

Sensing the Studio:  
The Role of Embodied Knowledge in Understanding Visual Representations of  
Craft Studios

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## Preface

In college, I studied textiles and became a designer and craftsperson; now, I have nearly twenty-five years of experience as a weaver, dyer, and practitioner of other fiber art disciplines. In 2011, I spent two weeks at a fiber workshop at Penland School of Craft.<sup>1</sup> This inspired me to launch a project, “Inside the Artist Studio”<sup>2</sup> in which I interviewed artists to learn about their studio practice. Between 2013 and 2018, I visited and interviewed over seventy-five artists and craftspeople across the United States.

My craft practice and interest in “studio photographs”—photographs of artists’ studios—expands how I understand craftspeople’s relationship with space, time, and materials as they relate to process. As a professional organizer, I use observation skills to take inventories (written and photographic) and evaluate how clients navigate their material worlds. These skills have also helped me to learn how craftspeople arrange materials and operate within their studios. As I deepened my understanding of how craft making happens in time and space, I looked closely at photographs of craftspeople’s studios to understand the space available, tools and materials needed, and steps involved in their processes. Limiting this project to craft practices with which I was familiar, I learned about these relationships and variables through their visual representation. I am interested in how a spectrum of photographs educate the viewer and convey certain kinds of knowledge through stories of handcrafted objects and their makers. I foreground my knowledge of craft practices to extend my understanding of what I see represented.

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<sup>1</sup> Workshop taken with Jason Pollen at Penland School of Craft, Penland, NC, accessed March 16, 2021. <https://penland.org/>

<sup>2</sup> *HK PowerStudio*, accessed March 30, 2021, <https://hkpowerstudio.com/>. While this project is being re-envisioned, it is not publicly available, though it was published via my business website.

## Introduction: Sensing the Studio

Although my “Inside the Artist Studio” project began seven years prior to my graduate work, this analysis has extended my appreciation for craft makers in their studios through their visual representation. Due to restrictions demanded by the coronavirus pandemic,<sup>3</sup> constraints on visiting studios during 2020 forced alternate methods for conducting my research. In lieu of interviewing artists and visiting their studios, magazine articles were used featuring photographs and articles of artists, craftspeople, and makers in their studios over the past decades.<sup>4</sup> Three prominent ones were *Where Women Create*, *In Her Studio*, and the *American Craft Magazine* (ACM).<sup>5</sup> Each of these publications features what, where, and sometimes how craftspeople engage their practice. I realized their potential as rich resources for analysis of craftspeople in their studios. In late 2020, I made numerous unsuccessful attempts to gain access to archives of these publications through gifted copies, local and university libraries, the Library of Congress (LOC), and editors of each publication. Due to various circumstances related to the challenges of the pandemic, copywrite protection, and digitization of LOC archives, I found that only the ACM was digitally archived and fully accessible for my research.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The coronavirus pandemic began in late 2019 and interrupted global work and life patterns due to its contagious nature. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> I would like to acknowledge my gratitude for core program faculty and mentors, Namita Wiggers, Linda Sandino, Shannon Stratton, Yasmeen Siddiqui, Ben Lignel, Tom Martin, Sarah Archer, Sharon Loudon, Sara Clugage, and PJ Policarpio. Each of you contributed toward enriching my understanding of craft histories and the critical thinking required to embark upon this research project. I will forever be grateful for your patience and generosity of time, ideas, resource and guidance.

<sup>5</sup> *Where Women Create*, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.wherewomencreate.com/>. *In Her Studio*, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://stampington.com/in-her-studio/>. *American Craft Magazine*, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine>.

<sup>6</sup> Kathy Woodrell, email communication with Heather K. Powers, September 2020. I appreciate the help of Kathy, reference specialist, decorative arts, architecture, and British history, Researcher and Reference Services Division, The Library of Congress. She promptly responded to my queries to help me narrow my search for craft aka “hobby” publications. She further informed me that “Many of them can be found under the subject heading “handicraft” although specific subjects can also be used such as ‘needlework’ or ‘embroidery’.” Unfortunately, the more recent publications I was searching for fell under collections that have not yet been digitized due to copyright protection.

As a preeminent national nonprofit organization dedicated to craft for over seventy-five years, the American Craft Council (ACC) celebrates craft through publishing, marketing, and awards.<sup>7</sup> The award-winning ACM, founded in 1942, conveys knowledge and educates its readers through stories about craft culture, objects, and makers, which makes it a rich resource for craft studies. As a member-subscriber familiar with the ACM, I saw their potential as the primary source for my research about craft studios and practices even though I did not know where this research would lead me. The ACC librarian, Beth Goodrich, helped make it possible for me to conduct this analysis of photographs of craft studios from 2000 to 2020.<sup>8</sup>

An initial search through all the ACM articles of all mediums with studio photography from 2000 to 2020 yielded over 130 articles with more than 580 photographs of craft studios. I realized that such a broad scope would raise questions that I could not address in this research. In limiting my scope to fiber arts, I drew upon my first-hand knowledge as a fiber artist.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, I could better interpret visual representations where my tacit knowledge extends my understanding. Even within this narrowed scope, it became apparent that the editorial approach of the ACM encompassed a wide span of photographers and writers.<sup>10</sup> Rather than analyzing images against the commission they responded to, I examined how their choices might educate

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<sup>7</sup> American Craft Council, "About," accessed February 27, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/about-acc>.

<sup>8</sup> Beth Goodrich, email and phone communications with Heather K. Powers between September 2020 and April 2021. I am especially grateful to Beth for her continuous help in allowing me to fully access articles between 2000-2008, when digital publication was not yet completed. She further expanded my understanding the editorial process and focus over the twenty-year span of my research, which was especially important since the ACM was undergoing editorial staff changes in the fall of 2020. Through this research, I became more fully aware of what a rich archive the ACC is for craft research in America.

<sup>9</sup> My fibers experience includes a range of processes such as hand, and machine sewing, knitting, dyeing, weaving, designing textiles and more.

<sup>10</sup> In coding my research, throughout the twenty-year span of fiber articles, there were six editors, twenty-nine photographers, and twenty-three writers. In addition, some articles included photography provided by the artist. This range of editorial choices demonstrated a lack of consistency, which sometimes made it challenging to tie images to the author's text. Due to a staff transition during late 2020, I was unable to speak directly with the magazine editor about these choices. Also see the Table in Part III: Conclusion.

readers, especially craftspeople, about craft. In my analysis, I will look at a spectrum of studio photographs that demonstrate a range of processes and spaces. I will examine how specific qualities in each image expand or limit my knowledge.

Through a visual and comparative photographic analysis, I'm interested in understanding what I can learn about craft practices from a spectrum of photographs representing craftspeople, spaces, tools, and materials. This inquiry foregrounds images to consider how they extend or obscure my understanding of craft. It also addresses the alternate sensory nature of knowledge through my embodied experience of craft techniques and materials, which expands my reading of these images. I hope to distinguish the qualities in some photographs that provoke embodied experiences and how this helps me understand what is represented. This research has required a critical and theoretical approach, drawing upon history, craft, and related fields.

