

Stitching Stories: The First Thread

Stitching Stories: The First Thread is a pop-up exhibition that brings together Asian and African American artists whose works explore cultural exchange, storytelling, and visions of shared futures through textile arts. This exhibition marks an inaugural step toward building a coalition of artists and community members committed to cross-cultural connection and solidarity.

The project grew out of an extended planning process and a series of six community workshops, where Asian and African American artists engaged directly with participants through textile-making, storytelling, and relationship building. These collective efforts reflect a broader vision of collaboration, mutual support, and cultural exchange.

Stitching Stories is also an open invitation—for artists, organizers, and all who believe in bridging communities—to take part in deepening understanding across racial and cultural lines.

Organizers and Partners:

Heritage Museum of Asian Art, Needles and Threads Quilters Guild, HerArt Foundation, and the Abrahamic Center for Cultural Education, Supported by Healing Illinois.

Artists:

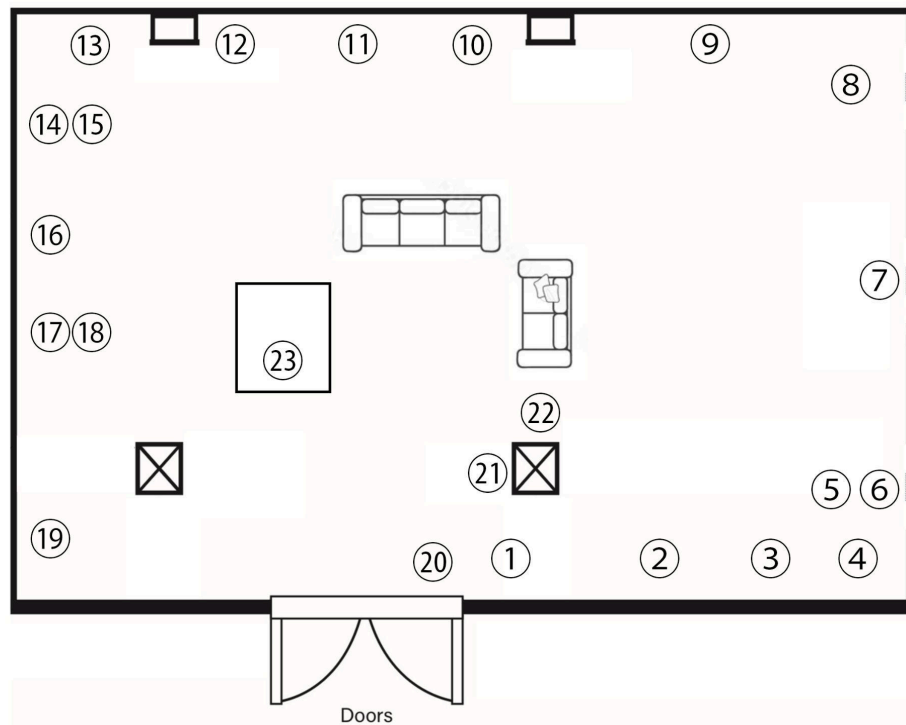
Doris Barnes, Dorothy Burge, Tatreez Jenin, Elizebeth Joo, Sona Kim, Seonyoung Lee, Margo Haynes, Kimberly Mosley, Ruth Raickett-Roberts, Susan Trice, Joyce Weathington, Sheila White, Zakiya A. Williams, Jiashun Zhou.

Opening hour: June 14 - 22, 11am - 5pm

Events: **Opening Reception:** June 14, 2–4 PM
 Juneteenth Special Activation: June 19, 2–4 PM
 Closing Artist Conversation: June 22, 2–4 PM

Accessibility:

The museum is wheelchair accessible. Audio Description will be available for those who need it during events.



1. *Village Women*, Margo Haynes
2. *Stain Glass*, Ruth Raickett-Roberts
3. *Khalili Qabbeh Tapestry*, Tatreez Jenin's personal collection
4. *Palestinian Hand-Embroidered Thob*, Tatreez Jenin's personal collection
5. *Gazawi Coffee Bean*, Tatreez Jenin
6. *Window*, Jiashun Zhou
7. *Window*, Jiashun Zhou
8. *Workshop Moments*
9. *Underground Railroad Sampler Quilt*, Sheila White
10. *Trace of Life*, Sona Seunga Kim
11. *"This is What 25 Looks Like: Williams Style"*, Zakiya A. Williams
12. *By Any Means Necessary*, Susan Trice
13. *She She*, Sheila White
14. *African Lady 8*, Doris Barnes
15. *Kobe*, Doris Barnes
16. *Friendship Quilt*, Ruth Raickett-Roberts
17. *African Queen Block*, Kimberly Mosley
18. *An Act of Resistance*, Susan Trice
19. *Mask*, Joyce Weathington
- 20, 22. *Woven Emotions_Fray*, Seonyoung Lee
21. *Weird Skin Project_transform*, Seonyoung Lee
23. *Daily Waste #3, Daily Waste #4*, Elizabeth Joo

