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Crafting Connections: An A/r/tographic Exploration of

Creative Repair and Reuse in Community Art Education

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Abstract

This Capstone project describes how creative repair and reuse can serve as a bridge to connect traditional craft practices and contemporary art. Coupled with informal learning opportunities, these approaches allow community art education to become more accessible. First, I discuss modern applications of textiles and needlework in the context of 21st century art. The artistic potential of mending is considered with particular emphasis on process, storytelling, and materiality. Next, I describe the value of sustainable practices in art education and the significance of creative reuse centers, thrift stores, and related markets for connecting makers and educators to secondhand materials. The theory of Communities of Practice (CoPs) is applied to both in-person and virtual learning environments and expanded to include practitioners of creative reuse and repair. Finally, a review of a/r/tography as methodology further connects a proposal for making as research within a community-based artist residency program. The function of my roles of artist, researcher, and teacher collectively support the foundational ideas of this paper—connection, experimentation, and sustainable practices.

Introduction

During a time of personal loss and transition, I discovered visible mending and its potential as both an artistic and craft-based process. Hand sewing became a form of healing following the loss of my father to a swift battle with cancer. I was able to incorporate deeply personal elements into my work by repurposing his clothing as patches to mend my own. These repairs became tangible expressions of grief and healing, marking a profound evolution in my artistic practice.

The goal of this study is to explore how a creative approach to repair and reuse can bridge contemporary artistic processes and traditional craft practices while fostering a more sustainable creative economy. This investigation is grounded in the practice-based research method of *a/r/tography*, which merges the roles of artist, researcher, and teacher (Irwin, 2013). A visual and tactile component accompanies this project, reinforcing my identity as a textile artist and supporting the idea that making and research are deeply intertwined (Girak et al., 2019). This study also examines the artistic potential in repair through the craft practices of hand sewing, darning, and other needlework techniques, with particular emphasis on process, storytelling, and materiality.

Etienne Wenger (as cited in Duque & Podkalicka, 2025) defines Communities of Practice (CoPs) as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p. 156). This study presents CoPs in the city where I live—Memphis, Tennessee—as well as transnational groups in which I participate. In-person and virtual spaces dedicated to art and craft education, arts-based research, and creative making are presented. CoPs have expanded to consider digital environments as meaningful spaces of connection with the rise of online learning platforms, video conferencing, and social networking

sites. Their interactive and supportive nature encourages innovation and fosters inclusivity, further classifying them as informal community learning environments.

In addition to connecting art and craft through creative repair and reuse, this study positions these practices as social and cultural activities that promote learning, meaning-making, and personal transformation. A survey of creative reuse centers, second-hand markets, and local sharing networks further examines this relationship and the potential of upcycling within the creative economy (Girak et al., 2019; Wells, 2025). As Weintraub and Peralta (2024) note, “The role of CoPs extends beyond knowledge generation; they serve as environments where an intrinsic sense of belonging is nurtured through interaction, play, support, collaboration, and inclusion” (p. 228). The culture of upcycling is analyzed in relation to makers and educators, proposing that upcycling itself functions as a CoP.

From the perspective of community arts education, this study also highlights informal learning environments in which knowledge is primarily exchanged through hands-on exploration, social interaction, and collective experience. A focus on adult learners underscores the significance of lifelong learning and creative expression for both personal and societal well-being (Gauntlett, 2011; Gibson, 2019). Knitting groups, sewing circles, quilting guilds, and other needle-working communities are historically known as meaningful spaces for social interaction and connection. Needlework can serve as a cultural connection to people regardless of age, socioeconomic status, or geographic location.

A proposal for a community-based artist residency including public art talks, participatory studio visits, and planning for future community workshops is included. The project will serve as a platform for my roles as artist, researcher, and teacher, further connecting the methodology of

a/r/tography as a framework for sustainable studio-based craft practices in the context of community art education.

Key terms: a/r/tography, communities of practice

Rationale

My artistic development has occurred largely outside of formal educational settings, shaped instead by self-directed learning and creative work experiences. As an artist and educator working primarily in traditional craft-based mediums, I understand how art and craft can feel simultaneously divided and interconnected. Much of my work emerges from this overlapping space of contemporary art and traditional craft.

Craft has historically been positioned as less valuable than fine art, and traditionally gendered crafts such as sewing and knitting have faced broad societal challenges. Gibson (2019) defines craft “as a process in which a skilled practitioner demonstrates mastery of materials and techniques in the production of an object” (p. 26). The Industrial Revolution of the mid 1800s had a substantial impact on how society produced objects, replacing the hand-made goods with machine-made alternatives, and contributing to the devaluation of materials and labor associated with craft. Despite this fundamental change in mass production, craft practices remain deeply connected to cultural history, community, and personal experiences.

Previous research introduced me to the concept of Communities of Practice (CoPs) which helped me recognize the groups that have shaped my own development: a knitting group I joined when I was a new mother, scholarship-supported opportunities to attend and work at craft schools, and a part-time position assisting community art education workshops. Through these experiences, I have learned the importance of mentorship and shared learning for artistic growth.

Mending has been particularly influential in shaping my artistic and educational path. What began as a focus on my own artistic development has evolved into a commitment to expanding access to craft-based skills and opportunities. As home economics programs have disappeared from school curriculum, skills like hand sewing are less commonly practiced. By leading mending workshops focused on basic hand-sewing techniques, I witness a cultural shift occurring through a growing desire to reconnect with these missing skills. Additionally, as fast fashion practices have come under public scrutiny, mending clothing rather than buying new has become a form of activism.

