

Artist's Statement

Celeste Maisel

The most significant part of my experience at Olin has been the people I have met and the friendships I have made. This project represents the importance that these people have had in the past four years of my life. I chose to work in embroidery because of its time intensive nature and traditionally feminine connotations. Historically, embroidery has been a woman's pastime and often young girls would embroider linens for a "hope chest" that would be for their future home after they got married.

To make a portrait, I began with a photograph of the subject, which I then transformed into a line art sketch on a thin paper. I then used this paper to guide me when creating the final work. Each portrait takes several steps and gives me time to focus on my subject. While creating the portraits, I thought about each subject as a person and about my relationship to each of them as I reflect on my life and friends during the past four years. The drawing of the patterns, choosing the fabric and thread, preparation, the actual needlework itself and final finishing steps combine to approximately 5-8 hours of work per piece. The time spent on this process gave me a chance to reflect on the people I have met here and the relationships that I have formed with them

For these pieces, I was inspired by the delicate lines and details in traditional red work and black work embroidery, which are single colored thread on a solid color background in intricate designs. Red work is a decorative needlework that is typically done on a white background in red, blue or black, colors that show up well against the background. This embroidery style really epitomizes the traditionally feminine designs and motifs depicted in vintage embroidery such as flowers, nature, animals and traditional or religious sayings. It was exciting to me to use a similar technique to create embroidery that differed so much from the typical redwork patterns.

The pop art style with very bold, graphic lines and bright colors, specifically the repetitive, multicolored, screen printed portrait work of Warhol was also a source of inspiration. The juxtaposition of the pop art combined with traditional embroidery, two very different art styles, really appealed to me. These types of

juxtapositions, as well as the idea of using old techniques and styles in new ways, are themes that show up in a lot of my artwork. Creating portraits in ways other than photography such as the screen printing in Warhol's portraits are a unique way to capture aspects of the subject through the eyes of the artist. The color choice for the thread and the fabric I use is unique for each piece in order to represent something about each person. For some people, I used light, plain fabric with dark, contrasting thread colors to bring out specific features or how I see them. For others, I used busy, colorfully patterned fabrics to depict their overall personality. I also used different types of stitches and some small details in contrasting colors to bring out distinct features, usually eyes or mouth, in the subjects to enhance the portrait and make a more interesting piece for viewers. Using the thread to create clean lines over my more sketched style patterns refines and completes the work.

In addition to Warhol, another artist I was very inspired by was Cayce Zavaglia. She creates hyper-realistic, complex portraits of her friends and family using thousands of colors of embroidery thread. At a glance her embroidered portraits look like oil paintings until the viewer gets close enough to see that they are actually created by layers and layers of individual stitches. Her innovative uses of embroidery as well as subject matter were both inspirations for this project.

I chose the size of the final embroideries to be eight inch diameter circles for a variety of reasons. It is a size that is large enough to view small details of the subject and display on a wall while still having an impact from farther away, but they are small enough to be easily portable. Additionally, the portraits are a similar size to the size that the viewer would appear to him or herself while looking in a mirror or at another person from a comfortable distance. During the creation of each piece, it gave the feeling of looking at the face of my friend for hours on end. Even if the viewer does not know any of the subjects, perhaps he

