



TATTERED
mended

CULTURES
mended

tattered cultures : mended histories

an international exhibition of
contemporary fiber art

Mary Babcock

Curatorial Statement

I grew up predominantly in a context of privilege and protection, with a goodly smattering of denial and despair. I remember as a child sitting in my mother's sewing room watching her mend socks wondering why – like the other kids—I couldn't just get new socks instead. It wasn't until later, far past the time those stitches became the soul-saving sutures of the permanent vest my mother stitched across my beloved stuffed rabbit's chest, that I realized those mending stitches reflected an act of care – of preserving and mending relationship.

We live in a world of contradiction, and the warmth of this literal mending was juxtaposed by a cultural tattering left unattended. My family spent many holidays with Gert-and-Dorothy. Gert was my grandmother's sister, yet the Gert-and-Dorothy duo was such a tight pair you never uttered one name without the other.

It wasn't until my late twenties, after coming out myself, that I realized just who Dorothy was and why they were so comfortably together for many years. The L-word was not in my family's or that decade's vocabulary. I never heard how they met, how they struggled, how they cared for one another. Histories lost – possibilities of connection left unnamed and unexplored.

I think of my own relatively safe middle-class background and wonder, how would our lives be different – richer – if the many stories falling outside the dominant cultural narrative, cast off like irritating fuzz balls, were instead valued and woven into our cultural fabric. Tattering might be inherent ...it is part of the wear and tear – some necessary, some not so necessary. But we seem to fall short on the art of mending. I go back to the early tools my mother shared with me in that sewing room with socks for clues to the knowledge of that lost art. And I think not only of the mending process, but also of the quality of the fabrics in need of mending, and the anticipated results.

My vision in curating this exhibition is to reveal “mending” as a potent metaphor for cultural enrichment and transformation. It is prompted by the multitudes of lives and events that are left unnoticed, distorted or dismissed by the dominant ideologies of a specific time and place. The work is grounded in aesthetic and technical proficiency, yet finds its origin in the difficult and often murky territory of first-hand experience with personal, cultural and historical marginalization. And, it reminds us to honor textiles as living — not historical — research tools, and to invites us, as visual artists and menders of history, to continue to locate contemporary concerns of marginalization, colonialism and social justice as an essential discourse within textile arts.



Maile Andrade

This work of panels speak to the losses that the Native Hawaiian has experienced: cultural practices, language, family and things that hold one's identity together but are now hanging by their threads, barely surviving the external influences. The foundation is the 'aina, that feeds us, land, ocean and sky. We still have these things to remind us of our kuleana (responsibilities) and Ho'ihi (respect) of the relationships to all things. Burnt into the panels are the 'oli, chants that protect, gather our gods and ancestors, and allow us to remember and ask for permission and guidance to access and reconnect with ourselves.



Frances Dorsey

Hybridization, whether racial or cultural, has been demonized as an undesirable process that dilutes its source. Formerly strangers were the unknown "other", but today relatively fewer of us are born, live and die in the land of our ancestors. Traditional societies and practices have become the exotic "other". Our world is now defined by processes of transit, whether by choice or not, and consequently we hybrids construct our identities, histories and narratives from fragments assembled haphazardly, dictated by chance as much as intent, according to our individual cultural, racial, ethnic or geographic encounters.



Euni Figi

Our wardrobes consist of some of our most intimate objects. Our clothes touch the most personal and private parts of our bodies. Moreover, they are the first communicators of our identities within an increasingly global culture.

I was born in Seoul, South Korea, adopted by a Dutch-American family, and raised and formally educated in the United States, the Netherlands, and Mexico. The Rice Apron Collection is a series of sculptural garments that explore aspects of the social and historic study of domestic dress, as well as my family's lineage and relationship to these garments. The pieces are exaggerated, non-functional variations of traditional clothing, manifesting a hybrid of cultures and identities in a conceptual self-portrait.

...My relationship with South Korea (the country of my birth) was tattered through my adoption. Other than physical ethnicity I have limited ties to Korea; and instead have a deeper identification to my American and European heritage. This feeling of a broken bond is mended through my fine art practice...