Throwaway culture has contributed to an overabundance of waste—not only in the fashion industry, but across many areas of consumption (Bridgens et al., 2018; Hochtritt, 2019; Wells, 2025). In response, repair cafes and creative reuse centers are growing in popularity, and community art education frequently intersects with these spaces through workshops and collaborative learning. As Gauntlett (2011) notes, “Suggesting that people can make, fix, and repair things for themselves has much in common with sustainability and environmentalism” (p. 57). A repair and reuse mindset may be especially impactful for educators seeking practical, affordable ways to integrate hands-on, reflective practices into their teaching.

The research presented in this project is relevant to artists, educators, community-based organizations, and individuals interested in sustainable creative practices. As Kettle and Koumis (2022) state, “through craft, we become aware of our own power” (p. 85). Approaching repair and reuse creatively allows that sense of agency to extend beyond the craft itself. In my own professional practice, this research will strengthen the integration of creative repair and reuse into my roles as an artist and educator, supporting the development of community projects and workshops that emphasize circularity, mindful consumerism, and an ethos of care.

Background

In this literature review I highlight the recognition of craft-based textile work within contemporary art, evidence of creative reuse and repair functioning as communities of practice (CoPs), and studies that consider the significance of informal learning spaces in art education. The arts-based research method of a/r/tography is also reviewed for its effectiveness in approach to the project.

The social meaning of creativity and community in the 21st century is supported by Gauntlett (2011) and Gibson (2019), who both acknowledge craft making and learning as social connection. Weintraub and Peralta (2024) build on Gauntlett's study of virtual communities through social media and internet sites, also connecting them to DIY culture. Wells (2024) outlines the importance of an emerging market of creative reuse centers and their beneficial role in sustainable artistic production and consumption. Girak et al. (2019) and Hochtritt (2019) validate this claim through examples of artists and educators who utilize secondhand materials in the classroom.

Al-Tawil and Hoven (2024) present applications of tactile learning strategies and their benefits alongside research. A review of a/r/tographic research dissertations compiled by Sinner et al. (2006) identifies attributes consistent among scholars utilizing this hybrid methodology, supplemented by the work of Irwin (2013) and Sinner et al. (2006). A case study by Thomas et al. (2015) is included for its examination of Crosstown Arts, a community-based arts organization in Memphis, Tennessee offering interdisciplinary artist residencies along with a wide range of creative programming and facilities. The Crosstown Arts residency is considered for its potential to support a project based in a/r/tography.

These selected scholarly findings collectively strengthen the idea that material engagement, community-based learning, and the revival of traditional handcraft practices intersect to challenge hierarchical distinctions between art and craft. Their perspectives also support more accessible approaches to creative making and learning, positioning craft as both environmentally and socially beneficial when approached as a sustainable practice.

Connecting Contemporary Art and Traditional Craft in the 21st Century

The evolving relationship between art and craft has undergone repeated cycles of sociocultural connection and separation, with craft often positioned as less valuable than fine art (Fariello, 2011; Gauntlett, 2011). Regardless of time and place, a strong link between maker and material is a consistent connection found in both art and craft. Psychologist John Dewey (as cited in Gibson, 2019) positions work in art and craft as “basic models of human experience, in that they make visible how things are connected to each other” (p. 28). Conversely, Campbell and Dalton (2019) contemplate the invisible connections, describing intergenerational craft traditions as “the inherent continuity of thread across time” (p. 32). Across several studies, process over product emerges as a defining element of craft (Campbell & Dalton, 2019; Fariello, 2011; Sotomayer & Garcia, 2019). This is especially evident in community art settings, where processes are more likely to include storytelling and transfer of knowledge, contributing to a sense of belonging. Utilizing these qualities of craft in an approach to art education can make creative learning feel more accessible.

Gibson (2019) posits that “craft skills function as cultural tools through which individuals gain agency within their communities” (p. 28). In the work of contemporary textile artist Celia Pym, that connection to craft is through the practice of mending. She describes the skill as “care...felt in your hands” (Pym, 2017, p. 566). Working with worn items creates an intimate

connection to stories of the owner and maker, especially in textile garments. Once considered a necessary chore in every household, the skill of mending faded with the globalization of clothing production and its successor, fast fashion (Bridgens et al., 2018; Wells, 2024). Throwaway culture has contributed to an abundance of waste that impacts communities everywhere, and a creative approach to reuse and repair is just one way of combatting this issue.

Reuse and Repair as Creative Practice

Cultivating a reuse and repair mindset brings awareness to the systems that connect us all. Circular economies benefit from a relationship with the arts by bridging sustainable creative practices through upcycling and responsible artistic production (Wells, 2024). By framing art education within sustainability, Girak et al. (2019) highlight “the power of aesthetic transformation through creative reuse” (p. 369) and argue that art education plays a key role in the development of ecological studio practices. Using an autoethnographic methodology, they found that working with discarded materials prompted significant paradigm shifts among students.

Duque and Podkalicka (2024) describe the concept of valuation, or meaning-making, as critical when considering issues related to secondhand materials and their perceived worth, stating that “as objects move—acquired, used, discarded, re-distributed, reframed, re-made, and used again—their value and meaning change” (p. 155). Circularity promotes cycles of meaning-making, and by engaging in creative reuse and repair, our attention is directed to material worth, waste cycles, and to connecting with others who practice shared values. These concepts also align with New Materialism, a philosophical movement that encourages a respectful relationship with objects and healthier habits of consumption (Simms & Potts, 2012).

