

WOVEN PORTALS: AN EXPLORATION OF ART AND POLITICS
THROUGH RESEARCH INFORMED PRACTICE

by

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Introduction

This project uses research-informed artistic practice of weaving to create three separate portals, each created through various weaving strategies and focused on interpreting a political object. Using the word portals, instead of sections or projects, is meant to emphasize the process and depth of research involved in each of the three works. Portals are defined as an entrance or a way to get to something, or in relation to technology as a page or website on the internet that provides access to other links or sites (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). Thinking about portals in relation to artwork is incredibly congruent; a piece of art provides a visual entry-way into a realm of certain thoughts, ideas, memories, politics and connotations. The use of portals in framing my work is inspired by virtual care lab's portals, a virtual collection of "doors" you can click on and explore that navigate "alternative formats of remote presence, archiving, and memory-making" (Portals, virtual care lab). In my work, each portal focuses on different themes and draws from various resources and artwork; the first focuses on the infrastructure of the dissemination of politics, the second on myself as a cyborgian political object, and the third on political banners and the feminine craft of weaving. Each portal is meant to port the reader and viewer into a specific web of information and association, exploring weaving as a tool to interpret and interrogate different political objects and uncover new associations and meanings in each of them.

The first portal *Fliers* is woven on a floor loom, with staples and paper clips woven into plain weave white fabric in order to render political fliers as textiles and highlight the metal infrastructure necessary to support political messaging. The second, *Cyborg self portrait*, is a self-portrait woven on the TC2 digital jacquard loom, considering my queer, half white, half Japanese, fourth generation positionality, alongside the connections between cyborg feminism

and weaving. The final portal, *Banner*, is a banner reading “ABOLISH IMPERIALISM” woven using overshot on a floor loom and draws upon anti-imperialist protest history and iconography as well as developments in weaving technology to emphasize the ability of the textile to hold artistic, personal, and political memory. Consistent across all three portals is a research-informed artistic process, and a Marxist/material analysis of art.

Art is not confined in a bubble and exists as material objects that interact with the world, which necessitates an understanding of art that is tied to its social impacts. Marxism carries great value as a scientific analysis of class divisions and how systems of power play out in society. There is great misinformation regarding Marxism as a totalitarian and extreme system of thought especially in Western capitalist societies like ours. A Marxist framework has been expanded upon and applied by many scholars, artists and art historians, notably John Berger (2012). Berger introduces us to an art historical world where pieces are not analyzed and judged only by their aesthetics - the type of paint that touches the canvas, the texture of brushstrokes, the use of color, the composition. Instead, he discusses the primary importance of what and who was being painted, who the painter was, who they painted the painting for, what the power dynamics of that transaction were, and what the painting said about the social class of its owner and how it reflected and impacted society (2012). I apply Marxism in my work as a way to analyze and frame art, acknowledging that art is a social and cultural object that affects and is affected by the material conditions of society and systems of power. The formal artistic choices come secondary. This opens doors to how art can be “effective” in society as more than an aesthetic object, as an object that is able to forward agendas, shift consciousness, and imagine worlds and landscapes that are more liberatory, particularly for queer people and people of color, which is most relevant to myself. This is to name a few; art is resistance, solidarity, joy, celebration, future world

making, tools of memory and history, instruments of critique ... it is indispensable, and the list goes on.

The process of creation for each piece is heavily informed by research practice - research of material, of other artist's practices, as well as literature on the topics and ideas I explore, from art reviews to history to social science. This allows me to create intentional and informed aesthetic choices that are grounded in specific meaning. This process challenges me to synthesize, communicate and reflect on ideas of personal and political memory, belonging, activism and organizing strategies, and broader realities of capitalism, imperialism, and globalization and communicate them through my artwork.

This project merges my art, personal experience and political/academic knowledge and understands how to express those ideas through creative form. Art is not just a product of formal, material, or aesthetic considerations; it is important to make this series that merges politics and art in order to convey to the viewer the inextricability of art from its material surroundings and political reality. Through presenting my own artwork grounded not only in my own research but also informed by my own lived experience, I hope to clearly demonstrate how art can be a research tool that can explore knowledge, communicate and develop connections, provide opportunity for introspection, and situate ourselves in the world. Art is therefore intimately tied to, informed by, and affects material reality.

Portal 1: *Fliers*

Chain mail armor and the metal infrastructure of information dissemination



Figure 1: *Fliers*

7 x 1 ft. Woven cotton, staples, paperclips, wood. Installed in LaVerne Krause Gallery, 2022

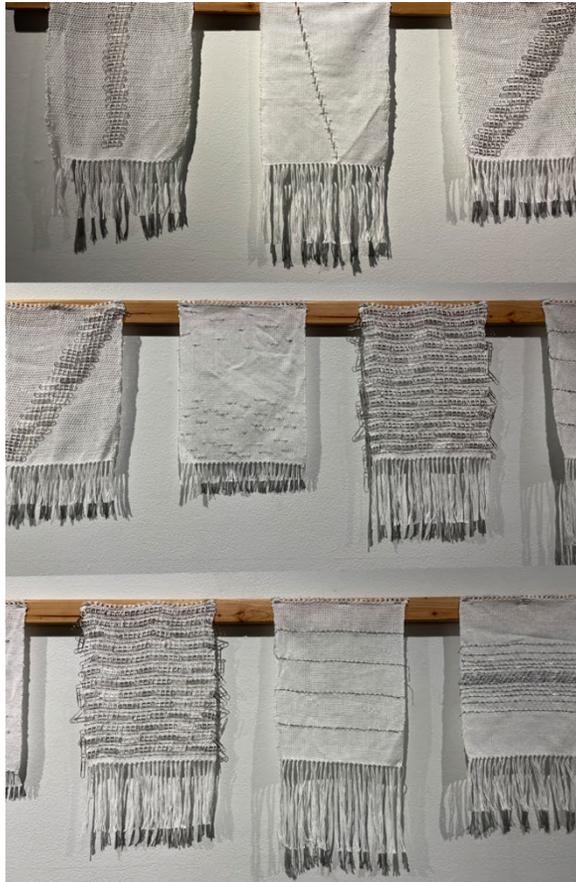


Figure 2: *Fliers* (detail)

