

The Space Between Seams

by

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Through the use of form, softly muted colors, and play with transparent materials, I create ethereal drawings and immersive installation experiences. I work with the softness in fabric and the controlled detail in drawing. In doing so, I am enveloping myself in the drive to create, pushing the viewer to be spatially aware of their bodies existing in space.

This body of work exists as I am processing the state of my own body. We engage and perceive the world through our bodies. The fabric panels I create call to the porosity and permeability of human skin. The skin contains our organs, yet is an organ itself, filtering the external materials from the rest of our body. I created an installation that is reminiscent of a body or organism, with a distinct exterior to observe and an interior to be surrounded by. The human body malfunctions and eventually decays. Through my work, I aim to confront my own discomfort with this, because we are all given one body to carry us through life.

Tangibility of Materials

My grandmother's repeated repair of my childhood blanket shapes my work. I remember her labor, continuously sewing my blanket and creating other quilts for our family. The fibers of the blanket wore too thin and my grandmother, living with Alzheimer's disease, eventually was unable to work her sewing machine. This labor of love has stuck with me throughout my creative

practice. Working with fabric, I make a distinct cut and through sewing, I mend these pieces together. However, one quick tear or cut to the stitches will cause an inevitable unraveling.

When I make a mark or cut into a material, I regret that this piece is altered forever. With each cut, I long for the piece to return to its original state. I keep each scrap I have, in hopes that they will not be lost to a landfill, that they can have some sort of future place within my creations. In mending and stitching pieces together, there is hope that the larger fabric pieces and the scrap pieces can be whole again.

Intuition in Creation

In *The Space Between Seams*, I created an immersive fabric installation with ambiguous beginnings and ends. In her essay *Without End, No, State of Drawingness* by Helene Cixous states:

“As soon as we draw, (as soon as, following the pen, we advance into the unknown, hearts beating, mad with desire) we are little, we do not know, we start out avidly, we’re going to lose ourselves. Drawing, writing, what expeditions, what wanderings, and at the end, no end, we won’t finish, rather time will put an end to it.”¹

The drawing process provides me a meditative state. Here, I trust my intuition to make the correct mark. I step back from a drawing to see it pulse. Each drawing has the potential to evolve further and further, without a definitive end in sight. The push and pull of intuition challenges my work.

In *Quiet Circulations*, the drawings suggest anatomical structures of the human body, such as veins and arteries, lymphatic vessels and the nervous system. The lines resemble cords,

¹ Cixous, Hélène, and Catherine A. F. MacGillivray. “Without End No State of Drawingness No, Rather: The Executioner’s Taking Off.” *New Literary History* 24, no. 1 (1993): 91–103. <https://doi.org/10.2307/469272>.

root systems or tangles, metaphors for connectivity. I gravitate towards these forms because they repeat in nature. In my work, they fade in and out from the viewer's vision. They exist on top of the fabric and deep through the installation, like the layered systems in our bodies.

Drawing on delicate fabric manipulates each of the threads, pulling them down and creating a "bruising" on the material. From a distance, this effect looks like embossing into the fabric, while up close, the light shows the subtle stretching of the weave. To create these drawings, I wound the material to leave drawn marks.

Embodiment and Lived Experience

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty posits, "the question is always to know how I can be open to phenomena that transcend me and that, nevertheless, only exist to the extent that I take them up and live them."² Merleau-Ponty's writings on phenomenology³, particularly the idea of embodiment of one's lived experience, connect my drive to create installation with the viewer's experience in the space. He refers to one's own living body, not an abstract object and not an inanimate body. Our ongoing loop of past memories and present encounters through our lived experiences shape our perception of the physical objects and spaces around us. Through installation, I ask how we can be cognizant of the intertwining of our lived physical perceptions.

I seek to create intimate places to contemplate in solitude. I strive to create pockets where the viewer could be more enveloped in thought, rather than distracted by external forces. These

²Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 1908-1961. *Phenomenology of Perception*. London : New York :Routledge & K. Paul; Humanities Press, 1974. (pg. 423)

³ Phenomenology is a philosophical movement that started in the early 20th century that sought to describe our consciousness and lived experiences, without assumptions about the external world. Compared to other phenomenologists, Maurice Merleau Ponty argued that our bodies are the most important and fundamental way we understand the world and therefore our consciousness.

fabric screens hang at varying heights, but they envelop the viewer within the form. They direct our movement throughout the space. While the installation reads as “white”, the organza fabric enhances the element of light, through reflection and absorption. When it is directly hit with light, it reflects a green color and the light passing through is a light tint of pink.

