

# echo gone wrong

Photo reportage from the exhibition 'Lines That Hold, Forms That Remember' by Elizabeth 'Grandma' Layton and Skuja Braden at Outer Space Gallery, Concord, New Hampshire

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Dear Reader,

At first glance the pairing seems unlikely: Elizabeth "Grandma" Layton, the Kansas artist whose flinty continuous-line drawings became a late-life act of clarity, and Skuja Braden, the Latvia/California duo who build porcelain vessels and figures, then paint them as if paper were curved into air. But the wager here is that line — the simplest instrument — can travel between mediums without losing its intelligence. It does. *Lines That Hold, Forms That Remember* is a through-the-looking-glass of time and a rabbit hole toward the future — a passage from past into future where line and form keep speaking.

For Baltic readers: Layton (1909–1993) was a Kansas artist whose late-life continuous-line self-portraits became nationally recognized; this show pairs her drawings with our porcelain forms in a dialogue about line, attention, and memory.

## The Frame

Layton's drawings are famously economical: a single, continuous contour gathers a face, a posture, the ambient weather of a day — truthful without ornament; tender without sentimentality.

Skuja Braden — the collaborative duo of Ingūna Skuja and Melissa Braden — shape porcelain forms whose surfaces carry drawn imagery, layered glazes, and lusters, fusing sculpture and surface into incisive narratives of embodiment, desire, politics, and compassion.

This exhibition is a conversation through time about how attention becomes responsibility: how a line can steady a life, and how a vessel can keep what matters. Their practices meet in shared ethics — compassion, humor as clarity, beauty as evidence. *The line holds. The form remembers.*

## How the Conversation Began

Elizabeth 'Grandma' Layton drew for twenty-five years; Skuja Braden have worked together for over twenty-five. Layton came from Wellsville, Kansas; Melissa Braden's paternal family hails from Chanute, scarcely an hour down the road. Melissa first encountered Layton's work in 1994 at the Humboldt University Library, opening *Through the Looking Glass* and finding a voice in contour that neither flattered nor lied. Layton's practice — begun in her late sixties through blind contour drawing (eyes on the mirror, not the page) — was daily and exacting, a discipline that turned witness into form.

She faced public life with private courage, using her own image as a proxy to stand beside those pressed by history: racism, colonialism, women's rights, censorship, AIDS, aging. The drawings are not about recovery from the world but about responsibility to it. Exhibitions followed widely, including at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American Art.

## What's on the Walls

The selection at Outer Space Gallery is restrained and lucid. Like Layton's, Skuja Braden's focus is conceptually driven. While Layton returns to herself as the vehicle, Skuja Braden remain rooted in porcelain's materiality yet avoid static or repeated forms. Not every form is a vessel in the strict sense, yet each carries a hollow core — an inside and an outside — so the word feels right. On paper, Layton's line discloses a mind in motion — the unshowy virtuosity of a contour that refuses fuss. Opposite, porcelain has learned from drawing's restraint while allowing a baroque aside: image and form argue their way to agreement, humor pricking sentiment before it hardens into piety. The eye moves from graphite to glaze and back again, noticing how attention feels when it meets friction.

## Domestic Forms, Public Stakes

Grounding the conversation in the domestic is a smart curatorial choice by Roger Buttles. Vessels propose use; figures propose relation; both carry history. In Skuja Braden's work, the domestic is not safe harbor but public stage, where image and object negotiate satire, doubt, and care. Layton's economy helps read that stage without distraction. Her line is a neighbor's voice; theirs is the same voice carried across another room.

## Hold the Line

*Not "therapy" but a war call—labor, courage, and an uncompromising line.*

Elizabeth Layton lived with severe depression and underwent electroconvulsive therapy. Late in life she set herself a blunt practice: draw every day. After six months of daily drawing, the depression eased. We refuse the downgrading label "therapy art." What happened here is artistic labor with real stakes—discipline, looking, and honesty used as tools to survive. That is why her work is revolutionary: it breaks the silence around women's suffering and models a method rather than a diagnosis. It is a call to action—for anyone carrying trauma—to make, again and again, until meaning answers back. (*This describes Layton's experience, not medical advice.*)

## Context that Clarifies, Not Inflates

Skuja Braden represented Latvia at the 59th Venice Biennale with *Selling Water by the River* (2022), an interior blown open into a weather system of 300+ porcelain works; in 2025 the duo received the Baltic Balva for Visual Artists; a permanent monument for the Kistefos Museum in Norway opens in 2026. These markers don't puff the work; they insist that porcelain can operate as contemporary art without apology. Clay isn't a genre cage; it is a grammar. In Layton's company, that grammar reads with extra clarity.

