

The Practice of Sashiko Embroidery

An AHS Capstone complete draft

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Artist Statement

This work is a brief study into Sashiko stitching as material culture through direct practice. Textile arts and practices provide a window into the human condition and its relation to objects we interact with daily. Practically speaking, this is the act of recognizing Sashiko stitching and other folk art traditions as more than art, and instead as an ordinary act as essential as eating, walking, and taking care of your loved ones. Sashiko stitching, then, is a fast and effective way to reinforce garments and fabric with additional thread. It is a practice from Japan, not dissimilar to other fabric mending and enforcing, and is intertwined with aesthetic and practical requirements, including limited access to new fabric.

Website

I've designed and programmed a website to host this work as a supplement to the library exhibit and for after the exhibit closes. It is now live at <https://sashiko.dieterbrehm.com> for viewing as a draft. The content it features includes photographs of my stitching, my artist statements and notes, and readings of the content in bit sized, "podcast" style snippets, playable via an animated interface.

Works

After a series of short tests, my first big project was to sew an apron for use in my own drawing works, as a studio apron (inking can get messy!). It is a simple denim apron with two ties around the back, and two pockets. As I grew in my ability to do the technical aspects of needlework, I started with embroidering the pockets before moving on to the larger field of the apron. Oddly, though, the pockets with their geometry may have been a more difficult subject.

Regardless, this apron will come along with me whenever I'm drawing or sewing for many years to come.

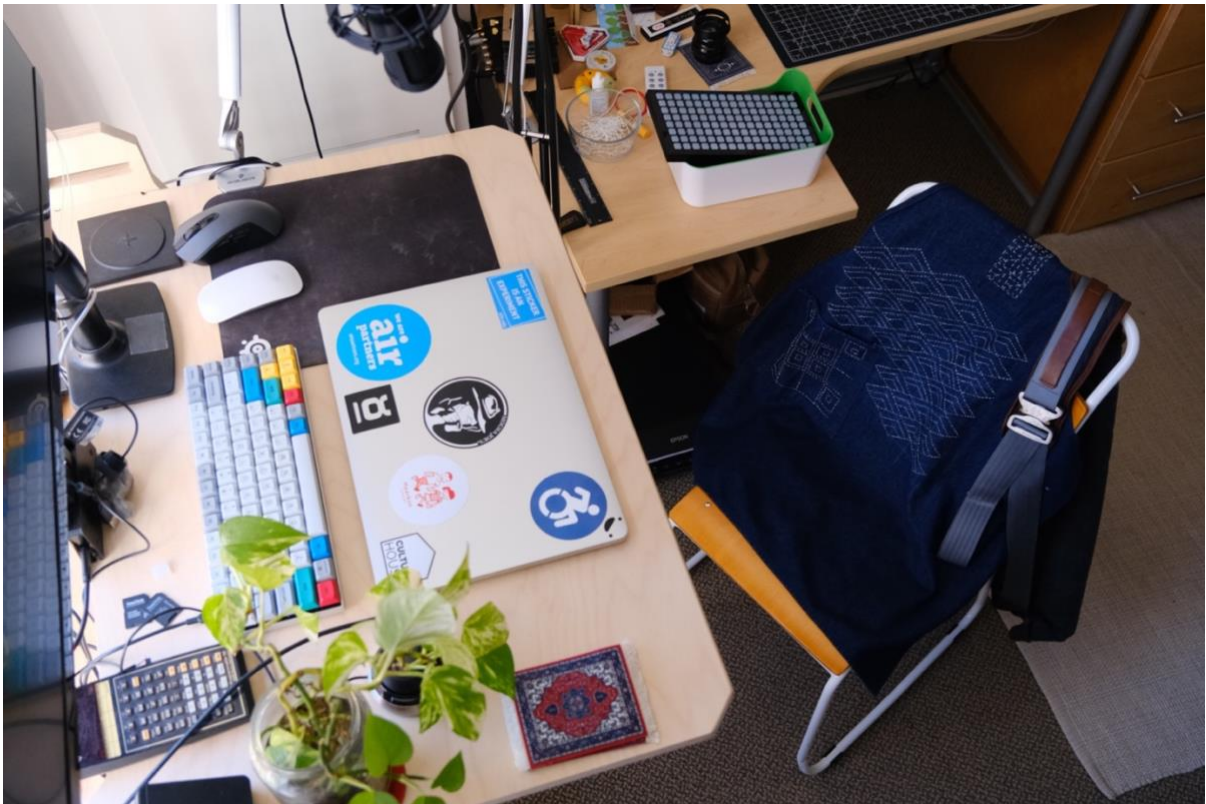


Figure 1 The workshop Sashiko apron in studio setting



Figure 2 The workshop apron against bookshelf setting.