① **Margo Haynes**

Village Women, 2018, Appliqué and Paint

Village Women pays tribute to the collective strength, wisdom, and daily life of women in traditional communities. Using appliqué and paint, I aim to capture the quiet resilience and beauty found in everyday moments. Each figure, formed through layers of fabric and color, tells a story of labor, sisterhood, and cultural continuity. This work is a reflection of the powerful roles women play in sustaining family, culture, and community across generations.

② **Ruth Raickett-Roberts**

Stain Glass, 2024, Machine & Hand Pieced, Appliqued

This piece is Ruth's interpretation of stained glass, reimagined through the vibrant patterns and textures of African fabric. Just as stained glass windows tell stories through color and light, Ruth uses fabric to create a similar effect—framing and highlighting the beauty and symbolism within each piece of cloth. The bold designs and rich histories embedded in the fabric serve as windows into cultural identity, resilience, and pride. Through this work, Ruth aims to honor tradition while exploring new expressions of spiritual and artistic reflection.

③ **Khalili Qabbeh Tapestry**

Tatreez Jenin's personal collection

Jenin received it from her mother as a wedding gift in 2022 who purchased it in Palestine. This is a hand-embroidered piece.

In the south of Palestine, the city of el-Khalil has some of the most colourful embroidery in Palestine. Jenin's maternal grandmother is from this city. This piece is floral, colourful and on a black fabric. This tapestry was likely from a thob [Palestinian dress] but then repurposed into a home decor piece. The embroidery on this tapestry resembles the 'qabbeh' [chest panel] of a Palestinian dress. Tatreez from el-Khalil is very unique in the amount of colours used, how floral the embroidery is and the dark fabric it is usually stitched on.

④ **Palestinian Hand-Embroidered Thob [Dress]**

Tatreez Jenin's personal collection

Purchased second-hand in Ramallah, Palestine in 2023 from a Palestinian family who were looking to sell their late grandmother's handmade dresses.

This dress consists of a general theme that is found all over the dress in one colour palette, a beautiful pink floral hand-embroidered identical stitching all throughout the dress. The contrast of the soft pink on a navy blue fabric makes it even more eye-catching. The horizontal stripes that run vertically throughout the dress are a connecting stitch called 'manajel'. This is a functional and timeless piece of the dress as women would hand-sew this stitch to connect the sleeves to the different parts of the dress. When dresses would be passed down, fabric is either added or removed to fit the new owner's body and stitched using the same technique called 'manajel'.

⑤ **Jenin (Tatreez Jenin)**

Gazawi Coffee Bean (meaning the coffee bean from Gaza), 2024

The embroidery design that takes up the majority of this piece in blue thread is called 'the coffee bean' design, and it is found in both the Palestinian coastal regions of Gaza and Yaffa. The red embroidery/the heart of the embroidery is a form of Kufic-like calligraphy that I embroidered, which reads the word 'Gaza' in Arabic. I began this project as a means of processing the horrifying reality my people in Gaza are enduring, each stitch connected me to a land [the Gaza Strip] that I have never had the privilege of seeing, to each soul robbed of a future, and to each wave on the coast of Gaza I've never got to see, feel, or hear before. The muted blue thread is somber yet hopeful and connects me to the shore of Gaza that I've only seen in my dreams and pictures. The deep maroon thread used in the center is the heart of the piece and the compass of all our hearts - Gaza. In November 2023, I woke up from a dream that I was sitting by the Mediterranean Sea in Gaza, watching the waves go by on a sunny afternoon and a beautiful breeze in the company of my loved ones. I felt so at peace being at the beach in my dream, and I remember feeling completely safe in a liberated Palestine. Waking up from that dream in the morning was met with so much pain as the bitter reality sunk in. This piece was inspired by the resilience of the people of Gaza and the unwavering connection we have as Palestinians to our land. Tatreez [Palestinian embroidery] is healing and deeply personal.

This pattern can be purchased digitally through my website or as a tatreez kit with the same colour threads on www.tatreezjenin.com upon searching 'Gazawi Coffee Bean'.

