



UNARTISANAL

AN ONLINE EXHIBITION
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JOY CURTIS
WOOLPUNK
DEFNE TUTUS

CURATED BY
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& VANDANA JAIN

IVIVA OLENICK
MARCY CHEVALI
KATHERINE EARLE

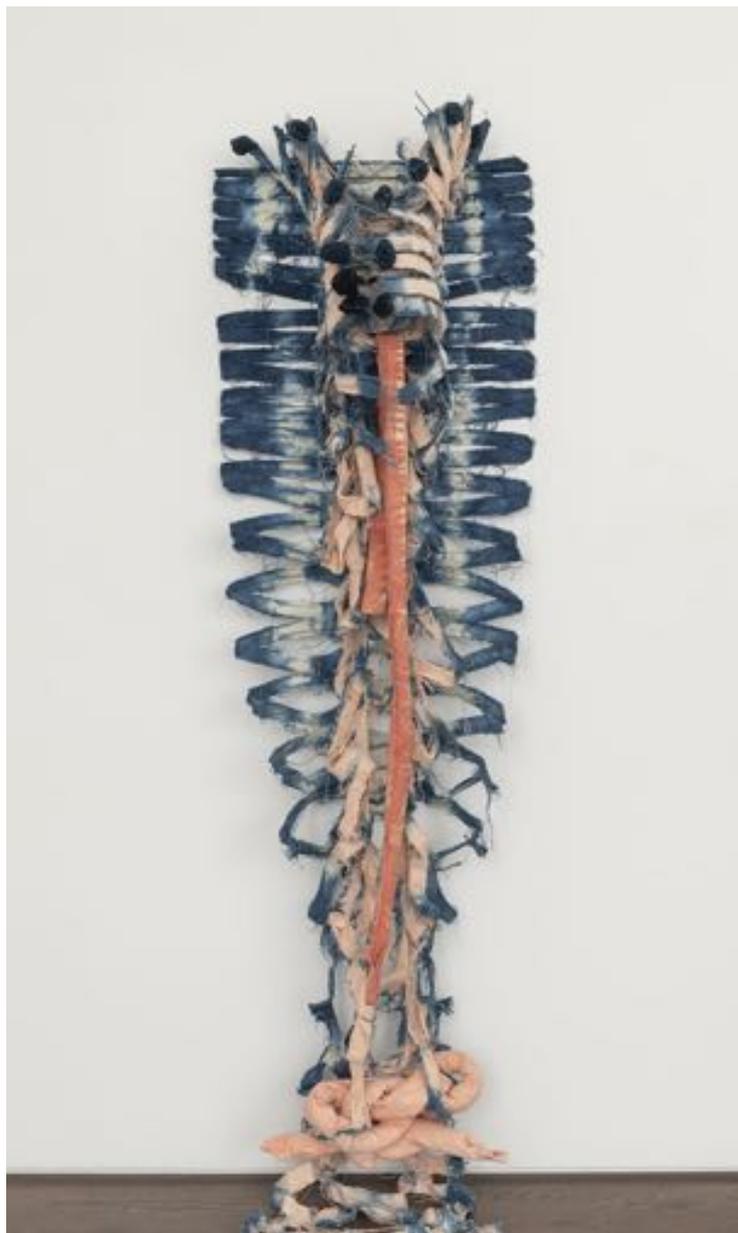
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JOY CURTIS



End of Aeon 2019

indigo dyed cotton duck and sea sponges, madder root using shibori resist dyeing on cotton duck, steel

72" x 22" x 22"

What draws you to the materials you work with?

I came to an endpoint with three very heavy and fragile bodies of work I made, and I wanted a greater economy in materials - softer, tougher, easy to fold, transport, and store. I learned dyeing and resist processes when I was a teenager, and I worked with fiber in other ways as a young artist, so it was a return to an old medium in a new way. Working with fabric, particularly cotton duck or canvas, gives me a freer feeling. It is inexpensive, not precious, and I like the way the edges fray. I occasionally use wool felt, spandex, linen and silk organza. All of these have a certain type of edge that is acceptable to my practice from a practical and aesthetic standpoint.

Why "craft" and not "art"?

I do consider my work to be art, but I use multiple craft methods in creating it. I don't really imagine distinctions or hierarchies in how an artwork should be materially accomplished. While there is a lot of labor involved, in a sense it is "fast and dirty" because I have something I want to convey, and I will use whatever I feel works, often what is at hand or within easy reach. I consider myself a sculptor, and both craft and manufacturing processes that have nothing to do with art per se are part of the history of the medium, and I mean "medium" as a way of communicating.

In what ways are you expanding upon the realm of craft?

