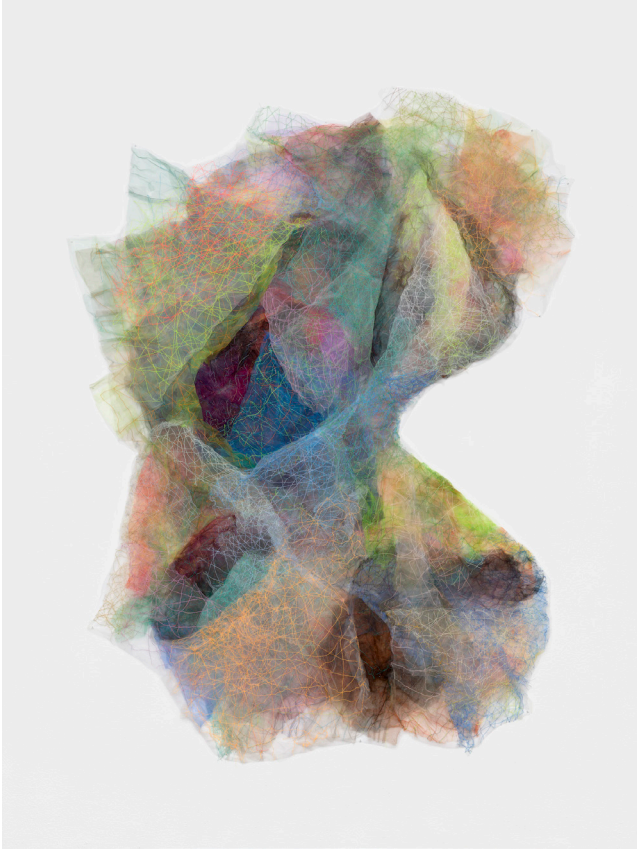
This is the heart of what I call radical repair. I begin with material that is fragile and ephemeral, tulle so fine it drifts at a breath, and I work it into something more complex and resilient than any single layer could be. I am interested in the labor that has long belonged to women: the sewing, mending and tending, and in what happens when that labor is given scale and made monumental. A stitch is a small act of care. Enough of them, held together with patience, can build a body large enough to stand inside a room.

Greek mythology gives me a framework for this. Across my work I return to figures who move through loss, memory and survival. The Nereids protect. Others forget, or remember, or endure. These are old stories, but I do not treat them as finished. I treat them as living. They give shape to questions I keep asking about how we carry harm and how we might carry one another.

Bottom left: **Holly Wong,** *Nereid 3*, 2025. Nylon tulle machine-sewn with light reflective thread and hand-sewn to crinoline substrate, 60 x 48 x 3 inches. Left page: detail. Photos: John Janca.

Bottom right: **Holly Wong,** *Nereid 2*, 2025. Nylon tulle machine-sewn with light reflective thread and hand-sewn to crinoline substrate, 60 x 48 x 3 inches. Photo: John Janca.