*Wendy Kawabata &
Hiroko Sakurai*

Throughout my uncle's childhood, my great aunt Flocie quilted with the women who shared her cul-de-sac outside Greenfield, Tennessee. The street was a half circle, with her house in the center of that arc, so they all met at the center. During gardening season they cut and pieced fabric in the evening after gardening, and when canning season ended they quilted the tops into beautiful quilts. Quilting happened in her parlor and when the quilting frame wasn't in use she pulled it up to the ceiling with pulleys. They would eat and talk under the quilt, then pull it back down and work again. In that same parlor her friends helped her birth her two sons. When my uncle married, she gave him and my aunt one wedding quilt and 10 "utility" quilts. They ended up on their children's beds, and then to their grandchildren's beds. Flocie and her friends quilted in order to secure, tend to, and participate in the future of their families.

Now far from that history, I'm separated from family and stories by both water and miles. The process of piecing and staining rice paper, and then working with a friend (also a mother) to bring the pieces together as a new whole has provided a conduit for remembering and mending my present to the mothers in my family's history.



Jeeun Kim

The conflicting values experienced living in two different cultures resemble a pair of shoes. Instead of comparing the opposing values or trying to unify them, I try to reconcile them with each other by contemplating and understanding them. The result can be like a journey in a mismatched pair of shoes.



Kay Lawrence

...When I was a child we lived in Port Moresby. Our Papuan 'boy', Viera, a married man with children of his own, did our laundry which included my fathers 'whites': starched shorts, shirt and long white socks. I was fascinated by processes of blueing and starching which all took place on the swept ground outside the kitchen. Viera first rinsed the washed clothes in the blueing water to brighten the whites. He then dissolved starch in cold water in a bucket, stirring it with a sappy branch snapped from the pawpaw tree. It was the pawpaw sap mixed with the starch that would give extra stiffness and sheen to the ironed cloth, maintaining the crisp façade of whiteness that assured our place in the hierarchies of colonialism.

...In the late 19c and early 20c, the pearling industry in Broome, Western Australia tattered the social and cultural cohesion of local Aboriginal people through occupying their country and seas and exploiting their labour. While the term Whitework refers to a type of European embroidery often associated with purity and innocence, in this instance, Whitework refers to the work we must do as white Australians, to reveal and repair repressed aspects of our history.

Chunghie Lee

The patched Pojagi (Korean Traditional Wrapping Cloth) made many generations ago in Korea are a source of great inspiration to me. They come to us from ancestor women who had no names or reputations. In their time they had little independence, but they were faithful to their situation and endured. Using carefully saved scraps of precious fabrics, they played with color and shape with a child's mind — naturally — creating pure and innocent art works. My work pays tribute to these ancestors and in their honor I often incorporate photographic images of them in my work. I see this patchwork as a metaphor for human life. We may feel ourselves to be as random pieces of fabric, alone and without meaning. But God's hand places us together in a beautiful composition which has great harmony and meaning.



“They’re flooding across, invading the place,”...They’re going to bring their families, their wives, and they’re going to bring their kids. We don’t need them.”