My inquiry method was mixed, using design research and visual and sensory ethnography as guides for my comparative analysis. Ethnographer and researcher Sarah Pink states, "Visual research methods are not purely visual. Rather, they pay particular attention to visual aspects of culture. Similarly, they cannot be used independently of other methods."<sup>11</sup> Her approach offers a methodology for experiencing and representing knowledge about cultures that she identifies as situated within her own experiences. Experience includes the researcher's observations of visual representations of culture which include text, objects, and sensory knowledge. I recognize that the knowledge one brings to a visual analysis influences its outcome; my goal is not to propose this method as applicable to everyone but to determine how embodied and other forms of knowledge influence my interpretation of these visual

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<sup>11</sup> Sarah Pink. "The visual in ethnography: photography, video, cultures and individuals." SAGE visual methods, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 123–144.

representations. Pink's interdisciplinary approach to methodology brought my attention to how visual research intersects other methods.

In their seminal book, *A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education* (1987), Paulo Freire and Ira Shor reveal an underlying problem of expecting methods alone to liberate education.

Transformation is not just a question of methods and techniques. If liberating education was just a question of methods, then the problem would be only to change some traditional methodologies by some modernized ones. But that is not the problem.<sup>12</sup>

Here again, Freire and Shore emphasize the value of an interdisciplinary approach. With this in mind, I began to view the educational responsibilities of my research and how the methods I used would influence how I understood these visual representations. Freire and Shore define *education* as an act of knowing. Acts of knowing are not only based only on our intellectual understanding; they also rely on our sense of reality and how it is “made.” The making of knowledge can be dissected into two parts, the first in which knowledge is produced and the second in which you know what you know.<sup>13</sup> My analysis shifted to center my conscious awareness of the kinds of knowledge I bring to my research and how photograph types conveyed these to more or less extent.

Since this research partially hinged upon my theoretical knowledge of both art and craft studios, I drew from historical and contemporary art and craft thinkers and writers to understand

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<sup>12</sup> Ira Shor and Paulo Freire. *A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education*, 37, (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1987), 35.

<sup>13</sup> *Idib.*, 7–8.



the different social and cultural constructs of “the studio.”<sup>14</sup> Especially helpful have been art historians Ann-Sophie Lehmann, Sandra Kisters, and Rachel Esner. In their book *Hiding Making Showing Creation: The Studio From Turner to Tacita Dean* (2013), the authors assert that, historically, visual representations of studios reveal the art-craft dichotomy by elevating thinking over making. Therefore, representations of art studios tend toward sites of individual creativity rather than places of labor.<sup>15</sup> Since most books about studios have an art, rather than craft focus, it is challenging to directly correlate them with representations of craft studios. Through my engagement with the portrayal of craft studios in magazines, I discovered that they have made a gradual shift to elevate process and depict artists surrounded by their tools and materials.

By expanding the studio’s definition (rather than fetishizing it) to include a range of activities and spaces, we can better reflect on the modern era craft studio’s complex, dynamic conditions.<sup>16</sup> These sites straddle professional and personal life, and their representation deserves more interdisciplinary consideration for a better understanding of individual, social, and cultural implications. These images document places in which craftspeople think, live, work, socialize and possibly show or sell their work. My analysis does not aim to interpret or translate the studio or their contents “as a finished work of art and a triumphant artistic manifesto.”<sup>17</sup> My interest is in the educational nature of these representations, rather than their aesthetic or entertainment

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<sup>14</sup> Additional resources that informed my understanding of art studios included; Joe Fig’s *Inside the Painters Studio*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press. 2009; Mary Jane Jacob, and Michelle Grabner, eds. *The studio reader: on the space of artists*. University of Chicago Press, 2010; Jens Hoffman. “The Studio: Documents of Contemporary Art.” White Chapel. 2012; Sarah Trigg’s *Studio Life: Rituals, Collections, Tools, and Observations on the Artistic Process*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2013. Sarah Trigg’s “The Goldminer Project,” accessed November 12, 2020, <http://thegoldminerproject.com/>; Hyperallergic, “A View from the Easel,” accessed, November 10, 2020, <https://hyperallergic.com/?s=a+view+from+the+easel>

<sup>15</sup> Rachel Esner, Ann-Sophie Lehmann, and Sandra Kisters eds. *Hiding Making-Showing Creation: The Studio from Turner to Tacita Dean*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 126.

qualities. To better understand the moments of craft making these images depict, I consider them visual interpretations of sometimes idealized studios, in a given moment, not stages set with fictitious props.

This comparative analysis of space, actions, and materials demonstrates how my experience in fiber processes and corresponding embodied knowledge helps expand my understanding of fiber studio photography within the ACM. I will demonstrate how a range of craft studio photographs convey various craft-making experiences to extend this analysis method to other craftspeople and craft researchers. Further, I will look to the text in these articles to understand how it does or does not provide context for the photographs. Individuals turn to the ACM to learn about how craftspeople live and make. While I speak from personal experience, I hope readers will consider extending their research methods beyond propositional knowledge such as logical, semantic, systemic, and empirical to include an array of alternative knowledge evoked through a spectrum of photographs.<sup>18</sup>

## **Methods**

I adopted a mixed and reflexive approach using visual ethnographic methods of inquiry of fiber studio images from the ACM. I structured my analysis by gathering, listing, and categorizing data and emerging ideas. I began my research by scanning the ACC website to identify articles that included photographs of fiber studios between 2000 and 2020. I defined a spectrum of photography styles to include studio portraits, hands in action, process, and materials and tools. This scope includes weavers, quilters, knitters, felt and installation artists, fashion and

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<sup>18</sup> “CUNY Department of Social Sciences,” accessed April 2, 2021, [https://www.qcc.cuny.edu/SocialSciences/ppecorino/INTRO\\_TEXT/Chapter%205%20Epistemology/Types\\_of\\_knowledge.htm](https://www.qcc.cuny.edu/SocialSciences/ppecorino/INTRO_TEXT/Chapter%205%20Epistemology/Types_of_knowledge.htm)

garment designer-makers, crocheters, broom-makers, chair caners, embroiderers, spinners, natural dyers, jewelry makers, cordwainers, and papermakers. I do not have personal experience with all of these disciplines. The spaces varied in scope from large to small, indoor to outdoor, and in rural, urban, and residential settings.

I coded all articles and accompanying photos according to process, materials, and photography type (within the spectrum listed here) and more into a spreadsheet (see the Table in Part III: Conclusion). After narrowing my research scope to fibers studios, I downloaded digital images from the ACC website and migrated them into the photography workspace, Adobe Lightroom®. This program enabled me to zoom in to look more closely at details and then tag and sort them according to any parameter, and look at them comparatively side by side.<sup>19</sup> I continued coding using reflexive, qualitative, ethnographic tools adapted from *Watching Closely* by Christena Nippert-Eng.<sup>20</sup> Although I could use some of these strategies for field notes, I needed other methods that did not rely upon live observation of interactions and activities. I turned to descriptive and process coding methods adapted from *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (2015). One technique I adopted from these methods was the process of cycling observations to break up my analysis.<sup>21</sup> This manual also illustrated how my analysis would benefit from adopting a simultaneous coding approach. In adopting a practice-based approach, I drew upon my understanding of objects and artifacts, such as tools and materials, to

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<sup>19</sup> Adobe Lightroom, accessed March 31, 2021, <https://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop-lightroom.html>

<sup>20</sup> Nippert-Eng, Christena. *Watching Closely : A Guide to Ethnographic Observation*, accessed March 31, 2021, ProQuest Ebook Central, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2015). A central focus of this ethnographic observation method relied on access to actions and environment that were partially unavailable through photographs.

