

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON TRADITION: THE  
ROLE OF CRAFT IN OUR LIVES TODAY

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have  
examined the thesis entitled

**THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON TRADITION: THE  
ROLE OF CRAFT IN OUR LIVES TODAY**

Presented by Nicole Ottwell

A candidate for the degree of Master of Fine Art

And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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Professor Laurel Wilson, Ph.D.

## DEDICATION

This is for my grandmother Doris Rose Schmidt, who has inspired me everyday of her life and every day since she left this earth. She was an artist who married a farmer, she put away her paints to be a wife, mother and farmer, only to start again after my grandfather's death and the sale of the family farm. As a child she taught me about art, fabric and being creative. As a teen she encouraged my art projects and in undergraduate school she was my biggest cheerleader. She passed away a few months before I began this journey of self discovery called graduate school. Through this journey I discovered what she taught me in silent actions that have been imbedded in my life. I would never trade a single day with her for anything in this world. I can only think she would be proud of the artist and stronger woman I have become.

This is also dedicated to the Trique weavers of Oaxaca who taught me to weave on a blackstrap loom, and taught me about life and how to live simply. To Laura Strand who took me to Mexico and taught me how to be a textile artist, and most importantly how to live a creative life. You encouraged me to follow my dream and to work harder than anyone else. I finally did it and I have you to thank, I am glad that I have you to share this with today. Laura taught me that hard work will get you somewhere.

This is also for every woman who has come before me who in one way or another has left a mark on cloth to make it more beautiful and useful, the silent hand weavers, quilters, and stitchers who have embellished cloth and made useful items for the home, most of whom made do with what they had. I use your

cloth today to honor you. A friend is always quoting her grandmother, I will close with her words:

“Eat it up, wear it out, make it do or do without,” Edith Hawkey.

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The list of people to thank is long and I feel blessed by that. First, I have a loving family who has always been there to lend a hand, especially my parents Mitzi and Steven and my brother Levi.

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To Andi Smith who told me it was time to take this journey, who sat and listened to every tearful phone call when I was ready to quit, and who wouldn't let me quit. You have been a constant in my life, and I am thankful for that and happy to think of you as my second "mother" and best friend. To the knitting girls Katie Kemp and Alison Slucas, we started out as knitting friends in the same town now we are good friend in separate states who talk knitting and share our lives from afar, I am happy to have you in my life.

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## ABSTRACT

There comes a time in any culture where the introduction of new technologies affect the role of known traditional systems of making or producing. The act of producing cloth is among one of many traditions affected by new technologies.

It is apparent that since the advent of the Industrial Revolution, technologies have gone through many changes. All traditional methods of manufacturing goods and objects have been mechanized and become mass-produced. This has had a profound impact not only on American culture, but global culture and economies. As an artist who has discovered a passion for the process of making itself, and esteems the value of the handmade object, I have become increasingly aware that the handmade tradition is quickly being eliminated from our lives. Therefore, in my work I address these issues. I depict the impact of technology on tradition and consider the role of craft by combining digitally produced and manufactured cloth pieces with handmade elements. This is done using the tools and materials for the production of cloth as the subject matter of this body of work to discuss the loss of the tradition of the handmade in our culture.

In this body of work I bring to the forefront of our attention the fact that the tradition of the handmade, in this instance the hand-woven object, is disappearing through the technical advances seen in digitally designed and manufactured cloth.

# INTRODUCTION

Textiles are my passion. The source of this passion is three fold; a family friend, my grandmother and an experience in Mexico with indigenous weavers. From a young age I was fascinated and intrigued by all things relating to domestic cloth. This interest was nurtured by my grandmother as well as a friend of the family, Jenny. My grandmother was an early art influence, she was a painter before marrying my grandfather. After his death she began to paint and take art classes again. She was a force that continually pushed me creatively; Saturdays were spent at her house, preparing the large family meal for Sunday and making art. We made things from clay and painted. What inspired me at grandmother's house was the table linens and household cloth. She also did all of the mending for the extended family. I learned from her basic sewing skills, how to mend tears in dress shirts and darn socks.

A family friend, Jenny, became an early mentor to me, teaching me to knit at the age of 12. I spent time with Jenny watching her knit, and was mesmerized by the fact that she could knit and do almost any textile activity. She would often come to our house to play cards and talk with my family as she knit the whole time. Her obsessive knitting did not seem odd to me and actually at that age seemed like a fitting thing to do. As a result I am now an obsessive knitter as Jenny was, but with a very different purpose.

The women who have directly informed my work have done it out of necessity or just desire to perpetuate the knowledge. But I have taken on

“making” as a conceptual issue in my creative research. I take knitting out of the domestic setting and into the gallery, while still speaking to its history.

Additionally the need I have to always keep my hands busy and be continually working can be traced back to these moments of my childhood. I am mesmerized by the processes of textile production. I do my best thinking, and center myself while knitting a wash cloth, weaving cloth or spinning yarn. When I need to think, these are the activities that I return to. These activities are not unlike a painter returning to the drawing pad to sketch, where I have my biggest ideas about culture, technology and the future of fibers. When I do not know where to go next with my artwork, or am feeling overwhelmed, I return to these activities, as women have, decades before me.

From the time I was a very young child, my grandmother taught me the importance of cloth in our everyday lives. She had quilts and handmade pieces of cloth she hand stitched as well as worn pieces of cloth that were handed down from family members who had already passed or whom I could only barely remember. As a result this cloth has become part of my daily life. I have large kitchen towels that were once her best Sunday tablecloth. Like generations before me, once cloth was no longer considered “Sunday best”, it was used for cloth for the tables outside when neighbors came to help with harvest. When these harvest time tablecloths were no longer usable as tablecloths, my grandmother then cut up and stitched them into kitchen towels. Additionally, kitchen towels always started out large until parts of the cloth wore out and were re-sewn to make smaller but very useful towels. Grandmother always said that

when a kitchen towel is used up, it becomes a rag. Only after there are a few threads left would it be acceptable to stop using the cloth. Her rags were often composites of several pieces of cloth because each piece individually would have been rendered almost useless.

It is through this connection with my grandmother and a whole generation of women like her that my concern for cloth production and disposal has come about. Early in the development of my work, I found myself incorporating my grandmother's patched approach into my own work to honor her influence in my life. In *Seasons I* (Figure 1), I have hand pieced many pieces of cloth together, resulting in a quilt like patchwork. This series became a memorial to my grandmother. She, like millions of women in every culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century whose work and imagination with fiber has been the source of my inspiration. However, this piece of work is composed of digitally printed imagery taken on the family farm and family photos.

As the work progressed, I realized the conceptual issues in my research extended far beyond nostalgia for what I idealized from my past. My conceptual interests are more post modern and involve the role craft plays in our lives in a technologically based culture where the majority of objects in our material world are mass-produced.

