

ANNE WILSON

Davis Street Drawing Room

Textile parts, excavations from years of Anne Wilson's art-making, form an archive displayed over multiple horizontal surfaces and walls in the studio (or drawing room) on Davis Street in Evanston, Illinois. The archive includes lace fragments, rolled house linens, worn cloth, handmade glass bobbins, and early hair and cloth studies from Wilson's art practice. This experimental art project transforms Wilson's studio into a site for close observation.

Beginning in the fall of 2022, Wilson and project manager Sofía Fernández Díaz host small group drawing sessions, inviting artists, writers, and historians to experience the assembled parts. Textiles are a particularly rich subject for slow, close looking. The more you look, the more you see. When magnified, a continuous cloth surface opens to thread lines with physical characteristics of texture and spin direction and structural interlacements, the threads moving up and down, over and across.

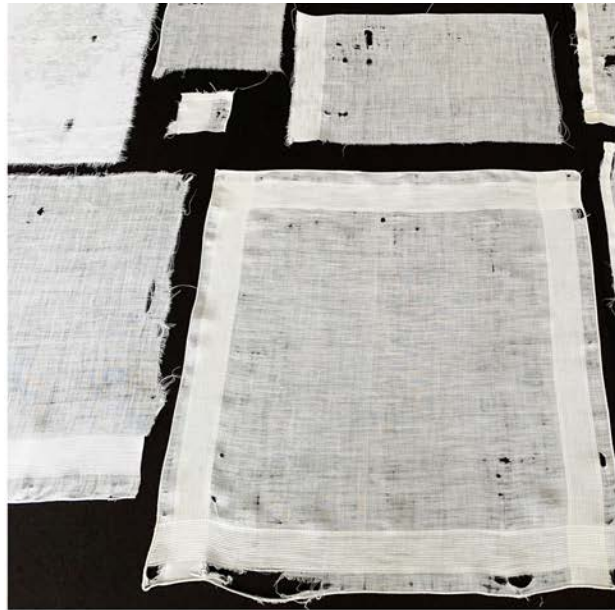
Both digital microscopes and hand magnifiers are available in the Drawing Room. Paper and drawing tools are provided, although participants may choose to respond through computer imaging, photography, or writing. Books relating to textile structure and history are integrated throughout the archive. Wilson's introductory presentations consider the history of the original 1887 building in relation to the objects displayed and concepts about found objects as source materials within Wilson's art.

Through consideration of the formal and critical complexities of textile fragments, participants are invited to create a visual or text-based "study" to share as part of a growing collection within the archive. Evolving concurrently with the use of the space as an active room to draw in, this collection of responses is contained within drawers and selected displays. In the lineage of art practices that foreground the relationship between artist and audience, these participant studies shape the collective meaning-making at the core of this project.

The Davis Street Drawing Room is about invention and critical thinking; about slow looking and complexity; and about textile histories, the everyday, and contemporary art.

Davis Street Drawing Room
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Object Lessons in the Drawing Room

Lily Lloyd Burkhalter

In French, *étouffe* means both 1) fabric and 2) substance, as in, the essential part of something. The word marries the material presence of cloth with its identity as a carrier of information: textiles contain memories, tell stories, and develop formal visual systems that shift in response to global exchanges.

Early in the summer of 2022, I visited Anne’s Wilson home and studio in Evanston, IL. She began with a brief history of the building, pointing out features from the original 1890 structure and its mid-century Prairie style renovation, and then invited me into her studio, a space that she speculated may have served as a drawing room for its turn-of-the-century inhabitants. Since then, the room has been opened to create a two-level studio, with tall windows giving onto the street at tree level.

Over the next few months, I worked as Wilson’s research and studio assistant to transform the space once again into a drawing room—a room to draw in. We developed curated surfaces on the tables and walls, displaying selections excavated from her textile collection: linens handed down from her family members, lace scraps scavenged at flea markets, tablecloths found at church basement sales, damask napkins, dish towels, and embroidered handkerchiefs. Through the assembled parts, a particular history emerges. Much of the cloth dates to the era of the house’s construction. Almost all of it comes from domestic spaces, gesturing to a certain kind of propriety which Wilson’s work has complicated in her use of such textiles as the material source of her practice. “I think of my art as a kind of conjunction between visual art concepts and material culture,” she has said, “where the histories embedded in materials and the way things are made are critically important to the work.”

