

SurfaceDesign

Creative Exploration of Fiber and Fabric

SPRING 2016

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transgressing
traditions





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Ann Morton

Fiber Processes as Social Practice

by Bhakti Ziek

Ann Morton builds on the concepts of co-operation and community to engineer large socially-engaged art projects. More than 600 people helped her create *Ground Cover*, an award winning Public Art Project commissioned by the City of Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture and funded in part by a National Endowment for the Arts Our Town Grant. It took nine months to create the 117 x 50-foot cloth image of blooming desert flowers that covered an empty lot in downtown Phoenix. The installation was on view for two days in December 2013, but the 300 blankets that composed the image are still keeping chronically homeless individuals warm.

Morton frames her projects using traditional fiber techniques “as a tool for engagement—engaging the hands of many to create a larger whole. This references the physical pieces, but it also references the fact that the work sheds light on larger social issues through the actions of many.”¹ She

also likes to create a “mash-up” between constituents of different segments of the population. In her *13 Fridays* project, she invited knitters to join her at the Human Services Campus of Phoenix to knit hats that were offered free to homeless individuals, a sharp contrast to the boundaries that normally separate charitable donors and the recipients of their gifts. These Fridays marked the beginning of Morton’s art as social practice, but she used her former experience as an award winning graphic designer to attract others to join. Her posters featured humorous pleas of compassion—“REAL KNITTERS SHOW UP (please);” “are you a KNITTER or a FOLLOWER?” and “BRAVE Knitters Wanted for 13 Fridays”—and drew 22 knitters. They made 142 hats that were hung on a line for individuals to take during the coldest months of the year.

Her interest in the problems and complexity of the lives of people experiencing



LEFT: ANN MORTON *Ground Cover Project* Aerial view of the site-specific installation in downtown Phoenix, Arizona, 2013.

The 300 handmade blankets formed a pixelated image of a blooming desert flower. Photo: Todd Photographic.

RIGHT: Participants installing the site-specific public art project in downtown Phoenix, 2013. Photo: Josh Loeser.

TOP: After the public art installation was complete, blankets were distributed to individuals experiencing homelessness in Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona, 2013. Video Still: Randy Murray Productions.



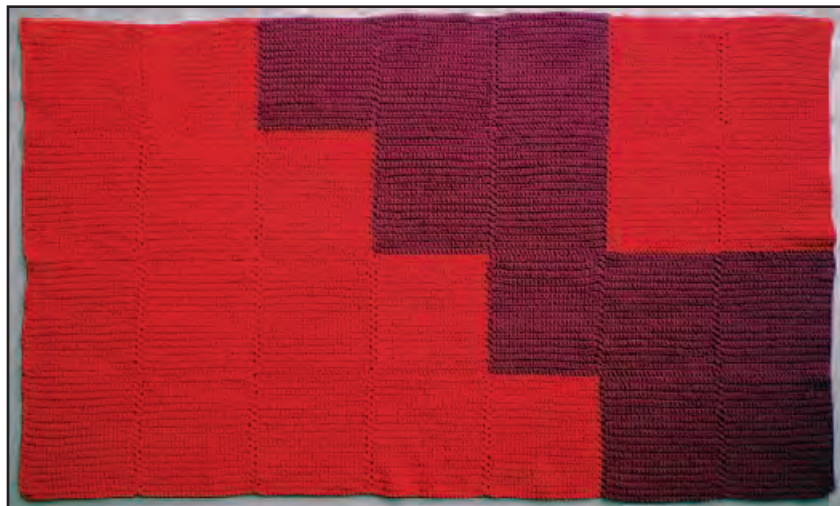


ABOVE: **Ann Morton Ground Cover Project** Knitting, stitching, crochet, quilting, weaving, 300 blankets, each handmade from 28 squares 10" x 10" each, final installation 50' x 117', 2013. Commissioned by the City of Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture. Photo: Todd Photographic.

BELOW: Detail, blanket I-9 made by Nora McGinnis. Photo: Ann Morton.

homelessness grew from work she was doing with cloth objects found in the street. When Morton or someone she knew found a lost or abandoned fiber-based object (the list reads like items in a hidden objects game: an umbrella, a potholder, a mop head, a red velvet wine bag), a photograph was taken of the piece in situ, and the location and date were noted. Morton documented and personified the 300+ objects by giving them social security-like numbers, and taking mug shots of each object with that number. Sixty of the objects were "shrouded" in white covers and posted

on the *Collective Cover* website. She imbues these inanimate objects with animate attributes—they are now "Members" that have been "inducted" into the project. Though their past is unknown, Morton gives them a context in the *Constructed Archives* by listing the news headline and other pop culture data for that day (i.e., the number one song, movie, and celebrity for the date they were found). Lastly, she places an image of the Moon Phase for that day into the archive. Humorous and poignant, Morton slyly captures all of our go-to oracles in this one section.



are you a KNITTER or a FOLLOWER?