Because I come from an art-making background, I move craft out of its traditional uses and contexts, possibly adulterating it, resulting in something singular and specific. I hope the totality of the work results in a synthesis of many craft forms and traditional dying processes.

Is your work rooted in any specific traditions or techniques?

Yes, my work is rooted in very old plant dying processes using traditional mordants and modifiers. I also use resist dyeing processes that are common to many parts of the world, but I am most interested in Indonesian wax batik, West African adire oniko and alabare, as well as Japanese shibori. I also use the lost wax casting method and make small bronze components for many of the cloth works.

How do you navigate "craft" while avoiding popular trends?

I do not think anyone can fully avoid trends. We live in a society and are bathed in various influences that are impossible to escape. I just roll with what is interesting to me, and when it is no longer, I move on. Does that sound trendy?

Do you consider craft utilitarian, or decorative, or both/neither? Why?

Craft has a lot of meaning beyond the utilitarian and the decorative, but all of these factors are important! I think most of us want to live with things we find beautiful that are also meaningful and connect us to a culture. Craft communicates in so many ways offering culturally encoded messages. It can reveal a particular sense of touch and the hand, and can unite artisans into a collective endeavor.

Why do you think so many people are returning to fiber arts these days?

I am sure I am not alone in my practical concerns stated above. People also tend to have less space these days. Fiber is a ubiquitous medium and so much of what is incorporated into people's practices is repurposed and recycled, or innovative: for example, making cloth from algae and mushrooms. It is tied to ecological concerns, for sure. While there is an impulse to create a future we want to see, there is also an impulse to look at the past and traditional methodologies. I think this is part of a dissatisfaction with globalization and the cultural erasure that can result from rampant capitalism. Fiber arts are deeply historical and grounding.

How has the pandemic affected your practice?

Initially, it gave me more time to work and reflect, but no more. I was able to go into more detail with the extra time. It required me to become even more introspective, and I am already an introvert. I found myself reflecting more on ecology. I imagined myself woven into the landscape. I feel the way I have always felt, overall; the pandemic only made things more obvious and clear.

JOY CURTIS was born in Valparaiso, Indiana, and has lived and worked in Brooklyn, NY since 2002. She received her MFA in sculpture from Ohio University in 2002. She is represented by Klaus von Nichtssagend, New York, NY, where she has had 5 solo shows. Recent exhibitions include: *With Every Fiber*, Pelham Art Center; *Cult of the Crimson Queen*, Ceysson and Bénétière; *Found Outside* at the Aldrich Museum (CT); *Weight Over Time*, T.S.A (Brooklyn); *The Working Title*, The Bronx River Art Center; *Tensile Strength*, ZieherSmith; *Object 'Hood*, Leslie Heller; *Eternal Return*, Nurture Art; *The Finishers*, The Wassaic Project (NY); and *Greater Brooklyn*, CRG. Curtis is the recipient of fellowships from Socrates Sculpture Park and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, and an award from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts. Her work has been reviewed in the *New Yorker*, *Hyperallergic*, *Artcritical*, and *Saatchi Online*, and featured on Gorky's Granddaughter and James Kalm's *Rough Cut* video blogs.

WOOLPUNK®



Make America Buy Art 2020
Hat with embroidery

Why "craft" and not "art"?

I do not consider myself a skilled knitter or traditional embroiderer, I am and make WOOLPUNK®. I recently trademarked this after two decades of creating fiber-based works that have been included in both "art" and "craft" exhibitions both nationally and internationally. I just make work and whoever wants to label it for their needs so be it.

In what ways are you expanding upon the realm of craft?

I am inspired by artists such as Martha Rosler, Tracey Emin, and Judith Pfaff, along with my paternal grandmother. A seamstress from Italy, she immigrated to America and sewed American flags for a living. Her patriotism and factory work influence my studio practice, along with my employment at several not for profit organizations which has allowed for direct involvement with hurricane recovery, homeless advocacy, and diversity, equity and inclusion community initiatives. I welcome the shifts in perspective in both our culture and community to celebrate the arts that focus on topics like this.

Is your work rooted in any specific traditions or techniques?

The material and techniques I work with - found materials, stitching, knitting and crochet - speak of women's history and of the ways in which the discarded material of times of plenty become valuable in times of deprivation. I recombine traditional women's skills with repurposed materials and objects to create resonant works that have a texture, pattern, and meaning akin to that of obsessive drawings.

How do you navigate "craft" while avoiding popular trends?

I embrace current dialogue and topics usually referencing politics, the environment or socio-economic issues to create work, discussion, action, or sometimes all of the above. Both local and global issues serve as catalysts for subject matter and I choose to create fiber-based art to pay homage to all who live and work in America.

Do you consider craft utilitarian, or decorative, or both/neither? Why?