Introduction

I've spent my time in Eugene involved in organizing projects on and off campus, and have flied for queer liberation, radical reading groups, climate justice and to get cops off campus. In my organizing, fliering has been a consistent strategy to establish community presence, invite people to studies, meetings, and events, and to reach and empower those oppressed under a racial capitalist, hetero-normative patriarchal society to organize and feel supported. Drawing from my lived experience, this portal of weavings interprets the political object of fliers as a textile, incorporating staples and paperclips, the material infrastructure required to distribute this information. Fliers is made up of eight stark white 8.5 by 11-inch weavings with metallic wefts of staples and paperclips running throughout, all hanging side by side stapled to a thin wooden plank. This portal explores how meaning is communicated through materiality while drawing inspiration from the work of El Anatsui and the construction of Japanese chainmail armor.

Staples and fliers: an act of dissemination

The weave structure, arrangement and composition of *Fliers* draws upon the material and placement of political fliers on the street. The size of each of these weavings as well as the plain weave structure is meant to mirror plain printer paper, which political fliers for community organizations are printed on as a cheap and accessible material. Each printer-paper sized individual weaving has an evenly balanced warp and weft (balanced weave) and are structured primarily through plain weave, with the metal incorporated through twill. The basic structure and balanced weave point to the plain and uniform texture of printer paper as well. In order to be eye-catching, fliers are often organized in two rows of three or two rows of two, and thus choosing an even number of weavings is meant to further emphasize the connection between

these pieces of cloth and political fliers. The arrangement of this work in a straight line is meant to emphasize the movement required to “read” these fliers. To see the details in each piece, the viewer must walk from one end of the work to the other. This simulates how we perceive fliers in our daily lives, often while walking or moving. The incorporation of wood also is meant to bring our encounters with fliers in our daily lives into the gallery, alluding to the bulletin boards and poles that fliers are often found on.

Before these fliers reach the eyes of the public, they require coordination and labor to distribute and put up. The act of stapling fliers builds community and connection; I’ve met new people and made new friends through this process, united through common political goals of liberation from capitalism and imperialism. The metal incorporated in *Fliers* are staples and paperclips. These objects are the infrastructure that is needed to carry out the process of fliering and instilling ideas of liberation, collective organizing, and community. Without them, the ease of fliering would be greatly compromised, as well as the surfaces one is able to flier upon (tape on smooth surfaces would have to be used, losing the ability to staple fliers onto bulletin boards, telephone poles etc). To facilitate the collective action of fliering, shared staple guns are passed around to whoever needs them, with staples serving as a literal and symbolic connection between people in this process.

Textile armor: determination and protection

The metal in these weavings is incorporated through a twill structure, and recalls instances of chainmail armor, a malleable metallic textile object. The use of chainmail as a protective mesh armor is present in civilizations all over the world. In Japan, chainmail makes its first appearance in the 14th century often as sleeves, thigh armor or shin guards, and is distinguished throughout its use in Japan by always being mounted upon a fabric surface

(Robinson, p. 186, 1967). In armor from the early 17th century, the sleeves were made of pieces of lacquered iron plates and chain mail (kusari/鎖) sewn onto silk (Ogawa, p. 226, 2012). The mail becomes adornment upon cloth, and the cloth is infrastructure to support the metal, just as the staples and paperclips adorn the white plain weave fabric, while the fiber warp and weft provides structure for the metal to cling to. Chainmail's protective efficacy lies in its weave methods, or how the individual circles of metal are attached to each other. Various constructs were used in making Japanese mail armor, but the structures of hitoye-gusari (一重鎖), or single layer mail most recall the plain weave woven structures utilized in this project (Robinson, p. 195, 1967).

Like armor, staples are symbols of determination and protection. Telephone poles and bulletin boards become entirely encrusted with staples and the surface of the wood becomes barely visible and turns rough and metallic, saturated with the determination of many people organizing and advocating for their collective needs and desires. Staples are also a determined material given their staying power; when fliers get torn down or melt away in the rain, their papery surface dissolves into crumbs that cling to the only remaining infrastructure - the staple. The determination and structural integrity of staples also ties to ideas of protection embedded into metal armor. The staples attempt to protect these messages of advocacy by keeping them up, and the act of stapling and the community-building potential forges connection and in turn, mutual trust, support and protection.

An act of experimentation/labor

The staples and paperclips are the material infrastructure of political dissemination, and although they are seen as apolitical unlike the messages on the fliers, they nonetheless serve a particular political agenda through their utility and are also inherently political objects due to

their manufacture and distribution in a capitalist world. The staples I used in this work are by Target's "Up and Up" line that I purchased for \$3.29, and according to the packaging, these staples were manufactured in China. While information from Target regarding which factory and where these staples were produced is incredibly opaque and challenging to discern, most modern paper staples are made from zinc plated steel wires, and the largest steel producing country is also China, so it would be reasonable to conclude that the materials for these staples were sourced and produced in China. Considering these politics of materiality reveal a reality we already know to be true in a globalized economy, where materials can be sourced and produced outside of the United States, and then imported and sold cheaply with the labor required to produce them made invisible.

Weaving staples and paperclips, already infused in their creation with the context of imperialism and globalization, into these cloth "fliers" expands how we can derive political meaning from non-representational objects. The staples become not just the infrastructure but also the content of the piece, replacing the ink and paper in their ability to communicate ideas. In each of the eight pieces, I chose to arrange the staples and paperclips in various patterns, creating consistency and organization in the composition of each weaving. This compositional choice required much experimentation and labor prior to weaving this final version of *Fliers*. I first tried a more organic approach to integrating the metal into this work, without a sense of pattern or consistency and found that this resulted in a work that was dis-jointed and unclear, which is undesirable in political messaging. I also first tried this work with a hand-dyed warp, creating a color gradation throughout the piece from lighter to darker gray. I found that this detracted from the centrality of the metal to these pieces, with its shine and textural variation being masked by the colored warp. Based on these learnings, I settled on an all-white warp and weft that

highlights the metal and lets it stand out, as well as more consistent patterns and organized compositions to mimic strong political messaging. This experimentation was important in teaching me how best to communicate political ideas in a non-representational way in an effort to center my politics in an artistic practice that is not based in print mediums.