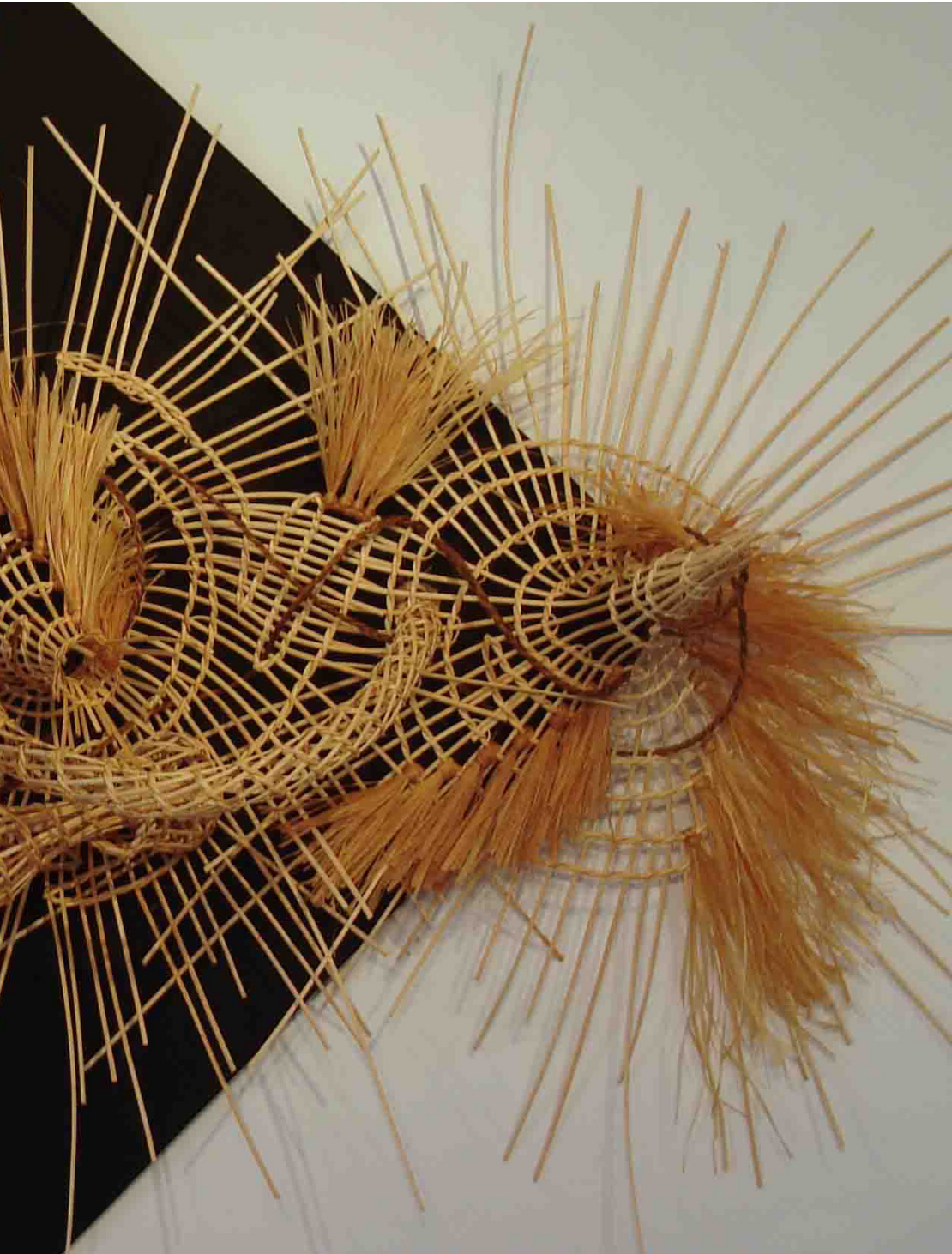
(Roger Barnett, self-styled volunteer “Border Patrol” person, in *The New York Times*, 11/25/06)



Sharon Marcus

During my first marriage I learned first-hand of the difficulties inherent in the immigrant experience as my Costa Rican husband, who came to New York at the age of 12, struggled with issues of cultural identity. Traveling back and forth between the U.S. and Costa Rica, he felt out of place in both countries. Life was familiar, yet unfamiliar, and no matter where he traveled there was no real feeling of being at home. His life was tortured with a sense of longing. Though our marriage didn’t last, the experience gave me a great empathy for the difficulties immigrants face.

My piece was inspired by fabrics left in the border crossing zone between Mexico and the U.S. Discarded fabrics raise questions about the personal stories of their owners. What were their hopes and dreams, what are their histories, where are they now? How can they “mend” their tattered lives?



Marques Marzan

The space between the threads of culture changes as civilizations evolve. These spaces expand, often tearing, causing a disconnect from the source. Living cultures span these spaces by drawing upon all that surrounds them to reconnect these ends. The importance isn't its originality, but that the thread continues.

Space Between is an attempt to visually represent the continuation of the twining tradition in Hawai'i. The tradition and level of proficiency of the past continues on, but through a "mend" that connects what I do to that of my heritage. The skill was not one that was maintained in an unbroken line, like other art forms still flourishing. My works is a reawakening and reconnecting of that which is an amazing achievement of the past.



Aaron McIntosh

I would like to honor all my ancestors who quilted and labored in anonymity creating such beautiful, expressive objects with their hands. Further, I would like to pay homage to my two grandfathers who were quilters. I cannot imagine what their lives must have been like carrying on such gender non-conforming crafts. Little is known about these men in my family, but they are a source of inspiration for me as I question my own genderqueer place in this world.