<sup>21</sup> Johnny Saldaña. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Limited, 2015). I used these coding research methods for some of the digital coding done in Lightroom.

contribute to my analysis.<sup>22</sup> My first cycle of analysis was rapid; I noted what grabbed my attention, seemed obvious, and made me curious. I slowed down, making abbreviated field notes, further describing what I saw and perceived. My field notes captured descriptive observations, categories of photographs, materials and tools used, kinds of people, impressions of emotions, types of labor or process, and studio types.

The AEIOU Design-Led Research Toolkit expanded my analysis to include activity, environment, interactions, objects, and users observations.<sup>23</sup> The flexibility of these methods helped me identify connections and overlaps. Using this framework, I printed, dated, and numbered images, and then constructed a time line that helped identify shifts in image representation. In doing so I discovered an increase in the quantity and type of studio photographs.<sup>24</sup> There was a steady increase in the number of studio photos published over twenty years; the impact of this is worth considering. Over this period, rather than focusing on objects, the publication used images to more fully tell stories about how objects were made and by whom.

As John Berger explains in *Ways of Seeing*, images are often the first line of communication for sighted people and, as such, have the power to convey and preserve notions about the visual arts, their physical manifestation, and experiences associated with them.<sup>25</sup> The “new language of images,” rather than perpetuating illusions of the magical and sacred process of art-making happening aside from all other aspects of life, offer the demonstration of the visual

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<sup>22</sup> Prag UK (Blog), Methodologies. Accessed February 25, 2021, <https://prag-uk.org/glossary-of-terms/methodology/>

<sup>23</sup> “AEIOU Design-Led Research Toolkit,” accessed March 31, 2021, <http://dlrtoolkit.com/aeiou/>.

<sup>24</sup> They break down as follows; between 2000 and 2005 there was one studio photo; between 2006 and 2009, five; between 2010 and 2015, sixty-four; and between 2016 and 2020, seventy. There may be some discrepancy between what was printed and what was published on the website. I had access to print copies for 2020. Images sometimes vary from print to website. See the table in Part III: Conclusion for more information.

<sup>25</sup> John Berger. *Ways of seeing*. (UK, Penguin, 2008), 33.

arts as more accessible and less cut off from the masses.<sup>26</sup> Yet, as Berger states, what is really at stake in photographic representations are a broad range of considerations about who and what constitutes the meaning of visual arts. What we see is dependent upon our cultural interpretations and assumptions as well as our perceptions. If people cannot see themselves represented, they are at risk of being cut off from history and present moment choices. I “saw myself” in some fibers studios images through materials and phenomena that were familiar to me, which gave me an intersubjective understanding of craft processes.<sup>27</sup>

Using and reflecting on our knowledge to analyze what photographs represent is what Roland Barthes described as photographic signifiers, which we can identify through qualities that grab our attention.<sup>28</sup> Some images “punctured” me with a quality demonstrated through close details or processes.<sup>29</sup> Images that have this lingering effect have what Barthes refers to as *punctum*; they remain in our minds long after looking and sometimes draw us back to them. Another quality that Barthes refers to as *extent* (extension of field) can be a literal extension of what we can see in an image or what we recognize as familiar.<sup>30</sup> I began to consciously look for punctum and extent and discovered they created an expansive quality bridging from representation to my perceptions, memories, and sensations. They helped to evoke experiences that I knew not just in my mind but also through my body.

To further examine my body’s role in this research, I turned to phenomenology to define embodiment and embodied knowledge. Merleau-Ponty brought specificity to the spatial

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 33, 34.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas J. Csordas. “Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology,” in *Ethos* 18, no. 1 (1990), 37.

<sup>28</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 5.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 26–27.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 25.

relationships and perceptions of my body, parts to the whole, and in space. He claimed “To understand is to experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, ... and the body is our anchorage in a world.”<sup>31</sup> His definition of *understanding* as a perception of the body-space-object relationship helped me interpret what I saw. Other philosophers that played an influential role in my theoretical understanding of perception and sensation included Pierre Bourdieu, D. M. Armstrong, and Thomas Csordas.<sup>32</sup> By situating myself in experiential terms, I began to explore my body-mind relationship to craft processes rather than perceiving myself as separate from the craftspeople photographed. Gradually my perception of what was represented began to merge with my memories of craft experiences.

I was unclear about how to communicate embodied understanding of the visual within my research and continued looking for clarification. I came across the work of philosopher and psychologist Eugene Gendlin. He explored the role language plays in communicating abstract ideas not by categorizing them, but by acknowledging a discomfort (bodily) of language in sharing the formation of meanings.<sup>33</sup> He does not claim discomfort as a method but as a signal for communicating about something embodied. He introduced the use of five dots “.....” to signify space, openness, or imprecision to bridge a gap between an unspoken quality and written language. Like the *punctum* and the *extant*, there was something there to think into and bring to words.

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<sup>31</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception* (C. Smith, Trans.), 112-170, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 2000, Original work published 1945).

<sup>32</sup> D. M. Armstrong. *Bodily sensations*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1962); Pierre Bourdieu. “Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception.” (*International Social Science Journal*, 20, 589–612. 1984, Original work published 1968), Csordas. *Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology*, 5. Csordas defines embodiment as a methodology for study of the body in relationship to culture, not the body as an object. I acknowledge that this as a simplification of a complex theory that I do not have the space to unpack here, yet it needs to be defined to situate my thinking about our bodies as oriented in space, cultures and processes.

<sup>33</sup> David Michael Levin. “Making Sense: The Work of Eugene Gendlin.” *Human Studies* 17, no. 3 (1994): 343–53. Accessed March 30, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20011051>.

Yet, I was still unclear about how to communicate this transition between types of knowledge from visual into sensations. The term Gendlin coined, *felt sense*, describes a physical experience and body awareness that “encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject at a given time – encompasses it and communicates it to you all at once rather than detail by detail.”<sup>34</sup> I find this term helpful in communicating knowledge not separately but as a spectrum felt and understood in a moment.

Markers such as *felt sense*, *punctum*, and *extent* were qualities I could look out for in my continued analysis. By identifying these, I could then analyze the ways alternate forms of knowledge often unconsciously influence our understanding. I was especially interested in exploring how these signaled embodied knowledge. I realized that memories could bridge conscious and unconscious between visual representations and other senses. By including other sense memories in my research, I hope to avoid the pitfall of relying solely on dominant Western-oriented visual analysis that may more frequently collapse subject and object.<sup>35</sup> In Part I, I will demonstrate how I began to apply these methods to a spectrum of image types in the ACM.