Ultimately, this work becomes infused not only with my own artistic labor and experimentation required to create this project, but also the unseen and made invisible labor required to produce the materials I use. This analysis of labor - both my own artistic labor in the creation of this work but also the made-invisible global labor - is a Marxist analysis necessary in understanding how this work functions in society. It is explicit about the resources and conditions necessary to make this piece, and how they inform the meaning and impact *Fliers* has as a completed work.

El Anatsui: critical materiality

The centrality of critical materiality to my work was also inspired by the work of Ghanaian artist El Anatsui. I was particularly inspired by his series of works *Metas*, which exist as soft and ephemeral sheets of disco balls, heavy in meaning and form yet shimmering and flexible. *Metas III* (Figure 3) is made from aluminum liquor bottle caps and copper wire. These works are stripped of Anatsui's usual use of color and exist in shimmering grays, which was part of what inspired the monochrome color scheme of this work and the emphasis on the shine and texture of the metals. Anatsui has become well renowned for his use of bottle caps to create grandiose and shimmering metallic textile sculptures. In the Guardian, Anatsui writes; "With the bottle caps, the story I've been telling is about Transatlantic trade and the goods – including human goods – which were sent from Africa to America to produce rum and other things, which came back to Europe and then finally to Africa. So the drink represented here by bottle caps links

all three continents" (2020). In response to this narrative, Anatsui only uses liquor bottle caps made locally in Nigeria and Ghana where he works (Lucas, 2021). This choice is of particular relevance consider how Nigeria and Ghana have become dumping grounds for waste from the West. In Tema, Ghana, hundreds of thousands of tons of used electronics are delivered, much of which doesn't work and is disposed of in the Agbogbloshie area created a toxic wasteland with disastrous health consequences (Yeung, 2019). Similarly in Lagos, Nigeria, electronic waste from imperialist countries is illegally dumped; in 2015 and 2016, 60,000 tons of used electronic equipment was shipped to Nigeria mostly from EU ports and the UK (Bonn, 2018). Anatsui does not consider his process of creating sculptures from bottle caps and found wire to be "recycling", which would imply a complete transformation of the object and stripping of its original meaning (Lucas, 2021). The original meaning of these objects as waste and their political weight is highlighted rather than disguised, turning Anatsui's pieces into place-specific reflections on the environment, circumstances, and history of Nigeria and Ghana.

Conclusion

Taking inspiration from Anatsui, through my own weaving process I transform staples and paperclips from a uniformly manufactured utilitarian tool into a textiles object of ritual and reflection. The eight fabric fliers are an airy and delicate portal and float in beautiful patterns across the space of the wood, giving the tedious work of fliering a spiritual element and honoring the act of dissemination as a way of creating community. *Fliers* is infused with the memory of staples and paperclips as infrastructure for political fliering, the memory of labor required in their creation and distribution, and the memory of my labor and my body's integration with the loom.



Figure 3: El Anatsui, *Metas III*, 2014

109 x 118 in. Wall Hanging. Aluminum (liquor bottle caps) and copper wire. Photo courtesy, Jack Shainman Gallery

Portal 2: *Cyborg self portrait*

The loom, the feminine body and technology



Figure 4: *Cyborg self portrait*

26 x 38 in. Digital jacquard weave, mixed fibers. Installed in LaVerne Krause Gallery, 2022

Introduction

What does it mean to be a racialized queer person in a white supremacist society? What does it mean to be someone four generations removed from her homeland of Japan, a country that has acted as a colonizer and estranged itself from the global South? What does it mean to be someone whose family immigrated to Hawaii while it was independent from the United States and now has lived there for over 100 years? The role of migration and multiple selves found within the technology systems of the computer and the loom figures large in the *Cyborg self portrait* portal.

As a woman of color, I am Donna Haraway's quintessential cyborg (Haraway, p. 54, 2016). Pulling from Chela Sandoval, Haraway understands women of color as having an "oppositional consciousness" coming from being constantly refused stable membership in categories of race, sex, or class, having identities that defy and cross these boundaries (p. 17). Thus, this "oppositional consciousness" is a cyborg consciousness as it embraces the defiance of boundaries. At first this was an identity I was keen to embrace, entranced by the imaginative and utopian sci-fi world that notions of cyborgs seemed to promise. Through weaving a self-portrait of myself wearing and shedding a cyborg identity on the digital loom (TC2 or Thread Controller 2), I play with the cyborg, as written about by Haraway in her *Cyborg Manifesto*, as a potential way to look at myself as a political object through my personhood and my identities, noting the possibilities and failures of this process. The possibilities come from the cyborg potential of the body as integrated into the loom, and the failures come from where Haraway's work strays too far from the material present, using a Marxist material analysis to understand where a conception of my identities (race, place, and queerness in particular) as cyborg is insufficient or incomplete.

Multiple selves portrait: cyborg integration of technology and the body

In the *Cyborg self portrait* project, I weave together three images of myself gazing both at and away from the viewer, adorned with metallic chrome extensions that attach and disperse from my multiple bodies. In this portrait, the incorporation of my three selves rather than one breaks the traditional portrait composition of an individual subject and complicates it. The composition of three that blurs and melds together showcases my identity's multiplicity and contradictions, and denies a hyper-individual capitalist conception of myself. My figures look three different directions, both directly at the viewer, beyond the viewer, and to the side. Directing the gaze of the middle figure at the viewer draws the viewer into the portal, and surveilles them as they look upon *Cyborg self portrait*. Once drawn in, the gaze becomes evasive in the other figures, looking past and away from the viewer, playful and elusive. This, combined with the blurring of the figures, creates a constant motion in the design that continuously engages and evades the viewer's gaze.