BOOK TWO
1943-1948

I came across these images of men from old personal photographs in John Ibson's book, *Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday American Photography...* John Ibson argues in his book that we must be blinded to these men's sexualities, as they are not explicitly known and most likely these men were best friends and experienced a certain intimacy unknown in today's male friendships. I do not think we should be blind to these men's sexualities—I think we should be open-minded. After all, why couldn't they be queer? The same justifications for their probable heterosexuality can be used to justify their questionable homosexuality.



Lisa Lee Peterson

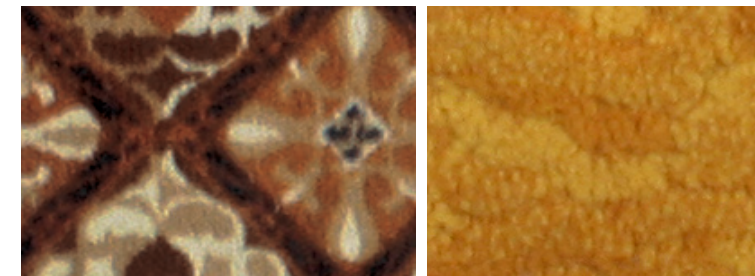
As a fourth-generation American whose ancestors immigrated to Hawaii in the 1880s, I walk, talk, and think American. But I am not seen as American in America nor claimed as Chinese in China. Each time someone denies my provenance, I eat the bitterness of not belonging... The work shoots at shadows, saying one thing but meaning another, weaving one image but reflecting the experience of countless others.

“With my black hair, dark brown almost black eyes, ivory-colored skin, and height of five-foot-three, I look as if I were someone from Asia. My husband is blond and hazel-eyed. His light-toned skin and six-foot-one frame mark him as someone of northern European extraction. We married in May 1982. Perhaps we met when he was resting and recuperating in a Bangkok brothel, a soldier seeking solace from the horrors the Vietnam War. Perhaps he rescued me from a life of prostitution, subsequent disease, and certain early death. The following are four other stories about how I might have met my husband. Each has elements of truth.”

— Excerpt from Truth or Lies, Part I: “Did you meet your husband in the war” by Lisa Lee Peterson



Kerry Phillips



My parents met at a square dance. How many people get to say things like that? For as far back as my grandma could remember, all of our ancestors had been from Texas. That is a lot of Texas.

My grandma was a great storyteller. She could remember everything. She was born in 1900 so her stories were filled with firsts that I can barely imagine. My firsts involve MTV and getting my first email address or cell phone.

The stories my grandma told, the stories that were left untold (but we still know them, or at least bits of them) and the stories that I can't remember well. I use these mismemories often as material for work.

My dad is the handy kind of dad. He can always fix things, and he likes to make things work better and more efficiently. He does this the same way they fixed things around the farm—oldfangled know-how meets MacGyver ingenuity. The fixings weren't always pretty or fashionable, but they were efficient and they worked—even if only for a short while.

These are the mendings I know. This way seeped into every aspect of my life growing up. It was a crash course in ingenuity and problem-solving and positive thinking. It enhanced my playtime. They are not restorations or putting something back to its original state. In these farm mendings there is an inevitable acceptance of brokenness and an unwillingness to let the brokenness have the last word. www.fixedthings.com

The act of trying to understand
how and why
something
has been
worn-out / eroded / destroyed / tattered
erased
in order
to
re-make, re-weave, re-alize,
re-invent
it.

– Vita Plume

Figure out which approach benefits BOTH sides
of the mended element. Proceed. Observe. Test.
Maintenance is important.

– Consuelo Jiménez Underwood

Mending is what we do to get by.

– Kerry Phillips

Mending is an act to fix torn
holes of our belongings
in everyday life.

– Seiko Atsuta Purdue

Mending fills some kind of hole, or void.
Literally a hole in your sock, but in the
metaphorical sense it may be more
flexible - you may fix something. A rip,
hole, or maybe just a pile of fragments
that you bring into a state
of order or integrity.

– Frances Dorsey

some thoughts on

Mending

“... [T]he relevant signs of authenticity... are the specific combinations of motifs, design layouts, techniques... colour combinations that indicate the origin of the textile. These regionally-specific ‘dialects’, textualised in cloth, speak a complex language of identity; voicing connections to place and relationships, and locating a particular sense of home...”