The art world is watching and the pandemic is helping craft-based work make the leap to the global market. Craft "art" has long been a niche taste for collectors in the U.S. and elsewhere, and some artists such as Nick Cave, Tiny Pricks Project, and others have helped it become mainstream visuals in exhibits, museums, and virtually on social media.

Why do you think so many people are returning to fiber arts these days?

Fiber is a flexible medium. It can be so many things and handled so many different ways.

How has the pandemic affected your practice?

Though I would have not wished for this to have happened due to all the loss, a smart artist friend told me to treat this time like a residency. Being a single mom, I took that advice and ran with it. It's amazing how much creativity can expand when given the proper support and time. Also, thinking-time is just as important as creative-time. We don't get enough of that in America. Working artists need more financial support for creative making. I enjoyed having art in my life to help me emotionally during this time as well. I am unsure if a lot of people had that outlet. It feels so good to have a project going to take your mind off things and a safe space to place your emotions. We forget that the mind is a muscle and, after a year of intense art making, my brain now naturally craves it. I don't want this to go away.

WOOLPUNK® is an American artist, born in Summit, NJ in 1971.

WOOLPUNK®, inspired by an immigrant seamstress grandmother who sewed American flags for a living, machine knits fiber installations, quilts sculptures, and embroiders photographs to influence social change. She has fabricated site-specific installations for a variety of institutions including the Monira Foundation, the Cathedral of St John the Divine, Hunterdon Art Museum, Lion Brand Yarn Studio, and Knock Down Center. In 2014, **WOOLPUNK®** founded the Gimme Shelter Project and hosted statewide community stitch-ins to bring awareness of the homeless increase in New Jersey. The stitch-ins created weatherized blankets that were donated to the PERC shelter in Union City, NJ on Global Homeless Day. The project was highlighted at Parson's School of Design and on Verizon Fios. Her work has exhibited internationally at the Arts and Crafts Museum, Itami, Japan; Casaterra Residency, Italy; Atelier Turbine Space, Switzerland; and Galerie Kurt im Hirsch in Berlin, Germany. She has received grant awards from Puffin Foundation, Goldman Sachs, and Geraldine Dodge Foundation. Woolpunk's embroidered photographs are included in the permanent collections of the Zimmerli Museum, Hudson County Community College Foundation Collection, and Montclair Art Museum.

DEFNE TUTUS



Book of Hours 2021
wire and beads
11.5" x 21"

What draws you to the materials you work with?

I've always been drawn to string and how things connect. As a kid, I remember reading in old books about a chain of daisies made to wear in one's hair and this fascinated me. I'd space out while playing the outfield and study the weeds in the grass and try to figure out this problem of how to bind two little buttercups or dandelions together.

Why "craft" and not "art"?

I am an artist, not a true craft person, but without cumulative crafts traditions, I'd find myself in a dry, desolate place without a signpost. Luckily there is a bounty of textile techniques and traditions to pore over and admire. I'm obsessed with historic and contemporary nets, weavings, embroidery, lace, baskets, couture, millinery arts, face masks, veils, bodily adornment and even hairstyles. I would not have quite as fertile a ground to work on if I didn't respect and have interest in craft. It's the mother of everything in art history.

In what ways are you expanding upon the realm of craft?

Craft takes a single-minded focus and precise determination that I lack. I find myself changing my mind hundreds of times while making something. This kind of meandering between two points suits me well. I'm not always certain of what the final product will be, and I'm proud of its improbability.

Is your work rooted in any specific traditions or techniques?

I don't have a close personal connection with a fiber arts tradition. I use my outsider eye to scope out what I like and I try to copy it, imperfectly. I add my own inflection. But I always feel aware of the true fiber crafts traditions and strongly desirous of a connection to that lineage, even wanting a personal, familial or ethnic connection, but feeling alienated from that comfort and sense of belonging.

How do you navigate "craft" while avoiding popular trends?

I change my goal many times before I'm done making something and this gives me the freedom to push further and make stranger things.

Do you consider craft utilitarian, or decorative, or both/neither? Why?

Probably both and more. Craft is the perfection of a focused goal. The end results are as diverse as we are and full of stories, drama, culture.

Why do you think so many people are returning to fiber arts these days?

During the pandemic, I think cooking and making sourdough were the bigger attractions for most people, especially because food is a creation we can instantly enjoy with our family and even gift to our neighbors. Slow simmering crafts like quilting, knitting and sewing are comforting pastimes that hold pleasant memories for many people. Maybe we all long to be connected to old traditions and the time at home seeking relief from worry and anxiety led many people to make things with their hands. I wasn't in the right mental frame to finish anything epic, but I experimented with what I had to calm myself and dream about something beautiful.