The merging of metal and the body represent the cyborg, where organic bodily forms combine with digitally rendered chrome. The chrome acts as a symbol of technology and mechanization, while also serving as a dynamic and decorative accessory, making the design playful and sleek in its metallic allure. I purposefully chose shiny and compelling shapes to decorate my body and serve as symbols of technology instead of something like messy wires or computer innards. Grappling with the cyborg as an all-consuming identity that rejects all existing hierarchies and boundaries, I insert the particularities of myself into my cyborg feminine representations that include my queer, half-white, half-Japanese, fourth generation positionality. Connecting to the *Fliers* project, my three figures are donned in chain mail armor and simultaneously wear and shed the metallic chrome attachments that extend and merge with my

bodies. Parts of the metal are integrated into the skin and facial features of the central figure found along the jawline and under the eyes while the eye and chest adornments seem raised above the skin and removable. The figure in the back right has shed her armor and it dissolves behind her. The blurring of the metal dissolving into and floating away from sections of my bodies reflects the malleability of my identities and the cloth. The blurring also nods to the connection between body and technology, and the constant motion required to weave this project; the shuttles passed through the warp, the warp threads dividing up and down, the beating of the weft, the pressing of the pedal. The combination of cyborg and human form celebrates the multiple layers of identity existing in the self.

Digital weaving process



Figure 5: *Cyborg self portrait* original Photoshop design (without weave structures)

TC2 technology allows a two-dimensional design to be transformed into a three-dimensional material textile through the technological labor required to design, test, and alter the pattern, as well as the physical labor required between the body and the loom to produce the final textile. Compositional choices of the arrangement of my bodies and faces, the integration of metallic chrome, and the blurring effects were all created in Photoshop (seen in Figure 5). Then, I separated the design into five separate tones and filled each with the corresponding woven structure to create a 4-color weaving pattern, with the 5th color being the color of the exposed warp. After the design is complete, I go to the loom to test my wefts. At this stage I choose the colors of my project. In order to highlight the presence of metal in the design, I chose a grayscale of soft yarn to capture the rich variation in tone and shine, using a white chenille, a light gray cotton, a dark gray speckled and looped synthetic yarn, a black cotton, and the shimmery off-white color of the warp. I tested a section of the design with my weft material, and because I chose some thinner wefts, I had to stretch the design so the final textile would be proportionally correct. The altered design with the woven structures incorporated into it can be seen in Figure 6. Once the design is scaled correctly, the weaving process becomes more similar to weaving on the floor loom, with my body and physical labor becoming intimately involved; I push the pedal to advance the pattern, similarly to the way I would push down on the floor loom pedals to raise the heddles and regulate the pattern, and I pass the shuttle through the warp threads and use the reed to beat each weft down.



Figure 6: *Cyborg self portrait*: designed scaled and with weave structures

Weaving and technology

On the TC2 the connection between technology as we think of it today and weaving is incredibly explicit; the loom is connected directly to the computer and reads the digital pattern and can generate it into a textile. However, technology and weaving have been inextricably intertwined, with women at the forefront, before digital looms connected to computers existed. The Jacquard loom is an early example of transferring control from the hand to software; this loom had the ability to use punch cards to store information and self-regulate complex patterns making machine-memory a possibility (Plant, p. 51-52, 1995). The Jacquard loom's programming technology was emphasized by Ada Lovelace as central to the development of Charles Babbage's "analytical engine", or the first computer (Sze, p. 380, 2003). As Sze notes, it is interesting to see how the creation of computers, often seen as a man's invention and tool, merges with the feminine art of weaving; "Therefore, given the fact that modern computer technology originates from weaving, women should have an intimate relationship with computers because weaving is the only technology in human civilization that man admits has been created by women" (381). The earliest loom can be traced back to ancient China (Sze, p. 281, 2003), and even these looms had extremely complex structures of warp and weft to produce intricate silk designs, with as much as 1500 different warp threads, showing the technological prowess of ancient women-weavers (Plant, p. 51, 1995). Research by Margaret Mead regarding Tiv women in Nigeria situates weaving as an integral part of their identity. She emphasizes that the mechanization of labor which weaving allowed disrupted the domestic scene and female identity; the kind of labor that women performed became part of the definition of a "woman". Thus, women became defined by weaving and weaving became integral to the concept of womanhood (Plant, p. 56, 1995).

We can think about the merging of the loom and the computer as the merging of two computers. I construct *Cyborg self portrait* from this vantage point, at the intersection between technology and femininity, between women's bodies and machinery. I situate myself, my body and its labor, at this intersection of traditionally feminine craft and computer technology which is a field generally considered to be dominated by men, but where women have played a key role (Sze, p. 380, 2003). As Plant emphasizes, the loom functions as an extension of the body through the process of passing the shuttle through, pressing the pedals to advance the pattern and raise the warp threads, and beating down each pass through. The weaver becomes integrated into the machinery itself through the weaving process (Plant 51). My body integrates with the loom and the computer through the labor involved in creating the design on the computer and weaving it on the loom. This integration is represented aesthetically with the inclusion of metallic chrome in my multiple selves portrait.

A *Cyborg Manifesto* and its criticisms

This integration between technology and women's bodies is discussed in Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*. Written in 1987, Haraway draws upon an eclectic combination of many theoretical and philosophical domains to try and bring the technological reality of a globalized capitalist world in conversation with socialist and radical feminism. Haraway attempts to craft a framework of the cyborg that is both material and ideological, existing outside of boundaries and introducing a new kind of constantly constructed unity that can facilitate liberation. From a Marxist standpoint, many aspects of Haraway's argument are slippery, contradictory, and hard to grasp, but her ideas remain influential and important in thinking through a radical application of feminism in a technologically dominated global landscape. *Cyborg self portrait* plays with the applicability of Haraway's manifesto to my own identities

and attempts to construct a cyborg visual representation of my multiple selves through a cyborg process of merging my body with the loom.