Home, not as a geographic location, but rather a person’s location in relation to the discourses and institutions of race, gender, class, sexuality, and culture, which shape us as subjects. ‘Home’ in this sense is the internal structure and terms of reference which frame what we experience, and how we experience; something which both empowers and limits us... The term “homework” is proposed as a “discipline of unlearning”; a critical confrontation with these invisible processes of learning that have shaped and formed our identities.... For the person who is displaced, thinking is not always knowing...

Rather than having two homes, I now seem to be without one. Having lost my ‘sense’ of home somewhere along the way. Echoing this, the language I use on a daily basis doesn’t have a word for ‘home’... and rather than the security of home, I am instead confronted with ‘homework’, which consists of a huge tangle of questions and doubts made up of my previous assumptions, beliefs, practices and experiences. I’m not sure where the person who set off with itinerary in hand has gone – as the agenda shifted and blurred, so has the self. Recognizable fragments surface along the way, but without reference points and mirrors of the familiar, what used to feel like a relatively tangible identity now feel like a wilderness of chaotic space, threaded through with irrelevant habits and blind responses.

...[T]his is an attempt to make sense of disorienting experiences through the silent action of inserting a narrative into cloth.”

– Ruth Hadlow, “The Unstable Process of Translation” in Reinventing Textiles. Transcribed into woven cloth in Vita Plumes’s Another Kind of Silence.



Vita Plume

I know that the silence of untold horrors and fears can erupt through nightmares. My mother had horrible nightmares... and never spoke about them. She said she never remembered them. I remember as a young adult going in to my mother's bedroom to soothe her, without waking her, back into a gentler dream. I have tried to imagine what it would be like to lose everything... and perhaps everybody.

"Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania are the three Baltic States." This one sentence, in my grade 7 geography textbook was the only mention of Latvia in my entire primary and secondary school experience in Canada. I'm sure only Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians even noticed the sentence. One blink of the eye or of memory and it was gone!

... In making my work, I look through the eyes of a second generation Canadian/Latvian and consider the issues of shifting identities and living in divided cultures. I weave in the shibori threads to resist both the 'cultural patterns' and as well as the 'word patterns'; each a holder of specific cultural information.



Seiko Asuta Purdue

After each war, we mend and heal little by little while at the same time having new killing events all over the world. In thinking about current wars such as in Iraq, I can't help but to reflect about my own country's tragic history, especially the bombing in Hiroshima in WWII. "Bullet Cloth VI" represents organic beings whose skin holds the bullets inside metaphorically. Each piece can be a soldier or any individual and cheesecloth (gauze) represents a bandage, bed, nest, or hammock. "Bullet Cloth VI" bridges the gap between the traditional technique of tie-dyeing and my original idea using contemporary materials; I used a bullet and wax instead of beans and thread. To revive the disappearing old handworks is an important way to mend and connect cultures.

O'ahu's Menders

A group of Honolulu based fiber artists who graciously created over 400 handmade cd jackets from collected textile scraps.

Special thanks to:

- Barbara Davis
- Dee Van Dyke
- Helen Friend
- Kanako Nagai
- Allison Roscoe
- Madeleine Söder



Denise Shea Robinson

Coralline algae is native to the coastal regions of Southern Australia and Northern Tasmania – it has an appearance of miniature bones and is the ‘fabric’ that attaches sea grass to rocks and surfaces in the ocean – when a storm blows it can be torn away from its bed and gets washed up along the shore – when left in the harsh elements the algae eventually dries, becomes brittle and crumbles to a very fine dust – becoming a part of (but invisible within) the land... For me this is a strong metaphor for the Tasmanian aboriginal culture. The algae, collected, dried, separated and sorted is then laid into a carefully applied skin of pigmented beeswax. The spare delicate panoramas reveal a narrative through abstraction of a particular place and material. By means of allusion, implication and suggestiveness the near-invisibility of the works invite closer inspection revealing trails of algae – once living now dried and calcified carrying their own individual epic story of journey – one of life, death and transformation.



Lisa Solomon

I'm constantly inspired by the women who came before me – my grandmothers and my mother have had an enormous impact on my making. For them creating may appear to be a “nesting” activity, however I see a deep relation in what they make in their “spare time” or in an effort to make a household nicer and my art practices... I am the product of a mixed race marriage – my mother is Japanese and my father is Jewish Caucasian. I have often wondered exactly how these two cultures intersect and how they have both influenced and converged in me. I wonder what significance our birthplaces have on us. I wonder how my life differs from them as women and wives.