## **Part I: Comparative Analysis of a Photographic Spectrum**

Specific types of images include vital elements that help viewers identify an artist. They include studio portraits (Figure 1), process (Figure 2), hands in action (Figure 3), or materials and tools (Figure 4). Part I provides a defining spectrum of photographs through four examples and their accompanying text as well as a brief comparative analysis that clarifies how text and image are used together. What follows, in Part II, are four case studies that provide an in-depth

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<sup>34</sup> Eugene T. Gendlin. *Focusing*, New York: Bantam, 1982, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Caroline Potter. "Sense of motion, senses of self: Becoming a dancer." *Ethnos* 73, no. 4 (2008), 444-465.

analysis of studio photos in four articles. All of these studios demonstrate their dynamic functions and how they can operate simultaneously as storefronts, showrooms, offices, classrooms, and galleries in addition to private workspaces or spaces for social experiences.

To understand what I mean by studio portraits, I will define what I know the studio to be. Ann-Sophie Lehmann offers her brief contemporary definition of the studio: “the act of making as a temporary creative unit, fixed in time and place, in which materials, tools, and makers interact.”<sup>36</sup> As makers navigate the overlapping activities they conduct in their studios, they must re-examine their needs and adapt to the constraints of different physical locations that operate as the studio. As often represented, the studio unfolds when and wherever making is happening and includes tools, supplies, handmade objects, and resources. In her 2018 essay, “Studio Conversations,” researcher and educator Alison Shields writes of her visits to 125 artist studios and defines them in the terms the artists’ use, not just as rooms but as places for thinking, processing, and learning.<sup>37</sup> Various ACC images of studios demonstrate how they increasingly accommodate these varied public and private activities such as teaching, learning, selling, archiving, and other aspects of a maker’s life.

This comparative analysis will move between photographs and some of the text in these articles. I look to the articles to see how they may support or challenge my understanding of what is represented. As John Berger explains, when text accompanies images, it changes what we see. Images without text can only provide part of the story. Since the ACM is not a how-to magazine, not every issue or article focused on craftspersons’ processes. Over the twenty years, both the

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<sup>36</sup> Ann-Sophie Lehmann, “Showing Making: On Visual Documentation and Creative Practice,” in *The Journal of Modern Craft* 5, no. 1 (March 2012): 10.

<sup>37</sup> Alison Shields. “Studio conversations.” *International Journal of Education Through Art* 14, no. 3 (2018): 379-384.



photography and text have become more detailed to more explicitly demonstrate something about studio practices. There seems to be an effort, if somewhat inconsistent, to tie the images to the text. Still, some articles include very little information that further educated me about what the images represent. If used collaboratively, images and text can provide us with a rich understanding and experience.

In her 2012 article, “Showing Making: On Visual Documentation and Creative Practice,” Ann-Sophie Lehmann explains the challenge of understanding making through written language alone. “Images can capture the complexity and simultaneity where words fail to do so.”<sup>38</sup> First, Lehmann asserts that a photograph’s essential function is serve as a visual archive of a moment “in which information and therefore knowledge about making is stored.”<sup>39</sup> We will see this kind of archival moment demonstrated in many of the photographs that include a combination of tools and materials. Second, photographs convey skill whereby “the image mediates between the domains of implicit and explicit knowledge.”<sup>40</sup> These impressions of skill were evident to more or less degree in photographs of process and hands in action.

I found it challenging to understand skill through images alone. Though perhaps not a precise approach, I looked for its evidence through a range of materials used, my perception of the complexity of techniques and body positions, and evidence that the process might require many steps over time. It can also be challenging to understand process (hands in action—a subtype depicting close-up process) without explicit descriptions or image sequences that unfold time, neither of which I saw in these articles. Though process shots can indicate something about

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<sup>38</sup> Ann-Sophie Lehmann, “Showing Making: On Visual Documentation and Creative Practice,” in *The Journal of Modern Craft* 5, no. 1 (March 2012): 9–23.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 13.

a range of skills, not all readers may understand these without further explanation. While each of these types of images may offer a glimpse into the maker's story, they cannot fully convey thinking, making, and sensations happening in them.

### Studio Portrait Photographs



Figure 1. Juliana Cho, Annelore retail showroom, atelier, and office. *Source:* ACM 2014. Photograph by Talisman Brolin.

As we see in Figure 1, Juliana Cho uses her studio as a design and sewing atelier, storefront, and office.<sup>41</sup> This photograph's perspective offers a partial extension of field (extent) that gives me a sense of her worktable scale and the room she works in. At this moment, she demonstrates her use of her worktable for pattern drafting. I can see the tools of a dressmaker in her hands and surrounding her in the space. Behind her, the large window provides light and puts her workspace on display to passersby. Cho's workflow is at risk of constant interruption as a workshop and retail storefront but may also invite curious passersby, making the location a tool

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<sup>41</sup> Monica Moses, "The Slow Way", in *American Craft Magazine*, (August/September 2014), accessed March 31, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/slow-way>.

for self-promotion. I interpret this as a space someone can see from the street but possibly separate from the main retail storefront. I infer there may be a door to prevent customers from interrupting Cho's workflow.

In applying the AEIOU method, I identify some of the activities, objects, users, and possible interactions in this environment. Still, there is undoubtedly more than I can see (extent), though I attempt to understand what I cannot see. The short article mentions this space as one of two storefront showrooms and that Cho works with an experienced pattern drafter. Paper patterns hang ready for use behind the work table. This image does not have a specific quality that pierces me (punctum). I am not a fashion designer or dressmaker, so I do not have a deep knowledge of what I see represented. I find it interesting, yet without a closer shot to see details of Cho's process, materials or tools, or a wide-spectrum picture that give a better sense of space, I feel cut off. If this image showed Cho constructing a garment at a sewing machine, I might have a felt sense of what is represented. Though this image provides something about Cho's process, it does not evoke in me rich sensory memories. It, therefore, limits my perception of her process, skills, and space. I acknowledge the possibility of a more in-depth analysis of this image yet by offering a description, application of methods and demonstrating the kinds of knowledge this image evoked, I briefly illustrate my analysis process. This image is an example that demonstrates of a range of qualities about Cho's studio space, materials and process; I will leave the deeper analysis of studio portraits for the case studies to follow in Part II.

### **Process Photographs**

The next image is an example of what I refer to as a process photograph because it represents a craftsperson making something. These images usually include the head, torso,

hands, materials, and some studio backdrop. Here, Alexis works on a recycled, braided textile (Figure 2).<sup>42</sup> The article describes him as a “proud magpie” using recycled and upcycled materials in textile creations. The term gives some clarity and context to the collection of materials and objects that may serve as sources of inspiration on the wall beside Alexis. There is no caption for this portrait, yet he is described as “A lithe and impish presence peering out through thick, black glasses.”<sup>43</sup> Though this is a clever description of Alexis, I wonder what else could have been said to connect readers to his social practice or personality.



Figure 2. Llane Alexis stitching. *Source:* ACM, 2020. Photograph by Peter van der Pas.