⑥⑦ **Jiashun Zhou**

Window, 2022, Floor Loom Weaving with Cotton and Jelly Yarn

Window reflects my relationship with time, memory, and the physical spaces that have shaped my creative life. The doors and windows depicted are from my university studio—a space where I spent five formative years learning, making, and growing. These architectural elements became more than just background; they became part of my artistic language.

As I prepared to leave that space, I found myself wondering: how do we say goodbye to a place that has held so much of who we are? Instead of a photograph, I chose to record the space through weaving—using dyed cotton warp and translucent jelly yarn to represent glass and the subtle light seeping through door cracks. This piece is my first attempt at translating a meaningful environment into fabric, allowing me to carry its presence with me as I enter new chapters of life.

In a digital age that encourages speed and surface-level memory, weaving offers a different pace—one that is tactile, meditative, and attentive. Through thread and repetition, I slow down to truly notice my surroundings and preserve the details that might otherwise be forgotten.

I hope this work encourages others to honor the spaces that support us, to recognize the small textures of our environments, and to carry forward the memories that make us feel grounded—no matter where we go.

⑨ **Sheila White**

Underground Railroad Sampler Quilt, 2019, Cotton, Hand-Cut, Machine-Pieced, and Machine-Quilted

This quilt is a historical tribute to the coded language and visual signals once used to guide enslaved people to freedom. The sampler includes a variety of blocks that were believed to convey directions, signal safe houses, suggest how to dress for escape, and indicate landmarks along the journey to freedom. In the lower right-hand corner, a story is told through stitched imagery, grounding the quilt in narrative as well as symbol. Entirely made of cotton, this wall hanging was hand-cut, machine-pieced, and machine-quilted to preserve the resilience and bravery woven into this legacy.

⑩ **Sona Seunga Kim**

Trace of Life, 2024, Print on Canvas with recycled fabric

I believe artists are, in essence, visual historians tasked with documenting the human condition. This realization drew me to utilize discarded garments as my signature medium, as these fabrics carry the often-overlooked everyday stories of Average Joe and Plain Jane. By repurposing these garments, I strive to preserve forgotten steps in life.

In 1999, I crossed the Pacific Ocean for the first time, landing in San Francisco with my father and my late grandmother. From that moment, I knew the United States was the place I wanted to call home. It would take 27 years, marked by uphill battles, identity crises, and the act of petitioning for my own immigration status, to officially become an American. Yet every step, no matter how difficult, became a path toward growth.

Trace of Life is an autobiographical series chronicling my journey through the U.S. and Canada, countries where my immigration story first took root in my heart. My Korean-American identity now enables me to honor my mother tongue while embracing the language that has shaped my everyday life. I am learning to fully accept my multicultural self, and in doing so, to define who I am on my own terms.

I dedicate this work to my family, whose unwavering support carried me through every chapter of this journey, and to all immigrants who continue to pursue their own version of the American Dream.

⑪ **Zakiya A. Williams**

"This is What 25 Looks Like: Williams Style", 2017, Quilt

Created in celebration of the Guild's 25th Anniversary, this quilt reflects both personal pride and collective achievement. With bold design and expressive fabric choices, "This is What 25 Looks Like: Williams Style" marks a milestone in creativity, sisterhood, and endurance. It is a tribute to the legacy of quilting as a communal art form and to the vibrant spirit that has shaped our Guild over the past quarter-century.

⑫ **Susan Trice**

By Any Means Necessary, December 2003

This quilt was created as a thank-you gift for my son, Colin, who made it possible for me to take my first journey to South Africa. The piece features Malcolm X—one of his heroes—as a symbol of strength, conviction, and the pursuit of justice. It is both a personal gesture of gratitude and a tribute to the enduring legacy of Black resistance and leadership.

⑬ **Sheila White**

She She, 2017, Cotton and Polyester Fabric Scraps, Glued and Machine-Stitched, with Artist's Own Hair

She She is a deeply personal self-portrait created as part of a class led by Wyclife 'Linc' Bennett in Atlanta, Georgia. Using cotton and polyester fabric scraps, I assembled this piece through a combination of gluing and machine stitching. My own locs are used for the hair, making this quilt not only a visual likeness but also a physical extension of myself. The name She She was given to me by a dear friend, and the quilt stands as a celebration of self-recognition, transformation, and affection.

⑭ **Doris Barnes**

African Lady 8, 2019, Appliqué and Machine Quilting

This piece celebrates the elegance, resilience, and cultural pride embodied by African women. Through the technique of appliqué combined with machine quilting, I aim to capture both the beauty and complexity of Black womanhood. Each fabric layer contributes to the texture of identity, heritage, and strength passed down through generations.