Another deep connection I have with cloth is from a time I spent learning to back strap weave in rural Mexico. As an undergraduate student, I spent two summers learning to back strap weave from native Trique (the tribe the women came from) women of Oaxaca. I learned back strap weaving before I learned

floor loom weaving. As a result of a cultural immersion with the women I was learning from, I began to understand the historical value of cloth from a cultural and monetary point of view. More importantly, I switched my world view from a local rural activity to an international view that spans thousands of years and textile history. Looms of the Trique are made using sticks and thread, the Trique make portable looms that are convenient for them. The process and tools are ingenious and light weight. The way the women take a few sticks and a hank of yarn and within a few hours have a working loom on which they produced all of the cloth they wear as well as household textiles, is humbling. These women create most of the cloth they use in their homes while doing daily chores, which for them include childcare, cooking, cleaning, tending the animals, and caring for the garden. This cloth production is important as it is their only source of cloth. There is no other option for them. Their clothing is their cultural identifier. Only women from their town weave and wear this cloth in the form of a long, ankle length, huipil ( traditional a woven blouse or long shirt like dress). The entire garment is based on their myth story. Each woven strip includes a motif called a butterfly with the entire garment abstractly referencing a butterfly. Anthropologist Lila Downs says, "According to Trique oral sources the knowledge of the loom was taught by their ancestors and these in turn learned from the mythical figure Ga'aj who possessed the knowledge of the loom."<sup>1</sup> These women and their work

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<sup>1</sup> Lila Downs *Weaving in a Trique Community of Oaxaca, Mexico: Representations of Historical Periods on the Huipil of San Andras Chicahuaxtla.* (Minnesota: Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota, 1991), 20.

opened my eyes to the privileges that I have as an artist in the United States and to the struggle they endure just to survive, yet they are happy.

Additionally, I was interested with how many of their possessions are handmade. When I wove using their process, it helped me appreciate the handmade and how extensive the process of the “handmade” can be. The Trique sparked my interest in the cultural significance of cloth within their culture which caused me to consider the role textiles play in my own culture.

The Trique women also taught me about craftsmanship and taking pride in what I make. The women weave what they wear, and their clothing denotes who they are and exhibits their talent as weavers. In a public space, one can identify the different tribes just by their clothing.

My art work is about honoring the makers of textiles that came before me, and honoring the tradition of weaving whether it be Tique women, my grandmother, my mentor Jenny, or an unknown person. There is also the idea of repetition in textile techniques themselves and the process the techniques require. As I sit and weave at the loom I spend thinking about the work. I can completely lose track of time while weaving, looking up hours later thinking it has only been a short period of time. Weaving and knitting are my meditation and focus time. The drive I have to continue to do these activities comes from an internal place, where I feel centered while performing these activities. Writer and crafter Betsy Greer speaks to this by saying “ I wasn’t writing, I wasn’t walking, but I was knitting. As I improved, the rhythm of the stitches quieted my mind and amazingly allowed thoughts to flow and mingle instead of sprinting through my

mind.”<sup>2</sup> Like Greer, when I feel out of sorts, I know it is time to go to the loom for some weaving time. In my creative process I have two looms that I work on and several hand knitting projects ongoing simultaneously, so work is always close to me. Like writer Tara Jon Manning states “When we knit, we dwell in our safe place- a quite focused, contemplative space. The ordinariness of the world gives way to a sense that everything holds a little bit of magic”<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Callie Janoff co-founder of “The Church of Craft” when speaking about how the group started with a series of questions amongst friends. “‘What in your life is spiritual?’ And ‘If I am a spiritual person how does that express itself in my life?’ We all came to the same answer: making things. When we make things we are connected to that part of ourselves that we imagine is the spiritual part, the part most resembling divinity.”<sup>4</sup> Like the writers Manning and Janoff, I too find the spiritual part of myself when “making”. These fortunate experiences from my grandmother, Jenny, and the Trique women of Mexico led me to my interest today, as well as my passion for the handmade and textile materials.

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<sup>2</sup> Faythe Levine and Courtney Hemerl, *Handmade Nation* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 90.

<sup>3</sup> Tara Jon Manning, *Mindful Knitting*, (Boston; Tuttle Publishing, 2004) ,4

<sup>4</sup> Faythe Levine and Courtney Hemerl, *Handmade Nation* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 55

## INFLUENCES FROM CULTURAL HISTORY

The first fiber user was the first to tie a knot; one of the first engineers. The first weave pattern was also the first wall of a hut; the first architecture. Today the body of a car is produced with woven fiberglass. Surgeons use machine embroidered textile grafts to promote nerve and muscle repair.<sup>5</sup> However, there is an inherent loss and gain when technology is introduced within any tradition. There comes a time in any culture where the introduction of new technologies affect the role of known traditional systems of making or producing. The act of producing cloth is among one of many traditions affected by new technologies has profound cultural effects.

Until the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the hand made object maintained a primary role in most households employed fulltime weavers or seamstress. Poorer families produced all their own clothing. All women were taught to take pride in their handwork and it became one of the few acceptable ways for them to express their individuality. There was no choice, all things were handmade. There was no machine woven cloth to purchase. Many people had to recycle and reuse the cloth they had since commercially produced cloth was expensive and not plentiful. Today however “handmade” plays an ancillary role in the function of everyday and has been relegated to become the subject of conceptual musings in art.

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<sup>5</sup> Colchester, Chloe *The New Textiles: Trends and Traditions*. (New York, Thames and Hudson, 2007)

Since the advent of the Industrial Revolution, technologies have gone through many changes. All traditional methods of manufacturing goods and objects were mechanized and goods became mass-produced. This has had a profound impact not only on American culture, but global culture and economies. The ability to mass produce textiles in our culture means that hand crafts such as weaving, knitting, crochet, embroidery do not play the same role in our culture as they did historically.

Most, if not all things that were traditionally handmade, have been replaced by machine made objects. Historically, the cloth that humans wore was all hand woven, felted, or knitted. Cloth is now mass-produced in a mill, and then clothing is sewn from it. Hand weavers are becoming an anomaly, as are crafts people. As a result the functional handmade item is becoming more rare as well. Inexpensive, mass-produced woven goods are widely available and preferred by many people. When given the choice, a cheaper item will be purchased, with little consideration as to where the item was made or its quality. For instance a mass produced woven throw that is 48" X 60" woven on a Jacquard loom can be purchased from Wal-Mart for under \$20.00.<sup>6</sup>, whereas, a hand woven throw of a similar size could cost between \$100.00- \$300.00. The cost between this throw and a hand woven one tugs at the purse strings of most Americans. I want to believe that most people would choose the hand woven one, but I know it isn't

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<sup>6</sup> WAL-MART WEB SITE 2/8/09  
<http://www.walmart.com/catalog/catalog.gsp?cat=4756>

true. We are allowing the big box convenience stores to make aesthetic choices for us. Americans tend to purchase what is in front of them and not think about quality. Our culture as a whole promotes quantity over quality. Producing quality goods is time-consuming and in our culture time is money. As a culture we often choose the cheapest and easiest solution. The stores are carrying a more diverse array of products, an individual can go to one store and get groceries, clothing, house wares, electronics, home improvement materials, and furniture. So the industrial revolution brought about positive and negative changes in the lives of humans but to what cost?