Figure 3 Workshop apron, enlarged



Figure 4 Sashiko apron



Figure 5 Front view of apron stitching project.

My next work revolved around repair more closely. I have an old pair of pants which have a hole in the knee, and I decided to stitch a small patch to reinforce the pants against future worries and stresses and to repair that existing hole. In doing so I practiced stitching onto pants which requires being delicate and not sewing through opposite pant sides. The patching denim

is a bit lighter and stretchier than the heavy duck canvas of the original pants, so I have some hope that it will give and adjust when needed to the original material. As I came up with the patch first, I ended up duplicating my stitching while attaching the black patch onto this pair of pants.

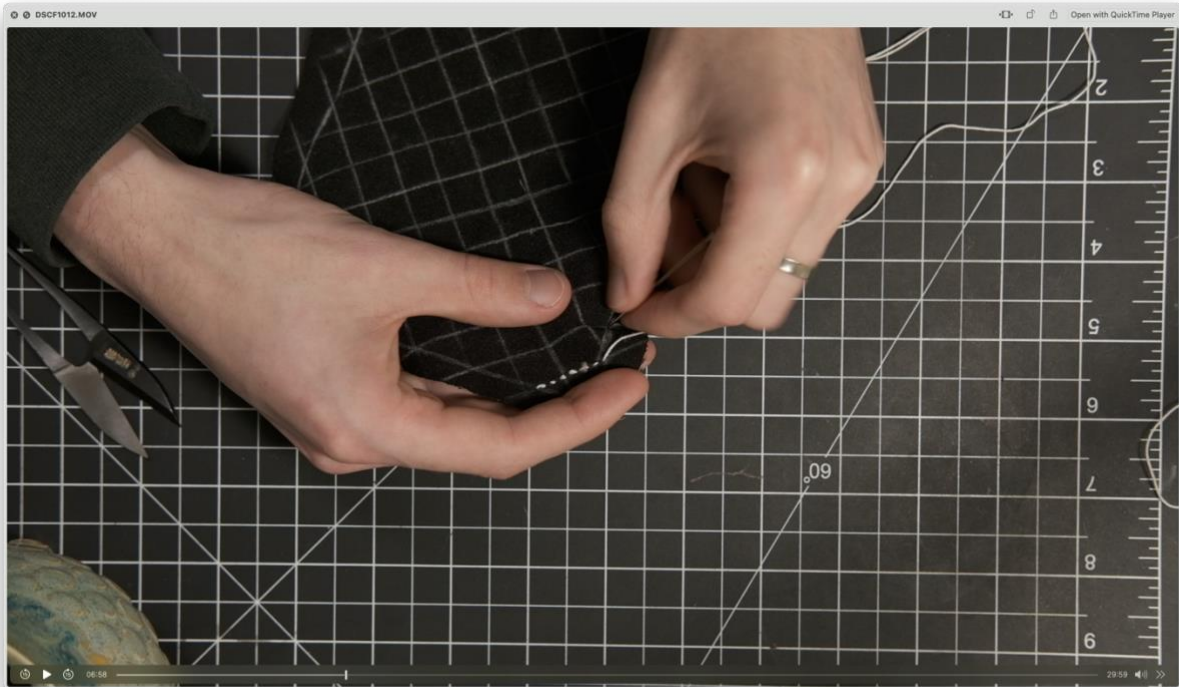


Figure 6 A short video capture of Sashiko stitching.

