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A Stitched Community



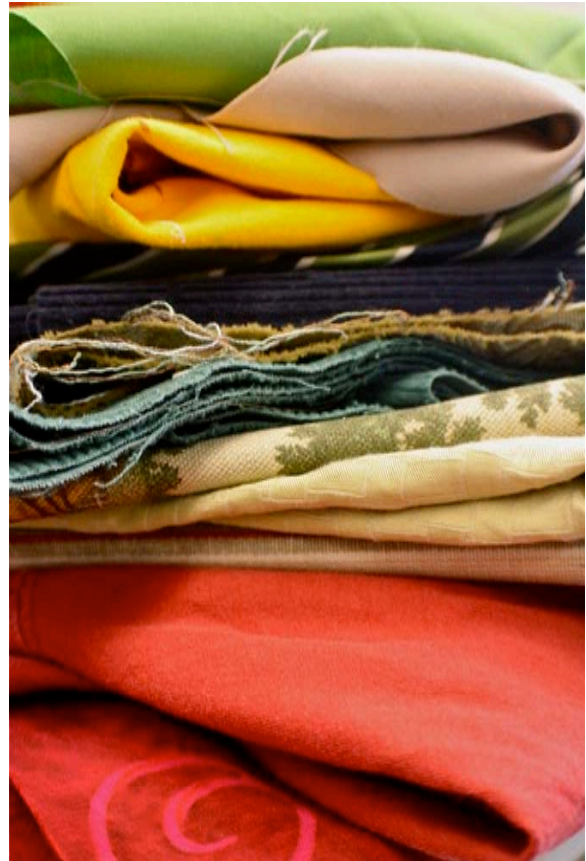
In my mind, art is the product and expression of one's passion(s). It binds and expands the interaction between what happens in the head and the heart to the external world. My passion in art has manifested itself in social practice, commenting on the significance of community, faith, and fellowship. I am captivated by the relationships that form within a diverse multicultural and trans-generational group of people.

A Stitched Community focuses on the breadth, diversity, and relational aspects of an ecumenical Christian community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, called the "Word of Life Community" (also referred to as "the Community"). Four years ago I became involved with this inter-denominational community, and it quickly became the foundation of my faith and

friendships. My aim is to showcase these interests through a community-quilting project that I have facilitated and collaborated on with members in the Word of Life Community.

The quilt is comprised of donated clothing and fabrics, using a strip quilting and a crazy quilt technique. In the construction of *A Stitched Community*, I have collaborated with members from the Word of Life Community in deconstructing the donated material, then reconstructing it with a strip quilting technique. Lastly, we cut and set the irregularly shaped pieces in to the final composition. The collaborative process is a metaphor for the development and growth of a community, and conversely, the concept changes and exists within the process.

The quilt resembles the people, relationships, and spirit of the Word of Life Community. Through which the process and composition of the collected fabrics interpret the vast array of personalities and differences between individuals within the Community. The denotation of *A Stitched Community* focuses on the “give and take” interactions, and growth in relationships, within a community. It is within these means that the work has manifested itself.



When I became involved with the Word of Life Community I was immediately enthralled by my experiences of support, relationships, life-style, and care within the group. It is my experiences within the Community that have prompted me to share and express the blessings of a tight-knit community to a greater audience. The Community is made up of individuals and

families who strive to live a communal lifestyle focused on faith, support, and service.

Thus the critical importance I saw in creating a project that resembles the wide range of



people whom encompass the Word of Life Community and the lifestyle it yields; ergo my decision in choosing a community-quilting process.

Quilting has a vast global history, with evidence predating written records (Orlofsky). However, the American culture was not specifically identified with quilting until the late eighteenth century, when women and other groups, like the Amish, began to develop new techniques (Kiracofe). The techniques were then passed down throughout the generations, engraining itself within American traditions.