Much like how the house on Davis Street holds footprints of its past lives—a floorboard tracing the spot where a door had been removed—the creases, stains, tears, and mendings of the textile remnants testify to the vagaries of time. These are ruins, objects that have lost their value because of the effort it takes to care for them. Visual elements of conservation spaces inform select surfaces in the Drawing Room, such as the table of linens rolled onto cloth-covered tubes. Those familiar with conservation practices as acts of deep care to stabilize losses might recognize the rolls as a storage method to avoid creases from folding. A writer might step into the room and think of scrolls. Throughout the archive, careful consideration of display establishes form relationships across disciplines. The site acknowledges intersections between domestic spaces used as museums, interactive study collections, museum storage facilities, and textile conservation practices.

Such intersections are central to the project; this is not a collection of textiles reserved for study by fiber specialists, but an invitation to make connections, to bring one’s personal associations and ways of seeing with others’ into a kaleidoscope view. By welcoming collective meaning-making during small group drawing sessions, the *Davis Street Drawing Room* inscribes itself in the contemporary practice of relational aesthetics, which privileges the creation of an experience over an art object. What might such an experience yield? Why bother with a prolonged inquiry into the gestures of making and use embedded in that most ordinary material, cloth? I am reminded once again of the double definition for fabric in French. As a verb, *étouffer* signifies “to expand”—we might speak of *un récit bien étoffé*, a well-developed story. The stories being developed here are polyphonic; here is an extension from fiber to other fields, which takes slow inspection as its point of departure. A counterbalance to the human tendency to fast looking, aggravated by the realities of contemporary life—in which cursory glances, fractured attention spans, unexamined biases, and quick judgements bear devastating social and political consequences—the *Davis Street Drawing Room* creates a space for understanding complexity through close, unhurried observation.

Lily Lloyd Burkhalter is a French-American writer. A Pulitzer Center Reporting Fellow, she holds degrees from the University of Virginia and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is working on an essay collection about textiles, loss, and language and a novel structured by the logic of the loom. She learned to sew in Cameroon and to weave in Chicago.

from **Slow Looking: The Art and Practice of Learning Through Observation** (New York: Routledge, 2018)

Shari Tishman

There are three kinds of complexity that often make themselves known through slow looking. One is the *complexity of parts and interactions*, which is to do with the physical intricacy or multiple features of things and the way those features interact. Another is the *complexity of perspective*, which is about how things look from different physical and conceptual vantage points. A third is the *complexity of engagement*, which concerns the interplay between the perceiver and the perceived. [...] A good place to see this in action is in the descriptive work of writers and artists. By way of example, here are three excerpts from a short story by Virginia Woolf, told in the first person, called *The Mark on the Wall*. In the story, an unnamed narrator describes the flow of her thoughts as she sits in an armchair and observes a mark on her living room wall. She begins with a straightforward description: “The mark was a small round mark, black upon the white wall, about six or seven inches above the mantelpiece.” [...] By detailing the mark’s physical features and location rather than just registering it as a mark and moving on to a new thought, the narrator is beginning to appreciate the complexity of its parts. [...] Here the narrator plays with the complexity of perspective. Taking first a historical perspective, she sees the mark as “the head of a gigantic old nail, driven in two hundred years ago.” Then she takes the perspective of the mark itself, imagining it as an observer of history—perhaps even an observer of her—“taking its first view of modern life.” [...] The narrator commits her gaze fully to the mark—and to the present moment—and contemplates her own engagement with it: “Indeed, now that I have fixed my eyes upon it, I feel that I have grasped a plank in the sea; I feel a satisfying sense of reality. [...]” The narrator’s sense that she has grasped “something definitive, something real” comes about by extending her observation of the mark on the wall beyond a quick glance.