Alexis describes his technique as involving “cutting, braiding, wrapping, and stitching as a process at once controlled and improvisational, a bit like jazz.”<sup>44</sup> Together with the image, this text helps me understand the way Alexis works with materials deconstructed and sometimes reconstructed by hand. I see the spool of sewing thread and handmade log-inspired pincushion with the initials LL on one end. I appreciate these small details that help me identify handmade

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<sup>42</sup> Deborah Bishop, “Reclaim. Remake. Relove,” in *American Craft Magazine*, (April/May 2020), accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/reclaim-remake-relove>.

<sup>43</sup> Deborah Bishop, “Reclaim. Remake. Relove,” in *American Craft Magazine*, (April/May 2020), accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/reclaim-remake-relove>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

objects Alexis uses daily in his studio. Yet, by situating this process shot against a wall, I am cut off from further understanding his studio's scale and workflow. In the article, Alexis also refers to his process as sometimes meditative, conveying that time is not a primary consideration in his textile constructions. The article alludes to a wide array of materials gathered and sourced from nature, textile mills, and more, but we can see only a small collection displayed on the wall. This photograph does not enable me to understand how this work surface is set up in proximity to other materials or tools. This process shot is an example that demonstrates how this type of photograph, combined with the text in the article, can expand my understanding of the craft process being represented.

### Hands in Action Photographs



Figure 3. Jordan Nassar stitching. *Source:* ACM, 2019. Photograph by Michael O'Neill.

Early in my analysis, I found myself lingering and returning to the photos showing close-up shots of hands in action (Figure 3).<sup>45</sup> As these began to evoke memories of making, I paid

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<sup>45</sup> Kavitha Rajogopalan, "Gray Area," in *American Craft Magazine*, (November/December 2019,) accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/gray-area>.

further attention to the qualities that aroused these memories. I zeroed in on photos of processes and working hands that capture ideas as they seemed to come to life. These images represent the act of making as it unfolds with interrelationship of the eyes, the brain, and the hands. I didn't immediately know that this was significant to my research. I gradually began to realize that, for me, photographic representation of action could provide punctum and extent. I looked for action through hand and body gestures that I recognized as familiar and could remember doing myself; these signaled my felt sense of embodied knowledge of something represented. For example, in Figure 3, Nassar holds the fabric in one hand just so, gathering some of the material into his palm to keep the section he's stitching smooth. He appears to be doing this work in his lap, and the perspective cuts the reader off from further understanding the environment (extent) he works in and how he interacts with objects. This type of close-up photograph of hands and materials becomes an invitation to both remember and imagine how it feels to embroider. I recall holding the fabric to maintain it securely in one hand while maneuvering the needle and thread through the fabric with the other. I also observe that he does not use a frame or an embroidery hoop to hold the material under tension. I perceive this as his ability to see where each stitch will go next while maintaining precisely straight lines in his grid-like pattern. I understand and perceive this as a skill because I connect this to my hand embroidery and cross-stitching memories.

To deepen my understanding, I look to the caption text, which reads, "The artist layers sharply delineated grids over soft, landscape-inspired color fields. Each piece uses about 75,000 stitches."<sup>46</sup> This further communicates skill by describing his process, including layering imagery and many stitches. In the article interview, Nasser further describes his cultural identification

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<sup>46</sup> Kavitha Rajogopalan, "Gray Area," in *American Craft Magazine*, (November/December 2019,) accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/gray-area>.

with the type of Palestinian pattern work he uses in his embroidery. This clarifies that he has developed embroidery skills and learned something about his Palestinian cultural history related to his embroidery. Without the text, these cultural connections would likely be less clear or invisible to many readers. However, the close perspective of hands interacting with materials I was familiar with enabled me to further my understanding of Nassar's process and skills. My familiarity with stitching and this type of process photograph created an extent for me to explore my sensory knowledge of materials and process. This hands in action photograph is an example that demonstrates how I was able to further my understanding of Nassar's process based on my embodied knowledge and memories of embroidery.

### **Materials and Tools Photographs**



Figure 4. Kay Sekimachi's bulletin board. *Source:* ACM, 2010. Photograph by Leslie Williamson.

Since Figure 4 offers neither person, method, nor extent of the studio, I begin my analysis with a practice-based approach to materials and space arrangement through my experience as a

fiber artist and organizer.<sup>47</sup> Here, we see a wall and partial bookshelf in the studio of Kay Sekimachi. Unlike the wall beside Alexis in Figure 2, this wall does not function as a backdrop; it foregrounds what the viewer sees on the wall. I turn to the caption, which reads, “Sekimachi’s bulletin board is a repository of finished pieces and works in progress.”<sup>48</sup> By hanging works in progress, the artist uses the wall serves as a different kind of worksurface; she can step back and view how these pieces drape or look together as a collection. Several appear to be jewelry, and the way they look vertically displayed is an important consideration. Seeing work displayed together gives me a sense of the artist’s materials, color palette, and technique.

There are knots on display, which gives me some understanding of the skills Sekimachi has. My knot-making skills are basic, but I recognize a few techniques that I have used or tried in the past. I recall a macrame board I inherited from my mother and realize that these boards also function as a type of bulletin board, which enable the user to pin areas of threads or cords in place while the unpinned parts are being manipulated. As I look closely at some images, memories percolate and give me a different understanding of these makers. My memories of process begin to demystify (rather than objectify) these craftspeople and their studio processes. Since many people have tried their hand at some knot-making, they too might be able to understand some of the skills involved in Sekimachi’s process. I realize the importance for me that some photographs include elements that represent the making process. In this image, I see evidence of this familiar process through the knots on display. Looking for the familiar seems so simple, yet after a series of images, this kind of familiarity is extent in Barthes’s terms.

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<sup>47</sup> Deborah Bishop, “Weaving the Sea,” in *American Craft Magazine*, (October/November 2010), accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/weaving-sea>.

<sup>48</sup> Deborah Bishop, “Weaving the Sea,” <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/weaving-sea>.



As I move down the image to the bookshelf's surface, I see various trays stacked and spread out, holding an assortment of materials or projects. They seem to function as storage for works in progress as well as materials, tools, and partially completed projects. There are also assorted tools and drawing materials collected together in baskets, cups, and containers, easily accessible on the top of this shelf that also seems to function as both a kind of work surface and storage area. Within the bookshelves are more materials and tools, some labeled in bins. I notice what is on the front edges of the shelves and what sits toward the back and speculate that the things behind are less frequently used. This image does not demonstrate a process or give me much information about the studio space (but there are other photos in this article). Still, in this image, the materials and tools on display provide me with a better understanding of a range of information conveyed. These help me understand some of the skills Sekimachi employs to create her pieces.

### **Summary**

In this section, I demonstrate an analysis of a spectrum of four types of photographs that fall within a range of processes, both familiar and unfamiliar to me. In my analysis of all the fiber studio images within ACM, I went through cycles to strategically shift my attention and uncover layers of understanding through visual representation, the accompanying text, and the kinds of knowledge they conveyed. The four case studies in Part II are a selection from all the ACM fiber articles that include studios, to provide an in-depth analysis of a range of photographs. My intent is to understand how each type of photograph within the spectrum defined in this comparative analysis evokes a range of knowledge types that I access for my visual analysis.