I believe this is where we have a choice to make. Do we want to allow technology to completely take over our lives? I believe consumers must take a stand. We have to choose to use a cotton dish towel instead of a paper towel. We have to make an aesthetic discussion, and choose the handmade item. Handmade is often not the easy choice but the better one.

Handmade objects for some people are valued because someone took the time to make the object. Some people believe that part of the maker is imbued into the hand made object. So part of the maker's soul is in the object, With this thought every object that I knit, or weave, or stitch has a part of myself in it. The philosophy is that as something is made by hand for a specific individual, positive thoughts, love and care become part of the object. I have heard knitters and weavers say that as they make a scarf for a loved one, they have made the object to allow their loved one to be wrapped in their love every time it is worn.

The evidence of the makers' hand is sometimes subtle, but is always there. The hand is noticeable in the care of the threads, the way the wood is sanded just right or the way that the clay mug fits the hand perfectly. Like other fine craftspeople, I am pleased when accused of stitching so perfectly that it looks as though it is machine stitched.

Today, there is a renewed interest to make things by hand. This trend has been seen in many new ways. For instance there has been an increase in the last decade in the number of people knitting. Everything from scarves and hats, socks and sweaters to sculptural installations and performance art coming out of the revived interest in knitting. Additionally, there have been many books written about knitting and knitting patterns. In a search of the term "knitting" on Amazon.COM<sup>7</sup>, I obtained a result of 73,047 books, with everything from patterns to knitting humor and knitting related novels. Another example of the increase in the contemporary "do-it-yourself" (DIY), is *Project Runway* a new reality based TV show aired for the first time on Bravo, in 2004. This reality TV show has gained great popularity. In *Project Runway*, which has had 5 seasons to date, contestants compete by designing clothing. Each week a new challenge is given and a contestant is eliminated based on their creativity or lack of creativity further there is now a DIY channel on cable TV as well. The idea of being able to create, fix and make things yourself continues to gain momentum. There is a desire by popular culture to be making things by hand, spending time on something that

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<sup>7</sup> Amazon.Com

has a purpose. Sabrina Gschwandter, a craft writer and blogger, said in an interview.

“I am often asked, ‘why is handcraft so popular?’ I think that handcraft is popular right now as a reaction against a whole slew of things, including our hipper-fast culture, increasing reliance on digital technology, the proliferation of consumer culture, and even war. During all major wars in which America has been involved, handcraft has experienced a resurgence. I think it is defiantly true right now A lot of people have written about the return of homemaking and the interest in nesting after 9/11. “<sup>8</sup>

Knitting groups are described as being just as much about the knitting as about the people in the group. I believe this is a result of the way technology has invaded our everyday lives, and these individuals are trying to slow down and reconnect with other humans. Gschwandtner further states “ Even though we all have frequent access to the internet and are able to communicate with people through digital media, we are still sensual beings. We need to maintain a tactile relationship to the world.”<sup>9</sup>

Ironically, as machine made textiles take over our lives, simultaneously, there is a resurgence of the handmade today as seen in the “do-it-yourself” (DIY) movement. There is a push/pull between these two trends and in some ways they represent a necessary evil in our culture today. Humans have an innate need to make things with their hands.

Crafters are choosing to engage in something tactile and are choosing to create in a way our ancestors did. Knitting groups are similar to the quilting bees

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<sup>8</sup> Faythe Levine and Courtney Hemerl, *Handmade Nation* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 26

<sup>9</sup> Faythe Levine and Courtney Hemerl, *Handmade Nation* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 26

of the past. This makes me hopeful that handmade textile production will continue. People who have been knitting for a while now are also taking up spinning in a desire to take their cloth production a step further. They take raw fiber, dye it and spin the yarn before knitting something out of it.

These DIY trends give rise to, knit and bitch groups, scrap booking with patterns and tools sold for the do-it-yourselfer. Additionally, there are a series of new websites that are dedicated to the obsessive crafting such as "Ravelry"<sup>10</sup>. Based on these activities, it is apparent there is a trend to produce functional objects by hand today. In the art world, "crafting" has become a conceptual issue.

The role of the hand vs. machine and its relative gains and losses have become the subject of this work. The subject matter is embedded in the textile tradition itself. I approached this body of work through the use of iconic imagery based on artifacts from weaving history. Images of weaving artifacts mechanically woven into cloth and then placing the original framed artifact next to these panels. Because of the disconnect I feel with jacquard (a type of cloth where the threads are controlled individually) woven cloth and my need to reintroduce the hand woven, hand knitted, and hand stitched work into this body of work, I have used "handmade" as a counterpoint to the mechanically woven cloth. This was done to show the inherent differences between mechanical and made by hand processes and illustrate what is lost and what is gained by each of these processes.

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<sup>10</sup> [www.ravelry.com](http://www.ravelry.com) popular knitting website.

## PROCESS

As a maker, and a process person, I enjoy the meditative properties of the repetitive motions of knitting, weaving, spinning, and stitching. The motions become part of my hands, and the motions seem to almost come naturally from the maker's hands, an automatic motion that I do not have to think about. I cannot just sit. I am often found knitting and stitching while in lectures, walking across campus, or at the movies. I am more calm and focused if stitching is in my hands. Much research has been done on the meditative qualities of repetitive fiber work. I find like Joanne Turney who speaks to the role of making in her book *The Culture of Knitting*,

“.....the meditative and mindful potential of creative practice and outline the process by which the knitter can transcend the everyday by creating a mental space that can enhance well being and act as a site for problem-solving. Essentially this might be understood as the fusion of knitting, spiritual awareness and self help, enhancing a state of calm, ‘wholeness’ and balance.”<sup>11</sup>

During the time spent in making my work, I transcend the everyday and encounter calm and my center.

As an artist who discovered a passion for the process of making itself, and esteems the value of the handmade object, I am increasingly aware and concerned that the handmade tradition is quickly being eliminated from our lives. Therefore, in my work I address these issues. I depict the impact of technology on tradition and consider the role of craft by combining digitally produced and

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<sup>11</sup> Joanne Turney, *The Culture of Knitting* (New York: Berg, 2009), 152.

manufactured cloth pieces with handmade elements. This is done using the tools and materials for the production of cloth as the subject matter of this body of work to discuss the loss of the tradition of the handmade in our culture. This is something I address in my personal life everyday as well. Should I purchase this knit sweater or should I knit one? Should I buy the gift I need at a big box store or should I buy something hand crafted?

In my work I marry traditional materials and techniques with new technology to simultaneously depict the demise of the handmade and the rise of mechanically mass produced items. One way this is shown is through the imagery chosen for the weaving. For instance, traditional hand weaving tools are no longer used for cloth production. The tools used for the home production of cloth such as reeds, shuttles, and looms, are no longer common everyday tools in this culture and have been relegated to the status of “artifact” seen only in antique malls or textile museums. As a result, many people do not know the name for these tools or have any idea of their original use. The decision to incorporate these historical artifacts as imagery in my work and juxtapose the original objects provide the viewer with visual clues to the meaning of the work as well as raise the tools (now artifacts) to the status of art object. This body of work grew out of my experiences at the Jacquard Center.