In the late nineteenth century, crazy quilts became the new art craze. The popularization of the new technique was largely due to sentiment, because crazy quilting utilizes remnant and scrap pieces fabric (Kiracofe 146). I fell upon this technique by happen stance. I knew I wanted to use left over bits of clothing and fabric from my community because of the emotional connection. Lastly, with the quilting process easily

lending itself to a harmonious work environment, many hands are able create together while enjoying dialog and companionship (Kiracofe 2).

Currently, the largest community-quilting project is “The AIDS Memorial Quilt.” The quilt is an overwhelming

statement piece that bonds

a vast number of

individuals and groups

together through their loss

of friends and loved ones.

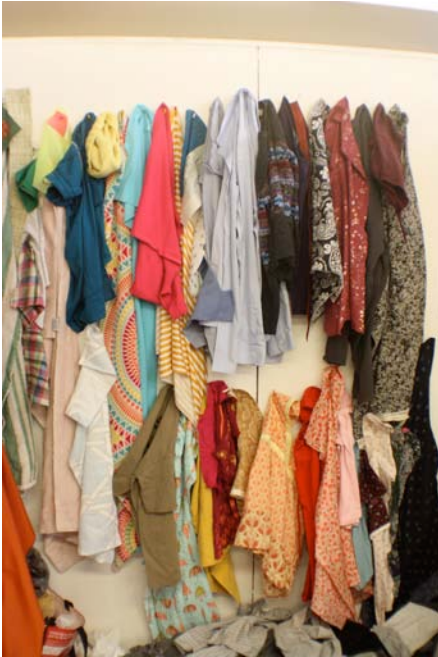
This on-going communal

project has been a source



of inspiration for me because of its breadth in size and member involvement; in addition to the many different purposes it serves using creative expression (www.aidsquilt.org).

As “The AIDS Memorial Quilt” has grown in size over the years, it not only serves the purpose of raising awareness of the disease but also establishes a collective group by bringing together an array of individuals and families. Hence the project has unified a new community by using the quilting process to bond individuals through their loss(es); whereas I am using an established community, in order to comment on the depth in relationships, diversity, and unity within a group. However, the correlation between “The AIDS Memorial Quilt” and *A Stitched Community* is that both unite individuals through a quilting process while creating a larger commentary on collectivism in art.



A Stitched Community is an expression of the “many hands” within a community. I have gathered clothing and fabric from roughly forty people (adults, teens, and children) within the Word of Life Community to represent this theory. The material ranges from articles of clothing, like pants, sweaters, t-shirts or blouses; or a piece of fabric from a DIY project, or any other object that may be made of fabric. The reason for this being two-fold: I wanted participation to be as simple as possible, in addition to each piece of fabric being a personal representation of the individual or family that donated it.

After the collection of material was complete, everything was cut into strips, nine inches in height with varying widths. Then, approximately fifteen strips were chosen and arranged on backing panels (dimensions: nine by thirty-two inches) by hue and or value relations. Following the completion of each arrangement, the strips were then sewn together directly to the



backing. This method is called strip quilting; it is a simple process that allows many people, with even the least amount of sewing knowledge, to participate in the making process.