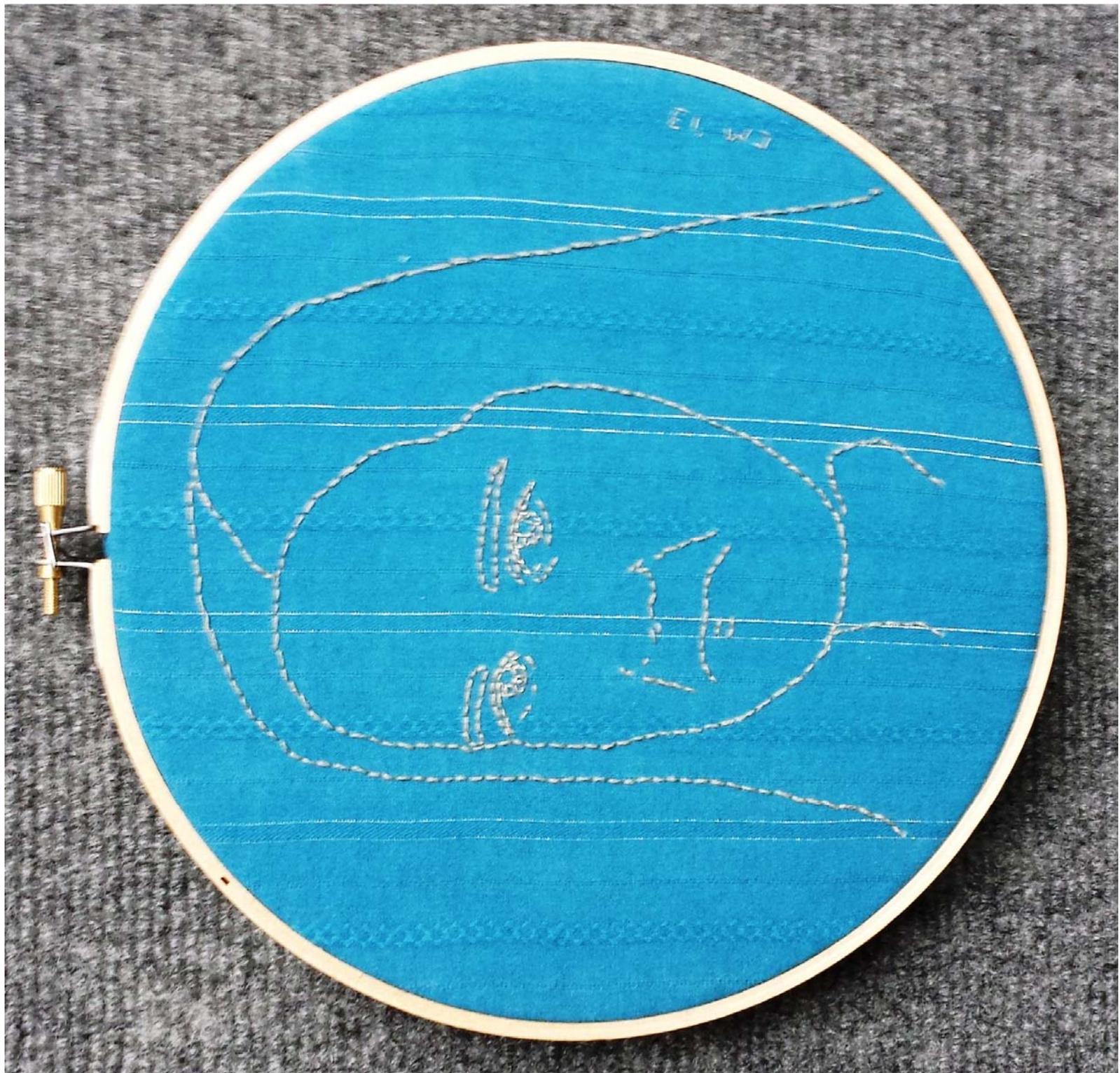
or she will notice similarity to someone familiar, or even themselves. While one portrait alone may not be especially ambitious, when they are hung together it creates a sense of a larger community portrait than just individuals. This is the only time these portraits will be displayed together. After this exhibit, they will be mailed off to all different parts of the country so my friends will get to keep the portrait of themselves. In a way, this is my version of a hope chest, but instead of making things for my future household, I am making the hope chest for the rest of my life, to always be surrounded by great friends and a strong, supportive community.