## JACQUARD

In 2007 I was awarded a grant to study at the Jacquard Center and work with the Oriole Mill in North Carolina to learn Jacquard weaving technology. Unlike most industrial mills, this company specializes in the weaving of textiles designed by artists. This experience led me to question the role of technology versus the role of hand made in my own work, which evolved to become the conceptual issue of this body of work. This experience made me question all I learned as a child from Jenny and my grandmother as well as the experiences I had in Mexico. While at the mill, the role of the hand came to the forefront. I became frustrated because the artist takes on the role of designer and has no connection to the actual making of the object. I felt disconnected from the process itself as all design work is accomplished on a computer screen and does not allow the artist or maker to touch the threads. I began to consider my role as the “maker” in this process and questioned how I could visually articulate this feeling and frustration.

This is not a new issue for me. The role of hand made verses machine made is something that I have been thinking about and considering for quite some time. Since childhood, I have been creating cloth with yarn and knitting needles, reconstructing scraps of cloth, sewing them together to make larger newer pieces of cloth. I have always been interested in what we purchase and why more cloth is not made by hand. Later as a weaving student in Mexico with native Trique weaving teachers, I questioned the lack of the hand in North

American culture. The Trique women could go to market and buy amazing handmade wooden cooking utensils, and there were many more hand carved utensils than plastic ones from which to choose. My third world experiences once again highlighted the lack of hand made choices in the United States and caused me to question the tools I use in my daily life. These ideas have always been part of my thought process but until I learned the Jacquard weaving process I did not feel I had the experience as an artist that gave me a language to easily communicate and talk about this idea.

In this body of work, I bring attention the fact that the tradition of the handmade, in this instance the hand-woven object, is being lost through the technical advances seen in digitally designed and manufactured cloth. Unlike my grandmother's generation in America, we have abandoned production and become consumers of everything. We do not think about the towels or other pieces of cloth we purchase for everyday use. The current available choices are between a mass produced cotton, linen, or synthetic kitchen towel, or a paper towel used once and thrown out. Each has its own set of strengths and weaknesses. For example, a mass produced hand towel made of polyester will not absorb much water or liquid and will quickly disintegrate in the wash. A paper towel is used once and thrown away. However a hand woven cotton towel will absorb water and stand up to repeated washings over a long period of time.

This body of work that resulted from the Oriole Mill experience and my ponderings about the role of the hand in cloth production led to this series, which is large in scale ( 6 feet and larger) making the object become iconic. Embedded

in the jacquard woven cloth is oversized imagery of weaving tools and sewing accessories. Through size, they are meant to be larger than life, to overwhelm the viewer, and simultaneously raise the status of these historical tools to “artifact” and “art”. The tools have been increased in scale to become ironic in order to pay homage to the history of the tradition of weaving and the historical role it played in our culture as well as the women who used these tools and the role of the hand in their lives.

*Ends* (Figure 7) highlights how I have photographed these tools and removed the first hand experience, then digitized them further removing the viewer from this historical context. It is ironic that the pieces are woven on a computerized loom and further removes it from its original use, while raising its status to become “art”. In combination with the woven pieces, the original tools are framed as an artifact. They are presented as an art object to compare and contrast the historical with the post Industrial Revolution and the lack of hand made in our culture. The presence of these tools also celebrate the role of the handmade object and the women who made these objects, yesterday, and today.

Additionally, the abstraction that occurs in the process from photograph to cloth further illustrate my thoughts about memories fading into the past and the fading of these handmade traditions. They become blurry, as with the memory of a mother saying “I remember my grandmother weaving”, but all the daughter has is the verbal second hand memory of this occurring in her family. The abstraction of memories is similar to the abstraction in this image.

The imagery in this body of work comes from textile objects I find at thrift stores and antique shops. I then live with these objects in my studio and display them in my space to decide what objects best represent the ideas I want to portray in the work. They are then photographed as singular artifacts or in groups, if I have multiples. The photos are uploaded into Photoshop to crop and determine which objects have the most interesting light and shapes, as the shapes are what matter most in the Jacquard weaving process. The image is then posterized furthering the pixilation of the image.

Once the final size of the woven cloth is determined, the number of pixels is calculated, and the file is reduced to the size needed. Each pixel is a group of 8 warp threads of varying colors. The palette chosen to weave the translated images is limited by the colors of these 8 threads. As the image is translated, the limitation of these colors contribute to the final effect of the woven image. The loom has a certain number of warp threads. Also, each mill and jacquard loom is different, so the number of warp threads vary from mill to mill. Once the image is the right size and the colors have been reduced, the image is transferred to *JacqCad Master*, a software program used for industrial weaving of cloth. The colors of the image in *JacqCad* must be reduced to 10-20 colors depending on the mill where the cloth is to be woven. The number of colors is determined by the colors of thread currently threaded on the loom. After the color combination has been reduced, weave structures are assigned to each color. This action is similar to the color printing process and relies on the optical mixing of color. When all weave structures are assigned, all the detailed information is

finalized for the mill. The files are then sent to the mill for the weaving to be completed.

While this current body of work was started at Oriole Mill, I could not produce all of the work there, as the designer must be present at the mill in order to weave there. As a result of the travel and the mill fees to weave at Oriole Mill, I chose to send files to Beljen Mill. This was a difficult decision, as Beljen is a traditional mill with many looms to tend who have too few weavers. The cloth quality and attention to detail is not the same with Beljen Mill. Also the time it takes to get the cloth woven at Beljen Mill and sent to the artist is several months. As a result, I prefer Oriole Mill.

## **Materials to Make Cloth**

The first example of this body of work is the piece *Potential* (Figure 2), an image of rag balls, prepared to be woven into a rug, a common utilitarian object seen in most homes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Historically, these domestic rag rugs would have been woven by hand. However, today like most domestic cloth, these rugs are commonly woven in large factories. I often think about who created these objects and what she intended to do with them. How did such precious things as rag balls end up at the antique shop? Were they found in grandmother's attic? Unfamiliar objects, were they placed in a yard sale or estate auction? Had this rag ball-maker used scraps from her life and those of her loved ones to make these balls? Were they intended to be simple woven rugs or

braided rugs? In this piece I want to pay homage to the woman who created these balls, who sat and stitched each strip of cloth together and then rolled them up into balls awaiting their turn at the loom.

It is apparent upon close examination of these rag rug balls that each of the pieces of cloth have been sewn together by hand. The strips that compile these balls are made of left over cotton fabric ripped into strips and then hand stitched together to create a long strand to be woven. These rag rug balls were selected because they are embedded with historical meaning, processed by women out of left over fabric scraps, and used to create a domestic object for warmth and comfort. My woven version of the rag rug balls is juxtaposed with rag rug balls which are randomly placed on the floor below the piece. This is done to depict how the objects usefulness is no longer seen. I have saved these cast off objects to preserve them, but society as a whole does not see their worth. Tossing them on the floor shows that the objects are seen as no longer useful or important. Yet when viewed in their historical content, these objects would be on the floor or perhaps set in a basket on the floor if they were woven into a rug for utilitarian use. It is this duality that is at play in this body of work. I want to trigger memories of previous experiences and relate past traditions to current culture.