An artist/teacher invested in sustainable practices can also have an impact on how their students think about consumption. Thrifting can be considered a site for public pedagogy as well

as a social practice (Girak et al., 2019; Hochtritt, 2019). While creative reuse centers are a modern, niche solution (Bridgens et al., 2018; Wells, 2024), alternative consumerism can be practiced in myriad ways. Charity shops, op-shops, garage sales, flea markets, non-profit and for-profit thrift shops, online marketplaces, and recycling centers are all examples of secondhand markets (Duque & Podkalicka, 2024; Hochtritt, 2019; Wells, 2024), making them widely available resources for artists, teachers, and students.

Informal Education and Communities of Practice

Art instruction has long existed beyond the school classroom in a variety of forms and spaces (Gauntlett, 2011; Hochtritt, 2019; Weintraub & Peralta, 2024). Public libraries and art museums are common locations that offer art-based learning to the community (Jones, 2018). The potential for greater diversity and accessibility in these environments make them powerful resources. Additionally, the informal nature of community-based art lends itself to making personal connections (Weintraub & Peralta, 2024). Sotomayor and Garcia (2019) discuss how National Core Arts Standards are based on the artistic processes of creating, performing/producing/presenting, responding, and connecting, and that in the connecting process, students are encouraged to use personal experiences in creative work. A community setting naturally allows for a collaborative environment where personal experiences can be shared and produce meaningful conversations, support, and reflection.

Craft creates community, whether in-person or virtually. Weintraub and Peralta (2024) suggest that social media sites like TikTok, YouTube, and Pinterest should be considered Communities of Practice (CoPs). As virtual learning environments have grown since the Covid-19 Pandemic, these communities have become more than just a space for sharing media and knowledge. Their interactive and supportive nature encourages innovation and fosters

inclusivity, further classifying them as informal community learning environments. Weintraub and Peralta also connect the DIY culture of Pinterest to DIY practices of activist groups dating back to the 1950s, affirming that craft has a deep historical connection to feminism, marginalized communities, and grassroots movements (Campbell & Dalton, 2019; Gauntlett, 2011).

Elaborating on these ideas, Sinner et al. (2006) also consider the practice-based methodology of a/r/tography and its ability to “further bridge the collaborative potential of researcher and participants by facilitating the formation of communities of practice” (p. 1249). With its emphasis on process, shared knowledge, and living inquiry, a/r/tography offers a framework where informal learning sites naturally develop and flourish.

A/r/tography as Application

Approaching this project through the methodology of a/r/tography not only allows for the connection of the roles of artist, researcher, and teacher, but also provides therapeutic benefits that enhance learning and clarify thinking (Corkhill et al., 2014). Textile work, with its repetitive movements—threading, knotting, and stitching—serves as scaffolding for contemplation. Al-Tawil and Hoven (2024) discuss “the applicability of various textile crafts in helping learners access and develop under-utilized pathways in the brain” (p. 272). As they wove a tapestry alongside their doctoral research, they discovered metaphors through the making process that deepened their engagement with the topic and generated new understandings. Sinner et al. (2006) suggest that “By making art, researchers generate sources of information and understandings for their inquiry” (p. 1246).

In defining what makes a/r/tography stand as a hybrid branch of methodology within arts-based research, Sinner et al. (2006) further explain that it “begins from the practices of artists, researchers, and educators, who, through ongoing inquiry in and through time, share their

processes of inquiry as well as the products that are derived from those inquiries” (p. 1227).

Alongside reading and writing, an a/r/tographic practice is grounded in the physical creation of artwork, visual journals, and other modes of documentation.

The immersive nature of an artist residency provides an ideal environment to pursue a/r/tographic inquiry. Crosstown Arts, a community-based arts organization in Memphis, Tennessee, offers three-month residencies for artists in any medium. Thomas et al. (2015) emphasize its function as an incubator for creative exchange, where “having the chance to meet other creative individuals is good for ramping up one’s thinking... [and] give one a different way of thinking” (p. 81). Founded in 2010, Crosstown Arts has been a key developer in the preservation of the historic Sears Crosstown building and creative revitalization of the Crosstown neighborhood. Known now as Crosstown Concourse, the one-million-square-foot building where Crosstown Arts operates is home to multiple galleries, exhibition spaces, performance venues, commercial and residential tenants, a high school, and much more (Crosstown Arts, n.d.). The opportunities and amenities available to artists in residence make for an effective space to engage and collaborate with community while the renovation of the massive building serves as a stunning example of creative repair and reuse in itself.

The ideas supported by selected scholars support the claim that creative reuse and repair can serve as a bridge to connect traditional craft practices in the context of contemporary art, and that through informal learning communities, art education can become more accessible. Creative reuse centers, thrift stores, and related secondhand markets are important resources for connecting makers and educators to materials, while also promoting a circular economy. Upcycling inspires creativity and material valuation through hands-on experimentation and critical thinking skills. Both in-person and virtual CoPs can further develop these relationships

by inspiring new modes of learning and accessible channels for sharing unwanted or excess materials. A community-based artist residency can serve as an effective setting for a project based in the methods of a/r/tography.

