

13. Michelle Kwasnycia: The Shape of Carrying

The Shape of Carrying is an expansive nine panel artwork on paper by Michelle Kwasnycia. It was created in 2026 using a printing technique called etching alongside ink on coloured paper. It is located outside the McMullen Gallery in a recessed window space.

The artwork is hung flat to the wall, six sections of paper that together measure six by six feet. The work is composed of geometric shapes, triangles with thick black borders that outline areas featuring flat planes of colour, patterns, and drawings. The triangular shapes create an alternating grid where more complexly patterned or detailed areas are placed next to or are intersected by blocks of colour. This pattern references a quilt, where sections of designs and images have been joined together with others, so that some may appear out of place or disconnected from the surrounding images.

In the centre of the work, stretching from top to bottom is the shape of a body. It takes up the majority of the composition, with the top edge of the print beginning just above the body's mouth and the bottom ending just below their hips. The body is geometrically sectioned into pieces by the work's alternating triangles. Some sections are detailed with long red parallel lines articulating the colour and shape of muscles, others feature bright white bones on a black background, and a few articulate pale body parts outlined with black lines. The body's shoulders feature intricate drawings of flowers, chrysanthemums with skinny petals tattooed in blue and red.

Through its assembled pieces, the work reveals and then obscures layers of skin, flesh, muscle, and bone, alternating between them to create views of a body that shift and change. It's a composition that's almost like a puzzle, but the pieces are all out of order or arranged in a way where they don't quite connect. Around the outline of the body, the triangular shapes feature patterns in shades of red, blue, and green intersected by flat planes of gold, off-white, and creamy yellow. These patterned sections at times reference shapes familiar to Smartwear, the zigzagging lines of a sensor, the weave of a textile, the long spindly lines of a computer chip.

About the artwork and artist:

The Shape of Carrying was created during the artist's summer research practicum with Smartwear and is inspired by their experiences. During her practicum, Michelle encountered mothers whose experiences shaped her understanding of the body as both extraordinarily individual and individually extraordinary.

The artwork's panels illustrate a postpartum trunk with skeletal and muscular systems articulated through patterns that are inspired by quilting. By using the visual language of the textile practice of quilting, the artist embeds a generational familial care tradition that tenderly sections and intertwines the body's structures. The pattern's motifs reference forms observed in Smartwear's interdisciplinary laboratory environments, connecting textile processes with anatomical research and scientific inquiry.

Through the work, imagined, largely unseen, and extraordinary interior spaces of the body become something otherwise, each between and beyond tissues, technologies, and textiles. An extraordinary body reborn, *The Shape of Carrying* pays homage to mothers and the remarkable capacity of the body to carry, adapt, sustain, and transform life itself.

Michelle Kwasnycia is an interdisciplinary artist who specializes in painting and printmaking. Her work focuses on identity, culture, and presence in relation to aesthetic systems, exploring how visual language shapes and represents the bodymind amidst intersectional oppression. In 2026 Michelle was a Smartwear Revolution Summer Student and had the opportunity to spend four months as part of the team, visiting various labs and having conversations with researchers.