*Potential* (Figure 5) is a woven tapestry, created to be the same weight as upholstery fabric, and made out of 100% cotton. The method of weaving and weight of the fabric is important as this effects the way it is hung and how it looks in the space. The objects are abstracted yet identifiable, and more so when the viewer sees the actual objects on the floor. The image woven into the cloth is

balls of rags strips awaiting their turn at the loom. The balls have been photographed and digitized. To further the irony, the digitized balls of rags have been woven on a mechanical power loom out of brand new cotton thread with little or no variation.

The selvages of the woven tapestry which are only there for utilitarian purposes, are part of the jacquard loom weaving method. The selvages have pattern and line to give the loom weaving information and to keep the tension even and allow the cloth to be woven. The selvage is left on this picture plane to reference the machine made quality of the work. I have also used an industrial hanging device to enhance the machine made qualities of the cloth. The final edge is a machine-surged edge, used to reinforce the mechanical process. I am showing the viewer how I have finished this piece of cloth in a mechanical way in order to actively keep the hand out of the mechanical woven cloth. As a textile artist, my initial reaction to the selvages was to turn them under and hide them from the viewer and finish the cloth with a hem. However, the raw selvages add to the industrial look and the machine-made feel of the cloth.

In a similar way I created *Materials* (Figure 3), which depicts a pile of hanks of yarn from my studio stash. 'Stash' is a word used by many craftspeople and artists to refer to the collection of materials used for their work; it could be yarn, cones of thread for weaving, or cloth for quilting. It is part of the obsessive collecting that craftspeople do. When inspirational materials are found, they are purchased and kept for a later project. The pile of yarn depicted in this piece is a combination of hand spun, machine spun, and hand dyed yarns, of various fibers

including wool, cotton, alpaca, and silk. I surround myself with my materials in my studio and in my home. They are a source of inspiration and comfort. The subject of this piece is unique as the source materials (hanks of yarn) are new, unused and current to today's craft world rather than the vintage objects used in the other work. The skeins of yarn were pulled from my studio shelves to become the image in the weaving as well as the objects on the floor.

For *Materials* (Figure 3), small areas of the pile of yarn were photographed to magnify the details and beauty seen in the twists of the hanks of yarn. For me, this piece emphasizes the beauty that can be seen in the materials themselves and exemplifies the variety of choices that surround me in my studio and influence decisions about my work. I am simply asking the viewer to look closer at these objects and appreciate them for their innate beauty.

For another piece, *Worker* (Figure 4), I bring to the forefront cast off spools and bobbins of silk thread formerly used by an old weaving mill. Most of these spools were found in one antique store, though each of the wooden spools are slightly different. All the thread is similar, a shiny smooth silk. The spools are featured in the box adjacent to the woven spools as they were found, some coming unraveled and slightly tangled. These objects have been in my studio as inspiration for my work for a couple of years. I have even used some of the thread in earlier work. The luminosity and the intense colors are what attracted me to the objects at first. Having them in my studio made me think about them, their previous uses and what one could be done with them today. I have often seen large glass containers fill with similar spools sold as focal points for modern

rooms. I am surprised by this and wonder if the purchaser or even the designer of this compiled object even knows about the purpose of the original objects. What will future generations think of these things removed several times from the original use and unidentified? I am preserving these spools and raising their status by placing them in a frame. By hanging them next to the woven panel of an image of the same spools increased in scale, they become iconic. Woven into cloth, they metaphorically compare and contrast our textile history of yesterday and today. The luminosity of the threads on the woven piece is apparent from a distance, and consequently I like this. This piece is an example of how the work looks different from a distance than it does up close in the same manner that a pointillist painting changes. In this piece, the viewer has the opportunity to analyze pixel by pixel through small bits of color, and weave structure.

## **Loom Parts**

In addition to the materials themselves, tools of traditional hand weaving are also artifacts of the post industrial revolution. They have also been selected for this body of work. Shuttles are used to hold the bobbin, filled with thread, and passed through the warp threads to create cloth. Shuttles are made of wood sanded and meticulously finished to run smoothly through the warp and aid the weaver in cloth production. Shuttles come in all sorts of shapes and sizes; some do not hold a bobbin but rather the thread or rags are wrapped around them. The shuttle is an object that is necessary for a weaver to work. It is a symbol of

weaving. The worn and well used shuttles that inspired this piece have obviously been used many times, throughout generations. Even if the viewer does not recognize the object, the past is recognized in these objects. They have aged and show their wear on the surface of each object.

*Carrier* (Figure 5) is a woven photo of shuttles of different sizes and shapes in a pile on a purple background. The contrast between the brown in the wood of the objects and the purple background in the woven piece adds tension to the work. *Carriers* (Figure 5) highlight old shuttles, some of which are hand carved and hand constructed. These are items found in flea markets and antique shops. I purchase them obsessively in order to preserve them from an uncertain future. I do not want these objects to be destroyed or re-incorporated into objects that could be used as decoration in a country themed home. For me it is disrespectful to the history of these objects to repurpose them as candleholders or bases for fake flowers. These are objects to be cherished and valued for their historical use, and they should not be relegated to be supports for a kitch aesthetic.

Shuttles are yet more objects cast away because of the Industrial Revolution, further removing the hand from the production of cloth. By using the old shuttles as the subject of the piece, and weaving the image on a mechanized jacquard loom, then placing the original artifact next to the woven image, I am asking the viewer to question what is lost and what is gained. Additionally, I want the viewer to appreciate these objects as significant tools of the textile tradition and as beautiful hand crafted tools.

Another piece, *Holder* (Figure 5), illustrates machine woven cloth made of cotton yarns. The colors of the textile are muted and slightly dark. This piece pays homage to the lonely heddle, which is a simple piece of metal that holds a single thread in place at the loom. The six foot woven cloth features a pile of heddles begging to look like pick up sticks or some sort of material that could be constructed into something else. This represents a pile of potential, and these heddles are just that potential for the hand weaver. They are tossed in a pile to show how they are being discarded and cast away by our culture. Today the metal heddle is no longer used. It is being replaced by a synthetic cord heddle, *texsolv*. The scale of the original heddles has been increased greatly making them iconic and drawing the viewer's attention to the dichotomy between these small original objects and the iconic scale of the woven piece.

These two panels depict objects that are being replaced by modern technology. Objects that I use everyday in my studio practice, are being replaced and phased out of my craft. I am once again questioning what is lost in this process. What do these objects mean and what does it say about our society if they can be so easily replaced?