Results and Findings

Throughout this project, several key findings emerged connecting material engagement, informal learning, and community interaction. I have kept a visual and tactile journal documenting my thoughts, materials, images, and resources as a way to record and process information. Using the practice-based research method of a/r/tography, this physical object has served as a tool for both archiving and exploring active inquiry, while also allowing for future public presentation of my ongoing investigation and development. Within this framework, I simultaneously worked on a collection of textile pieces inspired by traditional needlework methods, reinforcing that knowledge is generated through embodied and tactile experiences (Al-Tawil & Hoven, 2024; Corkhill et al., 2014; Jones, 2018; Sinner et al., 2006). Choosing to research unfamiliar needlework techniques allowed me to re-enter a beginner's mindset while working with familiar materials. Inspired by Al-Tawil and Hoven's (2024) "self-taught endeavor" of learning tapestry weaving alongside research, and their discovery that while refining new skills, one can "navigate the complexities of cognitive processes with heightened focus, leading to the formation of new connections that foster deeper understanding and expand our capacity for innovation" (pp. 274-276).

The results of my project culminate into a proposal for an artist residency where I will further develop these ideas, share my process with a public audience, and create a community workshop series based in teaching traditional needlework techniques through a sustainable approach.

Artist/With Abundance, We Make

A major finding in this project is that research through making allows for full immersion in the process and deeper cognitive engagement. Haptic learning develops understanding through repetition, promoting creative exploration and a chance to make new connections between ideas (Al-Tawil & Hoven, 2024; Corkhill et al., 2014; Jones, 2018; Sinner et al., 2006). As I created a collection of textile works inspired by traditional craft methods, I applied the concepts set forth by aforementioned scholars.

Recognizing post-consumer and manufacturing waste, overabundance of useful materials, and the devaluing of goods and labor is a central theme in my work as an artist. The parameters guiding the tactile elements of this project included using only found, discarded, thrifted, or existing studio materials, and saving all scraps for potential reuse. Cunliffe (2022) supports the use of parameters in creative work, stating that “some of the indecisive background noise is eliminated, allowing me to focus more clearly on getting my message across” (p. 86). As I frequently find needlecraft supplies and materials in local secondhand markets like thrift stores, estate sales, and free share sites, this limitation was a natural extension of my studio practice.

From the thread and fabric of each object created, to the sketchbook used for documentation, each piece was directly shaped by material availability, demonstrating how parameters can function as catalysts for creative decision making and clarity. Additionally, the use of secondhand materials often necessitates repair. After several weeks of use, the sketchbook I repurposed as my research journal began to show wear and needed mending to prevent the front and back covers from detaching. The burlap I found at an estate sale and used for a rug hooking study also had a few holes and needed darning to prevent unraveling. These details not only connected to my previous studio work but also aligned with New Materialist thinking. Simms

and Potts (2012) affirm that practices of making and mending foster engagement and sustainability, offering an alternative to passive consumption. Through these examples, the act of reuse became both a conceptual framework and a practical methodology, embedding material awareness within the making process.

Researcher/Visualizing Information Through Color and Pattern

Another key finding in the project was the importance of a visual and material system that structures and synthesizes large volumes of information. In the early stages of my research, I developed a system that originated as a mind map and evolved into a matrix-like diagram (See Appendix A). This diagram eventually informed both the conceptual structure of the research and the pattern template for the art works.

As I collected information, I identified eight primary themes with assigned colors that I then used to annotate texts, organize notes, and track connections across sources. Surrounding these central segments is a series of rectangular forms arranged in a configuration inspired by log cabin quilt blocks, representing the a/r/tographic framework. Quilt design techniques coupled with the grid-based nature of cross stitch and rug hooking further connected traditional craft practices to the research methodology by illustrating the boundaries and connections between them. The use of forward slashes in the stylized writing of a/r/tography is described by Dr. Rita L. Irwin as a representation of the “in between liminal space,” like folds in fabric (Campbell, 2024, 29:45). Rallis et al. (2024) expand on this comparison by “...emphasizing the potential for expanding and contracting, twisting and turning, reimagining artmaking, researching, teaching and learning in a myriad of ways” (p. 8).

By applying the design template across multiple media—including textiles, paper collage, and watercolor—it demonstrated both adaptability and scalability. I first created a small fabric

representation of the design using hand quilting techniques, followed by a paper collage for the front cover of my sketchbook. As I moved further into the project, I worked on a small cross stitch sample and a much larger rug hooked piece (See Appendix B). I also considered the myriad applications of this template that I could explore in the future, like stained glass, weaving, beading, and mosaic.

Jones (2018) explains, “Creativity enables the possibilities afforded by the idea of play: that you could play with ideas as much as you could play with images, materials, shapes, textures, colours and so forth” (p. 150). In this way, my own tactile learning creates space for experimentation, allowing the exploration of new techniques to inform and inspire new insights and connections across research findings. Pattern and color function here as a dynamic method of research, revealing connections that may not have otherwise been made through text alone. As Diachenko et al. (2022) note, color serves as “a prime engine for memory improvement and activation of all types of mental activity” positioning visual organization as a mode of thinking rather than just aesthetic appeal (p. 3). Their study further emphasizes that in “using mind-mapping for optimization...a person's cognitive abilities are active when they create schemes, presentations, and projects independently (including color schemes)” (p. 5). The direct relationship between this conceptual diagram and its material forms aligns with a/r/tography’s emphasis on interconnectedness: bridging theory, application, and future engagement through pedagogy.

Teacher/Finding Communities of Practice

Because needlework has always been an essential part of my studio practice, I felt it was important to challenge myself by learning techniques I was not familiar with. I used informal learning methods to experiment with appliqué, quilting, cross stitch, and rug hooking while

recording notes, samples, and images in my research journal. While I worked, I considered how I might teach future workshops with secondhand materials in each application. Because different techniques revealed varying levels of accessibility within resource constraints, sourcing tools and materials for use in a workshop setting can have a direct impact on its feasibility.

