



## SITE VISIT: Anne Wilson, Davis Street Drawing Room



*Davis Street Drawing Room, interior view. Image courtesy the artist.*

## SITE VISIT

Anne Wilson

Davis Street Drawing Room

Evanston, Illinois

*The Davis Street Drawing Room is Anne Wilson's new experimental and public facing art project. Textile parts, excavations from years of Wilson's art-making, form an archive displayed over multiple horizontal surfaces and walls in her studio (now drawing room) in Evanston, Illinois. The organization of lace fragments, linens, worn cloth, and glass bobbins is based on textile properties: rolls, stacks, layers, piles, balls, and cones. This art project transforms Wilson's studio into a site for close observation. To schedule a visit to Davis Street Drawing Room please email Sofia Fernandez Diaz, Drawing Room Project Manager, at [sfernandezdiaz@saic.edu](mailto:sfernandezdiaz@saic.edu).*

By Kristin Mariani, Gervais Marsh & L. Vinebaum

*Radical Hospitality*

L. Vinebaum

The Davis Street Drawing Room is sited in the front room on the second floor of a house on Davis Street in Evanston, Illinois. This is the home of artist and professor Anne Wilson.

I visit on a sunny day and the room is full of light. Wilson begins the visit by introducing the house and its history, pointing out architectural details like original fixtures, sinks, and a handmade leaded glass window. The house was built as a Victorian frame house in 1887, and the exterior renovated in the present prairie school style in 1909. From 1891- 1896 it was an upper-class boarding house. The room that is home to the Davis Street Drawing Room, Wilson surmises, could have been a drawing room: a space for its turn of the century inhabitants to retire for conversation after dinner. Back then, a drawing room might have been a space of gendered separation. More contemporaneously, the room has been the site of Wilson's practice, a space for unraveling the power dynamics of gender, labor, affect, and materials.



In its current iteration as the Davis Street Drawing Room, the room is a living archive. An archive of textiles and fragments and remnants of textiles. Textiles that form the physical and conceptual source material of Wilson's practice. A practice spanning 45 years. An artist's life's work.

Visitors are invited to immerse themselves in the archive. To slow down and observe. To look closely. They are invited to respond to the archive by drawing, writing, reading, researching, and photographing. They are invited to add their responses to the archive.

The room is full of textiles formally arranged on tables, walls, and in drawers. Impeccably pressed textiles, formally folded cloths, rolled up textiles of various kinds. Bed sheets, tablecloths, runners, napkins, tea towels, black-edged Victorian mourning handkerchiefs. Textile arrangements and assemblages: black lace, woven damasks, hems and selvages, cloth fragments, piles of scraps, cloths worn through with holes. Everyday textiles and textiles reserved for special occasions, all meticulously cared for. There are multiple generations of textiles worked by hand by women in Wilson's family, by her grandmother, great grandmother, aunts, great aunts, cousins. They did embroidery, cutwork, openwork, trapunto, lacework, and various kinds of needlework. The cloths were meticulously cared for, passed down from generation to generation. Cloths from the Midwest, from Canada, from Romania. They are imbued with the conditions of their making — poverty and necessity, leisure and status. And they are inscribed with the labor of mending and making things last.





*Davis Street Drawing Room, interior view. Image courtesy the artist.*

Labor and hard work.

The labor of care and taking care of. Cloth. Home. Family. Loved ones. One's practice.

The labor of grief and loss and mourning.

The work of materializing labor.

Recurring themes in Anne Wilson's oeuvre.

Handwork is slow work.

It's a lifetime of work.

The Davis Street Drawing Room is located in the artist's studio, in the space where she's been making art for 34 years. There are drawers with samples, investigations, experiments, and prototypes integral to the conception and creation of Wilson's major projects and series of works. I can't decide on a single textile to draw, so I spend some time looking through these drawers, seeing in them glimpses of the projects they sustained.

The room is filled with things that viewers of an artist's work never get to see. They are the insides.

I write

"RADICAL HOSPITALITY"

"RADICAL GENEROSITY"



Handwork is work that connects us to others. And the Davis Street Drawing Room is a shared ecosystem of people and cloth.

I stop to think about what it means for an artist to share her life's work so intimately and invitingly. To open her home, her studio, her intimate space of creation — carefully (as in full of care) transformed into a formal archive of sources for her oeuvre. To encourage us to engage with, examine, handle the materials at the core of her work. To invite us to bear witness to research and process. To create a response that becomes part of the archive for others to experience. To welcome us in. To invite us to become collaborators, to be an integral part of the work.



*(w)hole*

Gervais Marsh

There are so many (w)holes, areas perpetually coming  
undone. It is loss and nascent openings.