Haraway says that by the late 20th century, we are all cyborgs - “theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism” (Haraway, p. 7, 2016). While I agree that we do all rely on and interact with technology daily (checking our phone, checking the time on a clock, wearing glasses etc), I do not think that the cyborg is able to provide a unifying force that can override other identities as Haraway’s manifesto leads us to believe. According to Haraway, the cyborg gives us our politics (p. 7), and must reach beyond gender, race, or class consciousness because these things are forced onto us by patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism (p. 16). She wants to find a way of rejecting these boundaries and rejecting a need to find a totalizing theory of oppression and instead create a more radical unity, which she conceives of as cyborg united-front politics (p. 9). A grounded Marxist analysis immediately finds issue with this; denying the importance of using social scientific practices to name oppression and struggle for liberation seems like a denial of our lived realities, where gender, race, ability and class-based boundaries do actually exist. Haraway is critical of Marxism as an incomplete analysis of feminism as it only considers the revolutionary potential in their relation to labor (p.2) but poses a cyborg theory of relationality that instead rejects boundaries and material conditions in order to construct a new world order outside of a totalizing theory and outside of dualisms and binaries, and even outside notions of original creation and reproduction (p. 66-67). But this process of reaching beyond does not help us transcend our identities due to its concept being based on overriding our differences (DeCook, p. 1160, 2021).

Avoiding a visual representation of a cyborg self that is all encompassing and entirely mechanical or robotic, in *Cyborg self portrait* my body and my facial features remain visible and

in control; I wear the metal attachments, they don't wear me. The presence of the metal accepts the merging of my body and technology as a player in my identities and a way of relating to the world, but not a totalizing one that provides me with my politics. DeCook writes that although a cyborg theory of breaking boundaries and de-constructing the binaries and identities we put ourselves in due to existing systems of oppression has potential, re-constructing these entities through the cyborg is limited (p. 1161, 2021). We are not capable of living without difference and these differences should not be erased through the supposedly liberating form of cyborg. For me, my cyborg selves that emerge from this cloth feel appropriate as they were created through a cyborg process merging my body, the computer, and the loom. This conception of self is specific to my relationship with loom technology and adds another layer on top of my existing queer, racial, and diasporic identities rather than completely deconstructing them and attempting to re-structure them as cyborg. Playing with a cyborg interpretation layered on top of my queer, racial, and diasporic identities feels like just that; play. Ultimately, I do not see the world as a cyborg, I see the world as a half-white, half-Japanese, fourth generation queer women.

Besides the visual content and motifs, the creation of this textile thinks critically about the relationship of the body to technology and considers who gets to conceive of themselves as cyborgs in the first place. DeCook asserts that in order to think of oneself as a cyborg, a posthuman identity, one already must be considered human; "The idea of technology, the cyborg, the transhuman and the posthuman as identities that exist in a utopia, in a beyond, is a myth that is being perpetuated and shifted by those who already benefit from hegemonic paradigms of what counts as being human in the first place" (DeCook, p. 1164, 2021). This further asserts that cyborgs cannot be thought of as removed in any way from materiality, and that this theory comes from a place of privilege to begin with; Haraway provides a white and middle class cis

perspective, all of which are identities never dehumanized in the way that queer (particularly trans) and non-white (particularly Black) identities are dehumanized and oppressed. Central to the cyborg theory, Haraway emphasizes the undoing of boundaries in terms of thinking about notions of technology. She states, “There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic” (2016, p. 60). Haraway emphasizes that by undoing these binaries of technology, we can imagine machines as “prosthetic devices, intimate components, friendly selves” (p. 61). I welcome the integration of my body with the loom and the immersion of myself in this physical and technological process, but I do not deny the ways that laboring under technology can be oppressive. This is something Haraway attempts to acknowledge but in doing so also negates the importance of. She writes of Southeast Asian village women working in electronic firms owned by Japanese and US corporations (p. 59), but then goes on to assert that dualisms of domination are troubling and technology provides a way to challenges these dualisms because machines are human made and thus human (p. 60). It seems incomplete to assert that technology can be humanized and a technological positionality of the self through the cyborg can provide a way out for workers trapped in low-wage labor under imperial power. To blindly accept technology as good and human does not change the conditions of women in China laboring in factories to manufacture the staples I used in my metal weaving, or women who pick through toxic electronic waste in Agbogbloshie (Yeung, 2019).

Lee Bul's cyborgs



Figure 7: Lee Bul, *Cyborg W9*, 2006

71 x 24 x 28 x in. Hand-cut polyurethane panels on FRP, polyurethane coating

My visual representations of cyborgs are also informed by Lee Bul's cyborg sculptures (1997-2011). A South Korean artist, Bul creates sculptures of technological hybrid female forms, missing heads and limbs and rendered slightly larger than life hanging suspended in space. The missing limbs create "imperfections" in her cyborg figures, complicating the sterile sense of technology as perfect and powerful. The loss of limbs is reminiscent of violence, recalling the Japanese anime *Innocence*, featuring feminine robots destroyed by male sexual violence, but is also an intervention to the male gaze onto female forms, as Bul makes these choices in the constructions of her cyborgs herself (Jeon, p. 40, 2017). I am inspired by the stark curvatures of Bul's cyborg bodies and her use of texture and lighting to create depth on single-colored objects. Her cyborgs wear a close fit armor ranging from retro-futurist in her earlier cyborgs and becoming more sleek and minimalist, as seen in *Cyborg W9* (2006). Instead of futuristic armor, my cyborgs are donned in ancient chainmail. Bul is inspired by Japanese manga's female cyborgs as well as Western art historical representations of femininity. Through creating her cyborgs, she involves herself in this continuing dialogue of existing representations and tackles the complicated ideologies found in them, such as the male gaze that constructs images of cyborg women in manga as a fantasy of "uncontrollable and potentially destructive sexual energy and power" (Jeon p. 40). I admire her drawing upon various representations of cyborg femininity and attempting to fuse, reconcile and critique them through her artistic practice.

