

# Extended Interview

## The Thread Between Craft and Language

AMANDA EARL

Paula Damm  
Kate Daudy  
Effie Jessop  
Lori Zimmerman  
Fiona Dempster  
Nicola Winborn  
Seet van Hout  
Jill Magi  
Patti Roberts-Pizzuto  
Heather L. Johnson  
Sharon Kivland  
Lisa Qualls  
Jessica Bebenek

*Can you tell us a bit about yourself, where you're based, a bit about your art?*

PAULA DAMM: I hail from Cleveland Heights, Ohio and am a Registered Nurse specialising in School Nursing. I have always done 'women's work' with needle, thread, yarn, loom. I used patterns for years as I made clothing, towels, sweaters, samplers. I say made because things were 'made' – they appeared after working on them but it was more from my tools and fingers than from myself. It never occurred to me that there was any other way to do it. Then I found another piece of myself through rethinking how to use words, fibre and thread.

KATE DAUDY: I am a British visual artist recognised for my work exploring and re-evaluating the human experience in the context of the natural world. Known for my written interventions in public and private spaces, my work is based on an ancient Chinese literati practice.

Living and working in London, my observations have fed into an array of artistic disciplines including sound work, film, performance, interactive collaboration, photography, sculpture, large-scale installation and more recently books. My work is exhibited worldwide and I am also

engaged in regular philanthropic and activist commitments. Recent highlights include a large-scale installation of my work *Am I My Brother's Keeper?* inside London's Saint Paul's Cathedral, and *It Wasn't That at All*, a commissioned contemporary response to The Golden Treasure of Tutankhamun at the Saatchi Gallery, London.

EFFIE JESSOP: I am a British textile artist, living in Manchester, mostly creating portraits that are made up of words. Way back when studying for my Embroidery BA I wrote an essay using Edward Hopper's quote 'If I could say it in words there would be no reason to paint' and that has kind of summed up my approach to art. What do the words tell us that the image can't and what does the image tell us that the words can't? My work is almost entirely based on photographs and other than commissions tend to be somewhere on the self-portrait spectrum.

My favourite subject matter is text messages and other forms of instant communication. I love what is revealed by these hasty little notes, that are seldom written with a view to being revisited. Reading through a lengthy exchange of text messages can build up a wonderful picture of a relationship and yet is also very one sided; you are only seeing the communication that occurs when the parties are separate. I also went through a stage where online dating provided some wonderful material: the combination of the picture that a person has chosen to represent themselves to potential mates, along with the way they navigate those awkward early conversations is fascinating to me.

LORI ZIMMERMAN: I am a textile artist working in Los Angeles. Embroidery is my primary technique as I enjoy the meditative quality of hand stitching, the organic quality of the repetitive patterning and the challenge of working with



Jessica Bebenek, *The Waste Land*, 2017–2018, performance, twine, vintage gown, English literature anthologies, faux candles, lace, brocade fabric.

colour in the fibre medium. I incorporate painting, photography, collage and text into my work as it is called for. My recent work is inspired by the notion that as we grow and age, we are challenged to mend ourselves and our community; to heal both the skinned knee and the broken heart; to clarify misunderstandings and repair relationships; and on a larger canvas we join together with others to fight injustice – to repair the world.

I have a Bachelor of Fine Art from California College of Art and worked in textile design and interior design right after college. I took leave of the art/design world for many years as I raised my children and worked in management positions in non-profit arts organizations. I returned to my art practice in 2009 and have exhibited throughout North America. You can find my work at [www.lorizimmerman.com](http://www.lorizimmerman.com).

FIONA DEMPSTER: I live in a small town in the hinterland of Queensland's Sunshine Coast, Maleny. My background is mixed and I have come to my artistic practice late in life after differing careers as a physiotherapist, a senior government executive and a consultant. With no formal training or qualifications, I have found my way into and through a variety of mediums, at the heart of which are words.

Artists' books are my main form of expression and I am happy to incorporate metal, paper, Perspex, thread and embroidery in various ways. My work centres around feminism and peace, with forays into war, nature and stillness. My husband and I also run a small traditional letterpress studio (deckled edge press) and send out messages of hope as much as we can.

[www.fionadempster.com](http://www.fionadempster.com)  
[www.decklededgepress.com](http://www.decklededgepress.com)

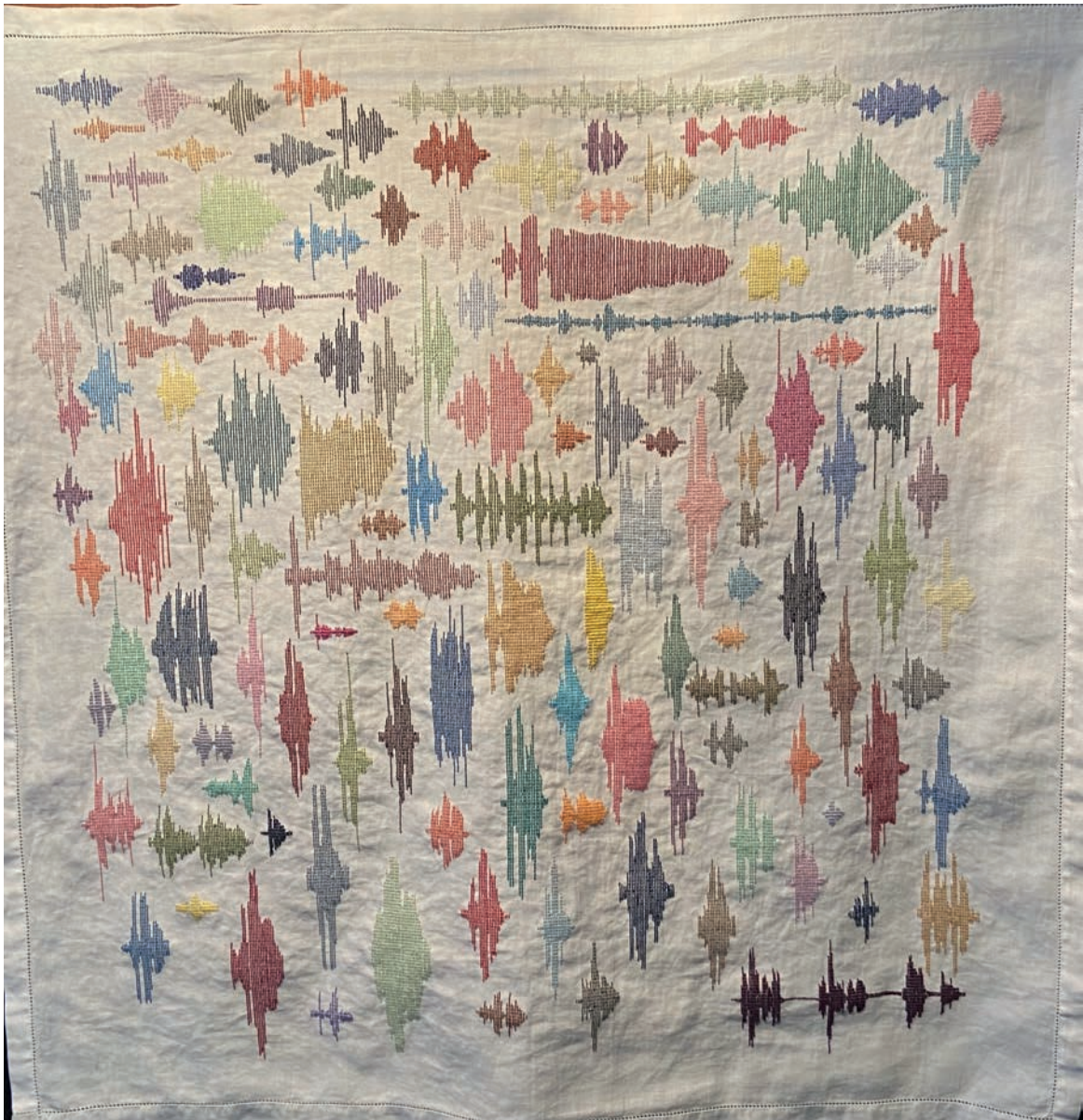
NICOLA WINBORN: I live in West Yorkshire in the UK. I am a mixed media artist and I have sewn in some shape or form all of my life. Like most young girls of my generation, I was taught how to use a needle and thread in the 1970s by my mother and grandmother. I began to use the discipline of Slow Stitch in my art in 2019. I was drawn to many aspects of this practice, such as its emphasis on

contemplation and slowing down. (Slow Stitch is hand stitching only, no machines are used, just our own dear fingers.) It also places importance on reclaimed and recycled materials, making it both low cost and environmentally aware. I also love the fact that, when I Slow Stitch, I am taking part in a spontaneous and purely instinctive practice, since it prizes unplanned sewing. Everything I make in this way is created purely within the moment and I need to feel/intuit a piece as I go along – I love being free of any and all pre-conceived plans through Slow Stitch.