⑮ **Doris Barnes**

Kobe, 2019, Machine Embroidery

Kobe is a portrait honoring the legacy of basketball icon Kobe Bryant. Using machine embroidery, I sought to portray not only his likeness but also his determination, excellence, and lasting influence. Stitch by stitch, this work reflects the spirit of perseverance and greatness that defined his life.

⑩ **Ruth Raickett-Roberts, Susan Trice, Zakiya A. Williams, and Workshop Participants**
Friendship Quilt, 2024

This quilt is composed of individual blocks created by participants during the April 27 workshop held as part of the Stitching Stories project. Each block is a personal response to the prompt "friendship." The blocks were brought together and quilted by Ruth Raickett-Roberts, symbolizing the collective spirit and connections formed through the project.

⑪ **Kimberly Mosley**

African Queen Block, June 2024, Pieced Geometric Shapes (including Half-Square Triangles)

The African Queen quilt block is a dynamic and versatile pattern celebrated for its bold geometric shapes and visual impact. Traditionally composed of squares, rectangles, and half-square triangles, this block is often customized by quilters using a variety of fabrics, colors, and sashing techniques. Typically based on a 5" x 5" grid, it can be scaled to create everything from table runners to large wall hangings.

The selection of fabric plays a central role in the design, allowing for personal and cultural expression. As an African American quilter, I chose to create this large-scale interpretation using African fabrics to honor my heritage and roots. The background quilting features a pattern inspired by Egyptian hieroglyphics, further connecting the piece to a rich cultural history.

⑫ **Susan Trice**

An Act of Resistance, October 2024

Concept:

This wall hanging was awarded 1st place in the Banned Books Challenge at the Needles & Threads 2024 Quilt Show. *An Act of Resistance* speaks to the power of literature, art, and truth-telling in the face of censorship. Through fabric and form, I aim to honor the voices that have been silenced and celebrate the courage to speak out—an act of resistance in itself.

⑬ **Joyce Weathington**

Mask, 2021, Collage Wall Hanging

This portrait piece explores identity and expression through the symbolic use of fabric. My creativity in making masks comes from incorporating many different fabrics, symbols, colors, and found objects within textiles. Each element contributes to the narrative of self-representation, transformation, and cultural memory. *Mask* invites viewers to reflect on the layered meanings we wear and the stories stitched into every piece of cloth.

②① **Seonyoung Lee**

Weird Skin Project_transform, 2022 and 2024, Yarn, Wool, Ribbon

②① ②② **Seonyoung Lee**

Woven Emotions_Fray, 2024, Yarn, Wool, Ribbon

This Project emerged from a personal journey shaped by self-doubt and identity. Growing up in South Korea, one of the most conservative and homogeneous societies. My relatively tanned skin stood out in a culture where clean, bright skin is often upheld as a beauty standard. My peers often teased me, saying, “you don’t look Korean enough”. It was a common kind of teasing among kids, but for me, it left a lasting impression. It became a small but profound memory that still affects me today. I believe it was the first moment I started to feel self-conscious about how I looked, even before my teenage years. Eventually, I made peace with my skin, but the emotional wounds had already taken root.

After transitioning from a designer to an artist, I began exploring these experiences of societal pressure through textile-based works. Two of these pieces are included in this show.

One is *Weird Skin Project_transform*, which is a garment-like piece that reflects my vulnerability toward my skin. Diverse textures represent the struggle to conform to narrow beauty standards. Various layers express repeated attempts to change myself, and the emotional difficulties that accumulate in the process.

The other piece, *Woven Emotions_Fray*, explores emotional complexity through a meditative and healing practice of weaving. The repetitive, time-intensive nature of the craft became therapeutic, allowing me to confront, process, and transform my emotions. As I weave, feelings are amplified and expressed as wave-like forms in yarn.

The *Woven Emotions* series captures the invisible weight of emotional labor and gives it shape—translating internal struggles into organic, tactile forms.

②③ **Elizabeth Joo**

Daily Waste #3, 2024, Daily Waste (Dunkin’ Donuts Paper Bag), Thread

Daily Waste #4, 2024, Daily Waste (McDonald’s Paper Bag), Thread

Daily Waste is an ongoing series that explores the intersection of emotional expression and cultural discard. By embroidering emotions onto fast food paper bags—items designed to be thrown away—I draw a parallel between how society devalues both emotional vulnerability and everyday waste. Each piece documents feelings often labeled irrational or excessive, reclaiming them as visible and valid. Begun during a period of isolation and transition after my move to the U.S. in 2021, this project reflects an effort to materialize suppressed emotional states and to question what we choose to reject—both materially and emotionally—in our daily lives.