## Part II: Case Studies

### Case Study I: Rod Givens and Ignatius Creegan

In the following images, I reference the article “Lincoln, Grant and two other guys” (2013)<sup>49</sup> about two milliners, Rod Givens and Ignatius Creegan, of Ignatius Hats. I aim to analyze what I can learn about a process that is unfamiliar to me. As demonstrated in some of the previous images, I find that photographs of processes that are unfamiliar to me limited my embodied knowledge and therefore turn to other methods for my analysis. In this case, I rely on what I understand of space, materials, and tools from AEIOU and other visual observations. In Figure 5, Rod Givens stands, casually dressed, in the middle of a room. He is surrounded by furniture that is covered with materials, tools, and hats on display. In the foreground of this image are two dramatic hats. To the right of Givens is a table that holds a modern-looking sewing machine. This sparks my interest and reminds me of other technology sometimes found in studios such as computers, power tools, compressors, a source for music, and so many specialized tools. I see no evidence of these and wonder what role technology plays in the hat-making process and the running of this studio business. Mounted on the wall next to the sewing table are small storage containers that might hold buttons, clasps, and other small findings. I must imagine these things because I have never made a hat. I make this assumption with my previous sewing experiences in mind. In this case, I can only draw upon the visual and adjacent memories of my own sewing projects.

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<sup>49</sup> Diane Daniels, “Lincoln, Grant and two other guys,” in *American Craft Magazine*, (January/February 2013), accessed March 23, 2021. <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/lincoln-grant-and-two-other-guys>.



Figure 5. Rod Givens in his studio. *Source:* ACC, June/July 2013. Photograph by Robert Severi.

I barely see an empty surface; tools and materials are piled around the room, covering walls, shelves, and worktables. Behind Givens, along the back wall, are bookshelves stacked with bins of materials from floor to ceiling. Most of these containers are clear and unlabeled. I wonder how they remember what is in each and if the containers are arranged by materials or workflow. At eye level, the bookshelves hold a row head forms that display at least a dozen sample hats; no two are alike. I wonder if these are one-of-a-kind and if they were made by the artists or other milliners. Their presence at eye level speaks to the value they represent. I draw from my memory of arranging materials in space to consider the bin sizes and other materials stored on shelves at various levels. Lightweight and less frequently used items should be stored up high; heavy, large objects, toward the floor. These storage considerations are essential for safety and other reasons. I also notice that a painting hangs on a section of shelving at waist height, which functions as both hidden storage and an aesthetically pleasing way to create such storage. Most of the bins are stacked uniformly, also possibly indicating an appreciation for visual order, even if not minimal order. The choice to hide or see materials and tools varies considerably among craftsperson's.

To the left of the shelves behind Givens is a floor-length window, one of two that allow in ample natural light. Along this wall is a display of “inspirational art” as indicated by the caption. All the visual stimulus leads me to believe Givens might be a visual thinker or that he keeps things out to simplify their process and stimulate new ideas.<sup>50</sup> I turn to the article’s text and discover that Givens is an interior designer who describes himself as an “organized hoarder.” Creegan claims that Givens is “also good at putting together a tableaux, a narrative, the way he groups things together.”<sup>51</sup> The photographs confirm this sense of aesthetically pleasing order. The table to his left is hard to see, and I wonder if it functions as more than storage. Still, materials are neatly stacked and arranged rather than spilling out of containers and off surfaces. Since Givens holds a hat with his left hand, I wonder if he works standing up for part of his process. I see no chair, but the sewing table appears to be at seat height. The hats on display demonstrate a level of skill that I am unable to grasp. Many seem elaborately constructed; some are simpler in style; this range shows their broad use of materials and techniques. Because there are so many, I wonder if they keep favorites, prototypes, or other merchandise.

Ignatius Creegan (Figure 6) sits in his workshop with his legs stretched out in front of him. He appears relaxed as he focuses on his handwork. He’s dressed “business casual” as one might expect for an office: a blue oxford button-down with a colorful undershirt peeking out, dark pants, shiny black loafers, glasses, and a plaid paperboy hat. I refer to this type of photograph as a “process portrait.” It gives me a sense of Creegan’s style, which might help me understand something about the aesthetic aspect of objects he creates through connections drawn

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<sup>50</sup> Dave Gray, “Visual thinking is a methodology that uses tools to externalize internal thinking processes making them more clear, explicit and actionable,” May 24, 2019, <https://xplane.com/what-is-visual-thinking/>.

<sup>51</sup> “Lincoln, Grant and two other guys,” accessed March 23, 2021. <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/lincoln-grant-and-two-other-guys>.



Figure 6. Ignatius Creegan in his studio. *Source:* ACC, June/July 2013. Photograph by Robert Severi.

between the person's style, surroundings, and creations. These aesthetic details often do little to help me understand someone's practice or skills. Yet, as in the arrangement of bins in Givens's studio, there can be more than meets the eye in what we perceive as purely aesthetic choices. This photograph's perspective leaves me with many questions about the hat-making process. What seems to be on display are years of trial, experience, and learned behavior, which accumulate to help individuals effectively arrange materials and tools within their space.

There is a lot to look at in this image. I do my best to think through the complex range of materials, tools, objects, and activities in this space. This image replicates the studio as a place of accumulative mess, functioning as a proxy that bestows assumptions about the creator's aura rather than helping me understand skill and process.<sup>52</sup> In *Hiding Making Showing Creation* (2012), the authors identify one challenge presented by studio photos crammed full of materials.

Photographs and paintings of the show studio have little or nothing to do with providing insight into the practice of painting, even if the studios are crammed with possible subject

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<sup>52</sup> Brian O'Doherty, "Studio and Cube." In *The Studio. Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art*, edited by Jens Hoffmann, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 38.

matter and all the materials needed for painting, plus, as a reference to the academic training ... such images are part of the careful construction of the image of the artist.<sup>53</sup>

Still, studio photographs that include materials and tools can reveal aspects of an individual's value systems and creative process conducted within the space and deserve examination beyond their visual complexity. Studio photographs that convey a confusing quality can demonstrate a quality of discomfort that Gendlin refers to. There is something in these images of accumulation that makes me want to dig in to better understand the imprecision that they convey. This image provokes my memories of clients and friends who tend toward habits of accumulation.<sup>54</sup> My understanding of material object attachments leads me to suspect that, based on the volume of space and quantity of materials, Creegan puts tremendous value in his collections. Indeed, the article confirms that Creegan is a collector of both materials and machines.<sup>55</sup> I learn from the article they've been in that space since 2003; therefore, it's taken at least ten years to grow this collection.

Above his sewing table (Figure 6), a large mirror reflects one of two walls of shelves containing hat blocks. The mirror lends a sense of scale and perspective to space, which is otherwise hard to gauge. Creegan's chair is on wheels, allowing him to move between sewing machines and other work surfaces. There is a floor mat in front of the table to his right, which might cushion long work periods standing. On the floor, I spot an assortment of trip hazards and wonder how this working studio functions. I wonder if each step in the process happens at a

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<sup>53</sup> Rachel Esner, Ann-Sophie Lehmann, and Sandra Kisters eds. *Hiding Making-Showing Creation: The Studio from Turner to Tacita Dean*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013, 27.

