

*Resonance in Dissonance:
An exploration of fabric assemblage
and the upcycled canvas.*

By

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The Context of Textile Arts in History



Fig. 1. Inca Artist, *Tunic*, 16th Century. *The Metropolitan Museum of art*, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/751901>

For millennia the use and manipulation of fabric and textiles has accompanied our existence. In the Americas, the oldest known textiles were created by the Andean peoples located in Central and South America. Using typically cotton and camelid these fabrics were dyed using pigments found in nature. By form and color, the clothing made with these fabrics signified status within the tribes and were used for ritual purposes (Aiken). This serves an example of how textiles have been charged with societal

notions throughout history. From using looms to create fabrics, to sewing them together, to decorative embroidery; these methods of creation have been classified as women's work. Despite the importance textiles have had on our societies, due to patriarchy and misogyny these activities were wrongly viewed as requiring less skill and as less important than work associated with men (Henry). Additionally, social class has played a role in the perception of textile manipulation despite all of it requiring skill. For example, during the 1800's there were class distinctions that persisted which delineated those who sewn for utilitarian purposes; lower class women who made clothing for their families or repairing them, and those who sewed or embroidered for leisure (Henry).

As time went on further distinctions were made which classified these techniques and skills as craft. Some of the reasoning behind this was that craft served domestic utilitarian purposes while art was purely to be observed and invoke thought (Tate). In the twentieth century



Fig. 2. Neftali, *UNITED STATES OF AMERICA - CIRCA 2006*: A stamp printed in USA dedicated to gee's bend quilt. 2006. Shutterstock, <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/united-states-america-circa-2006-stamp-92111966>

however, these notions began to shift and the lines between art and craft have since become increasingly blurred. Artist Anni Albers is often touted one of the pioneers of textile arts, with her experimental wall hangings she created at the Bauhaus in the 1920's and 30s (Lutyens). An example that serves great inspiration to me is the Quilts of Gee's bend. Out of the necessity to keep them and their families warm, enslaved black women created these quilts by hand, out of the few materials they had. In doing so they created beautiful abstract geometric patterns and a style of quilting that was completely original to their community. These women passed down their techniques and methods to each new generation to which contemporary generations continue to this day. These quilts began to gain notoriety after the 60s Civil Rights movement when they began to sell quilts to gain economic independence. Their popularity continued to grow, eventually being shown in various exhibitions around the country (Gross).



Fig. 3. *The New Bend*, Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio, 2022. Commonwealth Council, Thomas Barrat, <https://commonwealthcouncil.com/us/eddie-rodolfo-aporicio>

In the contemporary era, textiles continue to serve as a great medium for many artists who continue these traditions using a myriad of techniques which range from traditional to

experimental. Some of these notable textile artists include Faith Ringgold, who uses quilting techniques or Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio who uses textiles to create collages and assemblages.

Resonance in Dissonance

Contradictions lie within everything we enjoy and consume. From fashion and contemporary style, standards of beauty, and to the creation of art; opposing thoughts and questions can be had throughout. The notion of contradiction has always interested me and serves as the thread that intertwines the works seen in *Resonance in Dissonance*. Opposed to addressing the idea of contradiction in it of its itself, my goal was to home in on specific conflicting questions which are represented with motifs, materials, and through my creative processes. Additionally, I did not want to provide answers to these questions but merely visualize them through the materials, objects, and skills afforded to me.

The result of this research is a series of fabric assemblages and wall hangings which I employ a variety of formal tactics to piece together. Including traditional techniques such as sewing, embroidery, and visual mending. I also utilized other methods such as the use of safety pins and hot glue. Working in tandem with the techniques of assemblage and decoupage used, block prints and subtle illustrations are also seen on various pieces. This process however does not serve as the only stage of my production. The initial crucial step taken when beginning these works is what I call the “discovery” stage. Which entails searching for various objects such as old clothing, and other textiles. In a process that I like to view as not dissimilar to curation, I go through my old belongings or ask individuals in my life if they have objects and clothing they are looking to get rid of. Only after this stage can I filter them through my maximalist and semi-abstracted perspective and engage in the additive processes in which allowed me to create these works. Through the exploration of the forementioned techniques and processes, my aim is not only to visualize contradictions but also to illuminate how these ideas reveal the intricacy

inherent in our perspectives on artistic consumption day to day. The goal is to demonstrate that these complexities can be synthesized in a manner that is harmonious rather than disparate.

