

# *Interwoven: A Storytelling Quilt*

*a community art project on textile art and collective experience*

*Facilitated by Hasini Shyamsundar*

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## Background

Interwoven is a community-created quilt developed during a women's interfaith retreat in February 2020. This work responds to how textile work, and quilting in particular, has historically been regarded as a gendered activity (including both in the home and the market).<sup>1</sup> Even today, women in the textile industry often work long hours for low wages,<sup>2</sup> and the gender divide in the textile industry is not specific to Europe.<sup>3</sup>

Separately, the idea of the "female weaving" is also a common motif in Abrahamic and pre-Abrahamic spiritual and religious dialogue.<sup>4</sup> In Goddess spirituality, the weaving women are portrayed "as creators of culture, as inventors of the arts of agriculture and weaving, as poets."<sup>5</sup>

Finally, some argue that an integral part of understanding the collective history of textile-making is to partake in the action itself.<sup>6</sup> This activity draws on this perspective, encouraging retreat attendees to reflect on their collective experience of womanhood as attendees of the retreat, as students at Georgetown University, and as individuals living in a gendered world with an equally gendered history.

## Learning Goals

The goal of this project was threefold. Participating artists would:

- Express personal experiences through textile art and quilting in particular.
- Respond to one's relationship with faith/spirituality, nature, and life at Georgetown University through the medium of art.
- Explore how one's individual experiences fit into a larger collective experience.

## Materials

Artists were provided with the following materials:

- 1 piece of colored rectangular felt
- Fabric markers

<sup>1</sup> Marybeth C. Stalp, "Negotiating Time and Space for Serious Leisure: Quilting in the Modern U.S. Home," *Journal of Leisure Research* 38, no. 1 (March 2006): 104–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0022216.2006.11950071>.

<sup>2</sup> Beth English, "Global Women's Work: Historical Perspectives on the Textile and Garment Industries," *Journal of International Affairs* 67, no. 1 (2013): 67–82.

<sup>3</sup> Anuradha Nagaraj, "Interview: Women Work like Machines in India's Textile Mills, Says Union Leader," *Reuters*, April 22, 2016, sec. World, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN0XJ28L/>.

<sup>4</sup> Carol P. Christ, "Weaving the Fabric of Our Lives," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 13, no. 1 (1997): 131–36.

<sup>5</sup> Christ, 132.

<sup>6</sup> Beverly Gordon, "The Hand of the Maker: The Importance of Understanding Textiles from the 'Inside Out,'" in *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*, 2002, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/389>.



- Glue
- Craft supplies (e.g. construction paper, beads, pipe cleaners)
- Found materials (e.g. dry macaroni, old magazines, newspapers, kitchen sponges, loofahs)

Artists were also encouraged to collect materials (e.g. fallen leaves) from around the retreat center in Bluemont, VA without causing harm to the land.

### ***Process***

Artists were provided with their materials on the first day of the retreat and offered a brief history on the intersection between textile-making and gender. Then, the following script was utilized to guide artists into their creative practice:

You have the next two days to tell your story through this square. Tomorrow, we'll see how our individual stories combine to create our larger collective narrative.

First, I'd like to point out that these are only suggestions. Everyone is free to do as they please. I think it helps if you first sit quietly for a moment and clear your mind. I also suggest that participants not get hung up on doing this 'right' or worrying about trying to fit everything into their square. It's best to choose one or two elements. In other words, don't overthink it.



If there is something that is top of mind for you now, why not relax into that topic or question and allow yourself to explore it. Let yourself respond to it without trying to grasp it or define it concretely.

If you find yourself drawn to a particular medium or materials feel free to explore that. I have found at times that simply responding to the materials allows an idea to emerge.

Think about the words used to describe this retreat. What do they mean to you?

- *Interwoven* – How does it (if at all) relate to storytelling? Does the meaning of the term change when you parse it into "inter" and "woven"?
- *Faith* – Does it belong strictly to a religious context? Can people of different spiritual and religious backgrounds or people of atheistic or nontheistic backgrounds have faith?

Think about the words used to describe this project

- *Storytelling* – Telling is one aspect of "storytelling" but so is listening. Are you a good story-listener? What does it mean to listen?
- *Collective* – What does it mean to be a part of a collective? Does it relate to the term "interwoven"?

A few days after artists finished their individual quilt blocks, they were invited to a casual workshop to reflect on the quilt-making experience and join the blocks to one another. The quilt was presented to the Georgetown University Womens' Center on March 3, 2020.