<sup>54</sup> Dr. D. Samarender Reddy, "Hoarding Disorder: Symptoms, DSM-5 Criteria, and Treatment," accessed December 23, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3uPsVdV>. I do not apply the term hoarding since this is a psychological term related to but separate from OCD and recognized by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) as such.

<sup>55</sup> "Lincoln, Grant and two other guys", accessed March 23, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/lincoln-grant-and-two-other-guys>.

specific work station, but the perspective obscures their process by foreground materials. Maybe this is how their space usually looks, and if it is, I wonder if they are limited to working on one hat at a time or if they stop and make space for big production orders.

To Creegan's right and taking up significant space, there is a large table stacked with hats of all making and materials. Most appear complete, but a few seem to be works in progress. In front of this table and along the front left edge of the image sits an old sewing machine wrapped with red tape and a fabric collar that holds several pins. The old machine does not have an electronic panel like modern machines, and signs of its wear and use are indicated by a patina of rust, worn paint, and what appears to be adhesive residue. Old machines like this are the workhorses of many sewing rooms. Since they often only operate in a limited capacity, such as one or two stitches, they are less likely to need complicated repairs. This sewing machine is the only tool in the studio that helps me think through the hat-making process based on my sewing knowledge. It is the only tool pictured that I have an embodied knowledge of, and I am able to use a different method to read these images through more than the visual suggestions. Several spools of thread sit on the back left corner of this sewing table, along with several hats and a gooseneck lamp, making it seem possible that this is a functioning work surface.



Figure 7. Antique straw machine. *Source:* ACC, June/July 2013. Photograph by Robert Severi.

Directly behind Graham, another table holds a smaller shiny, well cared, possibly restored antique black sewing machine, unlike any I've ever seen. Without the accompanying close-up photograph and caption (Figure 7), I would not know this is a functional machine for the production of straw hats. This image finally tells me something more specific about interactions between objects, tools, and users. I can see the act of straw sewn in a circle, beginning to form the center of the hat.



Figure 8. Antique hat blocks. *Source:* ACC, June/July 2013. Photograph by Robert Severi.

There are no windows, and the overhead lighting gives the space a warm, cozy glow that complements this studio's vintage aesthetic. There is little evidence of modern technology. On the long wall behind the large table is a row of bookshelves that holds a vast collection of antique hat blocks (Figure 8), ribbons, containers, and other materials.<sup>56</sup> The collection of antique hat

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<sup>56</sup> "Lincoln, Grant and two other guys," accessed March 23, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/lincoln-grant-and-two-other-guys>. Creegan confirms in the article that he has a collection of 400-500 hat blocks in this studio and more than one straw machine.



blocks seems to fit the dimensions of the bookshelves, leading me to wonder if the storage unit was purpose built and how they are arranged—by size or type or another criteria.

These two rooms are so abundantly filled with furnishings and materials, it seems there is very little space left to occupy. The perspective of these portraits provided me with a more situated understanding of the workspaces that Givens and Creegan use. Unlike all of the photographs in the preceding section that situated artists, materials, and processes against flat walls, these photographs give us a sense of scale, workflow, and material accumulation over time. Using AEIOU, I identified some of the activities, interactions, and objects within these spaces. Yet these photographs did not give me a clear understanding of how Givens and Creegan interact with each other and with their tools and materials across their two rooms. I looked to the text to further understand their process, yet the article had a more aesthetic and material focus on their collections and the antique residential space in which they live and work. Without a memory of making hats, I could only draw upon somewhat related practices familiar to me, such as sewing, to understand the skill and labor necessary to make these objects.

The representations of accumulation and depth of space provided a punctum that was quite different from what was demonstrated by the previous process shot (Figure 4). The straw sewing machine (Figure 8) provided me with a personal connection to tools through my memories of sewing. Without knowledge of these tools and materials, I was cut off from further understanding their use. I experienced a sense of disorientation since I could not draw upon “felt sense” to guide my understanding of their process. For example, I still do not understand how hat blocks are used. Is each block used to make a different style of hat? Do Givens and Creegan work collaboratively? It is challenging to understand interactions and activities by looking at the two artists in different spaces in separate photographs. I wonder how many hats they work on at

once and how long it takes to make a hat or a collection of hats? Looking at these photos did not inspire in me an array of personal memories to extend to me a clearer understanding of their process. Without personal experience or memories, I found it difficult to understand their skills, labor, or process even within a spectrum of photographs. Additional process images and text could have demonstrated these further.

By including a case study of an unfamiliar practice, I hoped to understand better what kinds of knowledge I could rely on and what knowledge was unavailable to me for my analysis. In this case, there was very little I could draw upon from my own embodied knowledge. I found myself speculating about skills and processes and drawing conclusions about the artists' activities and interactions in space. Still, the spectrum of photography provided another way for me to understand the studio in terms of space division and the aesthetic connection between spaces and makers, materials, and tools.

### **Case Study II: Karen Hampton**

In contrast to the previous analysis of a practice I do not understand, I analyzed the following photos from the article “Social Fabric” (2016) with my experience as a weaver at the forefront.<sup>57</sup> I was excited to leverage my knowledge and experience of weaving to discover what signs might evoke my weaving memories and aid in my analysis of these images of a familiar process. Over the years, I have worked with and owned many looms. My training began in college and has continued through my career as a woven textile designer and artist.

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<sup>57</sup> Liz Logan, “Social Fabric,” in *American Craft Magazine*, (February/March 2016), accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/social-fabric>.

The first image (Figure 9) shows Karen Hampton sitting at a floor loom.<sup>58</sup> I look at the loom to understand the type of textiles Hampton weaves. I identify this as an eight-harness loom by counting the number of frames or harnesses visible across the top. This might not be something that every reader would understand, so I look to the text to understand how the author conveys Hampton's weaving process.



Figure 9. Karen Hampton at a loom. *Source:* ACC, February/March 2016. Photograph by Douglas Kirkland.

The article references several works of art and describes some of Hampton's techniques: "Hampton laid silk organza over muslin to suggest Flora's transition from slave to landowner. Using indigo and cotton weaving yarn, she inscribed on the skirt the names."<sup>59</sup> This description of one of Hampton's artworks, signifies the use of several techniques, including stitching and natural dyeing. The reference to weaving yarn draws a symbolic line between Hampton's finished works and her weavings, yet do not specifically attend to her woven process.

I return to Figure 9 to see what else I understand. In this suspended moment, she looks down at her weaving holding the beater bar with her right hand as she pulls it toward her body.

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<sup>58</sup> Logan, "Social Fabric," accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/social-fabric>.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Both the suspension of time and her direct gaze provide a punctum that stimulates my interest. I identify her action based on the beater's forward position. I notice her bench has no cushion, and I have the felt sense of sitting at my loom, memories emerge, though it has been nearly two years since I last wove. I can visualize my loom in my last studio, surrounded by windows overlooking the marsh. I cushioned my loom bench with a childhood quilt my mother made. I consciously snap out of my memory, which teeters on the edge of a daydream. With rich visual and other sensations close in mind, I return my attention to the image.