Cross stitch and quilting materials were easily found among my own studio supplies, but rug hooking required more deliberate sourcing. A chance discovery of a traditional rug hooking frame and fabric strip cutter at a local estate sale influenced my desire to learn this technique, further highlighting how contingency and material availability can shape the direction of practice-based research. Acknowledging the rarity of particular craft supplies also underscores the importance of access in craft practices, supporting teaching strategies that consider adaptable and low-cost alternatives, such as DIY tools.

As I experimented with new needlework techniques, another key finding became evident. Communities of Practice (CoPs), whether in person or virtual, were critical resources as I encountered challenges within the learning process. For cross stitch, questions were easier to answer with an experienced coworker and robust online platforms like Reddit (r/CrossStitch). I also utilized free online pattern making software, public libraries, and social media sites like Instagram. Rug hooking, now a less commonly practiced craft, required more searching. Several months before beginning this project, I met a London-based rug hooking artist and instructor while we were both teaching at Shakerag Workshops, an immersive craft program in Sewanee, Tennessee. Visiting his classroom exposed me to the design process, tools, and materials that I was able to take photographs of and make notes to reference later. I also consulted vintage craft books, YouTube, and a rug hooking group on Facebook.

Learning a traditional craft often exposes its historical context. The vintage rug hooking burlap that I found at an estate sale in Memphis just before starting this project was stamped with a stenciled pattern and the names, “Mrs. Harry King–Miss Carol King” below it. Online research led me to discover a 1940s *Time* magazine article about Mrs. Harry King and a group of women in Arkansas who would get together for rug hooking parties (See Appendix C). Compared to sewing bees and knitting groups by the author of the article, these time-honored examples of CoPs are as relevant today as they were then (Faris, 1940).

The Roundabout Studio: A/r/tographic Inquiry through Artist Residency

The experimental aspect of research through making serves as the impetus for my ongoing project. The concept of the “Roundabout Studio” emerged as a model for further expanding this a/r/tographic inquiry, and an artist residency will provide the dedicated studio space, time, and opportunity for community engagement to carry out these plans.

I will organize the studio space to promote a circular workflow, much like a roundabout traffic intersection. Continuing with the parameters of working with secondhand materials, the modes and methods of inquiry will be directed by what is available through community-based resources. As materials enter the studio during the three months in residence, my organizational research diagram will serve as a tool to sort and determine where everything belongs in the space. By creating a cyclical flow of materials, the scraps from one workspace will naturally provide materials for the next. This flow will promote continuous movement of materials in, around, and out of the studio as necessary.

I will continue to research, document, and share all process notes through a variety of modes for public viewing, including an artist talk and open studio events during the residency. Rasch (2025) states, “In the end, your research documentation may even turn out to be the

creative work itself” (p. 70). While hosting an open studio, I will demonstrate techniques, show works in progress, and encourage visitors to try learning a new skill through hands-on opportunities. An extension of the open studio will include social media and blog posts, encouraging virtual participation for those not able to attend in-person.

I will develop a series of textile-based community workshops supported by my findings in the studio, along with a plan to implement them on a larger scale following the residency. These workshops will be designed with an actionable and customizable framework that can be used in a variety of educational settings, centered on the foundational ideas of this a/r/tographic study—bridging art and craft through community connection, sourcing sustainable materials, and creative making and inquiry as a transformative process.

A mending workshop curriculum for educators that I have previously implemented in a variety of settings will serve as a guide for future iterations (See Appendix D). I will begin offering free community-based work sessions inspired by this format during the Crosstown Arts residency, learning best practices and identifying any challenges through participant feedback. Vis (2025) affirms, “By sharing knowledge, you participate in and help build a community. The community is continuously in the making” (p. 5). While the residency is limited to three months, afterwards, it is my goal to continue sharing, building, and participating in the community that was created during my time there.

Summary and Conclusion

This study set out to examine connections between traditional craft and contemporary art through the application of creative repair and reuse in community-based educational settings. Using the practice-based research method of a/r/tography, I blended my roles of artist, researcher, and teacher while designing a framework for collecting data, experimenting with material

processes, and developing a plan for future public engagement. Scholarly literature informed my approach to research through making, reinforcing the benefits of haptic learning and the importance of Communities of Practice (CoPs) within informal learning environments.

Additionally, these findings suggest that a revival of hand stitching through mending challenges longstanding hierarchies between art and craft while allowing space for needlework within contemporary art education. Positioning creative reuse as an effective approach to more sustainable making and teaching practices also promotes accessibility and mindful consumerism.

This project was shaped by my studio practice and my role as a community art educator. The use of secondhand and repurposed materials, repetitive needlework techniques, and an emphasis on process and personal connection remained central throughout. Learning and creating new textile pieces alongside research and writing fostered a more generative experience, ultimately informing my proposal for an artist residency where I will continue to expand community engagement and learning opportunities.

Based on these findings, I recommend that artists, educators, and arts-based organizations consider the potential of creative repair and reuse within their communities. Visible mending is a practical and valuable addition to any curriculum and can be easily adapted to accommodate a range of learning environments and ages (see Appendix D). Mending clothing or household textiles offers an accessible entry point, and basic sewing supplies are readily available through a variety of resources, including secondhand. Engaging with contemporary artists who work in repair can provide inspiration, and an internet search for “visible mending” is a great place to start. I also recommend organizing a repair club or “free” supply shelf to encourage mentorship and collaboration within one’s learning community. I also recommend checking with your local public library for books, events, or other resources related to repair and reuse. A list of online

resources is included to help facilitate these recommendations (see Appendix E).