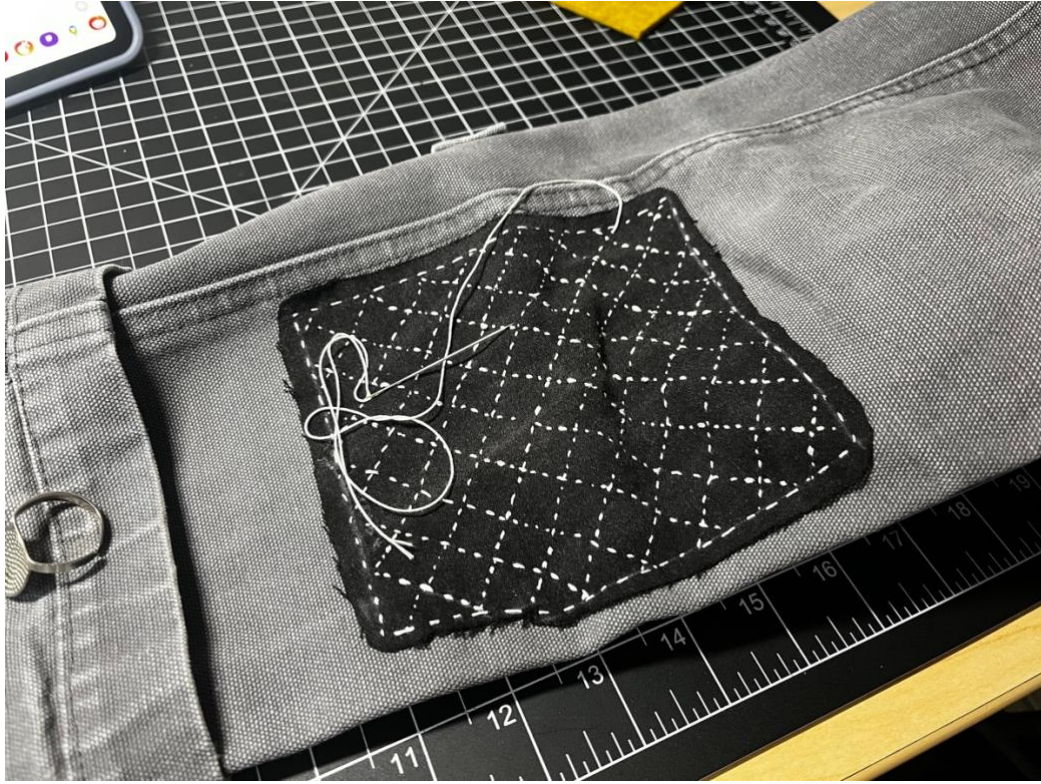


Figure 7 Pants being patched with Sashiko and darning.