The Body as a Record Keeper

I see a regeneration or a rebirth from decay through the cyclical nature in our world. *The Space Between Seams* aims to create an organism or body, with *What Lies Within* as a life source and *Growing Inside* as an uncontained growth. They act as studies as well as emotional relics. In 2022, my doctor diagnosed me with a chronic condition called endometriosis. It is a progressive condition, where lesions grow throughout the abdominal cavity, integrating yet disrupting the normal systems that were already there. In order to remove these growths, surgery is required to cut the lesions out. This procedure left me with a diagnosis and the removal of a part of my ovary. *What Lies Within* represents this form, an ovoidal shape with a piece removed to view an interior contained through stitching. It is a central structure within the installation, with layers of fabric acting as a barrier and protector for its existence.

Our skin exists as a boundary between the exterior and our interior. This larger installation made with chiffon and organza fabric is light weight and breathable, something that small particles can pass through, but acts as a barrier to any larger material. The windows of the fabric indicate that things slip through. Our skin does not consist of completely impenetrable barriers. It is an organ, existing to protect our interior while growing, shedding, and being scratched away.

I utilize fabric and stitching to convey a softness being bound together. I cut and dye

rectangle and square panels and patch them together. Our skin is not a solid form that is the same throughout our life. Rather, external material and the regeneration of our skin cells shape us over time. The longer we exist, the more stories our skin and our bodies tell.

The Fragmented Body

Autoimmunity⁴ is a condition where the immune system confuses healthy tissue to be foreign invaders, thereby “attacking” this healthy tissue. Ed Cohen states, “What if we were to recognize that “the problem” which autoimmunity reveals is not that “I” can mistake my “self” for an “other”, but rather that my embodied self always already is other?”⁵. Although researchers do not classify endometriosis as an autoimmune condition and the exact causes are unknown, some theories suggest that it exists because of immune system dysfunction. The cells growing outside of the uterus are not attacked by the immune system, therefore able to develop their own blood vessels and nerves. Whether it is endometriosis or other autoimmune conditions, they ask the same question, about what is considered to be part of the self and what is considered to be other. Through my work, I pose that the ideas of “self” and “other” blur when it comes to our health

The reference to “self” and “other” originates from psychoanalysis and ideas like the fragmented body. “Self” refers to our body and consciousness while “other” refers to what is not. This form of fragmentation occurs when we experience changes in our health. Something we deem as external has impeded on ourselves. This questions how chronic health conditions

⁴ It is estimated that 1 in 15 Americans have an autoimmune condition with women being more likely to develop them. Although a specific cause can be unknown, some studies indicate genetic, environmental, and hormonal factors and viral and bacterial infections can raise the risk of developing an autoimmune condition. Sundaresan, B., Shirafkan, F., Ripperger, K., & Rattay, K. (2023). *The Role of Viral Infections in the Onset of Autoimmune Diseases*. *Viruses*, 15(3), 782.

⁵ Cohen, Ed. *Myself as an Other: On Autoimmunity and "Other" Paradoxes*; Medical Humanities, 2004, 30(1): 7-11

infiltrate our bodies. Through infection or environmental impacts, something within us changes, causing our systems to “malfunction”.

The idea of fragmentation appears through the fabric pieces being stitched together. I incorporate stitching, with thread being a part of every piece. To mend is to stitch broken parts back together, but it transforms as the damaged pieces can never be the same again. Through fraying and fabric manipulation, I accentuate the process of unraveling. I pull the fibers of the fabric apart while the stitching tries to hold everything together. This disintegration will always be there, no matter how much I intervene.

In Conclusion

Our existence as bodies is always being altered by our environment. From the advancement in medical science, human beings are living longer than any other previous time in history. However, that introduces a new set of problems, that our bodies will eventually deteriorate. *The Space Between Seams* calls us to exist with full awareness of what our bodies do for us. It refers to our eventual unraveling, the finitude of our lives. As much as we try to repeatedly mend ourselves, we continue to unravel at the seams.

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