SEET VAN HOUT: I was born in 1957 in the Netherlands. Since childhood I was always working with fabric and wool: knitting, making clothes for my dolls, sewing my own clothes and as a teenager I was making fashion and sold it in shops. I finished the Academy of Arts in Arnhem (Netherlands) and have been working since 1984 as an artist, in painting and drawing. But I also work, more as a hobby, in textiles. Since I travelled to India, some 25 years ago, I rediscovered my love for fabrics and I was given the opportunity to work in a weaving mill in South India where I worked with embroiderers. At that time, I also became fascinated with memory. Textile techniques were the ideal conversion for my ideas on how memory works, and to make art installations about memory.

JILL MAGI: I am based in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, and Vermont, USA. I work in text, image, and textile, and have published six books of poetry. All of my books include visual works and research, and my most recent book, *SPEECH*, is where I think my textile practice came into its most sharp focus: as I wrote the book, I was learning to weave, and this back-and-forth-motion informed the action of the book where a person walks through cities 'here' and 'there' – in the middle of America and in the Middle East. In my visual work I tune into 'textility' – so not just working with fibre, but thinking about the labour of repetitive action, measuring things against themselves, and the line or stripe – of text, of the stem of a letter, the branch of a tree, the placement of poetry on the page. I might use paint, weaving, embroidery, lettering and on a variety of substrates. My most recent solo show at Grey Noise featured the archive of weavings to accompany *SPEECH*. The exhibition





Paula Damm, *TogetherVoice*, 2020, vintage linen, cotton thread.

also featured an archive of paintings made in what I call a 'textilic' manner: small, repetitive gestures creating a 'whole.' And in one corner of the gallery, I held public programs under the title 'Poetry School,' creating a small classroom and 'mobile micro-press' where people could gather, write together, and put together a handmade book on the spot.

PATTI ROBERTS-PIZZUTO: My home and studio are located on the banks of the beautiful Missouri River, in Burbank, South Dakota, just outside Vermillion, location of the University of South Dakota. My husband and I both work at USD, where he is the Professor of Printmaking and I have a job in Admissions. We relocated here in

2005 from Sarasota, Florida where we were both affiliated with Ringling College of Art and Design. I had attended art school there many moons ago and after graduating with a degree in Painting, began what I thought would be a temporary job as a cataloguer in the library there at Ringling. It had been 25 years by the time we left and it turns out my days of cataloguing, with open books in my lap, formed the foundation of the work I would be making in the studio for the rest of my days.

My small-scale, mixed media works on paper build intuitively, from the inside out, and serve as meditations on the ebb and flow of time and the unfolding cycles of history. The intimate scale of the pieces is a reflection of my love of the book page, each a kind of homage to the magic of language, the written word, and the book as keeper of knowledge and memory. The surfaces, created through layers of intuitive drawing, become a kind of palimpsest and metaphor for history. Making marks becomes a way to mark time. Paper, paint, beeswax, thread and beads all interweave to create a tangible record, a visual trace, of the lost and ephemeral. This process allows me to say the unsayable, to share with the viewer the collective longing at the core of the human experience.

HEATHER L. JOHNSON: Though currently based in Houston (Texas, USA), I grew up moving frequently, which has influenced a predilection I have toward collecting, compiling and responding to experiences and stories – mine and those of others. After discovering motorcycles in my late 30's, the act of traveling became central to my artistic practice, providing a way to connect in real time to environments, people and perspectives outside the realm of my own prior experience. I respond to these connections in a broad range of media, most prominently through embroidery and mixed media works, much of which involves the literal re-telling of stories through hand-stitched text.

I am best known for mobile projects that celebrate acts of giving and exchange. I set artworks loose in the landscape or give them away as gestures of thanks for stories and experiences that bring fresh perspectives, upon which I base new writings and bodies of work. For my current venture *In Search of the Frightening and Beautiful*, I ride my motorcycle

long distances, encounter strangers, and give them embroidered art works, in exchange for kindness or generosity. The project, now in its eighth year, has so far ventured nearly 40,000 miles throughout the Americas, and given away 47 works of art <https://thefrighteningandbeautiful.org/>

SHARON KIVLAND: I am an artist and writer. My work considers what is put at stake by art, politics, and psychoanalysis. I am currently working on the natural form. I have been called a poet, eleven times to date, much to my surprise. I am also an editor and publisher, the latter under the imprint MA BIBLIOTHÈQUE. I live in rural France and in London.

My recent solo exhibitions include: *La Forme Naturelle*, Edizioni Periferia, Luzern, Switzerland, 2020; *Jamais une fille chaste n'a lu un roman*, Circuit, Centre d'art contemporain, Lausanne, Switzerland, 2019; *Die Holzdiebe*, ZAK (Zentrum Aktuel Kunst), Zitadelle, Spandau/Berlin, Germany, 2018–19; *La Beauté révélée*, Château de Kerjean, Saint-Vougay, Finistère, France, 2018–19; *Entreprise de la seduction*, Espace d'art contemporain, HEC, in collaboration with the Musée de la Toile de Jouy, Jouy-en Josas, France, 2018.

In 2019 I published my collection of gallery/museum press release extracts, *Unable to achieve broad recognition in my lifetime, I laboured in obscurity until my death last year*. My book *A Lover's Discourse* was shortlisted for the *Bob Calle Prix de livre d'artiste* in 2017.

Of the two books, Christian A. Wollin writes: 'Sharon Kivland has duly given us the defining discourse diptych of the decade, journeying down the dazzling venues of Total Commodification with prudent zest.' I am noted for my irony.

LISA QUALLS: I currently live and work in Tallahassee, Florida. I was born and have mostly lived in the Southern United States of America. I grew up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana where I was surrounded by people from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds – Spanish, French, Italian, African, Native American, Asian and British. Those people were fiercely proud of their heritage as well as being proud of being Louisianians.





Kate Daudy, *Am I My Brother's Keeper?*, 2019, installation view.

My own artistic sensibilities are rooted in this upbringing. I have always admired art that blends different time periods and peoples and comes from collective experiences. My work is mostly about identity, sense of place and stories whether they be individual's stories or community stories. The landscapes of the South are prominent in my work even though I do not paint many landscapes, I consider them to be as important as the people I meet and I listen to their stories.

JESSICA BEBENEK: I'm a poet and interdisciplinary artist who grew up in and around Tkaronto (Toronto) and now live in Tio'tia:ke (Montreal). I've been an avid crafter and creator since I was a child, but switched almost exclusively to writing poetry through my BA & MA in Creative Writing.

Over time, I felt constrained by the purely lyric poetry I was being taught to write in school; I had ideas which couldn't be expressed entirely within

language. As I began to see the similarities between knitting and poetry, the twin histories of women's self-expression through both mediums, I couldn't help but weave them together. Now I work in performance, knitting, needle-point techniques, sewing, bookmaking, and my crafting toolbox is always growing.

www.JessicaBebenek.art  
 www.JessicaBebenekStudio.etsy.com  
 IG: @notyrmuse

*Can you describe your work with combining textiles and text? Please name a work and discuss it, process and the motivation behind its creation.*

PAULA: In my *TogetherVoice* project I have collected over 100 audio clips from people from literally all over the world who found my call to art request on social media. Individuals sent me their voice clip saying TOGETHER in their language of origin.

I then took the clips, converted them into sound waves which I then embroidered onto a beautiful piece of vintage linen. I knew when I received audio clips from the women's section of the San Vittore prison in Milan, Italy – all saying 'TOGETHER' – that this had become bigger than me. I cried. It has been very gratifying.

