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Mending Gold: Mending Cultural Divides Through Craft

The histories that are embedded in craft vary from culture to culture and have added to the richness and authenticity of communities throughout civilization. Our personal histories with craft, and more specifically through the making of textiles, endure and retain traditions, quality and cultural uniqueness in spite of industrial modernity and globalization (Figure 01). Textiles not only carry cultural histories through pattern, color and purpose, they carry personal histories that reflect each individual's subtle actions and embedded tacit knowledge. The common and worldwide act of mending is one of repair with the intention to reuse or fix. Mending is not only a useful and sustainable act that extends a craft object's usefulness it can also be an act of mending between cultures connecting meaningful translations that span across philosophies, personal identity and political circumstance. In a post-industrial and globalized economy the values and appreciation of traditional craft have been supplanted by mass production and outsourcing resulting in a devaluation of technique, materials and the necessity meaning.

The differences and commonalities we experience in our contemporary lives seem to offer extremes that either broaden the divide or bring humanity closer. Many of these shared experiences transfer to objects that we use where individuality and more importantly cultural rituals and ceremonies are overshadowed by the homogeneity of a mass-produced society. Homogenous fashions, home goods, automobiles and the like are similar if not the same shared experiences people have on the Internet with viral videos and memes on opposite sides of the globe. These circumstances have left the artist and the crafts person in a paradoxical position that calls for a re-positioning of what craft and culture can become as we seek new sustainable economies.

This paper will discuss methodologies in my creative practice where I use the act of mending in situ during residencies in the United States, the Balkans and India. Each mending derives from a cultural connection to textiles and manifests as a work of art that pays reverence to the material culture in the specific geographical location. From communist monuments (Figure 02) to palaces in the Himalayas of India (Figure 03) the work addresses the conflicted and torn landscape through mending the built environment. The act of physically mending on site serves as a metaphor by highlighting the worn and contemplating the broken to find diversity and common threads of cultures. Sensitive to the importance of cultural traditions, I ask questions and create a dialog as opposed to a colonized acquisition of craft. With this reverence, the paper does not proclaim absolutes or conclusions but rather frames a discussion on one possible way to reclaim local material culture in a globalized context.