

Integrative Project Thesis:  
*For Ellie*

*For Ellie* is a series of textile collages incorporating antique and modern fabrics. From the onset of my Integrative Project, I have been driven by my passion for collecting and holding on to objects with historical or sentimental value. In terms of process, sewing is a tradition that has been passed down through generations of women in my family. By stitching a physical union between my late grandmother and myself, I am remaining connected with my history.

My maternal grandmother, Ellie, was a seamstress with a knack for frugality. She was always repurposing fabric, never throwing away a scrap that might come in handy. After her death, I acquired the majority of her fabric and sewing materials – the source for my antique textiles for my collages. From her pieces I selected doilies, lace, and handkerchiefs. All of these materials had an air of femininity and softness about them, which I wanted to explore in my work. This is not the first artwork in which I used my grandmother's textiles as a base. For the course entitled 'Home' I used a doll dress that my grandmother had made nearly half a century earlier and embroidered it with text. Beginning with something old and placing my artistic changes on it gives me a beautiful sense of collaboration with my history.

Textiles are a large part of the other side of my family as well. My father's sister makes custom draperies and has a large fabric studio that our entire family frequents. When I wasn't sewing with my grandmother, I was picking up odds and ends at my aunt's workshop. The modern fabrics used in my artwork have all come from her studio.

I selected subtle patterns and muted colors that would work well with the delicate antiques without overpowering them.

In general, my personal aesthetic consists of a very specific color palette. Employing neutrals with occasional pastels, my work is certainly on the quieter side. However, it is this understated tonality that allows the small details – a croqueted piece of trim or variations in thread color – to be seen.

When deciding on the types of compositions I wanted to work with, I was very much inspired by the two-dimensional fabric work of Louise Bourgeois. I was drawn to the simplicity of the fabric combinations as well as the use of geometry. Her small pops of unexpected color were also something I knew I wanted to bring into my series. Bourgeois' attention to formal elements makes the textiles cohesive – playing off each other in surprising ways. This sensibility can be seen in my work through the repetition of line, pattern, and color. Some of the motifs that can be seen in *For Ellie* are scalloped edges with emphasis on the horizontal, pleats, and geometric patterns. By incorporating some of the same fabrics in multiple pieces within the collection, I am also giving the viewer a chance to notice further visual connections between the works.

My Integrative Project is made up of twelve collages, roughly ranging in size from six inches by eight inches to seventeen inches square. None of the pieces would be as successful on their own; it is their visual comparison to the others that makes them compelling. Take for example the largest collage – this piece began with a square piece of modern upholstery fabric that has a very small check pattern and a slight metallic shine. Sewn atop is the corner of one of my grandmother's lace tablecloths. The lace lets the small pattern of the other fabric shine through, creating an interesting play on layers.

On the left edge of the square I added a hand-pleated piece of pink fabric. The soft folds of what was once my grandmother's scarf now wrap the edge of the work, hugging the trim of the tablecloth and disappearing around the back. This colorful addition of a slightly three-dimensional element adds a surprising detail to the large expanse of cream lace. While this pink feature works well on this piece its impact is intensified by another work. One of the smallest collages is made up of horizontal bands, all of which are neutral until the very bottom. Clinging to the lower edge of the work is a melon-colored stripe, no more than an eighth of an inch thick. These seemingly minute details bounce off one another creating a sudden excitement in similarities.

Equally as interesting are the instances of irregularity that I chose to include in some works. The majority of the pieces are symmetrical and orderly – a stylistic choice seen in much of my other work. However, the points at which this regularity is broken catches the eye, standing out as an additional interesting factor. This technique is employed in the smallest work, a tiny doily sewn over a rectangular piece of silk. The doily is not shown within the bounds of the rectangle; instead it is off center and cut on the left side. The right and bottom edges of the doily kiss the edges of the silk background, extending all the way to the borders. The top however, comes up short. The color-block pattern on the silk meets the right and bottom sections of the doily perfectly, further stressing the fact that the top does not fill its portion of the composition. This slight departure from the grid also works to remind the viewer that these pieces are handmade, and none are perfectly square. Another instance of irregularity is the asymmetrical composition that is eleven inches square. The work is broken up into three trapezoidal shapes. The left is a dark tan, the right, a beige silk with one-inch squares