Overall, this project supports making as a mode of research, connection, and exploration while emphasizing that meaning can be found in materials as well as in the way they are acquired and transformed. Through creative repair and reuse, art education can become more accessible and sustainable by reducing barriers while encouraging diverse learning opportunities. In cultivating care for objects and materials, we also cultivate care for each other—by building skills, strengthening communities, and crafting connections.

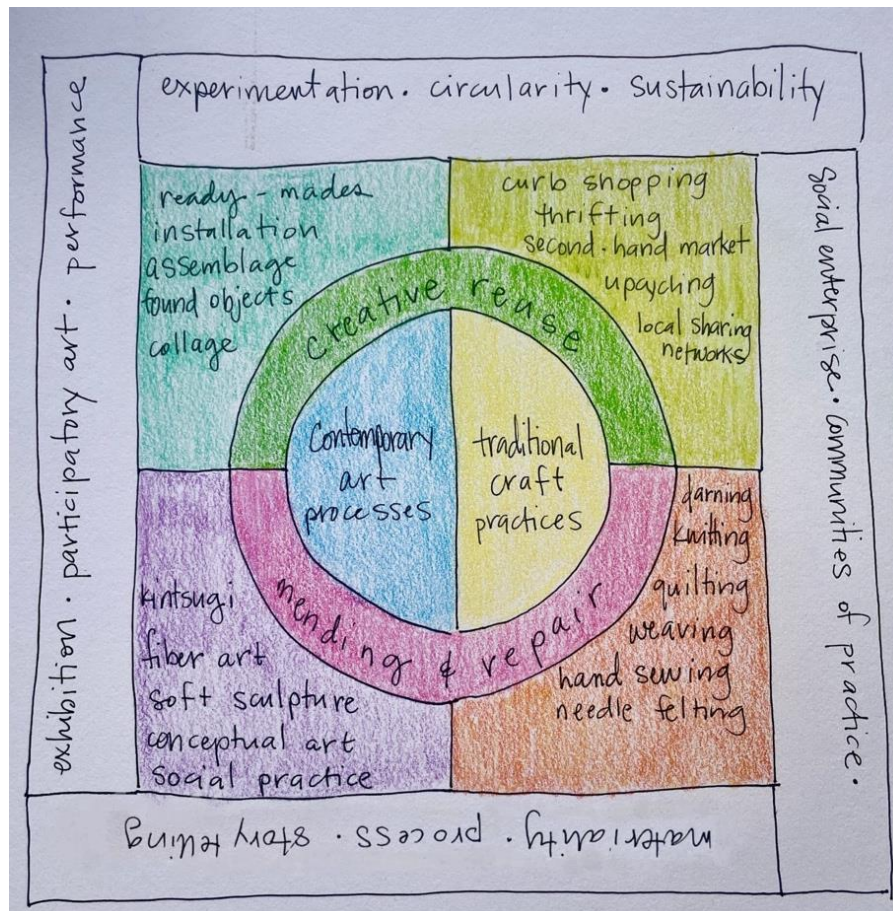
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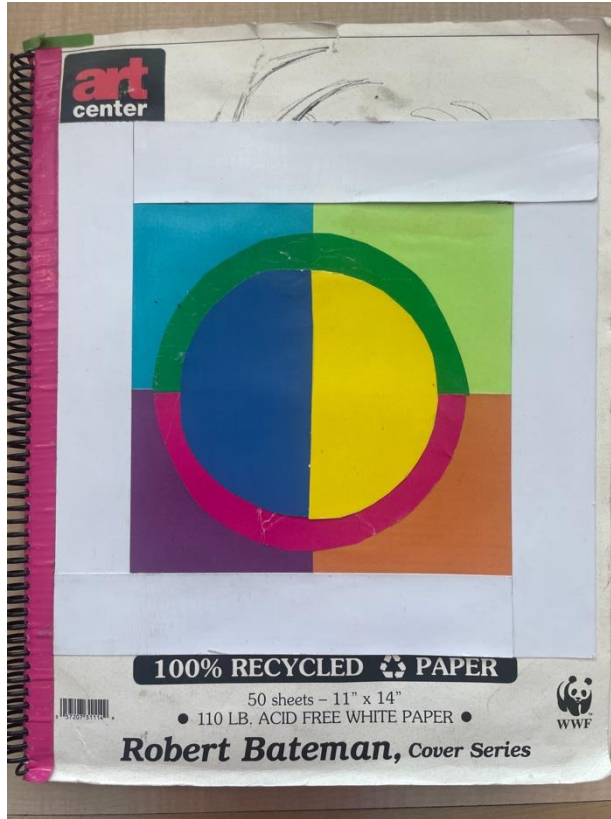
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Appendix A: Mind Map and Data Chart / Color and Design Pattern



Appendix B: Samples of Work Created Using Design Template

Appendix C: *Life* Magazine Article

MRS. KING, IN DARK DRESS IN CENTER, SITS ON THE FLOOR AT A RUG-HOOKING PARTY GIVEN IN JONESBORO AT THE HOME OF MRS. HORACE SLOAN, AT EXTREME RIGHT