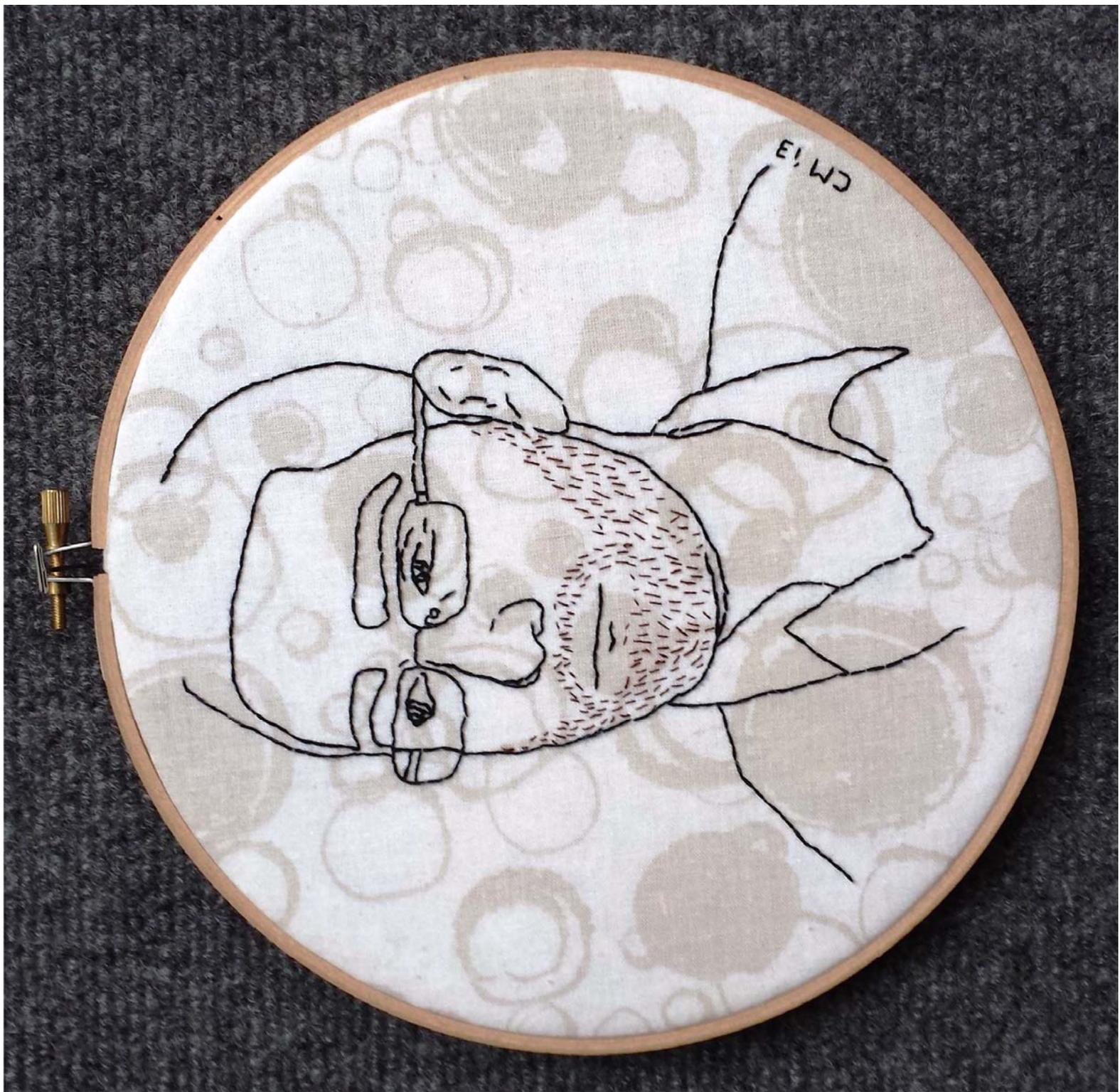












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AHS Capstone Sources

Fall 2013

[1] *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, April 15, 2010, Rozsika Parker, book

This book explores how the “relationship between women and embroidery has brought stitchery out from the private world of female domesticity into the fine arts” according to its description. As a woman who embroiders, think it is important to know and understand a little bit of the history and connotations of this art form. Embroidery is a very old craft and I am using it in a very non-traditional way, which I might mention in my artist’s statement. This is a reprint of a book that was originally published in 1984, I believe.

[2] *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, March 4, 2011, Maria Elena Buszek, essay collection

This collection of essays is by a wide variety of artists specializing in non-traditional, craft-type art.

I am always curious what drives others to create in these arts and crafts mediums that I am most drawn to as well as give me better ideas for how to display my final project and how to make a compelling artist’s statement.

[3] *Hoopla: The Art of Unexpected Embroidery*, October 4, 2011, Leanne Prain, book

This book is a collection of patterns and artist profiles of contemporary embroidery artists.

As a contemporary embroidery artist, (or at least an aspiring one) I think it’s important to see other artist’s work and hopefully get better ideas for techniques and ways of displaying my final project deliverable.

[4] White, Tanya, "Ornamenting A Narrative: an Embroidered Portrait" (2012). Theses and dissertations. Paper 925.

<http://digitalcommons.ryerson.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1945&context=dissertations>

This thesis is specifically about embroidering a portrait and it’s a different technique than the one that I will be using, but overall I think this could be a helpful resource.

[5] “PUSH Stitchery: 30 Artists Explore the Boundaries of Stitched Art (PUSH Series)” September 6, 2011, Jamie Chalmers, Lark Crafts. Book

This book is a collection of interviews with a variety of artists that all use the traditional art of embroidery in surprising and unexpected ways. There are lots of really beautiful photos of their work that are very inspiring.

[6] “Knot Thread Stitch: Exploring Creativity through Embroidery and Mixed Media” July 1, 2012. Lisa Solomon, Quarry Books. Book.

This is a craft book, but it has some really interesting and non-traditional techniques along with the basics. It mostly tells you how to do specific projects but of course everything can be adapted to anything you want.

[7] “Pop Art (Taschen 25th Anniversary)” July 1, 2007. Tilman Osterwold, Taschen; 25th edition. Book

This doesn’t have a lot of words, but it’s a beautiful collection of a variety of pop art and is great for inspiration.