



SLOW CLOSE LOOKING: Inside The Davis Street Drawing Room

Davis Street Drawing Room, curated by Anne Wilson, Evanston, Illinois, 2022–2023, September 9, 2022

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Exhibition Review

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SLOW CLOSE LOOKING: Inside The Davis Street Drawing Room
Davis Street Drawing Room, curated by Anne Wilson, Evanston, Illinois, 2022–2023, September 9, 2022

For three hours, twice a week over the past year, textile artist Anne Wilson has transformed the second floor of her Evanston home into the Davis Street Drawing Room: a living museum of a life spent in fiber (Figures 1 and 2).¹

The first artists, writers, and historians that comprise the visitors to this appointment-only experimental art project arrived by invitation in fall

2022—a period in which many were still reacquainting themselves with the experience of indoor social gatherings. Later guests arrive at the 1887 Victorian-style Chicago land home and studio through word of mouth and the Drawing Room’s Instagram, curated by the project manager and multimedia artist Sofía Fernández Díaz.²

Guests are greeted by Anne’s meticulous personal textile archive of



Figure 1
Folded napkins, top layer of excavation table. Courtesy of the Davis Street Drawing Room.

REVIEWED BY CASEY CARSEL

Casey Carsel is a New Zealand-born writer, artist, and editor based between Auckland and Chicago most of the time. Their texts have been published by magazines and galleries including *Ocula Magazine*, *The Seen*, West Space, and Clark House Initiative, and their textiles have been presented by Co-Prosperity, Chicago; Auckland Art Fair; and Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin; amongst others. They have received numerous prestigious grants, fellowships, and residencies, including a New York Public Library Short-Term Research Fellowship, a Fulbright U.S. Creative Writing Grant, a DCASE Individual Artists Program Grant, and a StudioWorks residency with the Tides Institute & Museum of Art.
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Figure 2
Mends, darns, and patches, under layer 2 of excavation table. Courtesy of the Davis Street Drawing Room.



Figure 3
Anne Wilson introducing project to artist Jin Lee and writer Calvin Forbes. Courtesy of the Davis Street Drawing Room.

sources for her artworks. Black lace fragments,³ white handkerchiefs pressed fine against blackboards that illuminate their weave's sparse skeleton. Smaller pieces of fabric, rolled delicately around tubes, complement larger, folded piles.

Hanging on the walls and tucked away in standing drawers are preparatory studies for artworks from Anne's extensive practice, which has included human-scale weaving warp

performances (*Wind-Up*, 2008), tears in damask cloth sewn open with thread and hair into perfect circles (*Dispersions*, 2013), and bobbins and textile hand tools spun from glass (*Rewinds*, 2010). Many of the studies were executed inside the Drawing Room space, which has been the artist's largest personal studio over the past 35 years.

Guests are encouraged to carefully handle some of the

materials on display, while other items—such as the fabric rolls and the lovingly folded piles—are only to be handled with one's eyes. A sign on the wall instructs SLOW CLOSE LOOKING.

In September 2022, I came to the Drawing Room with my best friend and peer Unyimeabasi Udoh. We were the second group to experience this contemporary art space devoted to drawing in the expanded field.



Figure 4

Anne Wilson introducing session to group. Courtesy of the Davis Street Drawing Room.



Figure 5

Artist Dana De Ano drawing. Courtesy of the Davis Street Drawing Room.



Figure 6
Artist Dorie Millerson drawing. Courtesy of the Davis Street Drawing Room.



Figure 7
Session in process. Courtesy of the Davis Street Drawing Room.

When I returned to visit Anne in May 2023, it remained much the same, with small changes as the project developed.

From the beginning, Anne has introduced the project with a 50-minute lecture on the textile sources on display—their relationship to cultural history, the artist’s biography and practice, and the building’s architecture (Figures 3 and 4). With the precision of a choreographed performance, Anne and Sofia together

uncover boards of textiles separated in layers by pattern weights, sharing the seams along which textiles wear over lifetimes of use.

