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For my essay, I will explore three words that I feel relate to my practice and that interest me and influence way in which I design. My chosen words are “gendered making”, “mending” and “tradition”, in the context of both fashion and interior outcomes. I will look at how the world and art industry views these practices as well as how these techniques have originated and been passed down through generations. Specifically, I will explore the impact of Judy Chicago’s “Dinner Party” in relation to gendered making, the traditional Japanese technique of sashiko when discussing mending, and the varied work of William Morris when addressing the topic of tradition. I have chosen these words as I find, though the way I design may be very modern, I always feel most comfortable painting out designs using ink and a dip pen, before incorporating more digital mediums. I also find that currently I am working in a very gynocentric environment which is how much of the world views these textiles crafts, though when you look at the art industry from a business perspective many of the companies I aspire to work with are led by or founded by men.

My first chosen word for this essay is “gendered making”. “Making” is defined as “to bring into existence by shaping or changing materials, combining parts” (Dictionary.com, n.d.). In the art industry, this can mean using fabric to create garments, or clay to shape a sculpture, or paint to change a canvas. Gender is defined, by the World Health Organization, as “the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. ... As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time” (World Health Organization, 2024). This definition of gender has been widely accepted at this time, though recent changes in law may mean that this definition is adjusted to fit with the world’s view on gender. From a more scientific perspective, the University of Oxford’s Medical Sciences Division defines as “encompassing the biological, psychological and social. It may refer to sex: the classification of male or female, assigned at birth. It could also mean gender identity: the internal awareness an individual possesses of their own gender” (University of Oxford, n.d.). When the word “gender” is used in conjunction with a word such as “making” it can bring a

whole new meaning to it. Where “making” in art is seen to be the beauty in changing something, gender forces these artistic processes into rigid boxes and social ideals.

Historically, a lot of crafts, particularly those related to the textiles industry, have been gendered, segregated, and devalued “because of their association with domesticity and femininity” (Butchart, 2018). However, in the Medieval period, embroidery, also known as *Opus Anglicanum*, was revered for its workmanship and expertise, and was created by both men and women. During the Renaissance however a hierarchy evolved that saw fine art more highly valued, over the craft of stitch and textiles, due to its strong masculine associations (Butchart, 2018). Although this example discusses the type of work and how gender has affected it, there is still a high disparity in industries that are seen to be female orientated. The fashion industry is one such area, where 85% of graduates from top fashion schools across the world are female, though in the top 50 major fashion brands only 14% are led by women (Zubaviciute, 2024).

The work of women has been devalued across time, not only in the art world, but also in other professions that were once highly valued and male centred, such as teachers and pharmacist (Zurich, n.d.). One prominent piece of artistry that has been publicly devalued is “The Dinner Party”, a full room exhibition created by Judy Chicago between 1974 and 1979. This piece of artwork consists of a triangular banquet table with each table measuring 48ft long and seating 39 prominent women from history and mythology. Each of these place settings consisted of a

