

Jen Chen-su Huang

**Davis Street Drawing Room**

July 20, 2023

*for my teachers, human and non-*



## Davis Street Drawing Room

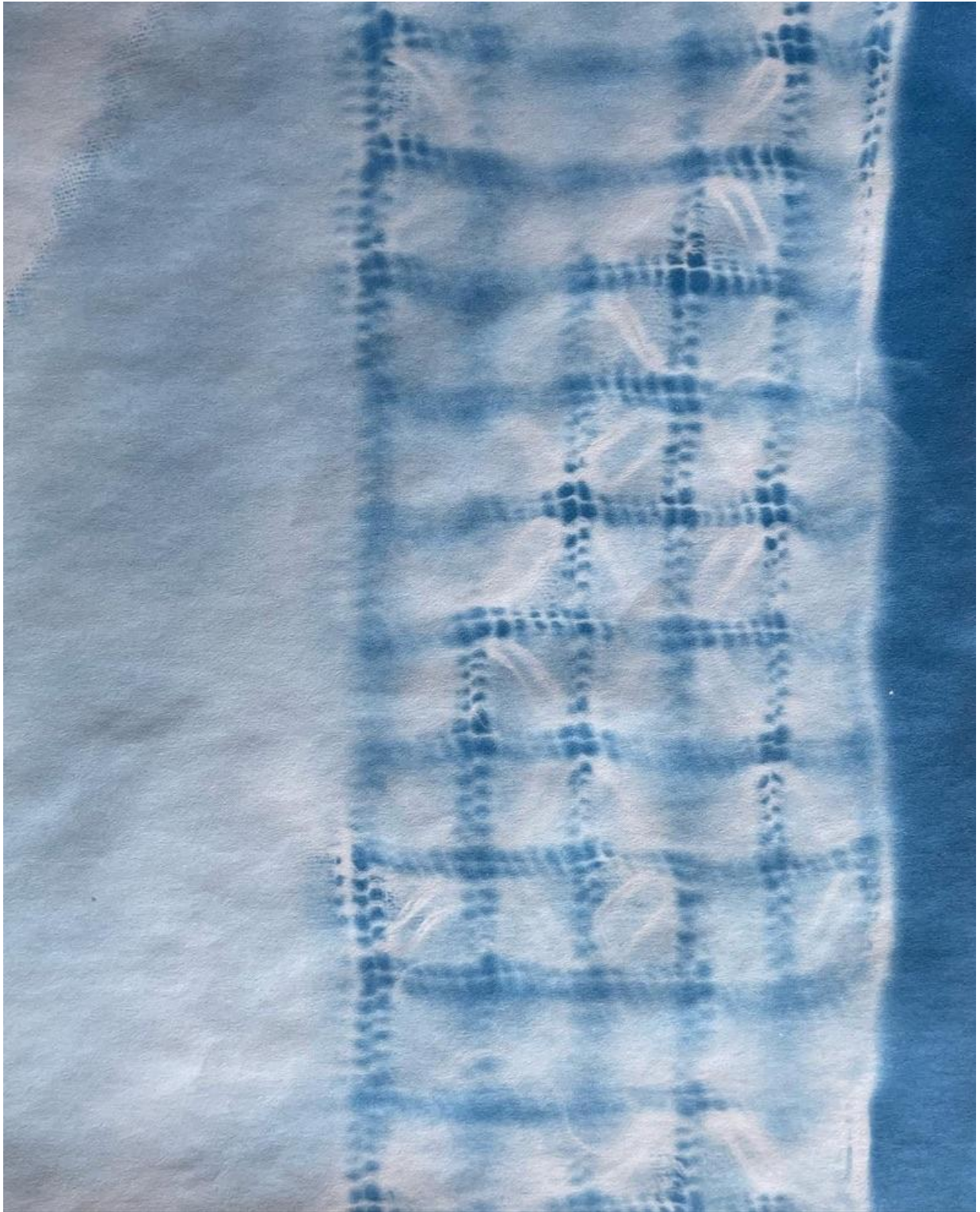
In the Drawing Room, Anne Wilson spoke fondly of Ruth Boyer, her mentor while studying fiber arts in the Bay Area in the 70s. Boyer's influence, her interest in the cultural and contextual histories of material objects, has shaped my approach to artmaking and textile scholarship as well. This is entirely thanks to Wilson, who was my mentor while I was studying fiber arts in Chicago a handful of years ago. Time passes quickly, but the impression left by passionate teachers is always palpable, especially as their students continue to retrace and further deepen those initial lines of thought, passing them along to the next generation. While standing in Wilson's historic home and studio, surrounded by household linens and lace made from family members or otherwise lovingly scavenged by the artist, I thought about the way these highly skilled textile techniques were transferred from teacher to student, particularly as it pertains to lacemaking in the 19th century at the advent of early photography. As the late afternoon sunlight moved through the windows, I paced between Wilson's kitchen and studio, hoping these scraps of torn cloth, lace, and even a hair net, might impress its shadow upon the blue cyanotype paper. Just like the lacemakers at the Wiener Werkstätte, who shared their innovative bobbin lace designs through this simple photographic process, I hoped to also bring into focus the threads that have long interlaced my woven and written practice together. Pricking on top of wavering white lines, lacemaking students recreated their teachers' patterns, attending to intersections, moments of cross and twist, within a sea of blue. I was informed of this method by my soon-to-be bobbin lacemaking teacher, Elena Kanagy-Loux, while in the basement of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, when she unveiled an archival blue box, which carefully preserved this uncataloged donation of lace cyanotypes from the turn of the century. At the Davis Street Drawing Room, these archival blue boxes resurfaced – this time, however, holding lace fragments that were meant to be handled, whose contact would leave a lasting impression.

This series of cyanotypes made at the Drawing Room never quite captures the likeness of its subjects, but instead maintains a watery hue. They remember the patterns passed down through great mentors and makers, yet the edges are fuzzy like my memory when I finger through the pages of my mind, struggling to recall the exact words a teacher or friend once said. Oftentimes, all I have is a feeling, a hazy imprint with which to pin a path forward, another pattern perhaps. The blur becomes an invitation to go astray, all while knowing that the very material with which I interlace precedes me; they are the guiding voices of the ones I love; they are twisted linen, cotton, ramie, ancient fibers and forever teachers.

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Wiener Werkstätte lace and lace cyanotypes from a visit to the Antonio Ratti Center at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in March 2023. Many thanks to Eva Labson and Elena Kanagy-Loux for sharing these with me.