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RISD Museum to Open First U.S. Survey of Liz Collins' Groundbreaking Practice

Liz Collins: Motherlode Features More Than 80 Works,
Across the Full Arc of the Artist's Genre-Defying Career

On View July 19, 2025 - January 11, 2026

PROVIDENCE, RI, March 21, 2025—This summer, the RISD Museum will open the first U.S. survey of artist Liz Collins' genre-defying work. For more than three decades, Collins has moved fluidly between the realms of fine art, fashion, and design, pushing material and technical boundaries to create works that evoke a depth of emotion, energy, and individual expression. The exhibition, titled *Liz Collins: Motherlode*, will feature more than 80 objects, capturing for the first time the full arc of Collins' career from the 1980s to the present day. *Motherlode* includes important examples of her immersive textile installations and wallworks, intricate and monumental woven hangings, fashion, needlework, drawings, performance documentation, and ephemera. In keeping with the RISD Museum's commitment to centering makers and broadening perspectives, the exhibition vividly showcases the trailblazing nature of Collins' work as well as the artist's deep commitment to illuminating Queer feminist creative practice and environmental activism. *Liz Collins: Motherlode* will be on view at RISD Museum from July 19, 2025 - January 11, 2026.

The exhibition is curated by Kate Irvin, RISD Museum's Department Head and Curator of Costume and Textiles, in close collaboration with the artist. *Motherlode* is accompanied by the first monograph on Collins' work. The book offers new scholarship on the significance and influence of Collins' career by industry leaders and those from her inner circle. Contributions include a lively conversation between the artist and art historian and critic Julia Bryan-Wilson and essays by Irvin, independent curator, writer, and historian Glenn Adamson, and writers, designers, and cultural thinkers Octavia Burgel, Zoe Latta, and Eileen Myles. The book, which is also titled *Liz Collins: Motherlode*, is being published by Hirmer Publishers and will be available in July 2025.

"Collins's creative process has yielded a spectacular abundance of work that runs the gamut from the raw and experimental to refined design collaborations, and to monumental fine art installations—an oeuvre that plots an adventurous course to a motherlode of multisensory well-being," said Irvin. "She

has always been a fearless innovator, seamlessly moving between disciplines to create work. Through the exhibition, the RISD Museum deepens its commitment to artists who push boundaries and expand how we experience art. *Motherlode* highlights the full breadth of her practice—her relentless experimentation with material and form, her embrace of fiber as a powerful medium for storytelling, and her unwavering commitment to amplifying Queer community and pride.”

Motherlode follows Collins across her many shifts and evolutions in pursuit of her aesthetic and conceptual vision, from the success of her knit-focused label to her early forays into installation works, to her performances with knitting machines inspired in part by her time teaching at RISD, and through to her ongoing engagement with issues of personal and communal meaning across a vast array of media. Throughout every turn, Collins has sought new generative space for experimentation and maintained a keen sense of humor and mischief. As discussed in Irvin’s insightful introductory essay in the accompanying book, Collins has been the ever-changing trickster, stretching the possibilities of her materials and upending expectations of how her work should look, feel, and communicate to audiences.

This is especially evident in her deep engagement with yarn, fabric, and textiles. Her radical approach has firmly asserted the power of these elements to hold and convey meaning, dismantling notions of textiles as “lesser art.” *Motherlode* features a dynamic range of Collins’ textile works, including examples from her fashion label such as *Lumberjack Goddess Dress* (2005) and *Samurai Coat* (2001), wall pieces and installations like *Euphoria II* (2016), *Veins-Darkness* (2022), and *Power Portal* (2024), monumental woven hangings like *Rainbow Mountain Weather* (2024) and *Zagreb Mountains* (2022); and more intimate wall-works such as *Specimens* (2000/2017) and *Worst Year Ever* (2010/2017), among numerous others. The exhibition also includes seminal works on paper, including *Ecstasy* (2014-2016) and *Atlas Matrix Variation 2* (2020), as well as ephemera and documentation from her *Knitting Nation* project, which through live performance-installations produced large-scale textiles that protested the Iraq War, examined the rainbow flag as a symbol of gay pride, and spoke to numerous other ideas and issues.

Inspired by a range of subjects and references, from personal emotional states to communal experiences, and to contemporary politics, Collins leverages the tactility of fiber to unravel, deconstruct, combine, reimagine and create anew the structures of our inner and outer lives. Through time, Collins’ practice has extended to fine needlework and drawing, which also factor strongly in *Motherlode*, as the exhibition courses through the incredible range of Collins’ oeuvre. The results are a depth of works that serve as intricate studies in materiality, the aesthetics of abstraction and optical illusion, and the power of art to evoke a deep humanness.

In keeping with Collins’ career-long commitment to instigating and celebrating Queer community and creativity, *Motherlode* will also include a salon-style exhibition of works by Queer artists curated by a group of RISD students in collaboration with Collins. The exhibition-within-the-exhibition will offer an immersive and inclusive social space—an environment meant to foster conversation and exchange. Developed in close partnership with the RISD Museum, the project reflects our commitment to co-creating spaces where multiple perspectives shape how stories are told. The students are exploring

works from the museum's collection and dozens of artists drawn from RISD alumni, students, faculty, and staff.

"The exhibition is named *Motherlode* in part to allude to the profound source of inspiration, learning, and connection that RISD—both the school and the museum—has been in my life," said Collins. "When I think about what formed me as a creative person, and continues to reverberate through my career, there are so many threads that connect back to this source. It's a tremendous honor to be showing my life's work in this manner at a place that has been so essential to who I am as an artist."

About Liz Collins

Liz Collins graduated with a BFA (1991) and MFA (1999) from Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). She would later serve as a professor of textiles at RISD from 2003 to 2013. In 1999, Collins launched her own knitwear company, which over the course of five years came to be recognized for its innovative designs. Starting in 2003, she increasingly shifted her focus toward visual arts. Her work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Touchstones Rochdale, England (2022) and Tang Museum in Saratoga Springs, New York (2015–17), and been featured in a range of international exhibitions and within a broad range of galleries and institutions, including at the 60th Venice Biennale exhibition (2024) and in the *Woven Histories* exhibition presented at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2023), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (2024), and Museum of Modern Art (2025). She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the USA Fellowship, MacColl Johnson Fellowship, and the Anonymous Was a Woman Award. Her work is held in a range of public and private collections, including the RISD Museum, Museum of Arts & Design (New York, NY), Mint Museum (Charlotte, NC), Museu de Arte de São Paulo (Brazil), Leslie-Lohman Museum (New York, NY), and FIT Museum (New York, NY), among others.

About the RISD Museum

Established in 1877, the RISD Museum is a dynamic space for creative exploration, learning, and community engagement. We unlock the creative process by integrating art, design, and education, inviting active participation in the making and meaning of art. Spanning cultures from ancient times to the present, our collection fosters accessibility, inclusion, and meaningful connections across communities. For more information: 401-454-6500 or risdmuseum.org.

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