How has the pandemic affected your practice?

I couldn't hoard more materials from junk shops or flea markets and had to make do with what I had at home. A lot of determined combing through the recycling bin.

Do you have any questions that you would like to pose to us or the other artists?

I'm interested in how artists contextually frame their work. What I want to know is, how have your interests and passions and research found their expression through your work?

DEFNE TUTUS is an artist based in Brooklyn. She received her B.A. in Art History from Tufts University. Through fiber, beads, rocks, metal, plastic and hair worked together in textile making practices, she makes clothing for witches. Defne seeks to slow down the gaze with a panoply of garments strange enough to provoke contemplation about the owner. A fragile animal body with strange powers is revealed. The work is a device to transform the laboring, vulnerable physical body into a mythical beast imbued with magic and unnameable talents. The regalia are shielding, prophylactic objects; a suit of arms invoking talismanic protection. The power of ornament transforms familiar materials into a protective construction to guard the body from the danger and violence of the world.

IVIVA OLENICK



Eat My Heart 2021
embroidery on fabric
8" x 10.5"

What draws you to the materials you work with?

Working with fiber feels like translating the lived experience of the body into a tactile form others can see. I think the medium conveys a sense of touch, even when viewers cannot touch the artworks. Also, given the long history of textiles and their connections to agriculture, foundational labor in the U.S. and around the world, they embed cultural mythologies, secrets and aspects of history we often try to sweep under the rug, like long-term impacts of foundational enslaved labor on race relations and life expectancy for people of color.

Why "craft" and not "art?"

I don't consider my work craft in that I am not making objects for functional use, even though I am using a set of materials and processes often categorized as craft. I consider my work art because it participates in conversations and concerns among contemporary artists and art institutions.

In what ways are you expanding upon the realm of craft?

Although not referenced in my attached artworks, I have been growing colonial textile crops for several years in New York City at several public farms and gardens, including Old Stone House & Washington Park in Brooklyn, and GrowNYC's Governors Island Teaching Garden. I've watched cotton survive through a New York winter, the bolls split wide open with fiber spilling out onto the soil. I've harvested indigo and spent whole days fermenting leaves to make dye, and leading workshops with adults and children. I believe these plants embed social and cultural histories, including the traumas of the people who cared for and grew them (in reference to enslavement). By growing these crops in an unexpected urban environment, I hope to open people's interest in and curiosity about the literal roots of textiles, and the histories they convey and embed, including social and cultural rituals from around the world, and foundational enslaved labor in the U.S. In short, I hope to make the invisible visible.

Is your work rooted in any specific traditions or techniques?

Most of the work I exhibit, including the attached images, is embroidered. Occasionally, I embroider or make fabric sculptures from hand-dyed fabrics. I am self-taught in both processes, and therefore hesitate to say I work in a specific tradition. When I grow indigo, from which I make dye, I reference the origins of the dyeing methods, which are adapted from contemporary dyers, who themselves often learned methods traditional to Africa, Korea, Latin America and/or Japan. I would say that many contemporary dyers use methods that combine or borrow from multiple countries of origin and cultures, as colonialism, trade and most recently the internet (have) convey(ed) technical knowledge across geography, culture and time.

How do you navigate "craft" while avoiding popular trends?

I have a strong internal sense of what I consider interesting or important. My embroideries are an analog blog, a way of trying to assuage human reliance on digital communications with a need to live in the body through immersion in hands-on craft. While I recognize that I am not alone in this interest, I like to think that my voice as a writer, which comes through in my work literally as text and visually as narrative illustrations, distinguishes me from trends, such as re-creating text messages and tweets to visually resemble the digital iconography versus crafting a new visual and verbal vocabulary to talk about the interstices of human connection, and the quiet parts of being that are often unspoken or unarticulatable.

Do you consider craft utilitarian, or decorative, or both/neither? Why?

I think of craft as utilitarian and decorative. When I visit the South, the art galleries show hand-thrown pottery, glass, fiber in the form of decorative and usable vases, dishware, quilts, etc. These works speak to the development of craft in the South as both decorative and utilitarian, and the passing down of traditions of making and using materials.

Why do you think so many people are returning to fiber arts these days?

Fiber arts include a range of processes that can be done safely at home (knitting, crochet, weaving, embroidery). The scale can range from handheld to billboard-sized, and the materials are accessible and non-toxic (except for some chemicals used in dyeing). In addition, fiber arts processes can be soothing and stress-relieving. As our lives become more digital instead of tactile, using one's hands to make an object for oneself or another to use can feel familiar, comforting and satisfying. Additionally, with so much time spent at home during quarantines and lockdowns the past year, taking up a craft like knitting, weaving or sewing seems like another version of baking sourdough: it's finally time to try that thing I've been thinking about and never tried...

