

Margaret Leininger

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Davis Street Drawing Room

This small handwoven tapestry was completed in response to visiting the Davis Street Drawing Room in early February 2023. Like many, my association with textiles is through familial history, mostly from my interactions with my grandmother who sewed and quilted. One of my earliest memories was observing my grandmother gathering together with her five sisters to make the most magical things out of yarn. I also have other associations with textiles that are not as nostalgic. I spent my formative years growing up in a rural Southern mill town. I witnessed first-hand the demise of the textile industry as it was moving overseas, seeing the mills dwindle in size, watching the worried faces of mill workers who were my neighbors struggling to find other employment. In rural South Carolina, textiles were seen as a necessary evil. The industry provided employment, but the conditions in which the mill workers worked were brutal not to mention the unpredictability of demands. Later in life, I spoke to a former mill worker who worked at the mill that provided me with a scholarship to attend college. He was excited to hear that the mill offered such opportunities, however, when he asked me what I did with my college career, he was visibly crestfallen to learn about my path back to textiles. Success for him meant getting out of the textile industry, and though I don't work in a mill, the strong negative association with the field persists.

While completing observational drawings of black lace, I reflected upon these perspectives as an artist and maker of cloth. I traveled back in time to when I discovered weaving through art school, (as a student of Anne's), and the conflicted history I had with the technique. As I lost myself in the process of drawing, I became engrossed in the immediacy of the medium as compared to constructing cloth one thread at a time. Drawing invited consideration of the gesture of a mark, the quality of a line, the flatness of the surface. When I returned to my studio, I was immediately compelled to create a dimensional response to the drawing in a woven structure informed by these observations. The woven tapestry embodied a physicality that the drawing could not. It was constructed through intense manipulation of threads that had to be pushed into place. The Icelandic wool I spun by hand lent itself well to creating a gestural interpretation of lace due to its coarse fuzziness and variegated dimensionality that naturally occurs in the process of spinning yarn by hand. It is a yarn that is similar to charcoal for its softness, its rich natural tones, and its messiness as the yarn tends to shed through manipulation. One observation made through the woven interpretation of the drawing of the lace is that negative space is equally important as a formal compositional element in both the tapestry and the lace. Other observations included how the density of the tapestry was in diametrical opposition to the ethereal lightness of the lace. The tapestry, made as a creative frenzied response to these observations, will memorialize the experience at the Davis Street Drawing Room and represent the continued inspiration from one my earliest artistic influences. - Maggie Leininger



Margaret Leininger, hand woven tapestry, hand spun Icelandic wool, 2023