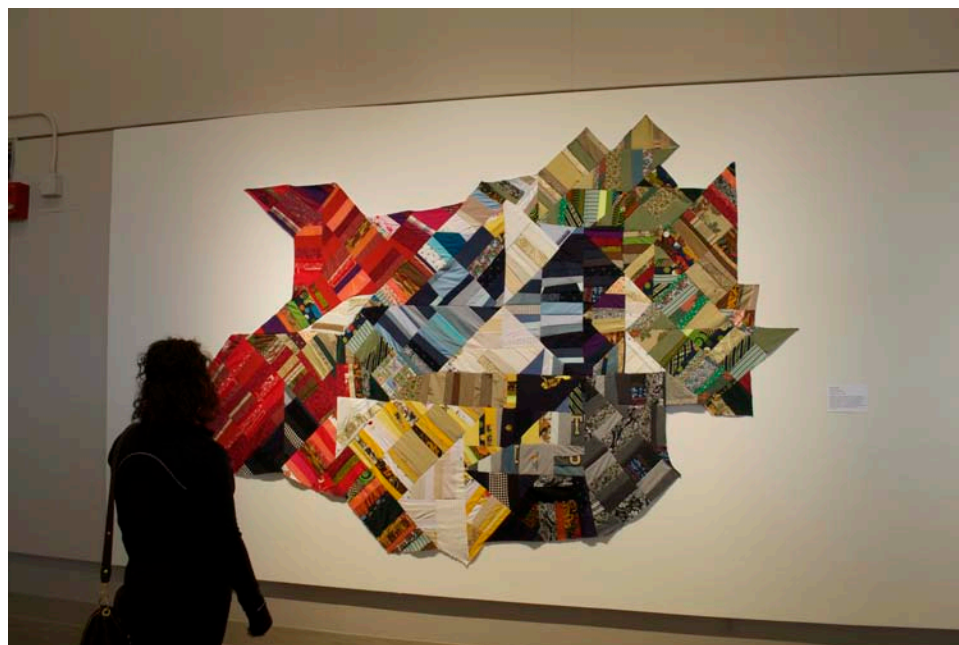
After all the panels were completed, two to three were sewn together to create larger fields of color. Then a mixture of these panel sets, and single panels, were cut into

triangular and non-rectilinear shapes, which permitted directional movement and a more visually dynamic field for the final composition. Following this I utilized the color blocking to reassemble the irregular shapes.



The challenge was to use the irregular line and shape, in conjunction with color and contrast, to create a harmonious composition from what seemed to be disjointed pieces. It was an intuitive process, in which the possibilities and limitations were integral parts of the design.

The final dimensions of the quilt came out to ten feet in length, by six and a half feet in height. The edges of the piece have been left unfinished, which will allow more sections to be added on. This connotes the continuing growth and development of the Word of Life Community, and communities in general.



Sculpture El Anatsui uses recycled materials like bottle caps, tin cans and car parts, piecing them together with copper wire to resemble fabric. These pieces range in scale,



typically at twenty plus feet. However, his creation is not accomplished alone. Anatsui has a group of workers in his studio continuously piecing together scrap metal

with copper wire to create these majestic wall hangings. He described his process as such: “the architect is the author of the design, but he is not the only one working on the piece... he is the generator of ideas” (Stamps Letcture). Anatsui’s process involves people who would not normally be exposed to this type of creative environment; he reaches out to people within his local community seeking employment.

Much of my inspiration for my process and overall aesthetic for *A Stitched Community* has come from Anatsui’s work, in particularly his technique in guiding vision and aesthetic. My goal in working with members from the Word of Life Community is to bring awareness to the unique bonds and relationships that form between individuals who join in a common goal. I am the “architect,” comparable to Anatsui, guiding others through a creative



process. The involved people and myself have shared in the decision-making and creation of the work. Allowing others to take part in the decision-making requires me to relinquish some authorship and control. Nevertheless, it is within this that I find inspiration and vitality within the project.

The members of the Community should feel a sense of ownership and pride in the piece because of their involvement and interactions in making it. The representation of “many hands” has hopefully come across to the viewer, and has given them an idea of how this vast group of people is able to join together in a shared life, rooted in support, service, and faith.



It is my hope that the current state of the quilt may evoke conversation amongst viewers. Yet, the fundamental success of *A Stitched Community* has come from the interactions, involvement, and life that have come out of the experience of the creative process. Finally, this work is an artistic representation of how a community comes together as one unit, working together and helping one another. By having others participate in the making, it symbolizes the meaning, depth, and value of my experiences within the Word of Life Community. In the future, it is my intention to continue similar collaborative projects with others – focused on collectivism in art and life.

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