The conception of *Resonance in Dissonance* began before I was even aware it did. Throughout my life I have always taken pride in my personal style, fashionable or not. I have enjoyed thrifting and piecing my wardrobe together each day. Years ago, while thrifting I never thought that in 2023 I would be using this same clothing for this project. I like to think that, years ago, casually shopping for affordable clothing was directly engaging in the creation of this project despite not knowing the future. Back then I had discovered these clothing items at the thrift store, in 2023 I once again have discovered these items for the use of this project, and even before I had laid sight on these clothes the previous owner discovered these items. This introduces various important contradictions lying within in the project. Did I discover these objects or rediscover them? Are these works considered construction or reconstruction? Are these objects new or old? These are questions that can be found in every work in this project since every aspect of *Resonance in Dissonance* was taken from objects and apparel that initially had different uses than their application in these assemblages, excluding thread. Even most of the block prints used were taken from previous projects and rejected art works from my past.

Are these conglomerations art? Or, simply trash pieced together? These questions are ones that appear in past art movements such as the Dada and Pop Art movements. Dada artists for example embraced the concept of “chance” and I feel that much of my process in this project does as well (Brennan). I attain materials from my environment that I have by sheer circumstance and created by applying techniques to mend them into one cohesive work. The Dada artists used these objects in their works to challenge the bourgeois notions of art (Cage).

While I am not directly focused on challenging these notions particularly, my desire is that the questions are implicitly expressed.

The first work that I created for this project is *Self Quilt*. Before the ideation of my senior project and served as the initial inspiration. Standing at almost 10ft tall, this work marks my first exploration into the use of fabric and textiles. For this reason, the process for it was rather playful and purely experimental in nature. Cutting each piece one by one I would simply move the fabric around until I found a composition that seemed promising. I would do this on one large piece of fabric which served as my canvas to which I would attach each piece.

With each work I made in this project I learned new techniques and as this was the first, it provided me with a semi-blueprint for future works. This project does differ from the rest as I used primarily glue and drew directly onto faux leather with oil pastels. The eyes drawn are the only representational part of this work and are meant to acknowledge myself and my experiences. Additionally, the choice of the orbital cuts of faux leather for the eyes visually resemble the glasses I wear. With that said, this work's concept relies primarily in its material, a tactic that I utilized in the works created after this. These materials consisted of tablecloths, bandanas, leather pants, wallet chains, toy jewelry and more. The black and white patterned textile that you see was fabric that I attained after a brief stint at a fashion design school. I used this to construct a rather boring skirt during my attendance, and after discovering this leftover material yet again, I desired to use it in a way that was opposite of how it was intended to be used. I wanted to free myself from what was considered correct and artistically skillful. This fabric which was intended to be used for a simplistic clean lined skirt was now used to create a piece that rejected sophistication.



Self Quilt (4' 6" X 9' 11")