How has the pandemic affected your practice?

I was about to say that I have more time, but really I have a different kind of time. Instead of commuting, I walk from my bedroom or kitchen to my desk. Without the small stresses of local travel, I can attend to more internal thoughts more regularly as I'm in a quiet, domestic setting most of the time. As my teaching and my schedule have become more varied, the call to make work in my downtime has become more insistent. As an artist, the forced time alone has been productive, and while I mourn the freedoms of movement and socializing we had before the pandemic, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the fact that I have dug into my work with renewed vigor and commitment. In the end, making my work becomes a commitment to my personal growth rather than a purely professional endeavor, although external validation can also feel good.

IVIVA OLENICK is a Brooklyn-born and based artist working at the intersection of textile craft, history and agriculture, and written and visual languages. Her work is represented by Muriel Guepin Gallery in New York, and she has exhibited locally and nationally at venues including the Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling, NYC; Old Stone House &

Washington Park, Brooklyn; Wyckoff House Museum, Brooklyn; the Center for Book Arts, NYC; the Hunterdon Museum, Clinton, NJ; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, among others. Iviva holds a BA in French Language and Literature/Psychology from Binghamton University, and an AAS in Textile/Surface Design from FIT. She is on the faculty of the MFA Art Practice Program at SVA, and teaches for the New Museum and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York.

MARCY CHEVALI



Thin 2019
cotton thread
5' x 8'

"While in residence at Farm Studios in Rajasthan, India in December of 2019, I created "Thin." Using locally purchased cotton thread, I knit a large shape, approximately five feet across, which, at a point, began to quickly and specifically taper into one and finally zero stitches. When completed, the piece was installed in a neighboring field and photographed with mountains and the unique landscape of the area in the background. The shape of the piece is metaphoric and personal. Another important aspect of the piece is that the stitch is loose and therefore see-through. Although it changes perspective, everything is visible behind it and the light coming through makes visible variations and imperfections in the stitching." —Marcy Chevali

What draws you to the materials you work with?

In "Thin" I used a simple cotton thread that was easy to find and readily available. I wanted it to be accessible and quick, not something that would get in the way of what I wanted to say or need interpretation. In India, where I made this piece, cotton became one of the first cottage industries and a symbol of the nation's fight for independence.

Why "craft" and not "art"?

Art is precious and is made by someone with special skills and special access. Craft is for everyone. It can be done as part of a community, either everyone working together on one project or people working on individual projects. It is something that can easily be pulled out to be worked on and just as quickly put away, easy to squeeze in around other daily activities.

In what ways are you expanding upon the realm of craft?

I think craft usually has a function. Sometimes that function is not important but it's still there. Bringing craft into the realm of art can sometimes give it the label "functionless". Though in reality it does have function, it's a symbolic or cerebral function, rather than practical. This is a nice combination as craft is so humble and utilitarian.

Is your work rooted in any specific traditions or techniques?

I often knit. I've used a fisherman's net knot technique that I learned from a book though I'm not entirely sure that I'm doing it right. I often teach myself so my technique can be far from perfect or traditional.

How do you navigate "craft" while avoiding popular trends?

I've never been one to follow popular trends, at least not successfully. My work is often very personal and deals with my particular set of circumstances. I strive to touch on the universality and the emotion of the experience. Even though a viewer has not had my specific experience, I hope that

they can relate to the piece with whatever their own emotional connection is, or even a political or community situation.

Do you consider craft utilitarian, or decorative, or both/neither? Why?

I think both, or whatever it needs to be at the time. Sometimes the object is important, sometimes the process of making it is important.

Why do you think so many people are returning to fiber arts these days?

Why did they ever leave? I think that in an increasingly digital world we have an unfulfilled sense of touch. Also a need to slow down in an ever increasingly speedy world.

How has the pandemic affected your practice?

Prior to the pandemic I was working primarily with glass. Without access to glass working facilities, I brought my work into materials that I could easily work with at home. I think it was helpful to have that break in my work, to have the chance to re-examine what was essential to my work and build out from there.

MARCY CHEVALI is a visual artist with an MFA from the Maine College of Art. She has shown work in galleries and artists' spaces including Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum, Queens Museum of Art, AIR Gallery, Gallery Aferro, and Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning, and with organizations such as South Asian Women's Creative Collective, Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, ABC No Rio, Project for an Empty Space, 4heads and Peculiar Works Projects. She was awarded an artist grant from the Queens Art Fund in 2015. In 2016, she attended Playa Artists Residency and in 2017, she was a fellow at the Edward Albee Foundation. In 2019, she was an artist in Baie Set Marie, Nova Scotia and at Farm Studios in Rajasthan, India. She had a solo presentation of her work at Aicon Gallery in 2021.