On each Friday since November 12th, a band of brave knitters has visited the campus of the Central Arizona Shelter Services (CASS) in downtown Phoenix. CASS is a provider for shelter and services for the homeless in Phoenix. The purpose of these visits has been to sit among the residents/clients there and knit woolen hats. These hats, upon completion, will be offered to whomever might want or need one during these winter months.

Our hope is that we will not be alone. Running every Friday through January 28th, we invite interested knitters or crocheters to join us for one, two or ten Fridays and become one of our brave band of hat-makers.

You can follow our weekly adventures... Experience our thoughts, stories and hats at:

13-Fridays.blogspot.com

Don't delay, get involved... this coming Friday!

13 FRIDAYS

This art action is organized by artist, Ann Morton. For more information and complete details on how YOU can participate, contact me: ann.morton@asu.edu



ABOVE LEFT: ANN MORTON 13 Fridays

One of three poster designs Morton created for the Public Action involving 22 knitters/crocheters who made 142 woolen hats for homeless recipients, November 2010–February 2011.

ABOVE: ANN MORTON 13 Fridays

Morton (L) and Tané Clark (R) were among the 22 knitters/crocheters who came on 13 separate Fridays to sit amongst individuals on the homeless campus to make warm winter hats to give away. Photo: Meghan Olesen.

LEFT: ANN MORTON 13 Fridays Each Friday, the hats made that week were hung on a line with a poster inviting recipients to take a free hat. In the background are several hats that found their owners. Photo: Ann Morton.





ANN MORTON *The Collective Cover Project* 60 found objects (processed as “Members” in the project), commercial canvas, embroidery, custom jacquard woven silk ribbon from artist-created digital file, QR code technology, data collection, digital photography, world wide web. QR code tags attached to each can be scanned with a smart phone or iPad for access to the Members’ *Constructed Archives*. Photo: Ann Morton.

Lisa Frieman, senior curator and chair of the Indianapolis Museum of Art’s contemporary art department, selected the *Collective Cover Project* as one of five ArtPrize 2012 installations out of a list of 1,517. She liked how Morton captured a day in the life of our society through these discarded objects, mentioning the artist’s use of smart technology as an element of the project. Each “Member” has a QR code, allowing viewers to access the *Constructed Archives* on their phones while viewing an installation of the project.

The *Collective Cover Project* was recently on view at the Houston Center for Contemporary Crafts (HCCC) along with *What happened today?*, a project created specifically for that venue. Morton juxtaposed the daily events of people’s lives with events that make the news. She wanted to include the full spectrum of Houston society in this project, so 3 x 3-inch notes with the question “What happened today?” were published in the *Houston Chronicle*. The returned handwritten notes were then sewn together into a paper quilt. As a second part of the project, Morton and HCCC interns Blaize Middleton and Madeleine Sanchez held workshops at the museum and other public sites where people took pages of the *Houston Chronicle*, cut them into strips, and made pile modules from them. These were later assembled into carpet-like borders on the quilt. Seen together, they upturn expectations: private reflections become legible while public news is rendered indecipherable. “This was a key conceptual element—the juxtaposition of the ‘white noise’ of news that we are bombarded with each day with the ‘personal’ news each individual deemed worthy of noting. The personal news, in some cases



ANN MORTON *The Collective Cover Project*
Detail, Member# 017-09-0116, a toddler’s holiday dress, found on the very first outing of the project on State Route 51 through the Dreamy Draw in Phoenix. Photo: Bill Timmerman.



ABOVE: ANN MORTON *What happened Today?* Exhibition of the public engagement project at Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Houston, Texas. The resulting textile spans 20' x 6'; the hanging stitched section is composed of 3" x 3" notes completed by Houston citizens, the ends are made of 3" x 3" hooked rug modules made from the pages of the *Houston Chronicle* by a variety of community groups throughout Houston.

A timeline with project details is featured with the exhibition.

Photo: Bill Timmerman.

LEFT: Detail, anonymous 3" x 3" note completed on April 23, 2015.

Photo: Ann Morton.

is more profound than world events... "2

Standing in front of the quilt and carpet, reading handwritten words that express the lives of individuals ("I ate biscuits today 4/19/15" or "My husband and I danced to a love song while cleaning the garage 2-22-15") almost washes away the rancor of the daily news. But not all the notes hold sweet experiences. Morton and the museum had to report a described incident to the police, and one man sent in many notes from prison. In total, the assemblage becomes a record of a community observing itself.