## **Wefters and Ends**

Preened bobbins are perhaps even less recognizable than shuttles. *Wefters* (Figure 6) and *Ends* (Figure 7) is comprised of the wooden end of preened bobbins. In this piece the ends of the spools comprise the composition. Originally

these bobbins would have been used in a specialized shuttle for a semi-automated loom, one with a fly shuttle which made weaving wide cloth easier on the weaver. The bobbins themselves are cast offs whose use is often unknown to people, and are often sold at antique shops. I find myself gathering these objects because they speak to my traditional hand weaving craft, and I feel a person who understands them should have them. Like other historical weaving tools, I am also saving them from the demise of becoming decorative components. The bobbin ends depicted in this woven piece are abstracted and become large circular objects, which at a glance, are not a recognizable. However, a noticeable thread falls in front of one end and gives a clue into the image. This simple line of thread curves through the bottom of the image. The overly worn wood that has become shiny through use is also presented in the piece.

The concept is to make viewers stop and look at what is in front of them, and meditate on the image. The hope is that one will look at the image and discover something new, and notice something beautiful in these objects. By taking the image of a simple object and making it many times larger than life, I allow both elegant and flawed details to emerge. Once again, making the object iconic and presenting it juxtaposed to the original artifact forces viewers to consider the history of the craft of weaving and the contemporary replacements for the tradition.

## Singularity

Two other pieces depict individual tools. *Maker* (Figure 8) features a small single bobbin, and *Icon* (Figure 9) illustrates a label shuttle. In both images, the artifact has been increased in scale to be monumental. These large objects seen in isolation and juxtaposed to the original artifact to produce a tension between the change in scale of the woven panel and the original diminutive artifact. By increasing the scale in the woven pieces, from inches in the artifact to feet in the woven panels, these insignificant functional objects demand a great deal of attention, from the viewer. The viewer is asked to question the actual objects and its purpose.

*Maker* (Figure 8) is based on a found object from an antique shop. When I found it I did not know exactly how it was used, although I knew it was for weaving. I have since discovered it to be a label or ribbon weaving shuttle originally used to identify the maker or for garment embellishment. As a textile artist, I treasure this object because it is a piece of textile history and an artifact from the past.

*Icon* (Figure 9) is a simple tiny bobbin for cloth production. Like most of the other vintage tools, it was found at an antique mall. Found among a group of tools, this object stood out. The woven panel shows a red/ maroon bobbin standing out from its muted gray yellow green background. This is a large woven panel with the image of a single bobbin in the middle of the panel. The actual bobbin is shown next to the woven piece on the wall. The original object is a tiny

bobbin wound with sewing thread weight fiber. With some research, I have found a similar bobbin with no thread in another shop. It was labeled “cop-quill cotton mill circa-1800’s” and I assume my bobbin was from the same mill.

In this example, the image on the wall is very large and shows every detail of the original bobbin. I am playing with scale in a way similar to Andy Warhol, taking the mundane and making it larger than life. With this simple object I am forcing the viewer to really look at the object’s every detail. By increasing a two inch bobbin to six feet the object literally becomes iconic and simultaneously a symbol of textile history and valued support of the craft.

## **Traditions of Saving**

Historically, women saved and recycled every little bit of fiber, including sewing notions. Seamstresses always maintained a button stash to replace lost or broken buttons as well as to embellish new items. These buttons were often saved to fix items of clothing that today most people would discard. Similar to my grandmother’s need to save and recycle every bit of cloth, she likewise collected all her spare buttons, which is another habit I picked up from her.

For *Eyes* (Figure 10), original antique buttons are displayed with an iconic jacquard woven image of buttons to metaphorically describe how functional items are hoarded until they takeover our lives. For example, I know many people who have large containers of buttons saved from clothing that was discarded, or extras that came with clothing or from other projects. In this piece, the pile of

buttons are photographed to create the composition. The buttons are quite large in the woven cloth, showing the mass of them as well as the obsessive nature of the collector. This piece illustrates the saver who keeps everything to make repairs in the future. In today's throw away culture, people often give away or throw out clothing that is missing a button. Some even take it to a seamstress so she can replace a simple button, unlike generations past who would have had buttons with which to replace a missing or broke button. The buttons in the bin would have been saved so they could be used again instead of being discarded. Adjacent to the woven piece are buttons preserved in a frame. A series of the buttons are pinned to the back of the frame, with a pile of them loose in the bottom of the frame. This was done to reflect on the obsession of the collector as well as the beauty and uniqueness of the individual buttons.

*Remnants* (Figure 11) is also about the saving of objects related to fiber. I have on several occasions found these empty wooden spools saved by someone. The spools in this case would have been used to hold thread, and for some reason the user could not throw these spools out. I remember my grandmother saving such spools. Saving of such a simple object is interesting and profound, and once again highlights the obsessive nature of the collector and the need to preserve useful objects that would potentially be used again. These spools are featured in a frame, suspended and solitary with several more in the bottom of the frame stacked precariously on top of each other.

These two panels highlight the need to save useful objects for a day when they are needed. They represent objects that could save money and time at a

later date. When you need one, you have it on hand, and there is no need to go to the store to purchase another. For some it is a loss of tradition and self-reliance. For others it is simply decluttering their lives. But the advantages to having these savable items on hand, simply outweigh the disadvantages of our culture today.

## THE ROLE OF THE HAND

In conjunction with the digitally and mechanically produced cloth, a series of handmade, labor intensive textile pieces, are also part of this body of work. As a member of the DIY movement and avid knitter and weaver of functional pieces, I had a direct response to the time spent at the computer working on the mechanically woven pieces. As a maker, I found it difficult to spend the amount of time at the computer working on a design for a jacquard woven piece. The lack of the hand in the actual weaving of the pieces does not satisfy my personal need to be “making”. It disturbed me that my hand never actually touched the cloth while it was being made at the Jacquard Center. The disconnect I felt during the first jacquard experiences lead to another related group of handwork that is included with this thesis body of work. This body of work involves executed pieces done in the form of hand knitting, stitching and weaving.

One piece *Hanky Study II* (Figure 12) combines the role of the machine and the role of the handmade to make social comment. This piece illustrates how consumer culture has evolved to make Kleenex the dominant material used today rather than washable cotton handkerchiefs. I do this by overlaying 3 versions of the same hankie into the piece. The overlay illustrates how commonly used objects evolve over time to address what is lost and what is gained. *Hanky Study II* (Figure 12) illustrates obsessive hand stitching into a Kleenex. In this piece, the same pattern stitched on the vintage handkerchief was duplicated in the jacquard weaving as well as into the Kleenex. This shows the viewer the wastefulness of throw away “hankies” and illustrates both gains and losses of

today's technology. Two other pieces that use hand done processes are part of this exhibition, *Labor* (Figure 13) and *Hand or Machine made?* (Figure 17).

As a counterpart to the Jacquard woven cloth is a series of hand woven shibori cloth pieces that illustrate the role and value of the hand. In *Labor* (Figure 13), the cloth was woven on a traditional 4 harness loom. The first thing I did upon returning to my studio after the Jacquard center experience was to put a long 30 yard warp on my loom and begin weaving again. I had the need to weave by hand. After spending two weeks weaving on a computer, I had not actually sat at a loom. The experience left me feeling like I had produced a huge body of work that did not have my hand in it at all.