Marcy has always had an affinity for strings and their way of connecting things both literally and symbolically. Themes of absence, fragility and stillness recur in her work.

KATHERINE EARLE



Jellyfish

machine embroidery on plastic bag
dimensions variable

What draws you to the materials you work with?

I started experimenting with embroidery on bags after reading about a pilot whale that was beached in Thailand and they could not save. It turned out the whale had 80 plastic bags in its stomach. Many sea mammals eat the bags thinking they are jellyfish because of how they look and move in the water. My jellyfish series is still in progress, as I aim to make 80 individual

pieces to honor this mammal we lost to plastic. Unfortunately this whale is one of many victims.

Our single use plastic culture is literally going to suffocate us. We are currently ingesting surprising amounts of plastic ourselves from the plastic packaging of our food, beverages and skin products. My use of this material started as a way to deal with having too many plastic bags at home, but has become a bit of an obsession. Now I really struggle to throw plastic away, because I know "away" just means it ends up in land or sea. Most plastics cannot be recycled. Only some can be downcycled into other lower grade plastic. A plastic bag is used an average of 12 minutes and takes thousands of years to decompose, and yet plastic production is only increasing. With oil and gas revenues down in the pandemic, there is even more of a focus on plastics as a source of revenue for these industries. There are dead zones in the seas because the amount of microplastics in our oceans outnumbers the stars in our galaxy. Shout out to Slow Factory and their Open Education series that has some great (free!) classes on plastics, fashion and waste.

Why "craft" and not "art"?

Arguably this distinction is rooted in colonialist tropes. Ariella Aisha Azoulay in her book *Potential History, Unlearning Imperialism* makes a strong argument in the chapter entitled "Plunder, Objects, Art, Rights" that the creation of "Art" as distinct and separate from craft allowed the hierarchical dichotomization of art, placing more value on some types of art over others.

"Art became a way to avoid engaging with the world shared with others; it is now a field of expertise ruled by imperial principles that have little if anything to do with care for the shared world. Even the expansion of the term art was destructive, because it led to a devaluation of many practices, practitioners, and objects now subjected to hierarchical dichotomies of high and low, primitive and modern, art and ethnography, art and artisanal, canonical and vernacular, masterpiece and craft, original and copy, authentic and touristsing, and art and non-art." -p61

When I first started college I went into architectural studies and I remember being most compelled by "vernacular" architecture. Much of it was sensitive and responsive to its environment, and had the best cooling and heating systems. It was the most forward thinking, yet it was considered in the field to be "from the past" and not advanced. Some books on it still called it "primitive." These distinctions are harmful in every way. It is good to see recogni-

tion that is long overdue for Gee's Bend artists, as we experience a slow disintegration of the harsh divide between "art" and "craft", but it still persists. When I was 18, I traveled to Chiapas, Mexico, where indigenous Mayan weavers wove incredibly conceptual patterns that referenced their philosophies on the cosmos, land and culture. Is that art or is that craft? Why? Textile arts were long considered a craft by Western art institutions and many textile artists still struggle to be recognized for the conceptual aspect of their work because people cannot see beyond the material, process or traditional component of the creative act. So many times when I exhibit weavings people reference the handmade. Do you not hold and make marks with your hand holding the paintbrush? Why do you not think of a painting to be a handmade object?

In what ways are you expanding upon the realm of craft?

I believe that there are endless ways to create and express ourselves, and craft is a very accessible way for people to be creative. I hope that by taking my own work seriously, and being in community, I can join efforts to disassemble the dichotomies between art and craft and encourage many talented craftspeople to be seen for the visionaries that they are.

Is your work rooted in any specific traditions or techniques?

I am trained as a weaver and textile dyer. With access to facilities and time, I would return to making more print work again. I am also a sculptor, working in metal, wood and clay.

How do you navigate "craft" while avoiding popular trends?

I avoid trends by generally not being too aware of them. As a weaver and textile artist, my work will always be situated within conversations on craft, so I just continue making with the hope that what interests me will also interest and engage an audience.

Do you consider craft utilitarian, or decorative, or both/neither? Why?

I consider craft to be both utilitarian and decorative. Craft is the art that we make to accompany our everyday, as opposed to the art made to sit in storage while providing ROI to its collectors. As Azoulay argues in her book quoted above, the way in which art became disassociated with the people and culture from whence it came (with that art then designated as craft, no longer considered valuable or conceptual) was an act of violence. As people we are inherently connected to our culture, ritual, sense of identity and meaning and so much else through art objects. We seek to decorate our lives and protect ourselves with our creative endeavors, which is also linked to our energy and spirituality. We imbue objects with meaning and with decora-

tion to give our lives a sense of deeper meaning, connect with the world around us, and protect and nurture ourselves and our families. This could be a wood carving, a meal, a portrait, a baby blanket, a quilt, an afghan, or a sculpture for the yard or the foyer. Art is utilitarian too. It is not a luxury item.