DAUGHTER CAROL HELPS WITH STENCILING, ALWAYS GETS THOROUGHLY SMUDGED

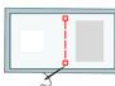
OLD ART OF RUG HOOKING REVIVED BY PARTY-LOVING SOUTHERN WOMEN

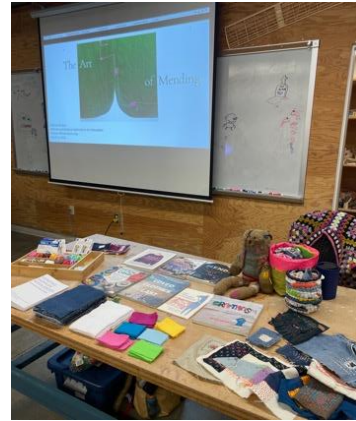
The scene of hooking housewives pictured above is a busy example of a new kind of party to which women in New England and the South are flocking. That hooking parties have in recent years encroached on the popularity of the knitting bee and sewing circle is due in great measure to the efforts of Mrs. Harry King of Beebe, Ark.

The actual hooking of a rug requires no great skill. With a hooked steel needle, almost anyone can pull strips of colored cloth through a piece of burlap on which the design has been stenciled in advance. But to produce rugs such as those shown on the page opposite, one must have an interesting pattern as a basis, skill in selecting or dyeing the rags to be used, dexterity in actual hooking. Mrs. King's great contribution is in making available to hookers more than 2,500 patterns, many copied from museum pieces.

Six years ago Mrs. King wanted to make an early American hooked rug for the floor of the remodeled Colonial house in Hoxie, Ark., to which she had just moved. Because she could not find any ready-made pattern she liked, she decided to make her own, copying it from a photograph of a rug in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It was so attractive her friends clamored for copies of her design. That was the beginning of a flourishing business. Mrs. King now travels about the country giving free advice on hooking to groups of women who find this a highly satisfactory medium for self-expression. She sells her standard patterns for \$1 to \$17.50, according to size, will make to order any pattern desired by a prospective hooker. The picture at left shows pattern being stenciled on burlap on which rug is made.

Appendix D: Mending Workshop for Art Educators

Workshop Title: Mending Sampler Needlebook for Educators	Lesson Length: 2-3 hours
Locations: conferences, public libraries, professional development sessions, community spaces, museum education programs, creative reuse centers	Course Level: k-16 educators, community educators
Instructor: Katrina Perdue	
Images of the project and setup: Inspiration & Resources Celia Pym Kate Sekules Bridget Harvey Amy Meissner Stitch-School Culture of Repair Fashion Revolution Repair What You Wear Worn Stories by Emily Spivack  www.katrinaperdue.com katrinaperdue@icloud.com IG: @katrinaperdue MENDING SAMPLER NEEDLEBOOK PROJECT GUIDE FOR ART TEACHERS Katrina Perdue 38th Annual Media & Methods in Art Education Eastern Illinois University March 8, 2025 Why do we mend? to save a favorite item sustainability to slow down creative expression improve dexterity mark making exercise to better understand materials to learn how things are made therapeutic benefits an act of care 3. whip stitch/applique stitch  aplique felt patch to second "page"  Extras: add a button closure add additional "pages" with other stitches continue stitching on front and back of book create a back pocket stitch: 1. running stitch even, straight stitches  Sew "page" to "spine" using running stitch. Knot one end of thread, start from inside, stitch to other end, tie a knot, snip.  2. patch from inside using rows of running stitch The hole on the cover will be patched with the first "page". Stitches can be parallel or alternating. Start on one corner and stitch in lines to the other, stitching uninterrupted over hole.  supplies: - denim, lightweight canvas, twill (use old jeans!) - lightweight woven cotton (sheets, collared shirts) - felt (sweatshirts or felted sweaters work, too) - hand sewing thread - embroidery floss, perle cotton, sashiko, crochet thread - hand sewing needles - large eye, long sharp (cotton darning, sashiko) - scissors - safety pins or straight pins - ruler or tape measure optional: - rotary cutter + mat - pinking shears - thread conditioner or beeswax - fabric marker/washable marker - thimble cut: - cut denim or canvas 8.5" x 5.5" (use this folded booklet as your template) - cut thinner woven fabric slightly smaller than denim. This will be the "page" - cut felt piece 2.5" x 3.5" (playing cards work great as templates!)  tips: - use a rotary cutter to save time and hand strain - pinking shears help reduce fraying on edges - draw fold lines with chalk or washable pen/marker assemble: Fold denim in half as shown below, finger press.  Cut a small square in the center of the left half (this will be the front cover of your needle book) Place cotton page on denim, matching center with fold line and covering square hole.  Place felt on right side of cotton "page."  Place a pin at each mark. Felt should only be pinned to cotton "page" layer 	



Rational:

Educators will learn basic hand sewing skills through completion of the Mending Sampler Needlebook and learn tips on how to teach their students to create a needlebook of their own. Beginning with lessons to learn and practice mending techniques on samples or personal items, teachers will later assist students in developing their own artistic approach to hand stitching and repair.

Goals / Objectives:

Composition/ Design

- Visible mending inspires the use of color, pattern and repetition through choices in thread color and mark-making with stitches.

Creativity/ Imaginative Thinking

- Repair of any kind encourages problem solving and an understanding of how things are made and remade.

Craftsmanship/ Technical Skill

- Sewing by hand or machine incorporates technical and practical skills along with creative expression and improved dexterity.