KATE: I wrote all over New York City in decoupage felt letters in 2018 in response to Trump's Muslim travel ban. Please have a look at my website (KateDaudy.com) for the link to the short film *Clear Skies*, that was made by Odessa Rae with Moby. This was part of a project that started with my work *Am I My Brother's Keeper?* – an emergency



Fiona Dempster, *Women's Words - Community*, 2017, organza, stranded cotton embroidery thread, 30 × 30 cm.



desert tent distributed by the UNHCR to refugees. My tent was lived in by one year or so by a family from Syria in Jordan, the family of Abu Teim. I interviewed refugees from nearly 70 countries about what they had learned about being a human being from their experience of becoming a refugee and wrote their words on this tent. It has now been exhibited all over Europe including at Saint Paul's Cathedral, Manifesta, Palermo, London's Saatchi Gallery and has been put on the Spanish national curriculum for school children aged 12–13. It is scheduled to be exhibited at the UN Headquarters NYC in 2022–2023

The motivation behind this was to show that everything is connected, and that we can all learn from one another. That our life is what our thoughts make it.

The doilies on the tent were made by 60 'internally displaced' women in Homs and Aleppo, commissioned to make the works so that my artwork could be useful, as it is funding their families to live in these terrible circumstances of war. Also the words on the tent and these artwork doilies were made by refugees so that the final work has integrity, as the words and images are all made by refugees themselves, merely 'curated' by me, the final work a vehicle for their self-expression.

EFFIE: My piece *Holding Myself Together So Far, and No Significant Bleeding* is a self-portrait showing myself on the evening after I had had an abortion. It is made up of the text messages exchanged that had some bearing on the abortion between myself and the father of the fetus, my mother, friends and colleagues. Creating this piece was an act of therapy for me, a way of re-examining all the thought process that had gone into the decision. There was also a sense of penance in creating the work; although fiercely pro-choice and with no doubt that I made the right decision, I felt I wanted to acknowledge the sadness I felt that this had happened. Working in hand embroidery is a very slow medium, and every letter stitched was a way of my owning what had happened.

The way the images are created means that if you get your eye in you are able to read and make out some segments of what is written, but it is quite

difficult and I enjoy that sense of laying yourself bare and yet being hidden in plain sight. There is a definite sense of sadness in the image, and the title of the piece gives a further clue (the title is from a text sent to my mother from the train whilst travelling back to my place of work after the abortion), but the real heart of the piece comes from the words, which are difficult to read in any depth. The piece was exhibited at The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition and was sold to someone who I know nothing about. I often wonder how much of it they have managed to decipher.

LORI: Combining text and textiles in my work is best exemplified in my piece, *Mending, Roe v Wade*. This piece was created in reaction to the growing trend in part of the United States to erode abortion rights through overregulation of abortion clinics. I had heard stories of what it was like to have an illegal and often unsafe abortion prior to the Supreme Court ruling on *Roe v Wade*. They are chilling. It was also personal as I had an abortion shortly after the decision. Looking back, I understood how that Supreme Court decision had influenced my life; kept me safe and allowed me to start my family when I was emotionally and financially ready. The question was how to portray the need to mend *Roe v Wade*. And how to make a piece that was not political propaganda but an artistic expression that held both emotion and meaning.

My solution was to create a piece made up of two pieces of cloth. The top piece of cloth is a digital print of the first page of the *Roe v Wade* decision. I burned holes in the cloth revealing the cloth below that held the horrific stories of women who had illegal abortions prior to 1973. I used embroidery to emphasise the holes and call for the need to repair abortion rights. I then embroidered a second piece where the women's stories were on top so they could be more visible. The piece was exhibited in 2019 at the de Saisset Museum at Santa Clara University in California. At that exhibition we included an audio reading of the women's voices.

In these pieces text is used in two different ways. The image on the first page of the *Roe v Wade* decision is a graphic representation of the decision. It is not meant to be read, but is a symbol of that



historic decision. The second layer of cloth carries the stories of women who had illegal and unsafe abortions. It was my hope that the viewer would read portions of those stories and come away with a glimpse of what that experience was like and the repercussions of making abortions illegal.

FIONA: *Women's Words* is a commission undertaken for McAuley Services in Melbourne. The work hangs in the only custom-built shelter for homeless women in Australia (all the others are in converted dwellings or houses). It is a

gorgeous architecturally-designed, modern, light and airy building providing a beautiful place to stay for women and children experiencing homelessness.

I was asked to create some works which responded to the site. I visited the old centre (in an adapted orphanage – oh the ghosts) and spoke with the women who were in residence there and also had access to the visitors' book – where the women leave messages to other women when they leave and move into their own new home.



Effie Jessop, *Holding Myself Together So Far, And No Significant Bleeding*, 2012, hand embroidery on linen.

From these conversations and words, I gleaned a lot about the women and their experiences. I pored over the visitor's book trying to find words which reflected the four principles of the organisation (compassion, hospitality, community and justice) and gathered a series of verbatim quotes for each principle.

I traced the handwriting onto sheer fabric and then hand embroidered the words onto the fabric. The sheer fabric allows the staggered movement of the stitches behind the scenes to be seen, and I think that there is honesty in that; and also some reflection on the fact all our lives can be messy at times; whilst appearing tidy on the outside. The sheerness also suggests how exposed a woman is if she is living on the streets; how her entire life is laid bare.

The four individual works are held in their own Perspex frames and the fabric is attached so that it drifts down and is not held fast. It was important to me that these women were not tethered or stuck in any way – that movement is possible.

NICOLA: I often combine my Slow Stitch practice with text rendered through either Rubber Stamp Art or hand painted Asemic Writing. In early 2020, I exhibited a collection called *At Close of Day* on my own online platform, Marsh Flower Gallery. The pieces grew out of a series of experiments I'd performed fusing my rubber stamping with sewing.

It was Winter when I created this body of work and the dark nights drew in early: I remember sitting in my small box room at home – which is my studio – watching the light fade at 4pm. I began to contemplate the ancient nature of hand sewing, of how when we take part in it, we are connected with the past and with our ancestors through familiar rhythms, patterns and materials.

Each piece uses reclaimed fabrics which I've sourced from charity shops and local community social enterprises. The threads used are also reclaimed from junk stores and closing down sales. I enjoy breathing new life into materials previously destined for land fill: for me, creating like this is a way of celebrating the infinite potential of every

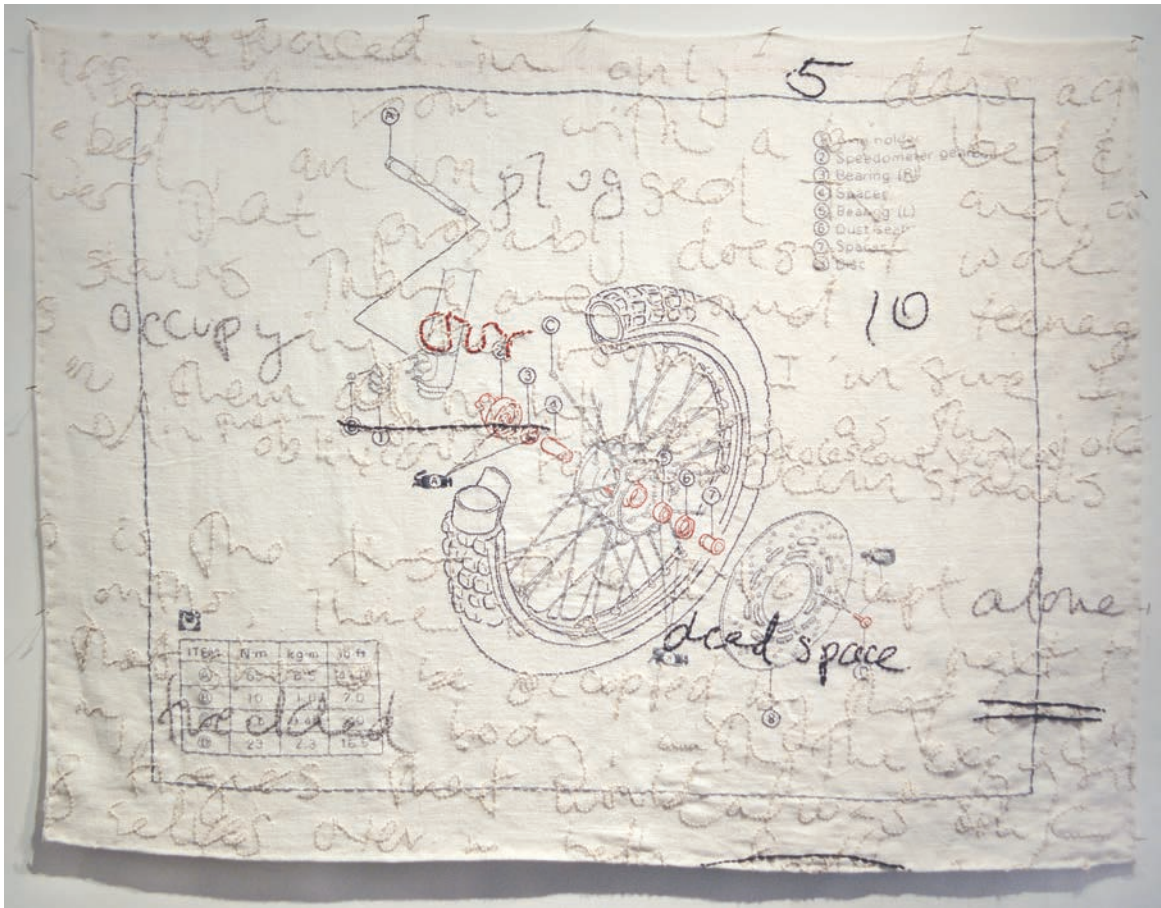
so-called 'scrap' of our material world. I wanted to keep the inclusion of text simple in these pieces too, and so I've chosen to use single rubber stamp letters like 'S', 'O', 'E', etc.

Other pieces in this exhibition use 'found' stamps like a hexagon-shaped drawing pin, the top of a screw head or a small piece of discarded wood – yet more material items enjoying a new lease of life away from the usual scrap heap. I would say that this is one of my main motivations as an artist – getting myself and others to see the 'old' as 'new' and very much worthy of our time and attention.

SEET: It seems only logical to picture memory as an attic in which all kinds of recollections are stored, or tucked away and forgotten, and from where we can retrieve them, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Nevertheless, our memory works very differently. Memories don't emerge from a storehouse of the past, but are constantly constructed and reconstructed in the present. Remembering is something we do, a 'working memory.' It involves the constantly re-executed selection, reshuffling and transformation of forms of recall. Remembering something is not a passive state but a constant activity, a performance, taking place in the here and now of those doing the recalling.

The work *Art of Memory*, which consists of texts embroidered onto strips of cotton, involves a variation on this procedure. Once again, the texts were collected from a wide range of sources – poems, scientific publications, self-help books, publications on alchemy and so on – but in some way or other, they all relate to memory. The embroidery, and the way in which coincidence determines which side is placed to the front or the rear, makes the texts partially illegible. But they have been brought together to form a single visual entity nevertheless, as if the artist is concerned with offering us an intelligible whole. How these strips of texts are presented differs from presentation to presentation, however: one time, they're mounted in a neat pattern on a wall, before suddenly crashing down like a waterfall; the next, they form an enormous cathedral, which you can walk through, or in a wall of sandbags along a river. My *Art of Memory* work does not lend itself





Heather L. Johnson, *What Keeps You Up Takes You Down*, 2016, llama's wool and cotton floss on linen burlap, 95 × 120 cm.

to fixed interpretations. It's up to the visitor to put together the fragments into new, but always temporary, constantly updated interrelationships – as if these works repeatedly enable us to practise our memory.

JILL: Inspired by Fred Moten's work in general and his book of poetry, *The Little Edges*, I have been looking for scribbles in my notebook, places where small thoughts and citations form 'clusters.' I then trace them onto thin unbleached muslin, then embroider the words in black thread, and then cut the cloth down the middle and separate the grouping of words: creating, in a sense, a set of new edges through this division. I like playing with time in this way – the quick jottings in a notebook

juxtaposed with the time it takes to embroider those words. This feels true of life at the moment and the need to pay attention to what is happening off camera, on the edges, in the uncensored moments of thought-image as they might occur on paper and then as I re-present them on fabric. These embroideries provide an accompaniment to larger paintings featuring bold horizontal stripes: paintings that look almost like signs or titles for something, but the thick bold line might be 'any language' or it might even signal censorship. I would like viewers to zoom out and close in and I like the push-pull that these works, together, force. After all of these years, working in these ways, I've realised that my poetics for making books and making visual work is similar: I do lots of citation



work, rearrange and cut up, working in expressive and mechanical ways, both. In writing and in textiles, I begin with the desire to say something, and then allow for cuts, seams, and random rearrangements to say something I would have never dreamed of. I like the idea that I'm pushing toward a kind of improvised sovereignty via this method.

PATTI: Given my interest in the book, my works are on paper, primarily Japanese papers, which are lovely to work on. The drawing and surface are deeply enriched by being dipped in beeswax, which reinforces the paper and enables the stitching that extends the drawing. Can I just say that I absolutely love sewing on paper? Drawing with thread on paper dipped in beeswax is a slow and sensual process, perfectly meditative, allowing me to think through my hands. The drawings are intuitive and the movement of my hands reveals the next mark and the path forward, step by step and mark by mark. The creative process reveals a kind of knowing, insights that are distinct from either language or image.

By way of example, pieces from the *Notes from the Ancestors* series, which are drawings made on Japanese paper that are dipped in beeswax. They are further embellished with stitched collage fragments of other drawings, embroidered imagery and sometimes beads. Many of the pieces from this series contain sections that depict asemic language (*Notes from the Ancestors* no. 9) or evoke words on the page with a pattern of dots or small circles that represent the words on a page (*Notes from the Ancestors*, no. 11, 15, 18). These drawings evoke old letters, manuscripts or perhaps, notes from the ancestors, whose words can bring us long lost wisdom from ages past.

HEATHER: My primary venture, *In Search of the Frightening and Beautiful*, has served as an umbrella project for many smaller investigations, each building upon the previous, responding to various findings and revelations from travels made. For the last two years I have been planning a new journey, for which I have been gathering stories from people in Houston and stitching edited versions into small artworks to take on the road. These I will leave in the hands of others in exchange for new stories and

experiences – all in the service of building bridges between people of different identifications, cultures, backgrounds and belief systems. The act of stitching evokes, among other things, the practice of mending – potent and necessary in our current time of polarization and disease.

While Covid continues to prevent safe travel, I've been working on a gifting initiative called *What Holds Us Together* that sends small stitched mixed media works on paper, layered with road story excerpts printed on vellum, to people who have been good to me over the years, as well as to those whom I know are struggling. Each person receives a fragment of a much larger work of art that, once put together, reveals a mechanical diagram illustrating the locations of vital tiny fasteners that keep a motorcycle's engine from blowing apart while in motion. It's served as a way to remind people how vital we all are, to each other and to the rest of the world.

SHARON: I will introduce the group of works shown in Luzern, a show that closed as soon as it opened. I will not write about them all, of course. The works on display and their arrangement were conceived for the space of Edizioni Periferia, following my exhibition in 2019 at CIRCUIT, Centre d'art contemporain in Lausanne. They may be considered as a series of stagings and restagings, often with familiar characters who assume new roles, concerning feminised reading, sexuality, and education. Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Karl Marx's *Capital* are central texts, provide a logical pairing in the spectre of social boundaries failing to hold, when what is private and what is public are no longer separate spheres. The first takes up the staging of the affliction of the woman reader, for Emma Bovary reads too much and her reading is bound to lead to trouble ('her over-exalted dreams, her too cramped house [*les rêves trop hauts ... la maison trop étroite*]'). In reading *Capital*, women readers are equally dangerous. Reading women have subversive potential, and reading leads to errancy and transgression.

In the hall women's knickers, antique, pink silk, embroidered in red *soie de Paris* in *Ecolier* script, with the phrase '*je suis une femme moderne*' are suspended in beaks of birds (a buzzard, a jay, a



Sharon Kivland, *La Forme naturelle*, 2020, installation view, with many elements, including books, furniture, photographs, clothes, embroideries, and animals

thrush, a pair of doves...). If the visitor continues through the silk and birds, s/he will arrive at something a little like a schoolroom. Eight wooden chairs are arranged on red glacé leather skins. From each chair hangs a *blousons d'écolier*, the smock or overall uniform that is no longer worn in schools. On each of eight chairs there is a squirrel holding in its dear little paws, *culottes* in varying shades of pink, embroidered in red *soie de Paris* and *Écolier* script, with a phrase signifying the lovely object that is the commodity, showing the mutable forms taken by *mademoiselle la marchandise*. On each chair is a paperback copy of *Madame Bovary*, each cover giving a certain impression of 'Emma', according to the time it was published. On a school desk a less diligent squirrel has made a bed of *Capital*, and fallen asleep, her embroidery (a handkerchief: *la*

*forme naturelle*) unfinished. On one wall, there is a row of eight books on a lectern, paperback copies of *Capital*. Opposite, two more lecterns, again with *Capital*. Around the other walls runs a frieze of black and white posters depicting alternately the faces of young girls and the silk and lace-clad torsos of women, take from French fashion journals of the 1950s. It is as if the girls are looking for models in the *corps morcélés*.

If instead, the visitor had turned to the right on entry, they would have been greeted by a fox head, holding an embroidered silk bed jacket, a *liseuse*, in his jaws. The text is taken from that strange tract written by Sylvain Maréchal in 1801, entitled *Plan for a law forbidding a woman to learn to read* (1801), which consists of eighty-two clauses, fortified by a

hundred and thirteen reasons for the law, to prove that the woman who knows the alphabet has already lost a portion of her innocence (his friend and biographer Madame Gacon Dufour declared that he must be partially insane), in acquiring excessive education, linking innocence and ignorance, carnal knowledge and book knowledge. I am convinced the tract is a masterpiece of irony.

In the library to the left of the hall, five short films, entitled *Coquetteries*, play endlessly, for a single viewer seated in a beautiful armchair. In each, a single page in a French lingerie magazine is tracked from neck to knee or foot, slipping over and down the garment, a negligée, accompanied by a voiceover reading a description of the lingerie trends of the season. The sound seeps through the entire space of Periferia.

For the accompanying edition, ten booklets were boxed with an antique handkerchief embroidered in *red soie de Paris* and *Didot* script, each with a characteristic of the commodity ('naturelle,' 'phénoménale,' 'sociale,' etc.).

LISA: While I learned to sew, embroider, and quilt from my grandmother, mother and aunt and I understand why other artists would refer to their use of textiles as 'women's work,' I have never assigned a gender orientation to the use of textiles in my own work. I think of sewing, crocheting, knitting, stitching and textile design to be about construction, materials and technique and gender neutral. I have a background in architectural design. Using the fabric to dye, cut patterns, stitch and create either 3-D or 2-D pieces of artwork is very architectural to me.

Some of the objects that I have created such as *Buffalo Song*, *Surveillance Maritime* or a series of shifts that are about women disappearing on the border of Texas and Mexico I consider to be sculptures made of fabric. They are about surface, form and colour. They are about space, both enveloping it and being surrounded by it.

*Buffalo Song* is a hanging sculpture with two main elements. One is a very long panel of gold silk fabric that is attached to the ceiling and flows through the second element, a woolen military style jacket

onto a hoop skirt armature. The silk is not stitched, it is guided through the jacket and around the armature to look like a beam of light becoming a skirt. A metal armature holds the jacket erect as if it were being worn. At the bottom edge of the skirt there are words from a Lakota-Sioux Buffalo Song written in pencil, circling around the partial sphere that creates the skirt. The piece is about the intersection of European and Native cultures, iconic forms and words representing the language and sound of the songs.

In some ways the piece is about my great-grandmother Marie Dean Smalley Overbeck who along with her sister made her way to Oklahoma as a young woman. They travelled from Kansas into what was then called Indian Territory to homestead. For my great-grandmother this was freedom to create a new life for herself. She met her husband there. He claimed the plot of land next to hers. She was unwittingly part of the demise of a culture of people and unfortunately probably part of the over farming in Oklahoma and what would create the 'Dust Bowl.'

*Buffalo Song* represents the sunlight and nomadic life of the Native-American tribes of that area who hunted and respected the American Bison. The song was sung before a hunt to call the buffalo and prepare the hunters. The military style jacket represents the Europeans moving west, claiming land and usurping territories from the First Peoples. The European and United States military jackets were prized by Native Americans and incorporated into their own style of dress. The hoop armature echoes the hoop skirt of the era. The pencilled and very subtle words of the Buffalo Song written along the bottom of the de facto skirt is a requiem to that lost way of life. The song whose text I used is still being sung and danced and will not be forgotten.

My great-grandmother's wish for freedom and a new life led her to a place where other cultures were being destroyed. I feel that it is my duty to create something that honours those First Peoples and their cultures as they honoured the land and the buffalo.

JESSICA: In my first knitted-poetry project, *k2tog*,





Jill Magi, *The book always she always wrapped in bandages*, 2019, handwoven cloth, cast bronze twig, laser-cut book, handmade box. Edition of 2.

I developed a system of translating poems into knitting patterns in which the stressed syllables of the poem become knit stitches and the unstressed syllables become purl stitches. In this series, I knitted poems by women in which the authors directly respond to one another, and so my knitting pattern becomes another in a chain of call and response. I first knitted the pieces myself, but it became imperative to me that other people have access to the patterns, to knit them themselves, thereby decentralising my role as the sole author of the work.

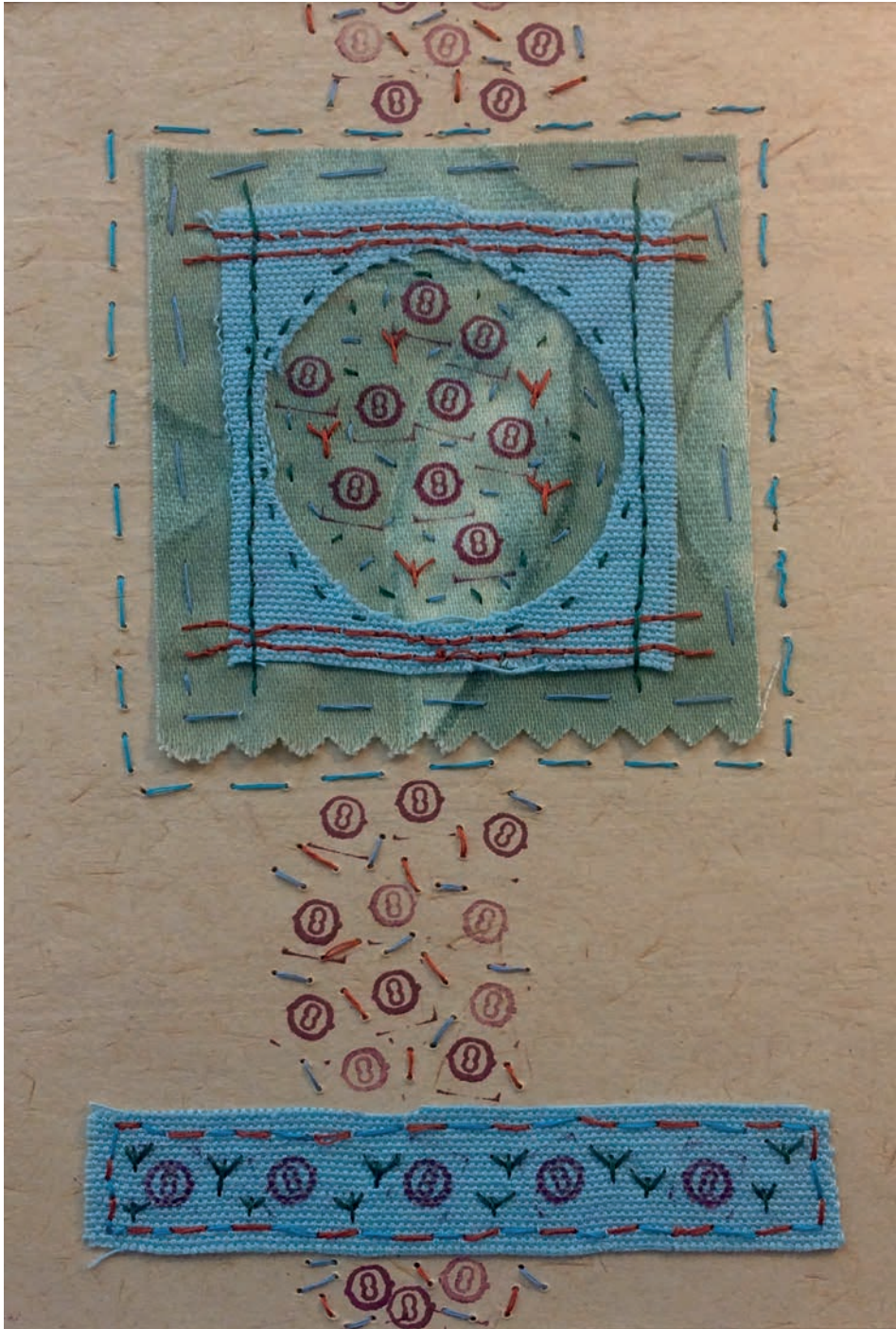
I'm inspired by how knitting patterns are a creative work by a singular author which are expressly intended to be replicated, in opposition to the cult of individual genius which we find in the poetic tradition. I took this idea further at Toronto's Nuit Blanche 2017 where I gave my first performance of *The Waste Land*. From 7 pm to 7 am, I publicly knit Eliot's Modernist epic poem, later completing the piece over another 13 hours of performances. I felt

that the private, trancelike labour of textile creation needed to be witnessed, that the act of creation was the very heart of the piece.

*How does it fit in with the rest of your artistic practice?*

PAULA: It fascinates me how marks and sounds send messages – how words can be fractured by different means; the word is still there – but not. I love how the oil and skin cells become integrated with the piece. The fibres become reliquaries for the word and the artist's self – holding something sacred but hidden. I love the idea of reliquary and previous works focused on this image. I love the risk when one takes a needle in their hand and starts stabbing/changing the base fibre being 'sewn' – that there is micro destruction of the base and there is always risk of blood!

KATE: My work, in whatever material it might be, looks at how everything is connected. Making work cut out in felt is just a part of my practice



Nicola Winborn, *At Close of Day 2*, 2019, reclaimed antique sewing threads, reclaimed antique fabrics, handmade paper; letter 'O' rubber stamp, plum ink pad.

which extends cross many media and includes collaborations and participatory performance. I am a multimedia artist and so all of my work fits in under that umbrella.

EFFIE: There are so many things that please me about embroidering text messages; using counted thread technique of embroidering means that the letters are really uniform, just like font on a screen. Yet hand embroidery is up there with the slowest of mediums, which beautifully contrasts the rapid ease with which we type out a text. Also the idea of creating an heirloom with great longevity, that will be cherished and admired, out of text messages that have been hastily written with little thought to them being kept and revisited.

LORI: I continue to be drawn to the meditative quality of embroidery and the universal themes of mending and repair. Text is a powerful tool in creating meaning and will continue to be part of my repertoire.

FIONA: Words and storytelling are at the heart of all of my work – whether it is beautiful calligraphy, hand-set traditional letterpress printing; burnt book pages or etched into aluminium. All of my work is slow, as is the hand stitching. Hand stitching connects me to the work of women through the ages and threads and sewing appear in a lot of my women's work.

SEET: A similar procedure of order and accident can be found in the large-scale work *Melancholy Girls*, a gigantic book with pages that were produced using a wide range of techniques and textile materials. If these pages are turned over, the back side reveals surprisingly different images that are nevertheless the reciprocal product of the front of the page. Like memory!

NICOLA: As well as being a textile artist, I also work with rubber stamps, mail art, asemics and collage. My brain seems to be wired in a way which constantly makes connections between these different methods and so I experiment and fuse practices frequently. There are strong parallels between the way in which materials are reclaimed through *Slow Stitch* and the way that Mail Art reuses ephemera like postage stamps, bus tickets,

letters, packaging etc. Both disciplines create tremendous opportunities to recycle matter and reveal its hidden potential.

JILL: Here I think it may be useful to talk about community and audience. I write books toward a community of poets whom I admire. And we have our elders – a kind of 'experimental' lineage from which we get inspiration, courage, and method. But books are quiet, read privately, and the incredible silence after publishing a book always drives me back into the studio, usually to play around with visual work. I return to colour, pigment, the repetitive action of weaving, a scale much larger than the space of the book page. It's as if I need to stretch out, physically. So, if I think about writing and textile work together, I can't help but think of the movement between notebook and studio, the space of a book, and the space of a wall or the architecture that is visual art's space and constraint. I need them both.

PATTI: This series reflects my ongoing interest in the continuation of time, the thread that runs through us, connecting our collective past to the unfolding future. The history our days accumulates, as civilization builds on top of civilization, our days.

HEATHER: The act of stitching embodies a certain generosity, in terms of its references to weaving and connecting, that leads down the path of embracing empathy and mutual understanding. Meditative, slow, careful and quiet, it places one in the role of the active listener.

SHARON: The first thought of these works was shown in Athens in 2019, in *Voyage around my room*, curated by Kika Kyriakacou with Vicky Tsirou. It is characteristic of my work that it is conceived as tableaux with a cast of characters, who may act in different ways according to the circumstances of their arrangement; my forms entwine politics and aesthetics in the intersection of public political action and private subjectivity.

In 1893 Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer published *On the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication*, introducing many of the ideas threaded throughout their



*Studies on Hysteria* published two years later. In both texts, they link women to fabric with the suggestion that the daydreaming incurred by needlework 'renders women especially prone' to the confused splitting of consciousness that defines the 'hypnoid state', a potential prelude to hysterical symptoms.

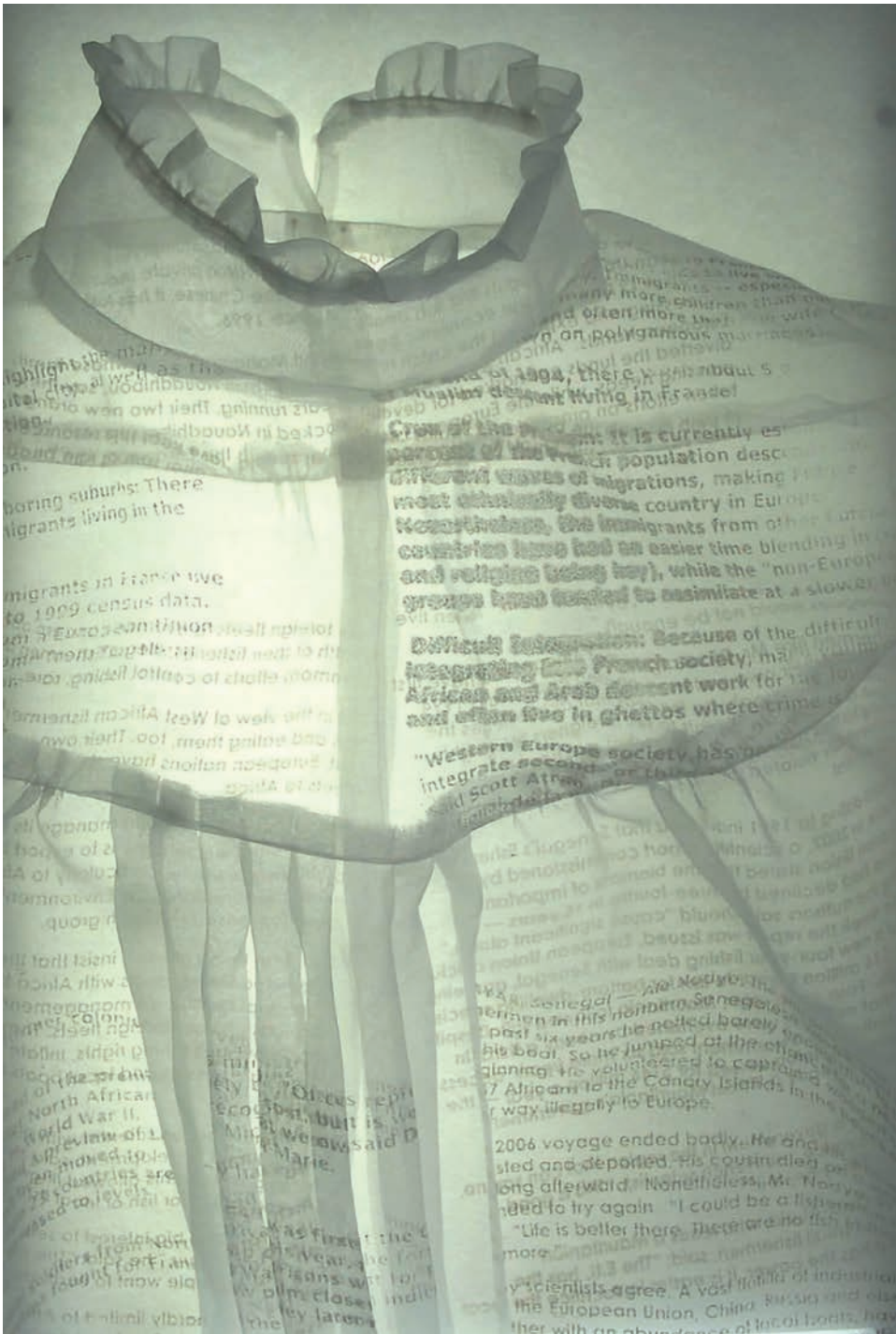
Jean-Jacques Rousseau once knew a girl (he calls her a young person) who learned to write before learning to read. She began to write with her needle before she wrote with a quill. She makes only Os, nothing but, large and small, inside each other, nestling Os, os, one inside the other, always in reverse. O is the same backwards, O is a mirror. O is one inside the Other: little o, big O. We Lacanians say petit a, little other, grand A, big Other. One day she looked at herself in the mirror and though how

ungraceful she looked in this constrained attitude of making her Os and threw away her quill. She no longer wanted to make Os. Her brother did not like to write either, but it was the constraint he disliked, not the ungraceful air it gave him. They tried to bring her back to writing by a trick. She was delicate and vain. She did not like to have her linen used by her sisters. Linen had to be marked, to show to whom it belonged, and no one wanted to mark hers anymore. They said she had to learn to do it herself. It was a matter of possession, ownership. It is always a matter of this.

Women once learnt to read through embroidering, as art or craft or labour, women's work in any case, where the skill of the needlework was more important than the mastery of cursive script. There was a time that only the catechism and



Seet van Hout, *The Art of Memory*, 2006–ongoing, installation view, cotton and thread.



Lisa Qualls, *Blouse for Dress*, 2009, silk, thread and silkscreen.

needlework were taught, but some demanded more, to be taught about everything. They read, and they learnt quickly. They understood forms. They assumed forms.

LISA: *Buffalo Song, Surveillance Maritime*, the shifts about missing women in Northern Mexico, *A Gesture of Love* and other constructions using fabric, dye, stitching and text are all inspired by people. They are about hard-working people looking for their place in the world and the hope of fulfilling their best potential. The people who inspire me are women and men, everyday people. They struggle and they succeed, they celebrate and they mourn, they live. My work is about life and the stories of individuals and communities.

I choose the materials and techniques that best express what I am thinking and feeling. Sometimes that comes to me in an image. Sometimes the materials themselves inspire the idea. I like to create sculptural things with texture, rich colours and a lot of handmade detail. Textiles are often my choice for expressing memories of people because the clothes, their forms and styles, embody power.

JESSICA: I'm realising now, as I progress further into my journey as a witch, how artmaking is a form of worship for me – a thinking-through and gratitude for my own creation and creativity. When I create through any medium, I feel connected to all people through time, especially women and queers, who have created for both domestic and spiritual survival, to feed their communities and to feed their souls.

Looking back to my *Nuit Blanche* performance, I can see how I created a magical circle, a sacred space for spell work to be done, though it was totally unconscious at the time. I'm also beginning to use language more in my spell work as the barriers break down between my artistic practice and my practice of being human. All that to say, I'm excited to experience how these two realms will continue to blend and what will come of it.

*Can you please name one or two women visual artists who work with language/text who have influenced or inspired you and why they have done so?*

PAULA: The amazing and talented Terri Witek has influenced me for years. Initially as my big sister who I was always in awe of because she always seemed so cool, smart, brave and worldly. Getting a glimpse of her thought processes when it came to her visual work opened a door as to how to think past the obvious, to attempt connections where there might not first appear to be any and to make those leaps and see what happens. Her enthusiasm and support have been never-ending. Finding this new part of myself has been like throwing open a window on a lovely spring day. (Terri, no cringing at my metaphor!)

KATE: Louise Bourgeois & Kiki Smith.

EFFIE: Tracey Emin. She wrote about things that were private and personal and put them there for all to see.

LORI: I am inspired by the work of Shirin Neshat who combines photography and calligraphy. Her work has a strong conceptual basis while also evoking a strong emotional response. She creates true art.

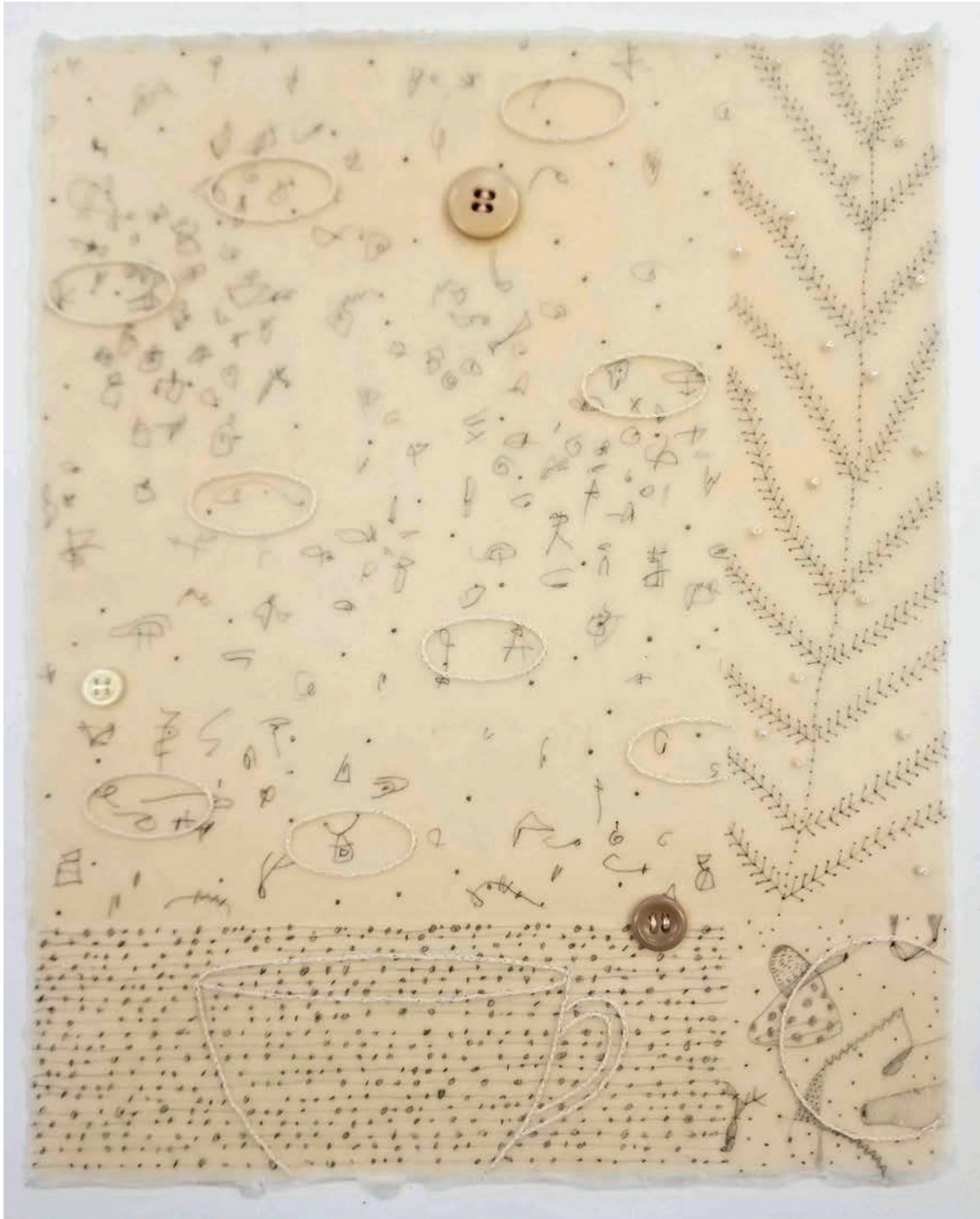
FIONA: Caren Florance of Ampersand Duck is a traditional letterpress printmaker who engages with words as visual poetry. She consistently pushes the boundaries of books and text and uses traditional processes into entirely new and contemporary ways.