In researching this project I learned that my mom and maternal grandmother were born in the same prefecture; that my grandmother didn't feel like she ever had a “home” until the state of Israel was created; that although I was born in one state I feel no ties to that region and think purely of California as my home.

I think much of my cultural background is considered “other”. Kids made fun of the Japanese bento boxes my mom made me for lunch; I often got asked why we didn't have a Christmas tree. When I was younger I hated the question “where are you from”... I really hated when people thought that I was Native American or Latino – not because I didn't like those cultures, but because I WASN'T. When asked where I was born and I responded the United States people had quizzical looks on their faces. It was always strange to not really fully feel embraced by a culture.



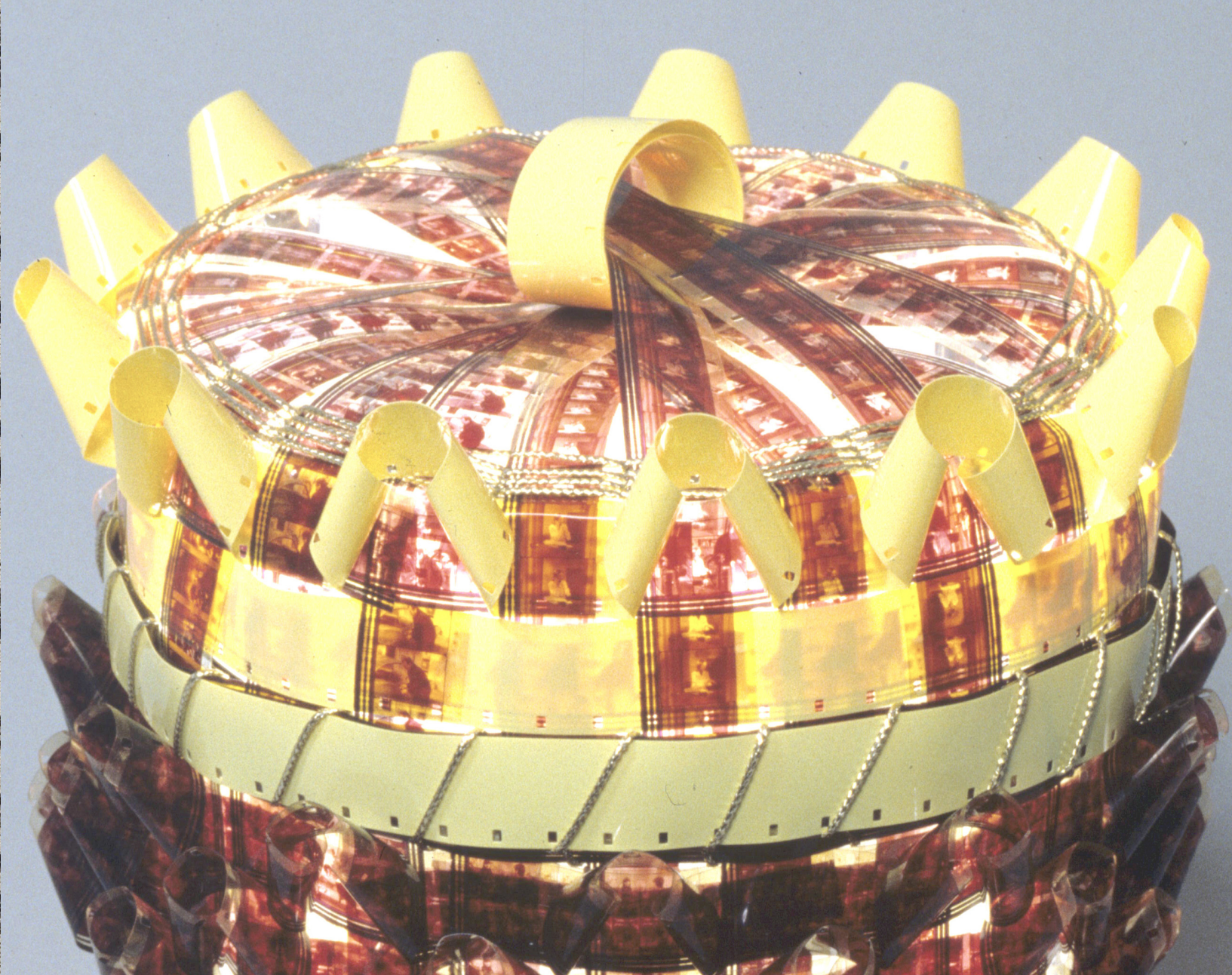


Kelly Thompson

A nomadic life, with extended periods living in California, New Zealand, Australia with regular travel to South East Asia, India and Europe has informed my artistic choices to produce cloth embedded with narrative content. These experiences have intrinsically shaped my research interests: recurring themes include notions of location and identity; souvenirs, travel and material culture read through Postcolonial theory; textiles as signifier and representation...

Fibres transform, becomes cloth, a tactile, flexible surface: light reflects off the surface, shifts with the viewer and catches new positions. This surface is a relief of threads, embossed and embedded, confirming a kinaesthetic knowledge. Cloth is a surface of many histories, constructed and mended through each transformation.

This work attempts to draw attention to the skills of the unremembered artisans who originally produced the [Turkish ceramic] tiles, and the intersection of age-old and 21st century technologies. Visual patterns travel in digitized forms from the 'real' or physical realm to code, to mechanical systems, to then become a new object. The irregularities of the hand, and the wear and tear of use from the source, are qualities that add visual disruption to the soft surface.



Gail Tremblay

Going to schools controlled by Euro-American, it felt odd in fourth grade when they made us study Manifest Destiny in history. As an Iroquois it was a shock to see people from the settler culture assert that God had given them the right to steal our land. Most of us learned that we could not trust the educational system and felt a deep and abiding distrust of things we learned from books written by outsiders. Our stories were not represented, and our enemies' stories were studied as truth. It made it difficult to talk to outsiders that didn't feel our grief...