Conclusion

Weaving myself as a cyborg and highlighting the integration between my body and technology and considering the degree to which my identities can be considered cyborg is helpful in situating myself as a political being. Thinking of myself as integrated with the technology of the loom feels empowering in my craft and honors the technological expertise of

women and their integration of their bodies with the loom that allows me to work on the digital loom today. However, I do not see myself as a cyborg regarding my racial identity or politics of place - I think a cyborg notion here is confusing rather than liberating. The oppositional consciousness described by Haraway that gives women of color a cyborg consciousness I think of simply as a political consciousness, or one that is aware of intersecting systems of power and how we play into them. I think of my cyborg self as best relating to my body's relationship with the loom, and layered on top of my other identities. *Cyborg self portrait* provides a portal to explore this layering of relationships, imagined visually through cyborg/human forms, merging my identities with chrome motifs that allude to the cyborg, while remaining critical about the technologies, resources and realities that allow me to explore these theories and create this work.

Portal 3: *Banner*

Abolish Imperialism: memory, politics and feminine craft



Figure 8: *Banner*

5 x 8 ft. Woven chenille and cotton, wood, staples. Installed in LaVerne Krause Gallery, 2022

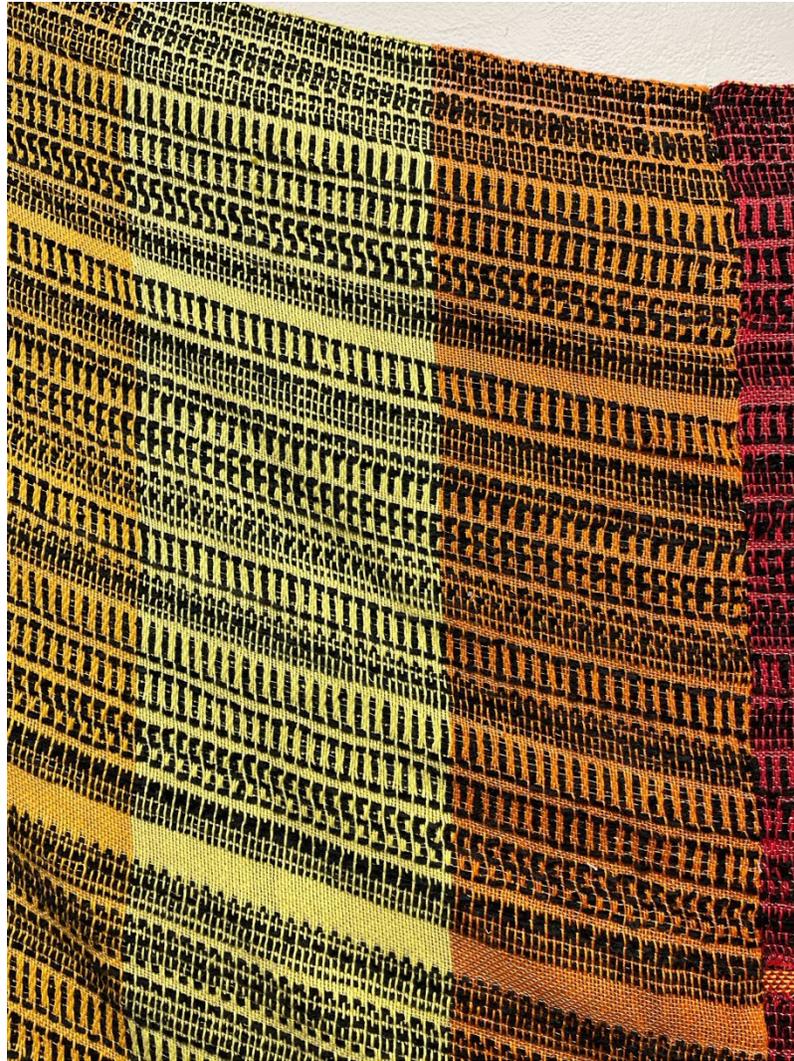


Figure 9: *Banner* (detail)

Introduction

“ABOLISH IMPERIALISM”

“ABOLISH IMPERIALISM”

“ABOLISH IMPERIALISM”

“ABOLISH IMPERIALISM”

This is the text woven repeatedly across the red, yellow, and orange banner, unreadable at first but slowly materializing from the pattern of threads in the final portal, *Banners*. The

“ABOLISH IMPERIALISM” phrase refers to the unity of my politics and moral compass I developed throughout my time in school, bringing forward lessons I’ve learned from organizing around environmental justice, anti-pipeline work, abolitionist/anti-police and prison work, and from studying global studies. The red, yellow and orange vertical stripes nod to the color-scheme of revolutionary images, and colors I’ve used in painting signs and banners, using jarring and bright eye catching shades to communicate daring messages. Enmeshed in these colors is black chenille thread that spells out the text. The delayed legibility of the text works as a form of coded design; upon first glance it simply creates a pattern of repeating breaks and lines, until a few letters start to pop out, and the brain is able to find and connect the words together. This creates a textile that floats between being a legible surface once the code is cracked, to resuming its representation as an abstract pattern when the viewer is too far away to make out the message. This portal thus has a more coded form of entry, revealing the entire possibility of its associations only when the viewer has been able to pull out the message from the fabric.

While the previous two portals explored how to conceive of a political object as a textile, this portal draws from an object already poised as political; the banner. *Banners* emphasizes the ability of weaving processes to carry many layers of memory, both political and artistic and personal. The *Banner* portal emphasizes weaving as an important process in the merging of art and politics; through weaving, we can communicate and better digest and understand our own politics and experiences.