Why do you think so many people are returning to fiber arts these days?

It is hard for me to answer, because I feel that we never left it to return to. Fiber artists have always been actively making their work, even without much attention or recognition. Textiles give us comfort, they are made of natural materials (unless synthetic and made of plastic of course, which is another whole issue), and they are linked to origin stories. The warp and the weft are fundamental building blocks of our lives, the loom was the original computer.

How has the pandemic affected your practice?

At first the pandemic really stopped me in my tracks and it took some time to be able to create. However, ultimately, it focused me and my work. I did a collaborative project installed outdoors and an exhibition in an abandoned factory where people could socially distance easily. These two events re-sparked my practice, as I realized there were ways to navigate the changed and challenging environment. I was privileged not to lose my day job, so I had relative stability that has helped me to continue developing my practice unabated. I have loved the online access to artist talks and events. While not being able to go see art was a loss throughout the pandemic, so many of us suffered truly earth shattering and monumental losses that nobody could really call that a hardship. When I needed some of that input I would just look back at shows I had gone to in previous years. Luckily I had a good archive to pull from and revisit, and institutions have their own comprehensive archives online.

Do you have any questions that you would like to pose to us or the other artists?

How do you stand in dignity as a craftsperson when others try to diminish your work or your method of making? Do you think craft can be distilled to being about a singular thing or is it defined by the unique environment, culture and person that produces it?

KATHERINE EARLE engages what falls outside of our periphery, both conceptually and materially. Whether it be by working within the space held by trees or branches in a forest, or re-imagining refuse, her work considers the details embedded in our lives. Materials serve concepts, and range across disciplines. When exploring decay and transformation she turns to rust. When she needs to draw, she employs embroidery. When in distress for our future, she uses modernity's most ubiquitous material, plastic. While it might be with wool, detritus, plastics, cotton, cardboard or clay, her work is always interested in highlighting what is hidden from our attention and what we choose to ignore. In doing so she demands that we confront certain truths about the fragility of our existence on this planet and in our bodies.

Katherine is currently based in New York. Her work has been shown in two-person and group exhibitions in the United States and Canada including at the Sculptor's Alliance, Art Aqua Miami, Site:Brooklyn, The Kube studios and Diagonale. She has participated in residencies in Canada and the United States, including the ChaShaMa North Residency, Concordia Fine Arts Reading Room Residency and the inaugural Sugarbouse (now Streamhouse) Residency. Katherine has a BFA in Fibres from Concordia University in Montreal.

RUTH JEYAVEERAN



What Came Before 2019

merino wool, mohair/silk yarn, linen thread, nails

12' x 12' x 10"

What Came Before explores the interconnectedness of objects in the material world. Presented in a "reverse taxonomy" these "artifacts" evoke archaeology, natural history and the sea, which hews all things down to their essence.

What draws you to the materials you work with?

Felting is tactile, hands-on work. Wool is primal and spiritual, connected to nature and a source of warmth and shelter. In the final stages of the felting process, I rub the fiber between my fingers, coaxing the newly formed textile into shape. This felt "skin" is pliable, flexible and remarkably versatile,

a fertile ground that can be embedded with objects, built up or carved into, sculpted, draped, folded, wrinkled or wrapped around a resist.

Why "craft" and not "art"?

This distinction has always seemed artificial to me and has even less relevance to the world today as the boundaries between art, craft, design and technology continue to merge.

In what ways are you expanding upon the realm of craft? Is your work rooted in any specific traditions or techniques?

I work with hand-felted wool in order to examine our relationship to the unseen objects we use and interact with every day. I'm interested in the many ways textiles are inextricably linked with human history and culture but remain a mystery to most of us, a feat of engineering hiding in plain sight. I try to place these materials traditionally associated with the domestic, decorative, functional and feminine in a new context.

How do you navigate "craft" while avoiding popular trends?

By making work that is authentic and stays true to my voice.

Do you consider craft utilitarian, or decorative, or both/neither? Why?

From the beginning of time, craft has encompassed all of these categories and more. In terms of textiles, the history of stitch can be traced back to our earliest ancestors when "needles" made of bone and "thread" made of plant and animal parts were used to stitch together fur and leathers. These early makers quickly found that the stitches used to join things together could also be used for decoration and embellishment

Why do you think so many people are returning to fiber arts these days?