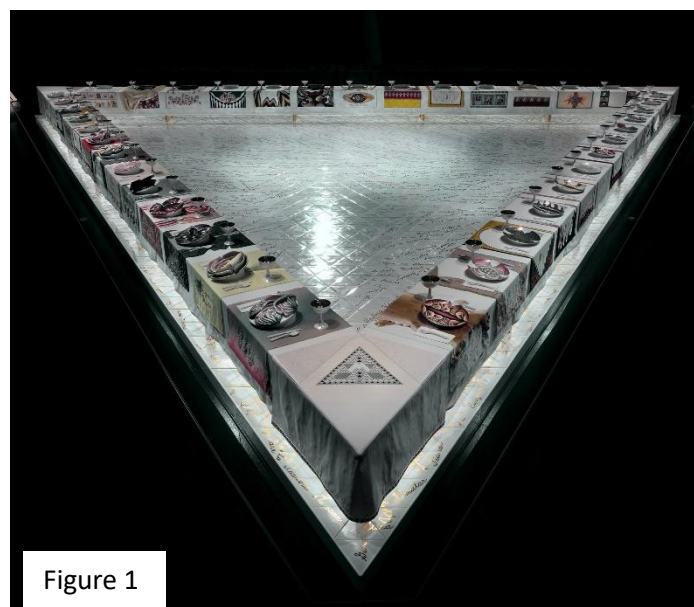


Figure 1

napkin, a chalice, a clunky set of cutlery, an embroidered runner and a large porcelain plate. Each person's 14-inch plate was individually crafted to look like a vulva and to represent the women's whose place setting it was; for instance, Georgia O'Keeffe's plate was green and purple and sculpted so that it was high off the table with outer layers extending to look like a flower or a woman's genitalia. The artwork also included a "Heritage Floor" which was comprised of 2,304 porcelain tiles adorned with 999 additional women's names. This meant that the artwork referenced a total of 1,038 individual women. The visitors to the artwork would also walk past 6 woven banners all depicting different phrases, before reaching the banquet table. The banners read, in order, "and she gathered all before her", "and she made a sign for them to see", "and lo they saw a vision", "from this day forth like to like in all things", "and then all that divided them merged" and "and then everything was Eden once again" (Chicago, n.d.).

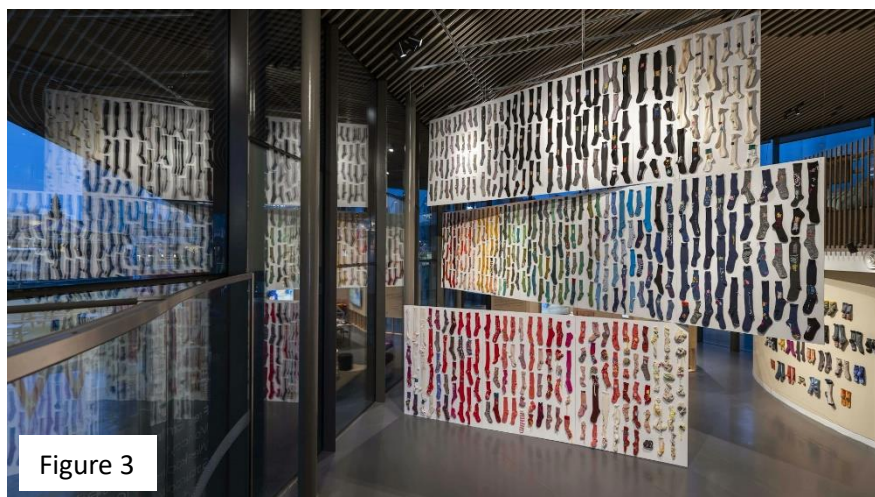


Though now this work is being appreciated for its beauty and power at its permanent home in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Centre for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, it was once shunned and cast out by the art industry and the men of the art world, which caused it to be put in storage from 1988 to 2002. In particular, in 1990, Chicago's piece was discussed in a televised congressional debate after an offer of a permanent display from a proposed museum at University of District of Columbia caused uproar (Russell, 2017). To me, what Chicago has

done with this art piece has done so much good for female artists as well as artists of all genders that use textiles and needle mediums. Not only has it showcased how these processes, that are thought to be only valid and practical in domestic settings, can be used to create high quality impactful pieces of art, the effect this piece has had is staggering in pointing out all the flaws in the way in which the world views female art.

My second chosen word for this essay is “mending”. “Mending” is defined as “to mend, repair, patch, or rebuild something that is injured, damaged or defective” (Merriam-Webster, 2025) by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. In the textiles industry, this can refer to cloth or garments that have become damaged over the course of the product’s life. Collins dictionary defines mending in the context of textiles as “repairing of clothes that have got holes in them [...] by sewing, darning, patching etc” (Collins Dictionary, 2025).