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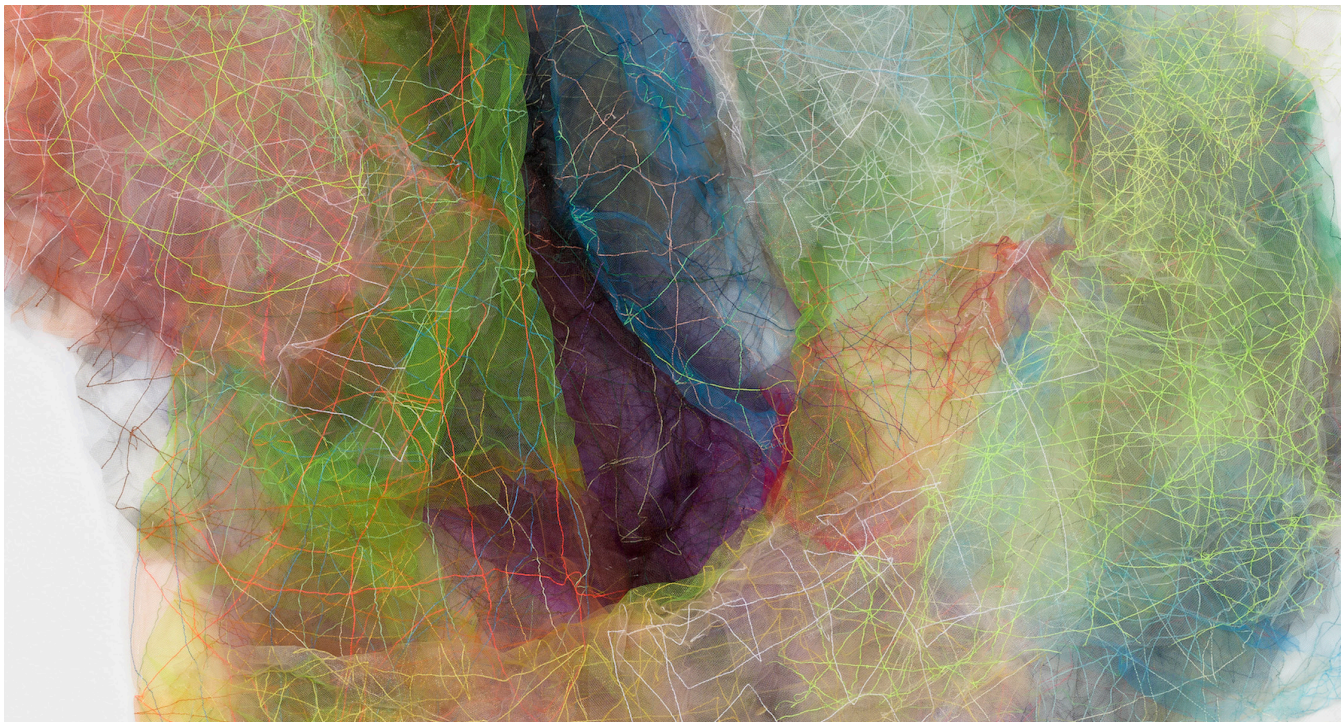



Color carries a great deal of that meaning. It is not decoration in these works; instead, it is how presence is built and how feeling is registered. The cooler Nereids read as protection held at a distance, atmosphere rather than force. In its warmth, “Nereid 3” feels closer to the body, more insistent. Here the color does that work directly. The warmth is not describing the feeling of closeness. It is producing it.

I make this work slowly, moving between the machine and my hands, and the repetition is a kind of meditation for me, as well as a kind of endurance. Each piece asks for patience and returns something I could not have reached any faster. To be recognized for color feels gratifying, because color is where this figure becomes most herself. She is transparency gathered into presence, one small mending held up to the light.

hollywongart.com | @hollywongart

Bottom: **Holly Wong,** *Nereid 1*, 2025. Nylon tulle machine-sewn with light reflective thread and hand-sewn to crinoline substrate, 60 x 48 x 3 inches. Top: detail. Photos: John Janca.

Right page, left: **Holly Wong,** *Nereid 5*, 2026. Nylon tulle machine-sewn with light reflective thread and hand-sewn to crinoline substrate, 60 x 48 x 3 inches. Right page, right: detail. Photos: John Janca.

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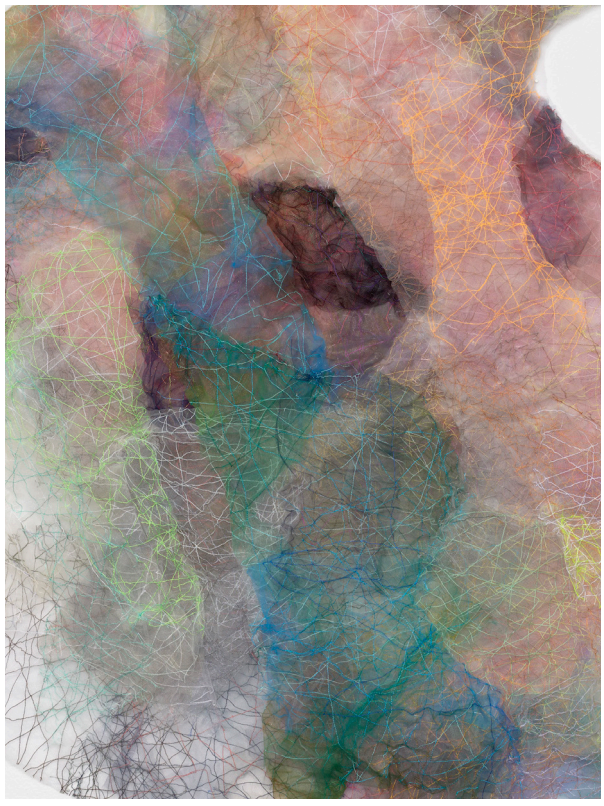

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