After her lecture, Anne disappears upstairs, Sofia takes over, and guests receive free rein on the second floor. They can choose to take a book of fabric or philosophy from the Drawing Room’s rotating reference shelf and read it in the living room, or fetch a glass of water from the kitchen. But the treasure trove of fragments and

fabrics is in the Drawing Room, along with magnifying glasses, thread counters, digital microscopes, pencils, paper, and prompts. Three hours of slow, close looking drift by fast.

Anne always invites her guests to create something—a drawing, a poem, a text, a rubbing—in response to their experience for the Drawing Room’s archive (Figures 5–8). During my first visit, the tall archive stacks in the studio were nearly bare. Now, with a total of more than 400



Figure 8

Work space of curator Tina Petersone. Courtesy of the Davis Street Drawing Room.

responses, piles fill every shelf, and guests begin their visit greeted by an additional rotating selection of contributions down the hall in the dining room.

The letter that I wrote to Anne after my first visit is shared in the Drawing Room binder “Participant Texts.”⁴ In the letter, I talk about the textiles both mended and left in decay on the Drawing Room tables. I think about Anne’s conceptual propositions on repair in works like *Dispersions*. I ask what it means to care for a fabric, to preserve it.

In their performance, Anne and Sofía lift layers of pristine handkerchiefs to reveal lower planes of similar handkerchiefs at various stages of disintegration. As I witnessed the layers’ unfolding, I held my breath. It felt like time travel, the future of all my things laid bare, entropies preserved for love, contemplation, and viewing pleasure.

The Drawing Room is an extended meditation, an investigation into a cloth’s lives—sometimes knowing, sometimes not; sometimes touching, sometimes not; sometimes unfurling,

sometimes not. Out in the world, in fast times that keep getting faster, relationships to clothes are performed without reflection. In the Drawing Room, there is the opportunity to tune in to the magnified details of the literal fabrics of life.

Shortly after visiting Anne in 2023, my aunt died, suddenly and devastatingly. The medic ripped her shirt to perform CPR; I ripped it further to wash her body afterward. We shrouded her in the blanket I made her for Christmas years ago. When the hearse came, they took the shirt with them. I kick myself for not keeping it, repairing it.

Recalling this experience, which is always with me now, I think of my letter to the Drawing Room. In it, I wonder how to memorize something. Now, I say the mourner’s kaddish wearing a silk scarf that she bought in Paris. I wear it on the days I miss her, so I wear it every day.

My aunt believed there was too much energy held in one person for it to all just disappear after they die. It lingers in the stories the life leaves behind, in the traces of that

life on the objects that surrounded them, in the textiles folded and unfolded and left for us to look at and live with, slowly and closely.

Sections of this text have been adapted from a letter written by the author to Anne Wilson/the Drawing Room in 2022.

The author has previously collaborated with Anne Wilson on a publication that accompanied Wilson’s 2020 solo exhibition *If We Asked about the Sky* (Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago), and advised with Wilson at School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2019.

Davis Street Drawing Room (exhibition, 2022–2023; visited September 9, 2022)

Anne Wilson (pers. comm., May 21, 2023)

Anne Wilson (pers. comm., July 17, 2023)

Any combination of the following figures are ready for publication. For more images, see: <https://www.annewilsonartist.com/drawing-room-images/>.

Notes

1. Since this article was first submitted, the exhibition has evolved, in another iteration, into *The MAD Drawing Room at Museum of Arts and Design*, New York. See: <https://madmuseum.org/exhibition/anne-wilson>.
2. Earlier, Lily Lloyd Burkhalter collaborated with Anne in building the project narrative and layout.
3. All of the fragments on display are sources for the artist's *Topologies* (2002–2008) and *Errant Behaviors* (2004)
4. installations, and will feature in a 2024 installation at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York. Portions of which have been reproduced in this text.