Text as textile

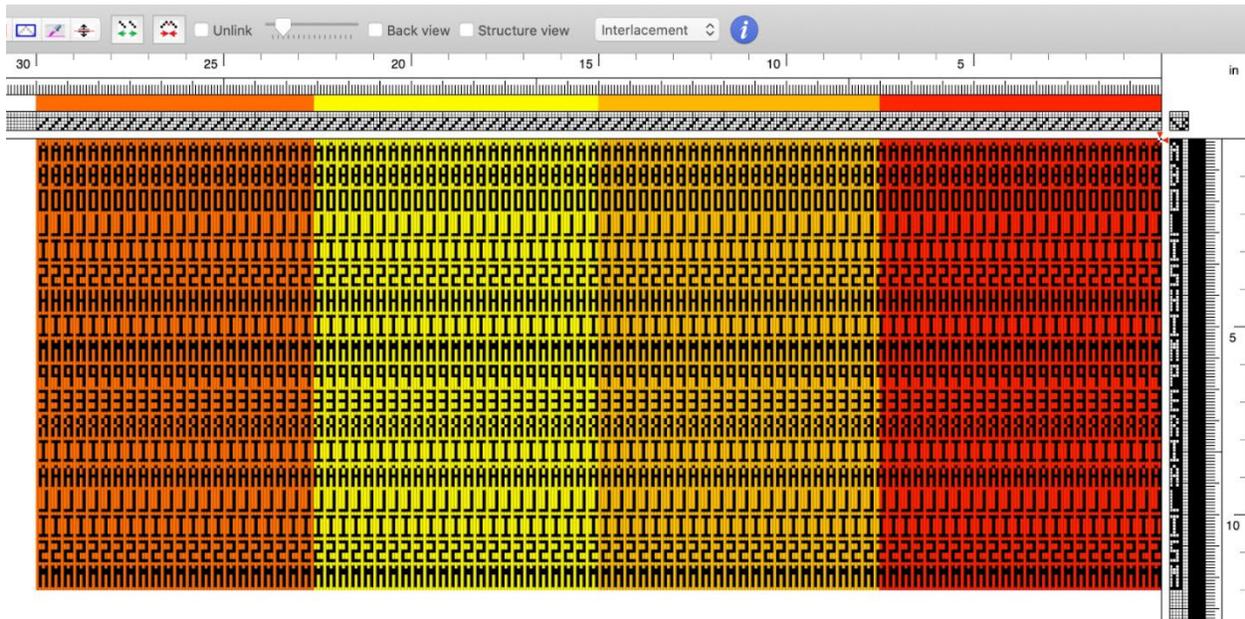


Figure 10: *Banner*: overshoot pattern draft

Banner is woven using an overshoot pattern that regulates the warp and weft to create letters as part of the weave. I created this pattern myself through an incredible amount of trial and error, working to make sure the letters could fit the constraints of the loom, that they weren't backwards or upside-down and that they were able to be read from top to bottom from the viewer's perspective. The final pattern draft I used can be seen in Figure 10. It relies on plain weave between the black chenille to hold the floats required to create the letters together. However, because the pattern is irregular and inconsistent due to each letter being unique, the plain weave in between creates uneven gaps of space between the wefts. These interruptions create breaks in the text and the letters, mimicking the loss of rhythm in the weaving process due to the inconsistent pattern. They also emphasize the undeniable materiality of handwoven textiles that do not act like a printer with the ability to render shapes and letters perfectly.

The textile is held by staples between two wooden poles, wrapped with bands of black chenille yarn on each side to provide a more comfortable hold for hands to carry. The handholds

and the casual display of the work leaning against the wall infer activation by people and their hands. The banner could be picked up and activated in a protest at any minute. The size of the banner also gives it the ability to act as a shield; banners can obscure people and protect their identity, and wood poles also give protestors a tool for self-protection. Half the banner drips tassels at the bottom that move freely, emphasizing the constant motion of banners when they are carried.

While banners are generally made up of a textile with text painted over the top, in this case the text and the textile merge. Traditionally in political banners, the job of messaging is done by the text, often in large bold lettering to convey messaging quickly and effectively. The text works as an iconic visual touchstone that hold the memory, energy, and intentionality of political action. This is supported by the banner's material as a large and often colorful surface to display the text. *Banner* re-interprets the relationship between the text and the banner itself, merging their functions through using the text as a weave structure to construct the banner. The banner is no longer a blank surface for the text, but the text is integrated and somewhat concealed within it, embedding its meaning into the materiality of the text and sacrificing some of its readability along the way. The text becomes part of the material, and the material becomes part of the text.

Cauleen Smith: the merging of art and political objects

The formal decisions of color and texture in this piece, and the fusing of art objects and political objects is inspired by Cauleen Smith's brightly colored banners featured in her 2018 film *Sojourner*. Six banners are featured in this film on translucent orange vinyl with text spelled out in velvet, reading phrases of "be at the hands of might" and "sit at the feet of action", excerpts from a text by Alice Coltrane (Mitter, 2019). *Banner*'s bold and warm color scheme of

red, yellow, and orange, and use of black chenille yarn for my letters are directly inspired by Smith's aesthetic choices in her banners and nod to this work as inspiration. In *Sojourner*, the banners appear at a protest in Chicago, at the Watts Towers in LA and more. Smith takes the political form of banners, interprets it in an artistic way through her use of color and material and interjection of Alice Coltrane's words, drawing upon both political and artistic traditions to create her work. In her own words, Smith says; "I appropriate forms from social institutions that organize masses, and then I undermine them. Groups of people can find common ground, and yet individuals can still maintain and question their own position - as opposed to me telling anyone what to think" (Smith, 2020). In this way, Smith's banners build upon the work of other artists and are simultaneously engaged with critical political dialogue. They exist as art objects as themselves and are also objects of protest and culture and memory. Smith's infusion of the political banner with bold aesthetics, and the placement of her work in both artistic and political contexts, inform my aesthetic decisions and the merging of political banners and handwoven textiles in this portal.



