

“Unstitched States”

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The word “collaborate” has carried different meanings since the word emerged in the nineteenth century: from its more common connotation (“to work together”) to a lesser-known association in the mid-twentieth century (“to co-operate traitorously with the enemy”). At this historical moment, we have come together from a variety of backgrounds, ages, and geographies to collaborate on a humble statement of inclusivity and solidarity. Rather than striving for perfection, we have made an imperfect work: a collaborative quilt.



Unstitched States: A Collaborative Quilt

As hate acts in communities have escalated around the country, needing active address at every turn, we have co-created this digital quilt as a testament of solidarity to the principles of equality and dignity. Given our geographic distance and short timeline, this quilt is digital to be easily sharable, hoping to represent more than the sum of its parts and to encourage community-building through the arts.

Quilting is an often overlooked craft, and not always considered an art. Quilting summons associations that make it an apt metaphor for this project: fostering community (through quilting circles/bees); reusing materials for functional reasons of necessity and warmth (often gifted); re-membering history and bequeathing a legacy; humility; co-creating and crafting new patterns; portable to take wherever you go (in this case across country and across borders); and often considered “women’s work.” We looked to collections of community quilts as inspiration: from the quilts of Gee’s Bend in rural Alabama to the AIDS Memorial Quilt once spread across the National Mall.

For this collaborative quilt, we invited contributors to share a 5”x5” digital quilt square in response to current events. Since we wanted to launch the quilt on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, this was a “quick-and-dirty” exercise, given its limited resources and short timeline. When we initially sent the invitation, we outlined much of the above background about the tradition of quilts, asking people to choose their own themes and reimagine the quilting tradition in their own languages, with their own materials, through their

own backgrounds, using their own visions. We also encouraged considering some combination of “Share Your Hopes” and “Share Your Fears,” quoting L. Rafael Reif, president of MIT, who described the day after the 2016 presidential election:

As I saw this afternoon, students have wrapped the six great columns in Lobby 7 with huge sheets of paper. Three ask that you “Share Your Hopes,” three to “Share Your Fears.” They are covered with handwritten responses. People are lingering to read and add their own. Many say they fear for the future of the country, some for their personal safety, for their civil rights or that “my values no longer matter.” Others fear that their peers will never take the time to understand why they voted for the winner. One hope struck me in particular: “I hope to understand the 48% of Americans who disagree with me.” Nearly all the writers express some kind of pain. Yet together they have created a wonderful example of mutual respect and civil dialogue.

Our project is titled “Unstitched States.” Like the United States, it can be summed up as US.

What ties us together from different parts of the country? The contributors here were all participants in the Kenyon Review Writers Workshop on “The Art of Text” and “The Literary Hybrid/Book Arts,” co-taught by myself (Gretchen Henderson) and visual artist Ellen Sheffield during the summers 2013–2016. For this project, I invited one of our former participants, Allison Dalton (class of 2015), to be my co-quilter. Special thanks to Allison for sharing her artistry. The bios of contributors are included on the site as “Quilters,” hailing from around the country: Massachusetts, Wyoming, Michigan, California, Kentucky, New Mexico, Texas, and more. Each participant came to the workshop with a different expertise (fiction, poetry, nonfiction, cross-genre, theater, book arts, digital arts, and other arts, not to mention science writing, law, architecture) along with a “beginner’s mind,” willing and wanting to find new approaches to their writing and art, and to learn from others. Together in our studio in Gambier, Ohio, we worked alongside each other to move beyond our borders, artistically and otherwise. Thanks to each participant for embracing challenges and co-creating common ground across diverse backgrounds and practices.

Our collective contribution to this conversation is incomplete, bolstered by sentiments from other participants who couldn’t participate within the timeline but who expressed their support. We hope that, in some small way, this project encourages building more communities and engaging writing and arts in this process. In the spirit of stitching together divides, we have left blank spaces in our quilt to invite visitors to think about how they would contribute to this quilt, or even start a new quilt. However you define “community” and “quilt,” we invite you to stitch across the borders in your midst.

To view the quilt of “Unstitched States,” read a collective artist statement, learn more about the project, and participate, please visit: www.unstitchedstates.com.

Editors: Allison Dalton & Gretchen Henderson

Contributors (in alphabetical order):

Margaret Bentley (Texas), *Women's Work*

Traci Evadne Currie & Danielle De La Mare (Michigan), *Continuing In Thy Footsteps*

Allison Dalton (California), *Mourning Square, 2016*

Alana de Hinojosa (California), *what you already know*

Mireidys Garcia (Massachusetts), *exIst*

Gretchen Henderson (Washington, DC), *Heart—Hear—Earth*

Kim Henderson (California), *[Untitled]*

Amaris Feland Ketcham (New Mexico), *A Hole in the Breast*

David B. Marshall (Illinois), *Angels of Our Natures*

Sarah Minor (Ohio), *Portrait of a Woman, After Wislawa Szymborska*

Kirsten Ogden (California), *Cage*

Monica Ong (Connecticut), *The Glass Larynx*

Jan Pfeifer (Kentucky), *What is this moment asking of us?*

Katy Santa Maria (Pennsylvania), *Anonymous*

Ellen Sheffield (Ohio), *Elemental Errors: Air*

Sue Sommers (Wyoming), *Empathy Flower-Reciprocity Clock*

Alison Stein (New York), *The Terrible Thing Has Happened*

Emily Troia (Ohio), *Mental Coordinates*

Darrell E. Ward (Ohio), *A Formula for the Universe*

Nanette Yannuzzi-Macias (Ohio), *Venus Trapped*

and for Mimi Chiang, *MemorlaM In*