When Morton creates situations that bring people together to work on elements of her projects, she is reworking a beloved part of textile history—the quilting bee. In the past, friends would gather to help one of their members make

or finish a quilt for their personal use. In Morton's projects, the community can extend beyond borders. The individual blankets of *The Ground Cover Project* were composed of 28 10 x 10-inch units. Sometimes groups gathered together to quilt a blanket; sometimes one individual knit or wove the whole thing. Just as the blankets are composed of many elements, so the blankets themselves became units of the whole image. Seeing the time-lapse video of the assembly of the parts into the whole (the city lot literally blooms), reminds one of *Powers of Ten*, the brilliant 1977 film about perspective made by Charles and Ray Eames. In both projects, we are reminded of the simultaneous existence of the macro and micro, of the individual and of society, of this moment and the totality of time.



ANN MORTON *What happened Today?* Detail, texture of the assembly of rug modules made from pages of the Houston Chronicle. Photo: Bill Timmerman.

Morton orchestrated two of her projects—the *Caution Field*, which accompanied the original installation of the *Collective Cover Project*, and the ongoing *Street Gems* project—“WITH homeless individuals, instead of FOR them.”³ Though often feared, shunned, and isolated by our society, Morton sees them as individuals experiencing a difficult situation and deserving respect. Her collaborators were paid by the piece for their work (another time-honored textile tradition). For the *Caution Field*, 10 people crocheted squares of caution tape that one of them (Ed) assembled. The roughly 240 “Member” objects of the *Collective Cover Project* that Morton did not fully induct into the *Constructed Archives* were then suspended in the *False Safety Net* above the *Caution Field*. One wonders how many viewers stopped to consider that they might be just a mortgage payment away from being trapped in that net themselves?

The *Street Gems* project, which Morton manages with the help of her colleague Cattryn Somers, provides modest stipends for team members living in a supported housing situation to make and sell jewelry and whimsical flowers. Made of discarded plastics from daily life, the mission is to unlock “the innate potential in individuals who have experienced chronic homelessness to instill the confidence to build a sustainable, independent life through simple acts of creative and

productive art making.”

Morton can be seen as a visionary, a humanist, an artist, and an organizer. Her practices of socially engaged work, based on the accretion of materials and process so basic to the fiber aesthetic, have had a positive affect on everyone involved. She has the ability to read a call for projects in a way that allows for something much bigger than just her own contribution. It will be interesting to see how her current public art residency unfolds at the 27th Avenue Waste Treatment Facility in Phoenix. Exposing the cycle of waste, Morton will combine textile/object making with a focus on the people whose job it is to deal with the cast-offs of daily life. An exhibition is planned for Winter 2016/Spring 2017.

^{1, 2, 3} Email from Morton to Ziek, 12/10/2015.

To learn more about Ann Morton’s projects, visit:
www.annmortonaz.com
www.groundcoveraz.com
www.collectivecover.com
www.facebook.com/streetgemspshx

—*Bhakti Ziek is an American artist known for weavings incorporating digital jacquard technology. She has been active for over four decades as an artist, author, teacher and lecturer. She currently resides in Vermont.*
www.bhaktiziek.com



Surface Design Association

P.O. Box 20430
Albuquerque, NM 87154
info@surfacedesign.org
surfacedesign.org

Executive Director

Danielle Kelly
executivedirector@surfacedesign.org

Surface Design Journal Editor

Marci Rae McDade
503.477.7015
journaleditor@surfacedesign.org

Editor, SDA Digital Publications

Leesa Hubbell
newslettereditor@surfacedesign.org

Web Site Manager

LM Wood
web@surfacedesign.org

Surface Design Journal Art Director

Dale E. Moyer
graphics@surfacedesign.org

Advertising Manager

Trevi Fountain
602.626.5891
advertising@surfacedesign.org

Member Communications Administrator

Gerrie Congdon
503.788.3322
membercommunications@surfacedesign.org

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www.sheridan.com

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Our Vision: To inspire creativity, encourage innovation, and advocate for artistic excellence as the global leader in textile-inspired art and design.

Our Mission: To promote awareness and appreciation of textile-inspired art and design through member-supported benefits, including publications, exhibitions, and conferences.

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- To provide opportunities for learning, collaboration, and meaningful affiliations
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- To inform members about the latest developments and innovations in the field
- To recognize the accomplishments of our members
- To encourage critical dialogue about our field
- To inspire new directions in fiber and textiles
- To raise the visibility of textiles in the contemporary art world

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