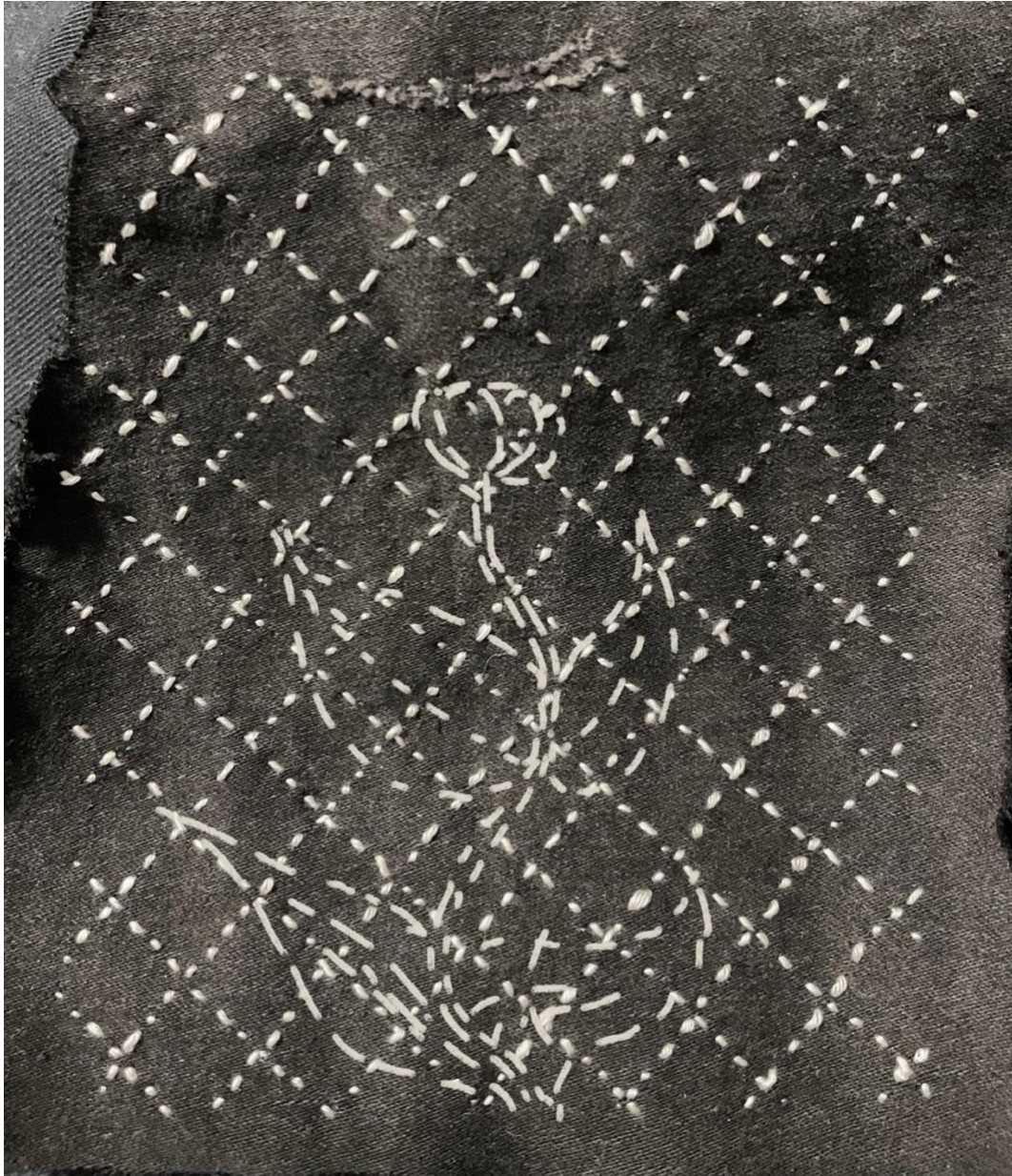


Figure 8 A rendering of future stitching done on an iPad with the ProCreate app to simulate a flower design on top of stitching.