## If the Show Has a Thesis

Line, here, is a form of ethics. The graphite declares what it will and will not pretend; the glaze line risks being permanent and public. Both carry memory without embalming it. In an era when skill is mistaken for polish, the exhibition argues for the older pairing of skill and truthfulness. The fragile stuff — paper and porcelain — turns out to be the reliable thing.

## A Small Room, an Un-small Conversation

Outer Space is a small room in a small city, but the conversation it stages is anything but provincial. It suggests that the distance between a Layton self-portrait and a Skuja Braden vessel is not a genre gap but a hinge — and that our oldest tools — hand, line, fired earth — still make contemporary sense. The works do not cancel each other's histories; they let those histories shake hands.

Text courtesy of the artists.

Photography: Morgan Karanasios.

Courtesy of the artists, Outer Space Gallery, the Elizabeth "Grandma" Layton estate, and Kaufmann Repetto Gallery

## Lines That Hold, Forms That Remember

Outer Space Gallery, Concord, New Hampshire

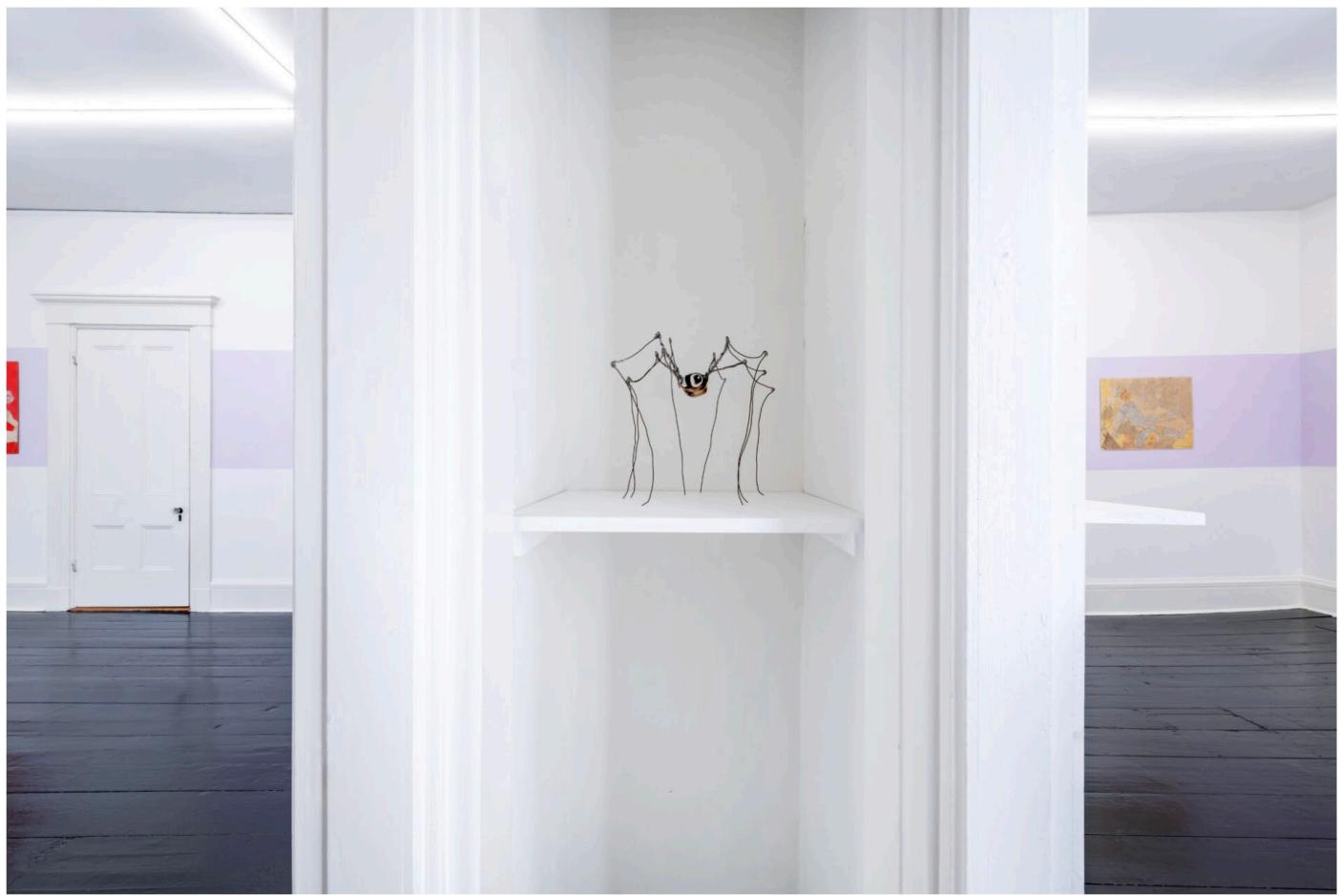
Curated by Roger Buttles

Dates: October 4, 2025-December 20, 2025

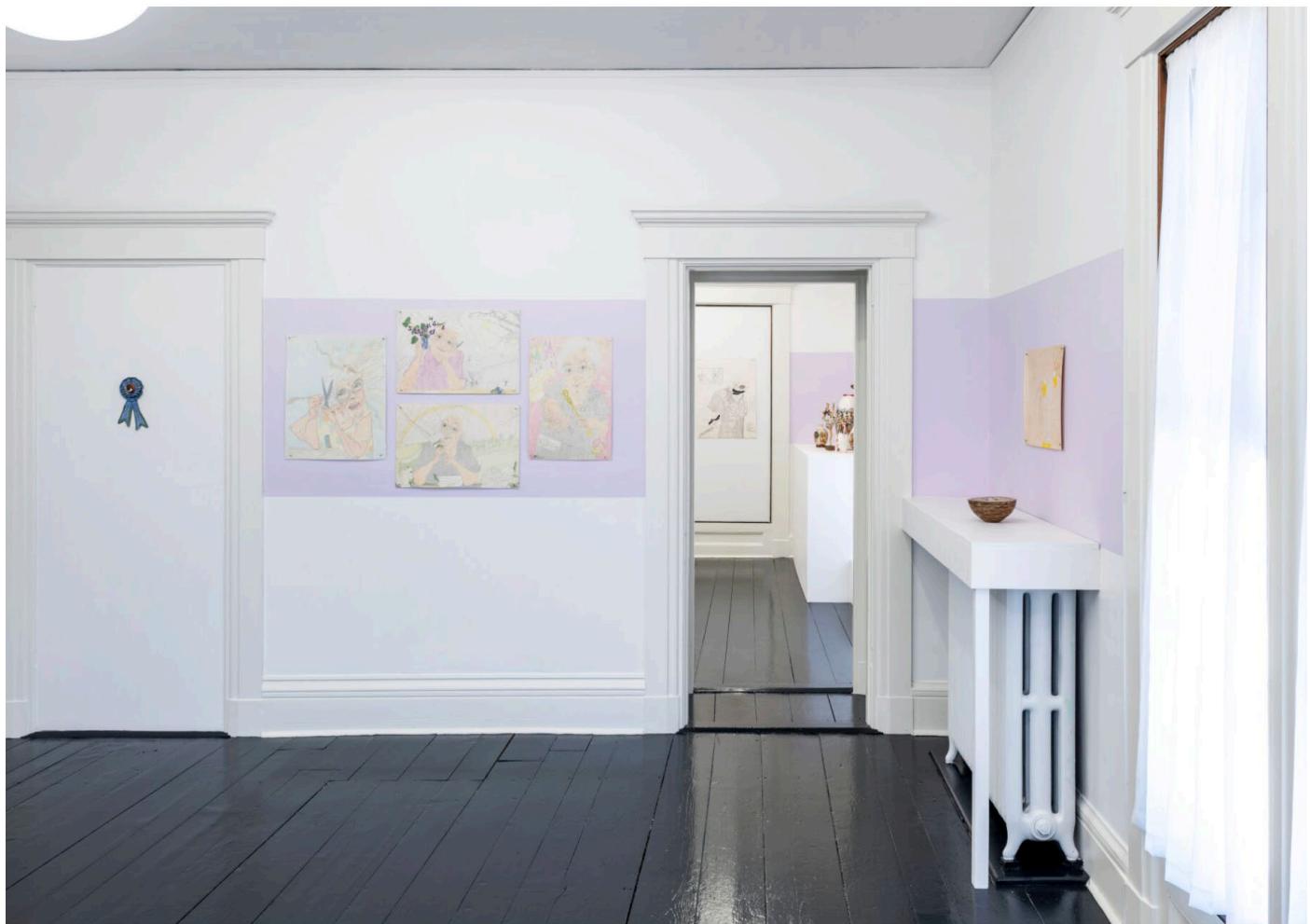
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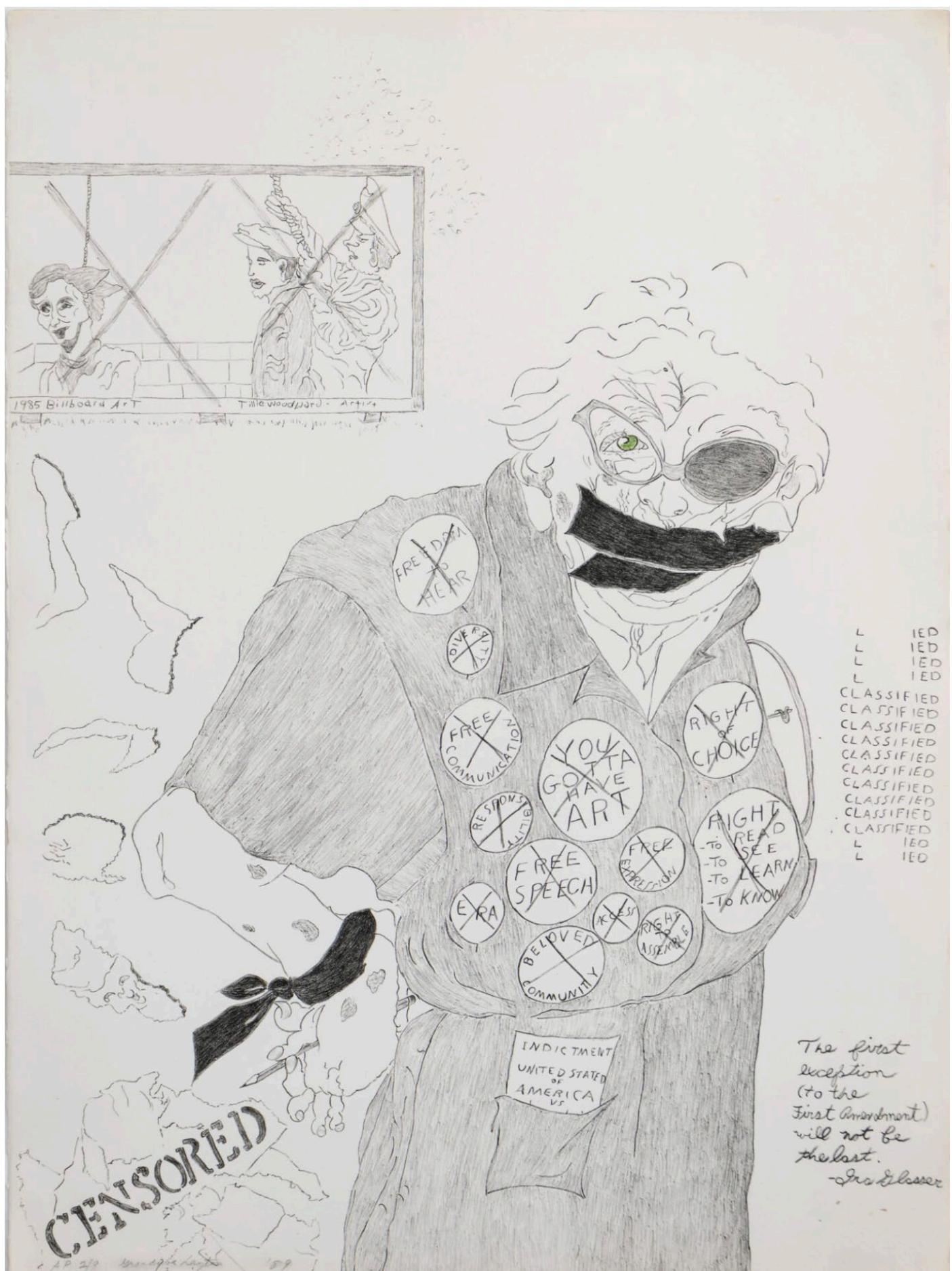
















Tell her to hold you, bud of a rose,  
For I speak as one who knows,  
who knows.  
—May Frank Converse













Pat and Sherman  
Drawing by Tony  
Jan 4, 1992