Shari Tishman is a Senior Research Associate at Project Zero, a research and development center at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where she also serves as a lecturer on education. Her work focuses on the development of thinking and understanding, and learning in and through the arts.

from **Anatomy of Memory: The Materiality and Structure of Igshaan Adams’s *Upheaved*** in *Igshaan Adams: Desire Lines* (Yale University Press, 2022)

Isaac Facio

Every fiber of *Upheaved* tells a multilayered story. Through close investigation of its complex network of interconnected elements that cannot be seen with the naked eye, I came to understand that its materials carry a history recorded in evidence and clues left behind—from the materials’ original manufacture to their transformed state in a work of art. I began my analysis on the macro level, examining the artwork’s overall texture, shape, and size, documenting its physical properties, and revealing unexpected elements such as the mass-produced braids and beaded plied wire. What I found echoed the results of the micro-level inspection, which uncovered common manufactured substances used worldwide in our homes and daily lives. Examination also revealed that *Upheaved* interweaves these mass-produced materials within a handmade textile.

As Adams approached these ordinary materials, he transformed them: not in their chemistry or elements but in selecting them and in how he wove them. In doing so, Adams has given them a new purpose and created a new story, a new history. Through the active intervention of selecting, reusing, and repurposing, insignificant, over-looked, ordinary braids and cords become the very foundation of the textile, providing its structure and the means through which the artist expresses his identity and personal history. In presenting viewers with an artwork in which synthetics are considered beautiful, refuse is treasured, and a connection is made at every traverse of the weft, Adams and his team demand that viewers reevaluate their assumptions. There is a shared human experience to be had in witnessing the intimate traces of the hand left behind by Adams and his team in the course of metamorphosing materials—and moments—into a magical cloth.

Isaac Facio focuses on the care, preservation, and exhibition of objects as Associate Conservator for Textiles at the Art Institute of Chicago. He maintains a research-based practice in art and science with an emphasis on technology and 3D woven structures, and is Senior Lecturer in Fiber and Material Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Originally from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, Isaac received training in textiles, textiles conservation, studio art, material science and technology across Chicago, Manchester, England, and Paris, France, and was a recent arts resident at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory. <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/250565/upheaved>

Practical Considerations

Small groups are welcome (maximum 5 people); appointments need to be scheduled ahead of time - Wednesdays and Thursdays 1:30- 4:30 pm.

The Drawing Room is located on the 2nd floor, up one flight of stairs. Apologies, there is no elevator available.

A selection of drawing papers, pencils, pens, markers, and magnification devices are provided.

For use of the digital microscope, please bring your own laptop.

For those who choose to contribute a “study,” either a visual or a text-based response, to the Davis Street Drawing Room archive, each study will be acknowledged by the maker/author name and date of creation. All responses are owned by the creator. Please note: The invitation to share a study with others is not a requirement of the Drawing Room experience! Your investigation can also be taken home with you, as you wish.

All participants should be vaccinated. If showing any symptoms of ill health, please stay at home and reschedule. For the comfort and safety of everyone, face masks are recommended.

Questions? Email Sofía Fernández Díaz <sfernandezdiaz@saic.edu>, Drawing Room Project Manager

Anne Wilson Bio

Anne Wilson is a Chicago-based educator and visual artist who creates sculpture, drawings, performances and video animations that explore themes of time, loss, and private and social rituals. Her artwork embraces conceptual strategies and handwork using everyday materials—table linen, bed sheets, human hair, lace, thread, glass, and wire.

Wilson's art is in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, The Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Des Moines Art Center, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, The Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, England, and the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, Japan, among others.

Wilson was named a 2015 United States Artists Distinguished Fellow and is the recipient of awards from the Renwick Alliance (2022 Distinguished Educators Award), Textile Society of America (2017 Fellow), the Driehaus Foundation, Artadia, The Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, NASAD (Citation Recipient), Cranbrook Academy of Art (Distinguished Alumni Award), the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Illinois Arts Council. She is represented by Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago and Paul Kotula Projects, Detroit. Wilson is a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Fiber and Material Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she continues to advise graduate students.

Website: <https://www.annewilsonartist.com>