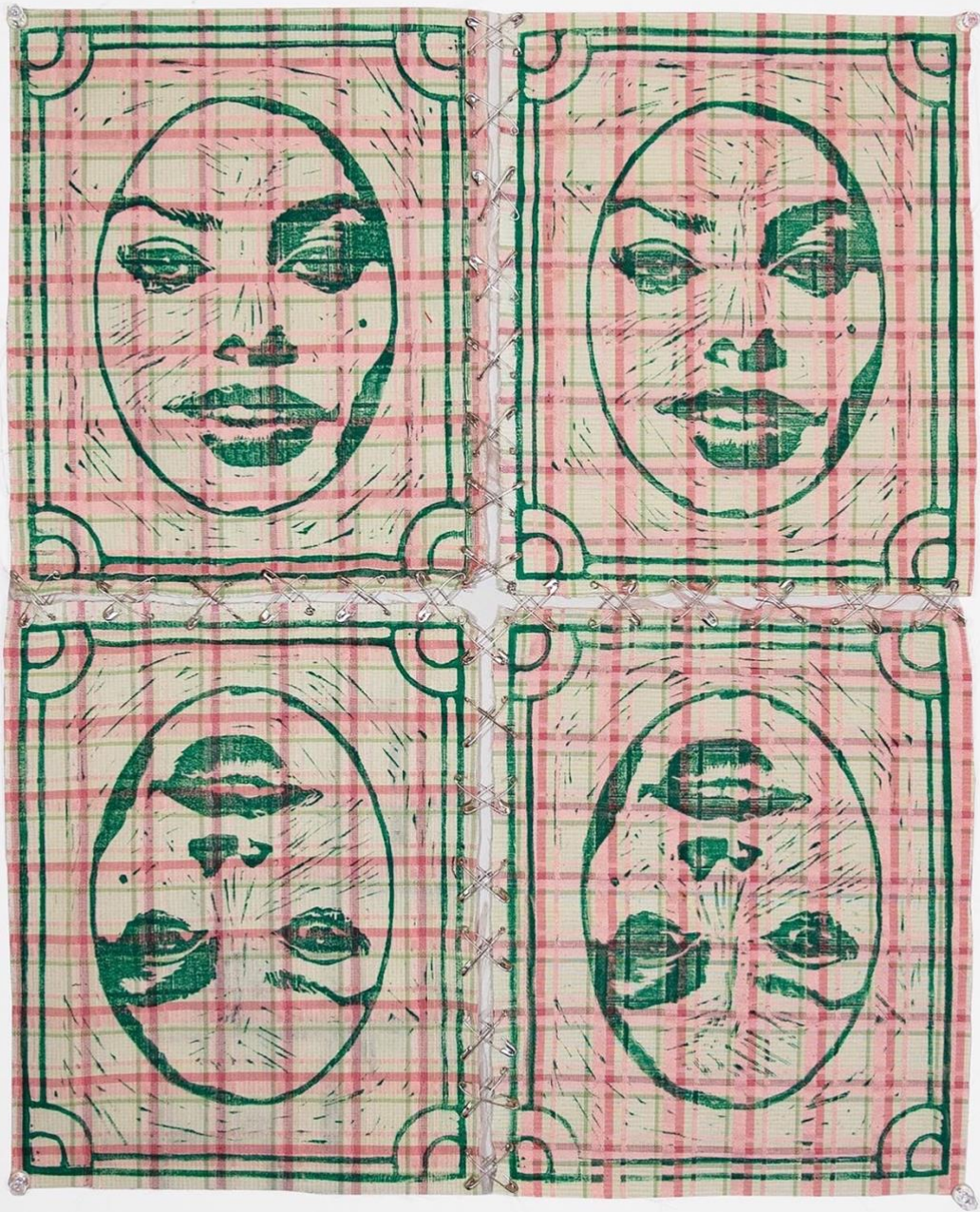
Various details



This affinity for anti-sophistication can also be seen more directly in the work *Sophia*. For this work I decided to narrow down my materials. These include a vintage tablecloth, safety pins, and green ink applied with a linoleum matrix used for a past project. The representational subject in this work is actor Sophia Loren. Known for her classic beauty and sophistication, this work relies on the contradiction of conventional beauty of Loren and the discolored, aged tablecloth.

Sophia visualizes beauty but not without crude imperfection. Additionally, I pose the question, how can these opposing descriptors exist simultaneously and operate together? Explorations of this can be found within many artists works. From Dada, to Pop Art, and designers such as Vivienne Westwood this can be seen. In the case of Vivienne Westwood, she was greatly influenced by the Dada movement and partook in punk culture which heavily engaged in upcycling and DIY design (Remy). Many consider Westwood's work as contradictory, criticizing consumerism and capitalism yet eventually creating one of the highest valued clothing brands to this day.

A visual characteristic of *Sophia* is the inclusion of repetition as well Loren's face positioned upside down as well as upright. The different positions in this case are meant to allude to the paradoxical perspectives represented in the piece. The use of repetition is meant to serve a similar purpose. This motif can be found in other works as well.



Sophia (17" x 20 1/2")



Misaligned Symmetry (22" x 28")

Misaligned Symmetry is one of these that use repetition. Using a similar collection of materials such as tablecloths and safety pins, this work is evocative of the ideas displayed in *Sophia*, except in the inverse. While *Sophia* serves as the classical perspective of beauty in the previously mentioned work, in the case of *Misaligned Symmetry* the linoleum print of the mouth serves as the representation of imperfection and crudeness. The mouth depicted in this work is mine. Due to the misalignment of my bottom row of teeth I figured it would provide suitable subject matter for this print. Serving as the only print specifically made for this work, I achieved

this print by processing a photo of my mouth in photoshop on the backdrop of a patterned shirt I own. From there I transferred the printed photo onto the block by using mod podge and carved it to be printed on the fabric. Regarding the tablecloths, I used simple black and white. Colors in which I feel are often associated with simplistic elegance or I was perhaps drawn from the use of them in upscale restaurants. In closer inspection viewers will notice that the edges are hand sewn or hemmed with red thread. This differs from the raw edges featured in *Sophia* further emphasizing the ideas expressed in both.



Detail photo of raw edges.



Detail photo of finished edges.