As an artist, part of my creating is the tactile experience I have with the materials. It took me several days to warp the loom of cotton thread with threads of soy silk, bamboo, linen, raw silk, mercerized cotton and tensile. I knew that when the cloth came off the loom each of the different fibers would take the dye differently, but all would dye.

Woven shibori is a term that refers to the idea that one weaves a cloth and at the same time an extra thread is included that will later be pulled up to gather the cloth in order to create a resist. When the cloth is subsequently dyed, a specific pattern forms on the cloth based on the sequence and tension of the pulled threads. I wove this cloth with two shuttles going, one that had cotton thread in it and one that had dental floss so that later I could pull these threads up once the cloth was off the loom. I proceeded to lose myself in the loom, sitting down thinking I would work for a few hours only to get up and realize it had been

far more than that. I lost myself in the meditative and repetitive motions of pressing down on treadles, throwing the shuttle, beating the thread, changing treadles and repeating the process again and again. I thought a lot about the Jacquard work that I had just created and was now hanging on my wall while I wove the first of what would become a pile of shibori objects. Once the cloth was finished and off the loom, I begin pulling up the dental floss threads. As I did so, the cloth that was once 35 inches wide became a 4 inch rope. I then took this rope like cloth and dyed it in tea, allowing the different threads to take the color in different ways. to store it, I made a chain out of it. Often weavers chain their warps while working on long projects. The chain I am referring to is the same used by crocheters' as well. One morning upon walking into the studio I saw the woven chained cloth on the floor under the piece titled *Materials* (Figure 3) which is a pile of skeins of yarn. The two pieces of art seemed to have a visual connection. And at that point, I decided to create a whole pile of these chained woven pieces.

*Labor* (Figure 14) is about the creative process. The pieces are not finished intentionally they are in process. The cloth was meant to be dyed and then unbound and washed to show the pattern from the shibori technique. However the cloth says more in a pile on the floor in process than it does finished and on a pedestal. This piece intentionally makes a comment on the perceived value of process. When most people discover that I wove the fabric, they are amazed that someone still does this work. This realization brings the viewer to more of an understanding of the process and labor of working this way. The

pieces are purposely displayed on the floor to force the viewer to question why they are on the floor. The jacquard woven panels are displayed on the wall, an accepted position for high art, while these hand-woven pieces are placed on the floor. By placing the 'precious' on the floor, the viewer is asked to question the role of the handmade verses the machine made in our culture, and ask which is more valued. I feel society casts the precious hand woven cloth to the ground; is unappreciated by the mass public. Recently, more and more people appear surprised by the cloth that I have woven and how much potential there is in it. I am amazed by the responses of viewers to this work. They often question how or why a person would sit and weave for days, while I question why they would not, though I am guilty of being mesmerized and seduced by my materials, and tools. My brain thinks as a textile artist who can spend days preparing the thread to dress the loom and weave the cloth only to dye it and cut it into a garment or other useful object.

The woven cloth pieces in *Labor* (Figure 13) are tabby woven have dental floss at regular intervals so that when the cloth is taken off the loom it can be gathered up into more narrow pieces. The hand woven cloth is 7 yards long (21 feet) and the mere length is meant to overwhelm the viewer. These pieces appear rope like as they are chained after being gathered. This chaining replicates the same action used with thread to prepare a warp. After measuring a warp, it is chained to keep the threads in order so they won't tangle. In a similar manner, the hand woven fabric is gathered in a contemporary shibori pattern and then chained to mimic the preparatory process for weaving.

The role of cloth in our culture has changed greatly. Historically cloth signified status and position in culture. It identified family and community affiliation. Special cloth was used for particular ceremonies. Only a few examples of this are left in the contemporary American culture such as the wedding dress, baptismal gowns, and a ministers albs. Today there is no cultural significance and the cloth is not used as a means of trade or monetary exchange. It has little cultural significance unlike the Trique women that I have studied with or other cultures, tribes, and indigenous peoples of Latin America. I crave to have cloth carry all of this history for North American people. In the final presentation of this piece, the hand woven shibori object is placed on the floor to question the value of this cloth and the role of cloth and the cloth production in our culture today. The placement of this hand woven cloth on the floor and the Jacquard woven cloth on the wall is intentional. The machine woven cloth is on the wall while the hand woven cloth remains on the floor. As viewers look at the relationship of one to the other cloth, I have purposely questioned which is more valuable.

The last hand made piece involves hand knitting. *Hand or Machine Made?* (Figure 15) is comprised of 372 washcloths each hand knit, from the same pattern and combined with the same number of commercially produced washcloths purchased from Target. The pattern used is one I learned from my mother's best friend Jenny when I was 12. Each cloth, though knit from the same pattern, is slightly different, with individualized characteristics. Each time I knitted a washcloth, I used the same needles and knit them the same way, but sometimes the yarn is slightly thicker or thinner. The process was meditative. The process is

so repetitive that it became comforting and soothing while I made them. The wash clothes traveled with me and I knitted them while sitting in lectures, walking across campus, while traveling by plane or car, or just sitting in a quiet space knitting. If I was stressed, my knitting became tighter, or if relaxed, I knit a bit looser. I also made occasional mistakes in the knitting, increasing by one or two, too many stitches or starting to decrease too soon. The washcloths were made from purchased yarn “Peaches and Cream”, a cotton yarn produced for knitting and crochet, as well as yarn that I dyed and recycled yarn. The recycled yarn is from cotton clothing that was purchased at second hand or thrift stores and unraveled. If this yarn no longer had a twist, I took the threads and spun them into yarn again before knitting. All the scraps of yarn that were not long enough to make a washcloth have also been knit together making stripy scrappy washcloths. This method was appropriated as it referenced all the ways that I have seen washcloths made by family and friends. In my family the scrappy washcloths are the utilitarian ones kept in the family and often used to wash the dishes. The idea of using recycled yarn and all of the scrap yarns goes back to the old adage ‘waste not want not’. I was taught not to waste anything, saving every bit of useable yarn, so making something out of leftovers feels natural to me. The interesting thing is that I often like the scrappy washcloths best. The colors of the hand knit washcloths are diverse and some are brightly colored while others are more muted (Figure 16). Some were knitted from a striped or variegated yarn while others were made from spotty yarn, and others from solids. So the color and pattern range is wide and diverse.

The hand knit wash clothes are stacked and displayed next to the mass produced washcloths that were purchased from Target. The Target washcloths came in bundles of twelve with a woven ribbon tied around them and a heavy paper tag attached. The commercially manufactured washcloths according to their tag, are 100% cotton 12 in X 12 in and made in Pakistan. The edges are finished with a surged edge which is utilitarian but not very durable. The bundles of 12 wash clothes were purchased for \$2.99. These wash clothes seem like a bargain, but once they are used, they do not appear sturdy. Once placed in the washer, the purchased cloths often wear out within 3-6 washings. The washcloths are probably cut from a larger piece of cloth and the edges are then stitched which contributes to their “throw away quality”. This is probably the most cost efficient way of making these. Many bundles of each of the color combinations were purchased. The color palette of the purchased washcloths are as diverse as the hand knitted washcloths. The two methods of manufacturing cloth are juxtaposed to compare and contrast what is lost and what is gained through mass production verses a hand crafted item. In this piece I directly ask the viewer to consider quality and personal satisfaction derived from the hand made wash clothes, verses the ‘throw away’ quality of the mass produced equivalent.