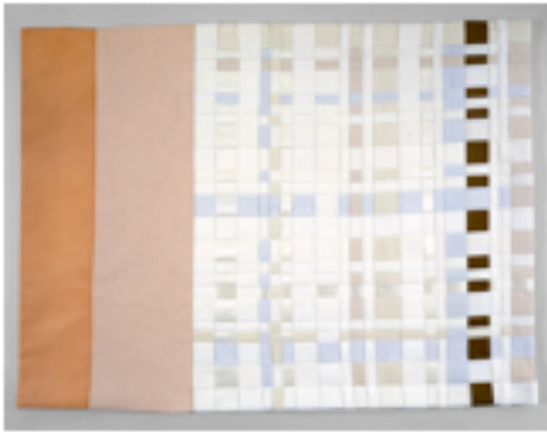
stitched into it. The center section is occupied by two pieces of identical lace trim, turned to face each other inward. The lace sits atop a light grey background and a thin strip of light blue fabric separates the lace from the tan on the left. Playing with the scalloped nature of the lace, I placed the pieces in a zipper-like fashion, closer at the top and opening up towards the bottom. The eye is drawn into the delicate space left between the edges as they ascend the piece, while the accent of blue is a soothing touch amidst neutrals.

Texture and weight also played important roles in my material choices. Though there are counterpoints of thick more manufactured fabric, I focused my work around lighter, more feminine textiles. My artwork and interest in sewing comes out of my family's domestic tradition and I wanted to remain true to that aesthetically. Whether it is the softness a handkerchief worn with time, or the naturally airy feeling of organza, the lightness of the pieces is highlighted. Further emphasizing the ephemeral qualities of the collages is the way in which they are hung. I sewed Velcro strips to lengths of webbing – a type of canvas strap. I then hand-stitched the webbing to the top of the back of each piece, making the fixture completely invisible from the front. The other halves of the Velcro strips were then nailed into the wall. By affixing the collages from the top alone, the pieces are able to hang freely on three sides. As the viewer walks by, examining the work, a slight wind will set the collection in subtle motion. The quiet fluttering of the work reminds the viewer that these collages are in fact fabric and have a definite dimensional quality to them. Though I had once considered framing my pieces, hanging the work directly on the wall in close proximity to one another also lets the separate members interact with each other.

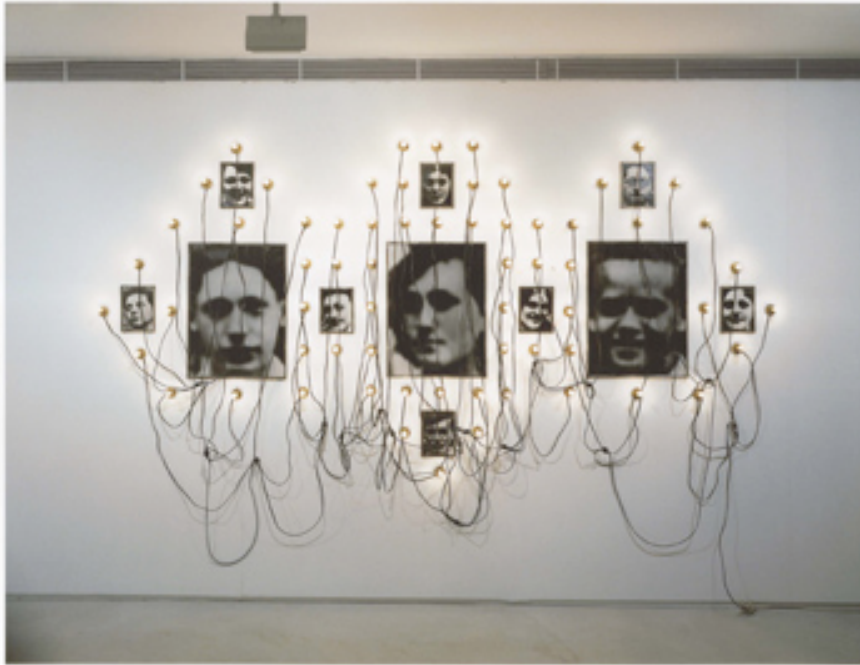
Working with my grandmother's textiles and incorporating them with my aunt's fabrics has given me the chance to explore my ability to create formal compositions while preserving the integrity of the materials. It is often difficult to work with objects that have personal history because you do not want to destroy them in any way; but by cutting her tablecloths and scarves I have found a way to honor my grandmother in the best way possible. Ellie loved to make something beautiful out of someone old and forgotten, which is exactly what I hope I have accomplished with my Integrative Project.

Influences:

Louise Bourgeois



Christian Boltanski



Betye Saar



My previous work with textiles:



My IP pieces:





