

Anne Wilson: a hand well trained

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<http://www.rhoffmangallery.com>

Studio working writing - 2017

I work in a textile language, making both material drawings in the studio and performing the infrastructure of textile production in public venues.

Found cloth and human hair have been my sources for material drawings for over 25 years. Cloth comes to me from all sides of my family. Some of the cloth travelled with family members who were refugees from Romania during WWII. Some of the cloth is from my Quaker and Canadian ancestors. My materials range from these heirlooms to more everyday found cloth, like commercially produced motel sheets, pillowcases, and restaurant cloth.

The politics of re-use are foundational to the work. I am re-using bits from the superabundance of existing material things, and acknowledging the history and context of cloth and its connections to the body and touch. All the cloth I'm currently employing was once used in sleeping and dining spaces – as tablecloths and bed linens.

I'm working along the edges or borders of this cloth, either the outer borders (a hem or selvage) or along a cut or slit made into the cloth. I think of all this work as materialized drawing with cloth as the substrate and human hair and thread as the line.

The horizontal edge drawings (**Draw Out...**) began as a response to the movement in my last thread walking performance at The Drawing Center and the tension as performers held the thread, pulling it back and forth between 2 points. As material choreographies, they suggest a score-like or notational format with the potential to also be "read" and generate movement. Other horizontal edge drawings directly employ text, **Proper Behaviors**, for example, use excerpts from instructional embroidery texts.

In another group of works, the **Inventory Drawings**, the designation of ownership - an inventory or laundry mark - is within one of the edges. Thus, each piece is titled according to this mark.

Practice (nos 1 & 2) are both texts and textiles. They are a form of asemic writing. They record the collective labor of 6 pairs of hands: Wilson and studio interns Caroline Gerberick, Ashley Hamilton, Carolyn Marcantonio, Claire Bartlett, and Erika Ray in the summer of 2015. The backside of the stitched edge reveals more about the identity of individual hand labor, the irregularities and idiosyncrasies of each hand - the pace of line, the cadence and rhythm of thread, the punctuation of knots, and the evidence of practice and close detail of learning.

In the vertical edge drawings, **Body into Culture**, a cut or slit or long oval bisects the cloth and these inner edges are also stitched with hair and thread, reinforcing the cut edge and delineating a shape. In some, the hair is released from the cloth substrate entirely and bound to form ovals. Together the 14 parts provide a more visceral relationship to the viewer's body.

This work is intentionally produced and placed out of the often-accelerated digital time demands of information production and consumption. My art embraces a determined feminism and human capacities of making, building and rebuilding, within a world of chaos, trauma, and destruction.

Notes about the title: a hand well trained

There is a political position in the words, "a hand well trained" - in the prescriptive message to an assumed woman needle worker, first written and here excerpted from an encyclopedic embroidery text from the late 19th century (*Encyclopedia of Needlework* by Therese de Dillmont) - a text reprinted multiple times and one I've used since high school. Not used as an appraisal of "good" work by my hand in the exhibition, rather to underscore problematic notions of women's conformity to social norms historically.

Also, "a hand well trained" could reference a baker, a shoemaker, a sex worker, or an embroiderer. There are many kinds and qualities of trained handwork.

There is currently a renewed engagement with hand making in response to contemporary conditions -- the saturation of the digital (the omnipotence of screens), the environmental urgency of reuse, and the political position of personal agency in making everyday things. As well, the greater critical acknowledgement of contemporary artists from Africa, Asia, and South America, where hand making traditions have historically held deep cultural and visual meaning, has contributed to a wider field of inclusion.

--Anne Wilson