Pieces intertwine through ever-shifting  
circumstances, and by the same processes  
they disintegrate, leaving holes of what  
once was and perhaps glimpses of  
what could be. Textures vary based  
on the conditions of becoming, shaped  
by desire, value, practicality.

There may be no whole, it may not  
be a possibility in a world built  
through fragmentation. Is it (am I)  
whole because I say so? Or is it  
gentler to understand living within  
fragmentation as a continuous experience  
of loss, shifting realities and  
generating towards something else?

To live through fragmentation  
necessitates experimentation.

I no longer fight the forces  
that pull me undone. What, if anything,  
emerges?

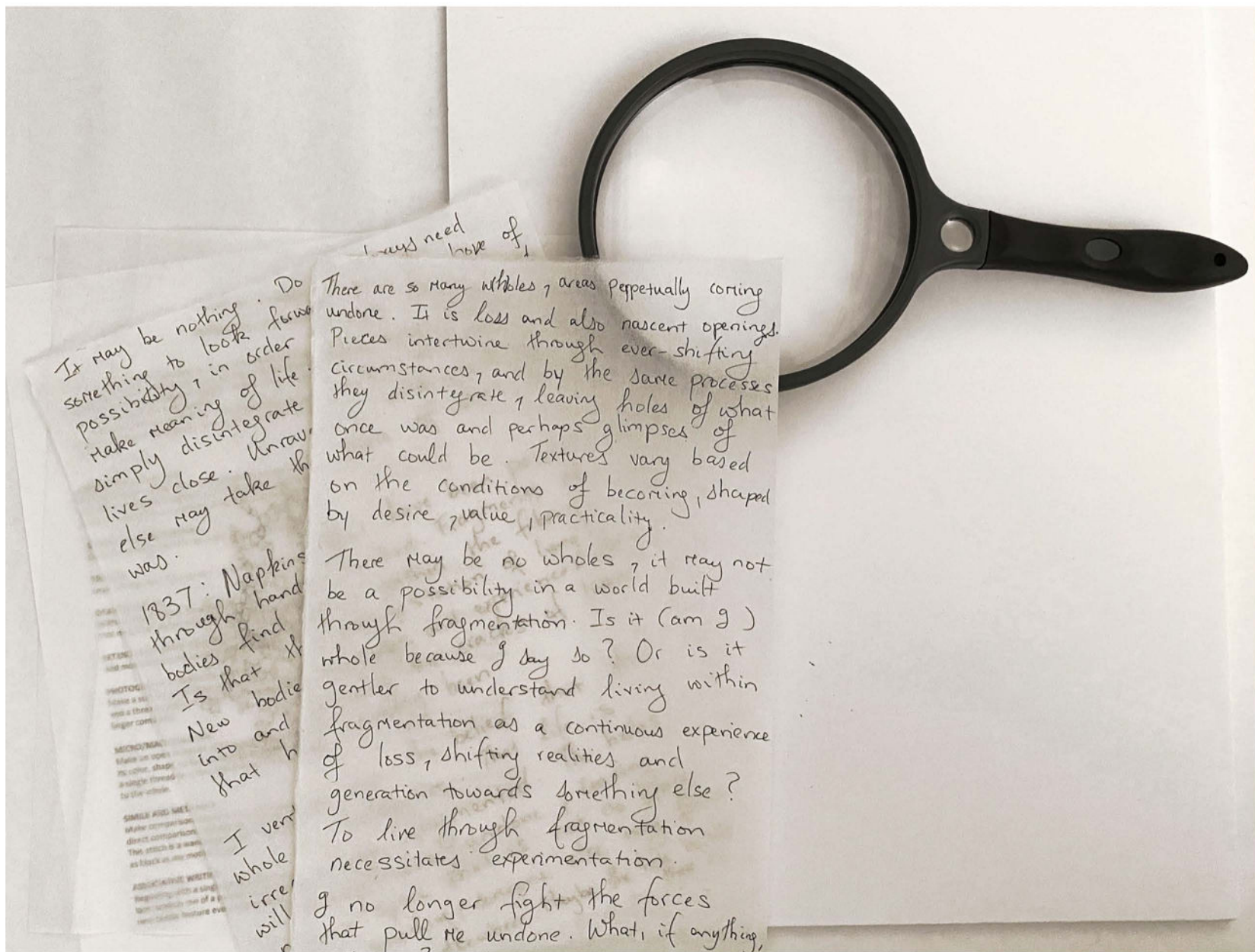
It may be nothing. Do I always need  
something to look forward to, the hope of  
possibility, in order to move through and  
make meaning of life? And also things  
simply disintegrate, worlds dissolve and  
lives close. Unraveling. Nothing else  
may take the place of what once was.