Celia Pym, a London-based textiles artist, explores the theme of mending in her art piece “SOCKS: The Art of Care and Repair” which is currently housed in the NOW Gallery in Greenwich. This piece consists of 488 socks darned by students at Surrey Square Primary



School community as well as socks darned by Pym herself. She would go into the school and teacher children students ranging from the youngest nursery pupils to those in year six, guiding and instructing them in the art of darning these socks (Greenwich Peninsula, 2025). The workshops used waste products, also known as "warehouse socks", sourced from the company JA Swift, a family-owned sock company with a history dating back to its

establishment in 1895 (Celia Pym, 2024). Through her efforts in preserving this almost-lost art, Pym aimed to create a bridge between the past and the present so that hopefully the children would continue the tradition of sock darning for generations to come. At the gallery, visitors are encouraged to bring their own socks to mend in the space, directed by videos



Figure 4

created by Pym, that they can either take home or add to the ever-growing display. When talking about this artwork, Pym states that “mending a sock is a small act of care, with a ripple effect. It adds to the story of an item, turning damage into something more meaningful” (Greenwich Peninsula, 2025). This is an example of modern mending that has been taken out of the domestic setting and put into an art gallery.

The Japanese have a phrase called “mottainai” which conveys a sense of regret over waste. This is shown in their culture through a number of different processes for mending a variety of objects such as sashiko, a technique to repair clothes, and kintsugi, a method to mend broken ceramics. Sashiko, which emerged in the Edo period (1603-1867 CE) in northern Japan, is a



Figure 5

process to extend the life of worn clothing or textiles by using “decorative reinforcement stitching” (The Craft Atlas, n.d.) to repair the deteriorating area. This can also be done with a base layer of fabric being added to the garment to add more support to the stitching, for



Figure 6

instance if a large hole had formed. The main goal of this process is whilst not only extend the life of a garment “[not to] hide the scars but celebrate them” (Braley-Palko, 2021). The word sashiko comes from the Japanese word “sasū” meaning “to pierce” and can be directly translated to “little stabs”. This process can be traced back to the 8th century, with evidence found in the possessions of Emperor Shomu. The tradition was historically performed by women in the rural communities of northern Japan and passed down through the generations (Japan Crafts, n.d.). This traditional craft has now infiltrated mainstream fashion with contemporary designers such as Katrina Rodabaugh, Flora Collingwood-Norris, and Kate Sekules exploring the rising trend of the celebration of visible repair of garments and shows such as the Great British Sewing Bee broadcasting this process into thousands of homes across the country (BBC, 2022).

My third chosen word for this essay is “tradition”. The Cambridge Dictionary defines tradition as “a belief, principle, or way of acting that people in a particular society or group have continued to follow for a long time” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). In art, specifically with the use of textiles mediums, this refers to the passing down of dyeing, stitching, or printing techniques through a family or community. However the Merriam-Webster definition best describes “tradition” and how it can be applied to the art industry: “the handing down of information, beliefs and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction” (Merriam-Webster, 2019). These differences in definitions show a difference in culture, despite these dictionaries both coming from the Western part of the world.

In the creation and decoration of textiles fabrics, there are many traditions across the world that have varied over time; for instance, the batik dyeing originating from Indonesia and screen printing from China as well as ikat weaving processes originally from South America and Central and Southeast Asia. One of the oldest traditional printing techniques is block printing. This process was originally created in ancient China, to make impressions into clay and silk (Asian Art Museum, 2024), and was then adapted by Middle Eastern cultures until it was eventually adopted by the printing industry across Europe. To create block prints, the printmaker first carves their design into a wooden block to create a relief surface with a raised pattern. The printmaker would then dip the block into dye and stamp it onto their chosen fabric, replicating the stamping process to create a repeating pattern. Whilst the process of block printing stays the same throughout these cultures, each region has a distinct style that varies even across countries. In India, for instance, the Jaipur region is known for its vibrant colours and bold designs compared to the delicate motifs found in the region of Bagru, however these designs can be easily differentiated from the intricate patterns of the Sanganer region. These processes also have traditional motifs that are used throughout the designs and can be seen in many examples across time. One of the most popular recurring motifs in designs is the use of florals, due to their connections to growth, renewal and beauty. It can also be seen across

