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Novel (2025) Gouache

These days, when truth dissolves, replaced by careless pronouncements, the body shivers. Truth dictated by the powerful propagates to keep that power intact.

Marta Morazzoni's *The Invention of Truth* combines two narratives: one of the 300 women who embroidered the Bayeux Tapestry in the 11th century, and the second, Victorian art critic John Ruskin's visit to Amiens near the end of his life. I titled my gouache painting, *Novel*, as a double entendre, responding to these days when truth is a novelty.

I've grappled with "truth" as a subject in various sculptures, among them: *The Truth Palace* (1991), *Calamity Jane and Questions of Truth* (1984-85) and the series *Fact Fiction Boxes* (1983-86). Each depicts truth as a construction, often humorously exposing its disheartening fissures. Three decades ago, curator and writer Lucinda Barnes gifted me the Morazzoni novel, particularly because of my sculpture, *A Problem with Maintenance* (1983). The large display case houses my grandmother's ironing board cover, and the misplaced brass plaque stands in front of it, telling the history of the Bayeux Tapestry. The scorched cover reveals years of labor and includes the addition of an iron-shaped burn that slyly refers to the scene with the comet that is well-known in the tapestry. The paint colors of the display were matched using paint chips to LACMA's dusty pink and muted blue walls, and a photograph of the museum's temperature control box nestles on the bottom of the display.

This is a favorite book for me because I have read it so many times and the slim volume is perfect when traveling, just as I have it now for my flight to India. I like this book because Lucinda gave it to me as a meaningful acknowledgement of my work.

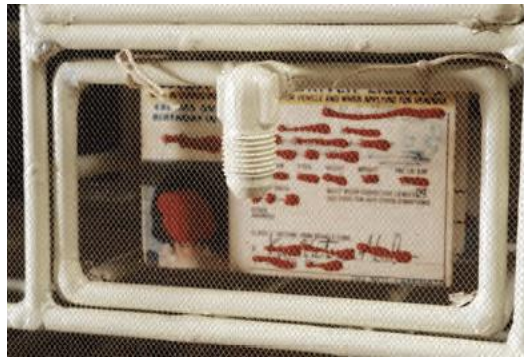
Novel is a painting of the book itself, modifying the original jacket design by Martha Simpson. I've zeroed in on a detail of the tapestry to emphasize the endless tragedy of war and transformed the rectangular title section into a "comet" shooting into frame. The detail of the embroidery is deliberate and close to painful, executed with 000 sable brushes, stitch by stitch like the laborious skill of the original embroidery. In the lower section of the painting, the book dissolves, the gouache liquifies. The novel begins to disappear like truth itself.

At the close of the book, Morazzoni notes this Ruskin quotation: "We can imagine falsities, we can compose falsehoods, but only truth can be invented." What comes to mind is that truth is not the opposite of lies. Or the contemporary exclamation, "This is My truth" shrinks through repetition. Truth is born in creativity according to the Ruskin quote. Correct? Maybe truth is dead. I can live with that.

Referenced artworks



A Problem with Maintenance, 1983, Ironing board that belonged to Abeles' grandmother, "Temperature Control" box (photographs and metal), etched brass plaque with history of Bayeux Tapestry, metallic thread that passes through the cabinet sides, wood, plexiglass
 Dimensions of case: 74" x 24" x 17" Dimensions of stand: 40" x 24"
 Gift of the Stuart Spence and Judith Vida-Spence Collection. Collection of Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Photos: James Franklin, David Familian



The Truth Palace, 1991, Welded steel, netting, identification documents marked with red pigment
78" x 35" x 12"
Collection of Barbara Cohn Photo: Robert Wedemeyer



Calamity Jane and Questions of Truth, 1984-85, Encyclopedia information about Jane on sticks in bottles, excerpt from a letter to her daughter about her marriage to Wild Bill Hickock, photographs of lie detectors and Jane, suitcase, lie detector readings on wood, acrylic on sheer fabric, metal, enamel 85" x 33" x 19"



A Deduction, 1984, IUF (Copper 7), altered map, wood brass, acrylic, text 3" x 11.25" x 13" Photo David Familian

Text on artwork reads: "Although previously considered to be a numerical symbol from North America, archaeologists have recently excavated a camel skeleton in the Sahara that had been implanted with a similar device. The evidence suggests the probability of an isthmus once connecting North America with Africa."