My Iroquois Fancy Stitch film baskets recycle pieces of film that are fragments from other people's creative work, and creates from them an object that reweaves materials from a medium with a long history of stereotyping my culture in both narrative and documentary cinema... I relished the irony of making film take on the traditional fancy stitch patterns of our ash splint and sweet grass baskets. The choice of weaving stitches, many of which have names, is deliberate...



Consuelo Jiménez Underwood

I must have been 2-4 years old. We were picking plums in northern California. "Get in the car!", my Mom shouted. Panic, anger, and desperation prevailed as we weaved in and out of trees, at high speed, navigating our way through the orchard, trying to get to a paved road. I was afraid, unsure as to what was happening. Behind us was a vehicle with blinking lights following close behind. My Mom stopped. My Dad got out of the car and I did not see him again until the following year, when I helped smuggle him across the border.

During the first years of construction the border wall constructed between the USA and Mexico was referred to as the "Tortilla Wall". This work honors and mourns the Christian souls that have perished while crossing the American Wall. The tortillas have been transformed to suggest circles of enlightenment. The flower petals are visual metaphors for "spirit". Silver and gold have dominated the dialogue between two nations. The separate panels suggest the three stages of death... Now, and soon to be completed will be a mile wide length of "electronic-surveyed wasteland" that will cut the North American continent in half.

Jan-Pai Wan

My paternal grandmother was a strong woman. She had to work all the time because my grandfather was a gambling man. She worked so hard to make ends meet that she gave birth to my aunt standing up while making a snow bowl for her customer. Not many people liked her because of her toughness (as opposed to the traditional virtue of being obedient), but I wish I had a chance to know her better.

The work shown in this exhibition starts from a kimono I found in Kyoto. Because the unusually bright color and style, I began to imagine the life of the previous owner. I use this language-equation for the title to question the role of female in the Asian society: “女 + 家 = 嫁, 女 = 嫁 - 家”. In English, “Woman + Home = Marriage, Woman = Marriage - Home”.
[Note: The word “marriage” in Chinese combines the character of “woman” and “home”. I reverse the equation to imply that woman without marriage means no home.]





an exhibition curated by

Mary Babcock

in collaboration with
Academy Art Center Curator

Carol Khewhok

exhibition co-sponsored by:

Honolulu Academy of Arts
The Academy Art Center
The Textile Society of America
University Research Council, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

catalogue design by
Scott Groeniger & Kirsten Rae Simonsen