Communication/ Reflection

- Collaboration through repairing personal objects for others builds empathy and connection

Essential Questions: what questions will guide the investigation

- How does collaboration expand the creative process and build community?
- How does repair and preservation of personal objects cultivate appreciation and understanding? (How does this change when we repair for ourselves vs for someone else)
- How does mending preserve aspects of life?

Key Artistic Concepts (see hand-out for definitions)	
Mending Darning Sashiko Boro Cloth Kintsugi	
Media / Tools	Methods
The Art of Mending presentation Mending Resources doc (with QR code on guide) Simplified Mending Project Guide for Teachers printed for each participant Supplies: precut denim, cotton, and felt for each participant, needles (number 18), a variety of thread, safety pins, scissors, beeswax, samples of mending	artists who use repair in their art practice hand and machine sewing skills community-based repair programs history of fashion/clothing manufacturing history of repair in society
Process / Activities	
Introductions Presentation (The Art of Mending) Distribution of materials for group lesson—Mending Sampler Needlebook Work through book assembly as a class, introducing and explaining materials as we go Discuss tips/tricks that will help teachers with students learning to sew Show examples of mending and other stitched objects Discuss ways to collect materials on a budget or secondhand/free Look at examples of k-12 sewing projects	
Modifications	Expansions
Magnifying glasses Blunt needles and cross stitch canvas in place of sharp needles/fabric Socks! Using adhesives or other no sew methods for repair	Sewing machine for experienced sewers Machine sewing, darning, or tailoring techniques Experimenting with non-fabric objects like plastic, paper, metal

Artistic / Cultural References
In Visual Art: Japanese traditions—Boro cloth, Sashiko stitching, and Kintsugi ceramics repair WW2 era propaganda posters – Make Do and Mend Yoko Ono: Mend Piece Celia Pym In social practice art: Amy Meissner: Seed Lab at Anchorage Museum, Alaska Julia Gartrell: Radical Repair Workshop Michael Swaine: The Free Mending Library The Sewing Machine Project The Collective Mending Sessions Lee Mingwei—The Mending Project In programming for k-12 schools: Repair What You Wear (UK) Culture of Repair A Froebelian approach: Sewing with young children
Resources:
Culture of Repair. (n.d.) Repair in educational settings. Culture of Repair. Retrieved April 22, 2024, from https://www.cultureofrepair.org/schools Maker Ed & Agency by Design Oakland. (2019a). Cultivating a Repair Mindset Toolkit. Berkely & Oakland, CA. https://makered.org/resource/cultivating-repair-mindset-toolkit/ Perdue, Katrina (2024). Collaborative Mending and Community Repair Events as Arts-based Service-Learning Projects in K-12 School Curriculums Repair What You Wear. (n.d.). https://repairwhatyouwear.com/ WNC Repair Cafe (2024, January 18). Stitching Stuffies. WNC Repair Cafe. https://wncrepaircafe.blogspot.com/2024/01/stitching-stuffies.html
21st Century Skill (P21 Resources)
creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, social responsibility, and global awareness

National Core Art Standards (high school proficient level standards)

<http://www.nationalartsstandards.org>

Creating: Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

VA:Cr1.2.1a Shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present-day life using a contemporary practice of art or design.

Presenting: Interpreting and sharing artistic work.

Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

VA:Pr6.1.1a Analyze and describe the impact that an exhibition or collection has on personal awareness of social, cultural, or political beliefs and understandings

Responding: Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work

VA:Re.7.2.1a Analyze how one's understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual imagery.

Connecting: Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

VA:Cn11.1.1a Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art.

Assessment Methods:

Formative:

Collaboration survey

Exit Ticket

Summative:

Zine: How To Get Curious About

Repair

Repair Journal

Key Terms:

Mending	To repair by sewing or darning
Darning	Mending a hole in material by interweaving yarn or thread
Sashiko	("little stabs") is a form of decorative reinforcement stitching (or functional embroidery) from Japan
Boro cloth	the practice of repairing textiles through patching and stitching over and over again. Often blue fabric with white thread using sashiko style stitches) Originated in Japan.
Kintsugi	Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold lacquer, celebrating the repair rather than trying to disguise it

Appendix E: Recommended Resources for Creative Repair and Reuse

Websites with educational resources, video tutorials, and downloads

[Stitch School](#)

[Repair What You Wear](#)

[Fashion Revolution](#)

[Fixing Things for the Future](#)

[Fixing Fashion \(YouTube playlist\)](#)

[K-12 — iFixit EDU](#)

[Stitching Stuffies—Repair Café](#)

[Materials for the Arts](#)

[Repair Cafe](#)

[East Bay Depot for Creative Reuse](#)

[SCRAP Creative Reuse](#)

[Sugru Mouldable Glue](#)

Artist inspiration

[Celia Pym](#)

[Kate Sekules](#)

[Amy Meissner](#)

[Ali Clifford](#)

[Collingwood-Norris](#)

[Catherine Reinhart](#)

Projects and articles

[Socks: The Art of Care and Repair](#)

[FABSCRAP](#)

[People Fixing Fashion](#)

[Radical Repair Workshop - Julia Gartrell](#)

[Visible Mending short film](#)

[Michael Swaine: "Mending for the People"](#)

[Freecycle](#)

[The Buy Nothing Project](#)

[Meet the NYC street tailor mending clothes from a pushcart](#)

[Worn Wear - Patagonia](#)

[V&A Make Your Own: Japanese 'Boro' Bag](#)

Materials

[Make and Mend](#)

[Remnants](#)

[Swanson's Fabrics](#)

[mega list of creative reuse centers](#)

[Guide to Buying Used Art Supplies](#)