these cultures that they have very different ways of illustrating florals. In India, many of their designs include intricately drawn florals and in China they use many delicate blossoms in their prints, which contrasts against the bold and vibrant flowers found in examples of African printing (Srivatava, 2024, pp.74–80). There are also many different meanings of each flower type across these cultures. In western cultures, roses are seen as a very meaningful flower as they symbolise love and passion, whereas in Chinese cultures they value the peony as “the king of flowers” as it represents wealth, prosperity and good fortune. These flowers can also represent cultural and religious festivals, for example the Chongyang Festival in China use the chrysanthemum to incarnate immortality and to Buddhists the lotus flower represents purity, enlightenment and spiritual growth due to its ability to grow in muddy waters and then bloom above the surface (New York Weekly, 2023).

One such designer who uses traditional motifs and processes in their work is William Morris, a craftsman, artist, writer, designer and socialist from the 19th century (The William Morris Society, 2015). Since his first block print in 1868, William Morris has become one of the most prominent designers of the textiles industry through his use of embroidery, block printing and weaving. When Morris started out in the early 1860s, he experimented with designs using embroidery, however in 1868, in Clarkson, Lancashire, he moved on to create wallpapers and textiles using the block printing technique; the use of block printing was a process he stood by throughout his career despite the development of modern rollers to aid production. After

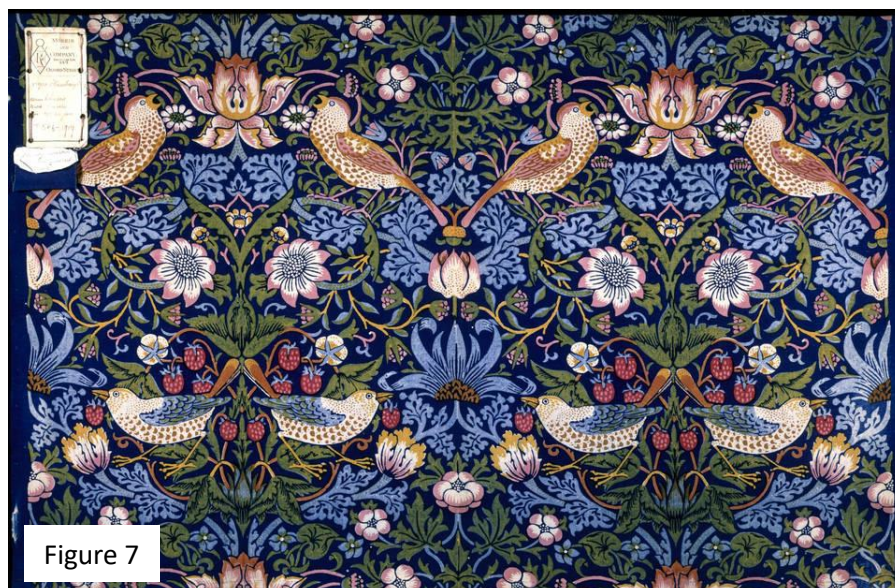


Figure 7

spending many years of his career working with painters, Morris found that his artistic style worked better in repeating patterns, so he spent much of the 1870s mastering this skill. With his newfound repeating patterns, Morris developed new styles to add to his collections reviving the use of natural dye processes in textiles with the help of Thomas Wardle in Leek, Staffordshire. Many of his designs derive inspiration from ordinary English garden flowers such



Figure 8

as tulips, delphiniums, and bluebells as well as irises, honeysuckles, and thistles which he often paired with the wildlife he would spot from his garden. After his work was becoming very well-known across England, he bought Merton Abbey, an old textile print factory, which allowed him to broaden the types of textiles his company produced. Once Morris felt he had mastered the block printing techniques, after putting another printmaker in charge of that sector of the company, he began to teach himself the traditional art of woven textiles, using various traditional looms. These pieces were often inspired by traditional 16th and 17th century Italian silks, though in his work Morris often experimented with new ways of mixing fibres (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2018).

After exploring my three chosen words (“gendered making”, “mending” and “tradition”) for my dissertation, I would like to further explore the traditional mending techniques across the world and how these vary in different cultures, such as darning, patching, and embroidery, with touches on Craftivism.

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