NICOLA: Sara Fanelli – her illustrations with text never fail to fill me with joy. I delight in the Dadaist strand in her work, her love of the nonsensical, play and childhood. Plus, her work is awash with colour and collage, which are two of my greatest passions.

SEET: Louise Bourgeois, Tracy Emin, Nick Cave (man), Sheila Hicks.

JILL: Etel Adnan and Cecilia Vicuña. Etel Adnan writes in English and she says she paints in Arabic. She moves between writing desk and painting desk. Some have even said, about her work, that the writing and the painting are different. Yes! I love this freedom. These two textures of work do





Patti Roberts-Pizzuto, *Notes from the Ancestors, no. 15*, 2016, graphite, embroidery and button on Japanese paper dipped in beeswax.

not have to 'relate.' I read all of Adnan's work as an insistence on freedom--she doesn't adhere to genre, and she moves between mediums at will. This, of course, is political. Cecilia Vicuña has been a mentor to me and I treasure her work in both the poetry community and, more recently, in the world of visual art. I am so glad she is finding more audiences. Her insistence on poly-lingualism and the relationship between utterance, thread, poetry, breath, handwriting is sustaining to me. I also love the ways that she 'works large' – by making many many small things –her army of 'precarious' – and also by ritualistically unfurling bundles of roving dyed in deep and gorgeous colours. Again, like Adnan, Vicuña is always playing with 'no genre' and insisting on sovereignty. How both of these artists move toward sovereignty without resorting to individualism is a thing worth studying: so necessary now. Speaking of thread, it is as if their work is always tethered to community, to the politics of the real, and the tethering appears to be so that they can truly soar.

PATTI: Leslie Dill – her playful and innovative use of text to pay homage to the magic of language. Anne Hamilton – her powerful installations that incorporate place, memory, and symbols to uncover lost history. Agnes Martin – does not actually use text, but the meditative nature of the grid and pattern of horizontal line calls to mind, for me, the beauty of language and a kind of visual text.

HEATHER: Barbara Kruger's brazen ironic punk rock anti ad banners influenced the hell out of me when I was young. Annette Messager also comes to mind, the way she has spent decades turning the most raw and difficult human experiences inside out, for all to witness. There are countless others.

SHARON: All the unnamed women – the lorettes and the grisettes, the shopgirls and the hironnelles, the seamstresses, the lace-makers, the embroiderers, the women of the Paris Commune who set up workshops to teach girls to read and write, to learn a trade in silk and wool and lace and writing... Add to them the artists who might disappear from time

to time but whose work continues, hands down... and the writers, the poets, the female dandies.

LISA: I have to be honest and say that I cannot think of any women artists who have specifically influenced or inspired my work with text.

The women whose text has inspired me the most have been writers: Irene Nemirovsky, Zora Neale Hurston, Willa Cather and Pearl Buck. These authors/artists are women who write about life and whose words evoke powerful images.

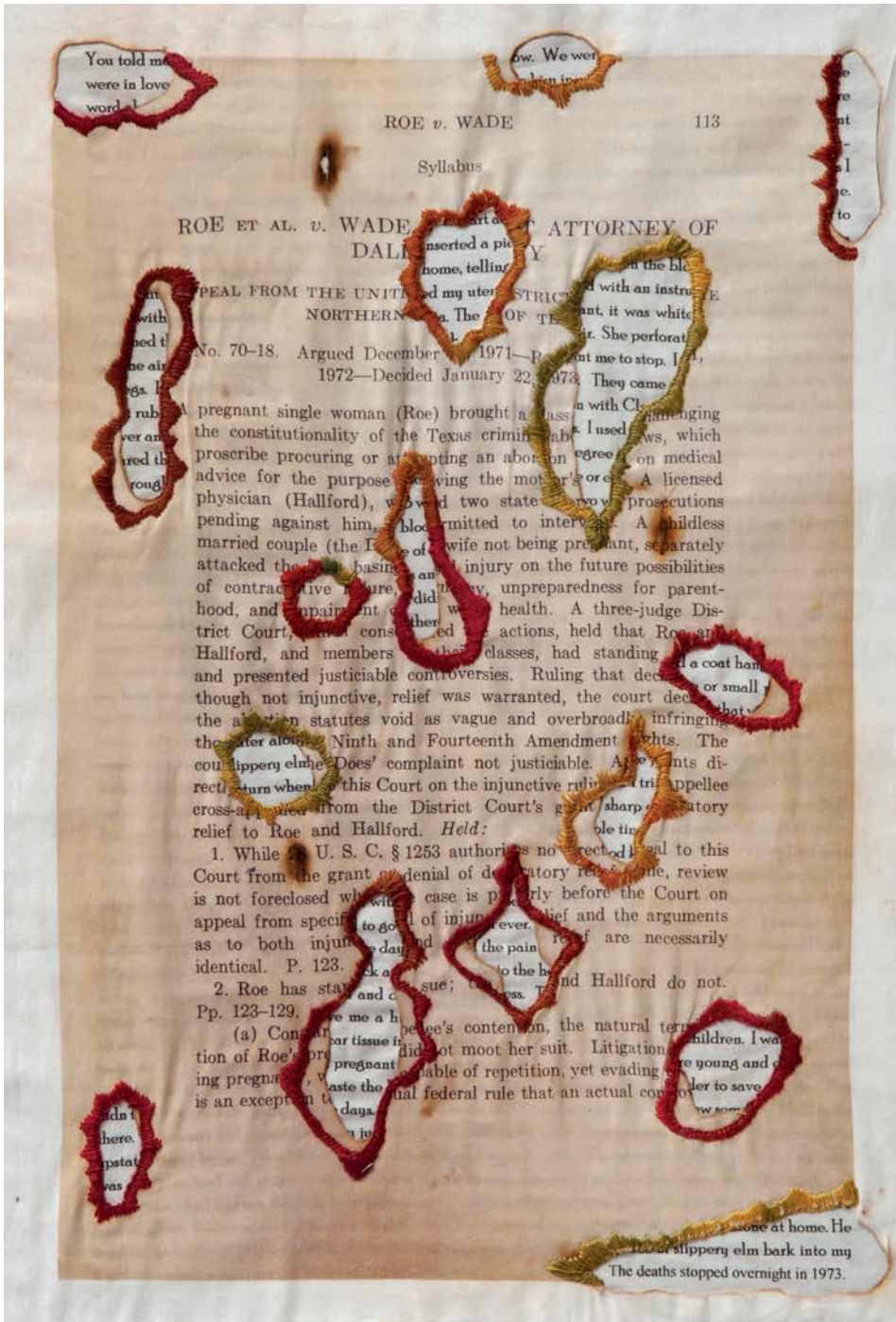
JESSICA: Jen Bervin was a huge early influence on me in transitioning from exclusively lyric poetry to interdisciplinarity and fibre art. Bervin mingles bookmaking, weaving, erasure poetry, stitching, and performance to create singular and delightfully tactile languages. Before seeing her work and having the opportunity to meet her, I didn't realise that boundaries between artforms could be so wonderfully blurred. She was trained as a visual artist who then trained herself as a poet and so I thought, 'why can't I do the same reversed?'

*Anything you'd like to add?*

PAULA: Thanks to the women of WAAVE – you have been welcoming and inspiring. And most importantly, it is never too late.

PATTI: Our lives are built slowly over time, through events that play out on stages large and small. We spend our numbered days celebrating the quiet joys and sorrows that bind us to the earth and to one another. In the endless sweep of history, we each become part of the community of those who came before. I leave the trace of my days through the work of my hands.

LISA: While I have been included in this interview because I am a female artist who uses text and textiles in my work, what I want most is to be seen as an artist. An artist who tells stories, who creates subtle and powerful images and who perhaps heals through those stories and images.



Lori Zimmerman, *Mending, Roe v. Wade*, 2014, digital print, cotton, embroidery floss, 35.5 × 24 cm.