The hand knit wash cloths serve as a counterpoint to the mass produced wash clothes. It is obvious that half of the washcloths are not mechanically made. Since June 2008, I have been knitting these as a subtle way to protest mass produced items in our culture. Hand knit cloths last many years through

numerous uses; they are made to last, while manufactured cloths disintegrate after being laundered several times. On average, the materials in the hand knit wash clothes cost 1-2 dollars each and are made in approximately 1 ½ hours to knit. The process of knitting these is part of the experience, as the repetitive motions are meditative and automatic for me. It is as though my hands know what to do, because I knit with out looking at the needles.

When looking at the piles of washcloths that I had knit, I began to think about the mass produced washcloths in almost every home in America. I began to think about the age of the hand knit washcloths I use daily in my life. I have had some more than 15 years and they are still in use in my home. Why is it that most people would rather buy a wash cloth that will fall apart soon after purchase, rather than take the time to make or purchase a handmade one that will last far longer? One simple answer to this question is the convenience of the mass produced items. They are “easier” and provide more free time to do other things. However the ironic thing is that many of us are still compelled to make things by hand for a variety of reasons. Often people are looking for something meditative to do as part of their daily lives, while some people just want something to do with their hands, or find a way to connect with others and create a community.

In conclusion, handmade items are important to me and have become part of the subject and conceptual issues of this body of work. In *Hankie Study II* (Figure 12) *Labor* (Figure 13) and *Hand or Machine Made?* (Figure 17) I ask

viewers to evaluate the choice presented and determine what is lost and what is gained when choice is made.

## CONCLUSION

As consumers in our contemporary culture, we are spoiled. To find a hand made gift, one would have to search out a specialty store or an artisan web site. It takes planning and time to shop in this way, though the shift in thought towards handmade gifts are becoming more popular. Annie Mohaupt, a shoemaker from Chicago, feels this change in her business, “I think people want things that are unique. As the world becomes more homogenous, handmade things become more precious.”<sup>12</sup> So the Industrial Revolution brought about positive and negative changes in the lives of humans but to what cost? What are the choices we have? We need to make a choice between hand or machine and we need to think about the choices we make. The surge of handmade in our society is a glimmer of hope for me. It represents A place of comfort that some are learning an appreciation of the handmade.

Through this experience, I have created both intensively-produced handmade objects and machine made work designed with a computer. What I have found is that I enjoy the balance these different ways of producing give me. I can work on the digital Jacquard weaving and then come and sit at the hand loom and weave for a while, or knit or stitch. I find this balance to be the way I can continue to create the jacquard cloth, while still fulfilling my need to be “making”. I want to continue in this research.

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<sup>12</sup> Faythe Levine and Courtney Hemerl, *Handmade Nation* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 80

At the Oriole Mill I was allowed and encouraged to weave small samples of my cloth pieces to decide if I wanted to weave the whole piece. I was allowed to watch my cloth be woven. The loom operator, called a weaver, would stop the loom if one thread was inserted incorrectly. The weaver is also the one who explores why the loom shuts down or malfunctions. The loom often shuts down as the files are changed. This, the weaver explained, was because the industrial looms like to weave large amounts of cloth, with simple or small repeats. The looms do not like weaving 1-2 yards of cloth and then stopping to weave another small file. One day when I was at Oriole Mill and watching a weaver weave cloth for a different person. He saw a flaw, and he pointed it out to me. He unwove those picks and then restarted the loom. When we talked about this he said that at a regular large production mill he would never have been allowed to do that if he even had time to see the flaw, he would have been running several looms at one time.

This experience showed me that flaws exist in most mills including Beljen Mill where the majority of this work was created. In a traditional mill there are several looms and one weaver who watches and takes care of all of them. Often it is taking a lot longer than it should to get the cloth produced. At Beljen Mill the turn around time is no longer weeks, but now several months. At the time that the thesis work was woven at Beljen Mill I was unable to work with Oriole Mill. The mill has since changed their policy and I am once again able to use Oriole Mill. As a result of this experience with Beljen Mill I plan to work exclusively with Oriole Mill in the future. The weavers at Oriole Mill are craftsmen who really care

about the cloth that is produced inch by inch, unlike Belgian mill where it comes down to the total number of yards of cloth woven that day. A perfect example of quantity verses quality.

I want to continue to work with the conceptual premise of the hand verses the machine in the future. However I want to find better ways to access the mills. I want to go back to *Hankie Studies I and II* (Figure 12) and add to this series. This will mean developing more of my own weave structures and continuing to find textile objects from the past and the current cultural non textile replacements to make these comparisons. I feel this is where I can best work in the future, mining more of the handmade and bringing it onto the digitally woven realm.



Figure 1 *Seasons I*, Hand dyed cotton, Found Quilt, hand pieced overlay of found vintage textiles, with Digitally printed, hand dyed and potato dextrin on silk organza, silk habitti, cotton, and silk noil. 25" X 36"



Figure 2. *Potential*, woven Jacquard panel with found Rag Rug Balls. 3.5' X 8'



Figure 3. *Materials*, Woven Jacquard panel with purchased knitting and weaving yarns. 3.5' X 9'



Figure 4. *Worker*, Woven Jacquard panel with framed found vintage wooden spools containing various colors of silk thread. 8' X 6'



Figure 5 *Carriers* and *Holders* Woven Jacquard panels with found vintage shuttles and heddles. 16' X 6'



Figure 6. *Wefters*, Woven Jacquard panel with framed found vintage bobbins. 8' X 6'



Figure 7. *Ends*, Woven Jacquard panel with framed found vintage bobbins. 8' X 6'



Figure 8. *Maker*, Woven Jacquard panel with framed found vintage label weaving shuttle and bobbin. 8' X 4.5'



Figure 9. *Icon*, Woven Jacquard panel with framed found vintage bobbin. 6' X 6'



Figure 10. *Eyes*, Woven Jacquard panel with framed found vintage buttons.  
8' X 6'



Figure 11. *Remnants*, Woven Jacquard panel with framed found vintage wooden spools. 8' X 6'



Figure 12. *Hankie Study II*, Jacquard woven panel, found vintage hankie and embroidered and appliquéd Kleenex. 22" X 29"



Figure 13. *Labor*, Woven Shibbori panels with spools of thread and a chain of warp, a basket containing weaving shuttles and bobbins with thread. Variable size, approximately 4' X 8'



Figure 14. Detail *Labor*



Figure 17. *Hand or Machine Made?*, 372 Hand Knit washcloths of various cotton yarns and 372 Target brand washcloths. Variable size, approximately 5' X 5'



Figure 15. *Hand or Machine Made?*, 372 Hand Knit washcloths of various cotton yarns and 372 Target brand washcloths.

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