Untitled (14½" x 18")



Detailed photo showing the use of “boro” as well as decorative use of safety pins.

While the previous two works mentioned utilize block prints the next two works I will discuss do not. At 14½” x 18” I left this assemblage untitled, as I felt a title would distract viewers focus on the material. This piece along with another untitled work are the most abstract of the project. I decided to break the boundary of the square canvas in a similar manner to the first piece of the project. This assemblage consists of various textiles adorned with screw back apparel studs and are mended together using embroidery floss. This is one of the most important aspects of the work. While the embroidery floss serves the utility of binding these

pieces of fabric together it is undeniable that they are also decorative. This is highlighted by my choice of colors; orange, yellow, all of which contrast the denim and neutral colored fabric.

Using this thread and the various techniques used in this project, my desire was to simulate the practices that have been historically classified as “feminine domestic craft”. One way in which I attempted to engage in these practices is that all the works in *Resonance in Dissonance* were constructed or conglomerated by hand whether using untraditional or traditional ways. One of these traditional ways were visible mending techniques and the subtle use of the Japanese tradition of “boro”, which refers to the repairing of textiles through the patching and repeated stitching of thread at random or in a calculated manner (Souabe). While women craft makers and artists used these techniques in a utilitarian manner to extend the longevity their clothing, I feel

its visible nature and beauty contradicts its utilitarian focus and that's how I wanted to express it in this work.

While the thread is meant to convey the contradiction of utility in artistic perspective, other aspects of this work do as well. For example, viewing the work you will find safety pins once again. However, opposed to their use in other works in my project, the safety pins do not serve to hold together fabric and are only used for decorative purposes. Additionally, cargo and denim are usually associated with utility but in the case of this work they do not. Furthermore, you will find that in this work I decided to use specifically pockets, in which under normal circumstances serve a purpose but, in this case, only are meant to be observed. The materials in the second untitled work function in the same manner.



Detail photo showing use of different textiles and “boro” techniques.

The next untitled piece is 16” x 23” and features fabric taken from a sweater, jeans, floral pattern shorts, and a suit jacket. The contrast between the utilitarian fabric choice of denim and the more decorative fabric like the suit jacket or the floral patterns is emphasized. My thought process behind this was that utilitarian clothing is traditionally associated with active labor while formal wear is to portray class when being observed. However in the contemporary, individualism and idea of personal style has created the perspective that blur these associations.



Untitled (16" x 23")

What determines use or utilitarianism? Is to be observed not a use, or is it? An example of this is the first work, *Self Quilt*. While the title refers to an object with a use and in various ways resembles one, the work itself is clearly not. It does not serve its titled purpose, yet viewers may find the associations based on its visual qualities and use of fabrics. If an object is hung up and being observed and thought over who is to say it is not being used.

Observers is made from a cotton laundry bag. The cotton is printed using red ink with other past carved linocut blocks and is framed with sewn on denim waist bands. As you can see the motif used in the first work, the eyes appear again but as opposed to only representing myself it also represents others. This work is meant to address ourselves as we engage in dressing up and curating our styles each day. Are our outfits art? They are conglomerations of fabrics much like this project. Or perhaps we ourselves become the art when wearing them?



Observers (27" x 15 1/2")



Detail photo of usage of jean waistband and linocut print.

For the last work *Style Blanket* you can see the denim scraps as well as the suit jacket pieces alternating and contrasting each other. I first cut each piece into equal sized rectangles and printed onto them using a linoleum matrix with yellow ink. This linoleum block was from a past project, similarly to how the fabric used was discovered among my belongings. After this I attached them in a quilt like manner using traditional hand sewing techniques and finished the edges with a blanket stitch, once again inspired by domestic craft. The subject of the print is a vest. By printing on these alternating fabrics, it is almost as if the vest is made from either the denim or the suit jacket fabric. I hope to display that the vest can be perceived in different ways. Pointing to the subjectivity of these questions and contradictions presented throughout the whole project.



Style Blanket (16" x 21")

In *Resonance in Dissonance*, I have explored contradictions in contemporary style and art, using fabric assemblages and wall hangings to pose various questions. The projects involve a process incorporating traditional and unconventional techniques, with a crucial discovery stage where objects and clothing are curated. Inspired by art movements like Dada and what is normally associated with feminine domestic craft, the works aim to provoke questions about the nature of these creations—whether they are considered art or repurposed objects. Through this exploration, the projects emphasize the harmony that can be found within disarray, sparking contemplation and dialogue on the complexities of our artistic consumption.

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