1837: Napkins that have been passed  
through hands. Touched. Fragments of  
bodies find space within the fibers.  
Is that the manifestation of living?  
New bodies, memories and experiences fitting  
into and exploding the cracks of lives  
that have already been.

I venture into the belief that the  
whole is subjective. That life is  
irreconcilably fragmented. The holes  
will always come undone, leaving  
negative space that is not no space.  
Maybe something/someone else may fill it  
in or gesture elsewhere. Maybe the hole is all  
there is.

Thinking alongside Evelyn Hammonds' essay "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality."





I must need have of,

It may be nothing. Do something to look forward possibility, in order make meaning of life. simply disintegrate lives close. Unrav. else may take the was.

1837: Napkins through hand bodies find Is that bodie New and into and that h

I very whole irre will

There are so many wholes, areas perpetually coming undone. It is loss and also nascent openings. Pieces intertwine through ever-shifting circumstances, and by the same processes they disintegrate, leaving holes of what once was and perhaps glimpses of what could be. Textures vary based on the conditions of becoming, shaped by desire, value, practicality.

There may be no wholes, it may not be a possibility in a world built through fragmentation. Is it (am I) whole because I say so? Or is it gentler to understand living within fragmentation as a continuous experience of loss, shifting realities and generation towards something else? To live through fragmentation necessitates experimentation.

I no longer fight the forces that pull me undone. What, if anything,

Davis Street Drawing Room, Gervais Marsh work space. Image courtesy the artist.



*Between the folds and the rolls*

Kristin Mariani

My visit to Davis Street Drawing Room begins with a meal-like pause in Anne Wilson's dining room. My hungry eyes land on Gervais Marsh's hand written poem, then travel to studies and drawings of other participants. These responses precede my own read of Anne Wilson's open archive of source material. Her dining room is a trail head to the multiple domestic pathways that charge my reading upon entering the Drawing Room. Delineations of doorways and thresholds in oak floorboards trace the house's transition from a two-family duplex to a multi-dwelling boarding house, leaving an indelible footprint of configurations shaping the lives under this shared roof for the past 135 years. This house has two sides. The doubling of Wilson's house is not symmetrical. As a participant of Davis Street Drawing room, I am invited to not just mingle with these multiple histories, but to share my own, and invent a future.







*Davis Street Drawing Room, interior view. Image courtesy the artist.*

Folding is a form of doubling.

There are many polarities to register in entering the Drawing Room: the stark contrast between the black and white materials, the contrast between figure and ground of the open lacework and threadbare handkerchiefs, evidence of everyday life and the finality of death, stains of impulsive gestures and strains of spotlessness, all underscoring the social conforms of the home's era. I enter the Drawing Room between the folds and the rolls. When I cross the threshold, to my right is a manifold stack of tablecloths and bed linens — a multilayered block where the edge of a dinner table is contiguous with the edge of a bed. To my left is a horizontal display of rolled domestic cloth.

Rolling is the most archival way of storing cloth. The form of the roll lends itself to what is within arms reach — domestic items such as dishtowels, placemats, table runners, and bureau toppers—quotidian items that bear history of regular use, now held creaseless in this archival form. Rolled forms are familiar to households today for convenient dispensing of disposable products, like paper towels and toilet tissue. While folding is not the most archival way to store cloth, cloth is not the only thing being archived in Wilson's choreography of folds. The stacked cloth block follows a template loaded with meaning, charged by the unknowns of what is in repose.

What resides in the repast is at rest, yet my mind is not. My subjectivity multiplies staring at this stack of folds. I imagine domestic appetites tucked inside the bedsheets and table cloth, and inside the layers of the rolls. Daily acts of eating and sleeping are bulging inside these fibers. Hunger and intimacy rubbed into the grains of cloth, satisfied or not, with traces of food, wine, pubic hair, blood, sperm, squirts, and other viscosities. People wiped and rolled themselves on these textiles, fluids were exchanged, cups were spilled, words hurt, plates were passed, glasses broken, arms embraced. Interiority and exteriority so perfectly intertwine in this irregular meandering of folds. Stacked like striated rock, framed by its layered ridges, each edge is an ending and a beginning.



*Kristin Mariani is a Chicago based artist and designer, Couture Section Editor of Bridge and founder of [Red Shift Couture](#).*

*Gervais Marsh is a writer, scholar and curator from Jamaica, whose work is rooted in Black Feminism and deeply invested in Black life, concepts of relationality and care. They are a PhD candidate in Performance Studies at Northwestern University. For more information on their practice, please visit [gervaismarsh.com](http://gervaismarsh.com).*

*L Vinebaum (they/them) is a Chicago based writer, artist and educator. <https://lvinebaum.com>.*

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