Figure 11: Cauleen Smith, *Sojourner* (video still), 2018

Digital video, color, sound 22:41 minutes

Political and artistic memory

Inspired by Smith's work, *Banner* simultaneously becomes an art object as well as a political object engaged in the memory of generational weaving knowledge and years of political struggle. The weave structure and loom technology required to make this piece draws upon years of knowledge and memory from weavers, and my own aesthetic decisions build on the contribution of other artists, such as Cauleen Smith, as well as my own experience in political organizing. This idea of the textile itself storing memory is something that holds long-standing relevancy to the practice of weaving; through the advancement of loom technology, as I explored in the previous project of *Cyborg self portrait*, the Jacquard loom became able to store its own memory like a computer through punch cards. Even on a floor loom, memory is embedded in the bodily practice of weaving and the rhythm the body develops in repeating a pattern, becoming

muscle memory and stored in the weaver's limbs like a dance. However, in this project, the sense of pattern becomes somewhat interrupted; in order to create the letters, the raising and lowering of the warp threads is inconsistent, as each letter requires its own specific combination of threads raised. This slows the weaving process and facilitates a cloth that not only outwardly presents a message which carries with it history and memories, but each letter is also a specific memory of its construction. Described in relation to needlework process by Young, "Like paintings that show their brush strokes, these story cloths show every stitch and by extension every movement of hand that pushed the needle in and pulled it out" (p. 34, 2005). The same can be said of weavings; the cloth shows each moment of the warp rising above or below the weft and the labor of the body that facilitated this motion, which in this work is represented by each letter in the phrase "ABOLISH IMPERIALISM".

The slow and painstaking weaving process to craft each letter also affirms the personal nature of this political message, providing, as Smith describes in her banners, an opportunity for personal meditation and reflection as well as a form of protest (Smith 2020). Using text pulled directly from political movements infuses the political history of anti-imperialist organizing calls into *Banner*. From student organizing and anti-war protests in the 60s, the Black Panthers, and movements internationally, such as the revolution in the Philippines and the People's War in India today, anti-imperialism has been a visually striking organizing call for revolutionary action. It holds truth as an analysis of oppression rooted in global solidarity; the detrimental conditions facing the world seem to stem directly from imperialist intervention, extracting wealth, people, and environmental resources from the global South to fuel imperialist countries in the North. An anti-imperialist lens is important personally in thinking through my identity and how I situate myself in the world, as someone residing in the imperial core of the United States, and also

ethnically tied to the imperial power of Japan. These are relationships in my identity that directly inform my reality and make anti-imperialist politics personal, which is affirmed through the slow and intimate process of weaving this political message as cloth.



Figure 12: Student protest during the Marcos administration in the Philippines. Retrieved from *Student protest during the Marcos administration*. (2022).



Figure 13: Emory Douglas, Black Panther Newspaper, 1970.

13 3/8 x 18 1/2 inches. laser reproduction of offset.

Political cloth and feminine craft

Considering the feminine history and connotations of weaving on a textile object that is handwoven and spells out a political message ports to another layer of meaning. The production of handmade fabrics has long been associated with women throughout various histories across the world, producing textiles for everyday utilitarian and functional objects, cultural practices, and political uses, through producing protest banners or AIDS memorial quilt panels (Cooke, p. 10, 2005). Because textile work is associated as a feminine and therefore innocent and apolitical craft, textiles provide the perfect platform for women to subversively protest undercover. For example, during the Intifada, Palestinian women in the West Bank wore dresses embroidered with colors of the Palestinian flag that had been banned by the Israelis (Cooke, p. 11, 2005). Textile workshops and sewing groups have provided a cover for women to meet and organize, and textiles themselves have been a way for women to push their politics.

Conclusion

This final textile portal explores the merging of women and textiles and politics, three things that have long been connected. The textile itself is handwoven and delicate, while using bright and explosive reds, yellows and oranges inspired by the bright political banners and iconography of revolutionary propaganda. *Banner's* message is direct and demanding, and coded. Under the guise of the “gendered innocence” of fiber art, *Banner* demonstrates the subversive political potential of feminine craft. Together it creates a colorful textural and eye-catching textile that is political and gorgeously violent to its core.

Conclusion

Together, these three portals interrogate and interpret three different political objects, *Fliers*, *Cyborg self portrait* and *Banner*, as woven structures. These portals share a common material language as woven objects. As woven objects, they also all carry an analysis of femininity and women's presence in the history of the craft of weaving, the physical process and labor of weaving, as well as the ability of textile objects to hold personal and political memory.

In *Fliers* I studied the infrastructure of dissemination via staples and paperclips. The labor required to produce them and their political utility in fliering is meaning that becomes embedded into the cloth, along with my own labor of weaving and material experiments. Woven cloth displays memory and the passage of time in its constructions, and the staples infuse their own material and political memory into a cloth and artistic process that is already memorial, carrying both its history of constructions as well as women's presence in the development of weaving technology. In *Cyborg self portrait*, I used cyborg processes of merging my body with technology through the labor required to render a self portrait that plays with the applicability of cyborg theory to my identities. This portal draws the connection between women's influence in weaving and technology and explores the history of looms storing both physical and virtual memory. In *Banner*, I demonstrated how woven structures can incorporate blatant political statements through weaving with text, and merge personal, political, and artistic histories in the cloth. I refer to women's role in creating political cloth, and the subversive potential of such a "gendered" art form, and reference how the cloth becomes embedded with the political memories the text carries, the memories of my labor, and the histories of political cloth.

Weaving ends up providing an incredibly compatible material process to explore political themes. Through this project, research informed weaving practice allowed me to better

understand the politics of the objects I studied, learn how to utilize weaving as a research tool, and carry a material analysis through my work, grounded in the portals shared material language as woven objects. Indeed, my own creative practice and research with each portal in this process just scratches the surface of the efficacy of weaving as a political tool. I am eager to continue to explore how weaving can be used as a political tool through the processes of creation, research, and reflection in spaces outside the gallery and outside the university. While exhibiting this work brought conversation, community and support from friends and peers, the materiality and utility of these objects provide incredible potential for the role they will play for the rest of their lives outside the gallery. I can imagine the portals existing in conversation with other weavings and artwork, being put up in community (for example, *Fliers* could be put up as individual fliers, on bulletin boards alongside their paper counterparts), and being used as jumping off points for further collaborative artistic endeavors. *Fliers*, *Cyborg self portrait* and *Banners* are portals into a world of artistic liberation, where art is thought of and used not just an aesthetic object but a tool for political understanding, critical materiality and revolutionary expression.

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