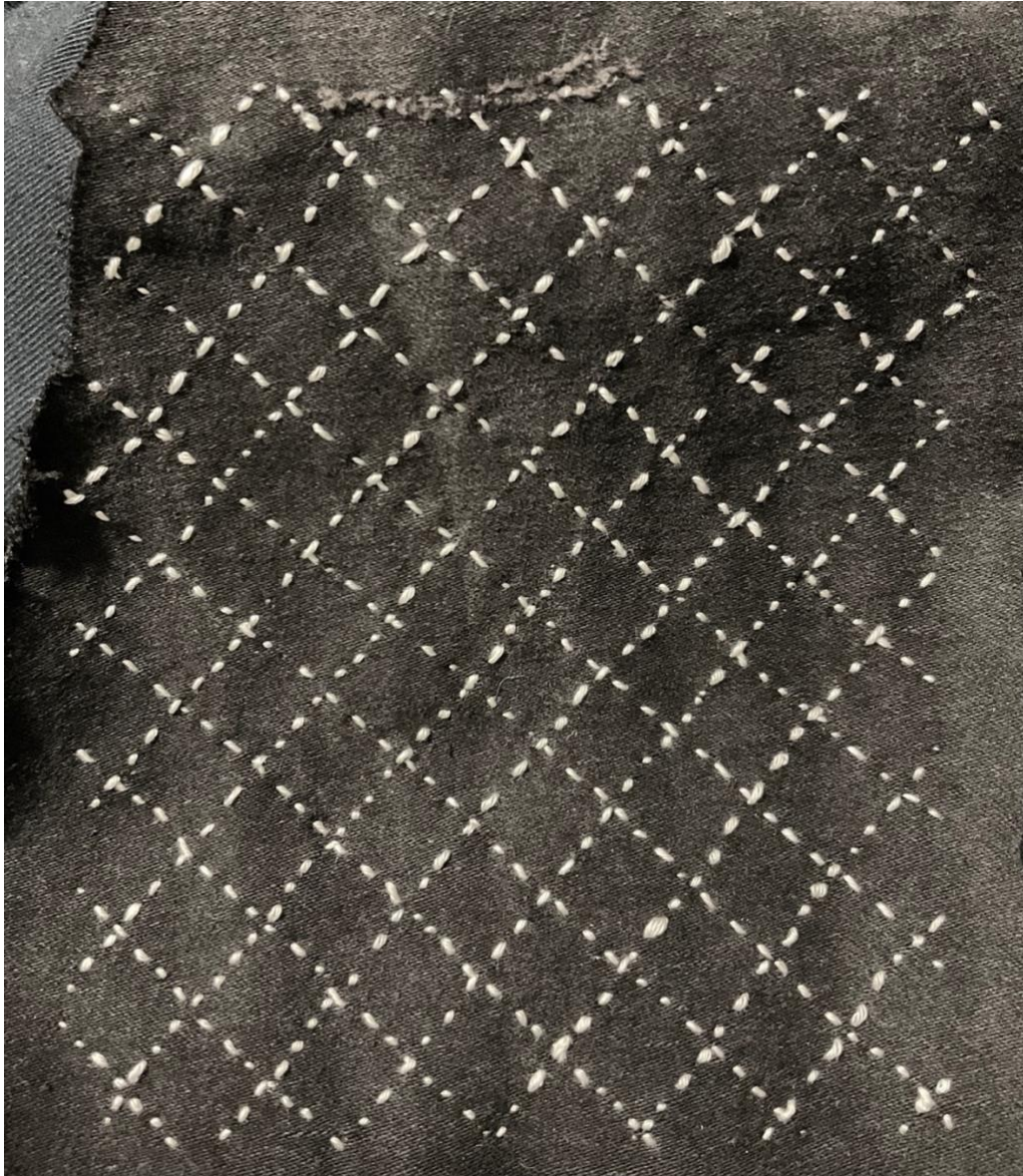


Figure 9 A recently stitched path, to be used for a pair of jeans for mending.



Figure 10 Patched pants in a front view.

The last project to complete a simple triplet of work will be an embroidered tote bag which I'm borrowing from a friend. Throughout this semester I've avoided buying new garments that fit the constraints of this project, as I feel that it would contradict the spirit of the material culture of Sashiko and additionally conflicts with my feelings on consumable clothing. The challenge with this last piece for this period will be working amongst existing screen printing while letting my own stitching visually interact with the bright yellow line art in the printing.



Figure 11 Borrowed tote front view.



Figure 12 Borrowed tote in bookshelf setting, front view.

Context Sources

I've settled on a number of sources which has grown from my initial set and which has been valuable in learning Sashiko as a material culture. For my exhibit materials, I will be focusing on visuals, including the jacket sourced from the MET archive in Figure 13. My other influences, especially the books, will be brought to the exhibit for people to look through as I discuss them.

"Japanese Country Quilting" by Karen Kim Matsunaga

This book presents a number of patterns, including a wide variety of traditional ones. I think that it will be a valuable reference while I'm learning.

"Sashiko Patterns" published by Boutique-Sha

This book was recommended by several people practicing this form of stitching. Though it is all in Japanese, I have a copy and the diagrams, photographs, and illustrations will be essential in my work.

The MET

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has a number of high quality photographs of coats and other items reinforced with Sashiko, including items from the second half of the 19th century and older. In the MET's cataloging system, one of the coat's accession number is [67.172.1](#).



Figure 13 Sashiko Jacket MET 67.172.1

“The Beauty of Everyday Things” by Soetsu Yanagi

I picked up this book partway through my project on a sudden trip to a bookstore. It is concerned with the culture of mass production versus local crafts production, folkcraft, and the Japanese folk craft community in rural provinces. It is a collection of relevant essays written between the 1930s and 1950s, and is accordingly insensitive and odd as times. With that said, the commentary on folk art and craft is valuable.

Internet Resources

Many of the best and most accurate sources result from scouring the internet for hidden resources. I dedicated significant time in this project so far to searching on the internet for PDFs, blog posts, translations, and more.

One significant resource is the “[Upcycle Stitches](#)” website, which hosts articles, tools, and information about Sashiko and related work.

Another source is a stitcher online by the name of [Lindzeanne](#) who works in mending and Sashiko but with their own separate practice and interests woven in, including use of Boro techniques and mending ideas from the United States and elsewhere.