Fiber art and felting in particular celebrates the repetitive motion of making as a therapeutic and tactile experience that we so desperately need in our modern world. These processes create a meditative space, a way to slow down and connect with older traditions as well as our own bodies.

How has the pandemic affected your practice?

During the pandemic, I haven't been focused on making anything. I spent quite a bit of time reassessing my values, what makes me happy and what success actually means to me.

RUTH JEYAVEERAN is an artist, designer and educator based in Brooklyn, New York. In her art practice she uses wool to examine the relationship between craft, textiles, technology and human history. Her felted sculptures and wall hangings have been exhibited at various galleries throughout New York and she's been awarded residencies at La Napoule Art Foundation, PADA Studios and Jentel.

In 2018 she was an advisor on sustainable textile practices for the Bio Design Challenge at the Museum of Modern Art, and a juror for the Nancy Konigsberg Fiber Art Award given by the Textile Study Group of New York. She created and curates Crafting Change an annual exhibit of textile-based work for New York Textile Month. Currently she's an Assistant Professor of Textile and Surface Design at the Fashion Institute of Technology. She has also taught courses in textiles and fiber art at Parsons School of Design.

ANA MARIA FARINA



histérica #4 (hysterical #4) 2020
upcycled fibers on monk's cloth
52.5" x 29"

What draws you to the materials you work with?

I love yarn. I love working with it, touching it and creating surfaces that can provide a sense of comfort.

Why "craft" and not "art"?

I don't choose one over another; I believe these are closely intertwined. My process is craft-based, meaning I use craft techniques and hours of focus and labor to create. However I do consider my end product to be art, since I am not creating something simply utilitarian but instead using these methods as a means for expression and investigation. At the same time, I question the marginalization of the category of craft and how much of that is due to it being related to a majorly feminine and a lot of times non-white practice.

In what ways are you expanding upon the realm of craft?

I am making use of these techniques, some of them passed through generations in my family, to investigate questions about the worlds we inhabit.

Is your work rooted in any specific traditions or techniques?

Right now my main technique is tufting, a carpet-making process. I also use latch hooking, punch needle (which in Brazil is curiously called Russian stitch) and rug hooking.

How do you navigate "craft" while avoiding popular trends?

I think as long as your work speaks to you and your practice is genuine and related to your research/life interests, then there are no such things as trends.

Do you consider craft utilitarian, or decorative, or both/neither? Why?

It depends. I consider craft as a process. What the artist will do with it will tell. For instance, I believe figurative painting to be intensely craft-based. Now the product could be considered craft/commercial or it could be fine art, depending on the intention of the artist.

Why do you think so many people are returning to fiber arts these days?

I know I returned to fibers as a way to return home, in both the sense of the home within, to feel grounded, and my ancestral home, to feel connected to my roots. There's also the fact that everything is so incredibly fast and ephemeral, and fiber work requires the complete opposite. You can't rush it. You have to sit there for hours and hours and work every stitch.

How has the pandemic affected your practice?

Well I'm privileged enough that I could still find space in my living room to continue to work. But one thing that I realized that was super important is that I absolutely love working from home. It was the first time I did it (since I've always lived in tiny spaces and had studio spaces somewhere else) and it felt great. Like the work can be a part of your routine so organically like

any other thing you do in your day. And you can come back to it whenever you feel like it. It lives with you, and that relationship is important to me.

ANA MARIA FARINA paints using a gun - a tufting gun - along with needles, hooks, and knots. Repurposing a phallic signifier of violence, she conjures vibrant objects of comfort that inhabit a mystical pictorial space between abstraction and representation.

Ana Maria was born and raised in Brazil and is now based in the Hudson Valley, New York. She received her masters degree in Art and Art Education from Columbia University in 2016, and in 2018 she was awarded a fellowship to the New York Foundation for the Arts Immigrant Artist Mentoring Program. In 2019, she received a scholarship to attend the MFA program at SUNY New Paltz, where she also served as the Visiting Artist Director and Instructor of Record. Ana's work has been featured in many spaces throughout New York and she has upcoming exhibitions at the Wassaic Project, the Garrison Art Center, the Dorsky Museum, among others.

Unartisanal

This catalogue is an accompaniment to *Unartisanal*, a virtual exhibition taking place at abcnorio.org/unartisanal as well as on Instagram at [@abcnorio](https://www.instagram.com/abcnorio). Curated by Yasmeen Abdallah and Vandana Jain, the exhibition features artists working in traditional craft and prioritizes work that foregrounds the integrity of the maker, materials and methods; favoring quality, time, principle and labor over trend, style or aesthetic. Incorporating an array of techniques drawn from many traditions, these works slow down to a different wavelength. The practiced methods, steady hands, repetition, and focus required by craft are augmented by chance, whim and unconscious intent.

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