The finish on Hampton's wooden loom bench appears worn to a dark patina. From this patina, I infer long-term use and wonder if others owned the loom, as so many are passed from weaver to weaver. The front beam also has patina from extended contact with weavers' hands and bodies. The rest of the loom is a lighter brown since it encounters less contact. I understand the loom's size (my perception between object-space and Hampton's body); I believe it is between four and six feet wide. I look to the large weaving on the wall behind her to see if I can identify woven cloth strips seamed together. The layers of dyeing and stitching and the angle from which the photograph is taken make it difficult to tell, but there is a faint impression of one or more horizontal lines, so it is possible that she weaves strips and sews them together to create larger pieces like this one.

Hampton's right arm rests lightly across the front beam, obscuring her left hand. I imagine that she holds in her left hand a shuttle containing weft yarn. My experience, in this case, extends my knowledge beyond what I see to include my understanding of techniques and tools used to pass the weft through the warp. Without them, the thread would tangle before being woven. As I work through this analysis, I loop back to a weaving memory from college. When I was learning to weave, I joked with friends that we were getting a degree in knot untangling.

From my experience with various floor looms, I can infer from her position that her next action will be to “throw” the shuttle. This inference leads me to recall how the shuttle travels horizontally, sliding along the metal reed and across the lower edge of the beater bar. As it passes through the open V-shaped “shed” of warp threads, it gradually loses speed as it comes to a stop on its own or is caught by the opposite hand. This picture shows a frozen moment; in the steps that follow, the beater bar will be pulled toward the weaver, pushing the weft yarn into place, securely interlocking them with warp threads.

Treadles that lift and lower the harnesses are barely visible on the floor across the front of the loom, but they are essential to the process of weaving. Looking at them, I try to remember how they feel against the bottoms of my feet, and I begin to recall how it feels to push them down to lift the harnesses.<sup>60</sup> I remember the feel of the rhythmic motions and sound of the harnesses as they are raised and lowered. I remember the tinkling of metal heddles suspended on frames within the harnesses and their rattling as the beater beats the weft yarns into place. Treddling is similar to pressing down peddles on a piano, except more force is required. The first time I sat down to weave, the loom experience reminded me of playing the piano. I was not great at it, but the loom felt familiar. I wanted to weave, to make both a kind of music and a thing, perhaps partially because of this embodied familiarity.

In trying to understand something about the labor involved in Hampton’s weaving process, I look back to the photograph and accompanying text. I look for clues and draw upon my tacit knowledge. I know that intricate designs require more harnesses; the more harnesses, the more weight lifted, making the treddles harder to push down. I have personally seen and felt

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<sup>60</sup> The most basic weave structure, tabby or plain weave, uses two harness, warp and weft yarns alternating over and under one another.

the physical toll weaving can take on the body. Sitting at a loom appears effortless, yet the act of weaving requires repetitive, coordinated, and sustained movements using all four limbs, as well as the back, which can be uncomfortable and, over time, can cause injury. Sitting on a hard seat in a hunched-over position and engaging in continuous repetitive actions result in stiff, sore muscles, and can lead to carpal tunnel syndrome or other musculoskeletal injuries. Factors that exacerbate the difficulty of the labor include the weaving pattern, yarns, type of loom, the amount of time spent weaving, and the speed at which cloth is produced. None of these factors is explicitly clear through this photograph. Weavers at Churchill would frequently request modifications to their looms or shuttles to make their job easier on their bodies and increase production speed. Production weaving often requires sitting at the loom for eight hours a day, which is probably not the case for Hampton. Perhaps the best physical offset of weaving is to break it up with other activities. We can see from Hampton's artwork on display and the descriptions in this article that she doesn't rely only on weaving alone for her textile art. There is little evidence of labor's complexity or the coordinated skills required to operate the loom conveyed through the photographs in this article, and no information is provided in the text.

I turn back to the photograph to learn something about Hampton's studio space. She has bright, clean, white walls which display various pieces of her textile art. On the wall directly in front of her loom hangs a sizeable indigo-dyed textile with blue-and-white markings and red-stitched text. This piece is larger than the loom and offers a sense of scale. My perception is that her ceilings are higher than ceilings in the average residential space.<sup>61</sup> The window to Hampton's left imparts natural light. The gray floor appears to be painted concrete, and I wonder if her loom

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<sup>61</sup> Newer American homes have a standard nine-foot ceiling height.

slides across the floor as she weaves; as I consider this, I remember scratched floors in previous weaving studios I've used. I also wonder how loud it is as I recall the deafening noise of multi-loom production weaving facilities where hard surfaces surround looms with very little to dampen the noise. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires production weavers to wear ear protection.<sup>62</sup> The textiles on Hampton's walls might help dampen the noise, though I speculate that the noise might not be a concern for Hampton. There are no shelves or other furnishings visible. In one corner of the room rests a casually stacked pile of loom parts, a common sight in many weaving studios since they often need to be exchanged or replaced.

I move to the second image (Figure 10) in which Hampton sits next to a larger loom. She smiles and looks away from the camera. Here I get a sense of her personality, but there is nothing that pierces me—no activity or interaction between her and objects or the reader. There is no warp on this loom, which also lends a certain theatrical sense but tells me too that Hampton is not actively working on both looms. The size of this loom indicates her ability to weave larger textiles without piecing them together. I speculate about the number of harnesses on this loom since they sometimes have fewer harnesses, which can make them lighter and easier to use, proportional to their scale. Behind her, I see the smaller loom that is featured in Figure 9. Between these two images, I try to puzzle together the arrangement of Hampton's studio. The photographs cut the viewer off from two sides of the space, making it difficult to understand how her process unfolds or what activities other than weaving happen there.

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<sup>62</sup> "OSHA Personal Protective Equipment," accessed April 4, 2021, <https://www.osha.gov/personal-protective-equipment>.



Figure 10. Karen Hampton, weaver and scholar of African American textile history. *Source:* ACC, April/May 2016. Photograph by Douglass Kirkland

The two shelves on the cart next to Hampton contain various weaving and textile tools and materials. I presume it has wheels and can be moved between looms and other work areas. There are paintbrushes, a sewing pincushion, metallic thread, scissors, colorful feathers, scissors, and other objects on the top shelf. I look to the article to learn more and find the following partial description of the process Hampton used to create one of her textile artworks, “Flora’s Daughter” (2002); the “artist weaves together difficult historical and personal truths in her complex, startling textiles, using a broad array of materials and techniques, from natural dyeing to digital photograph printing on fabric.”<sup>63</sup> Again, the article references a range of techniques used in several pieces of her work, yet makes an important distinction that Hampton is not just a craftsperson who weaves but is an artist using various processes. Like in Figure 3 of Nasser’s use of embroidery techniques that tie to his Palestinian identity, the reference to the historical complexity of Hampton textiles and research relays that they are metaphorical and perhaps in some cases, even allegorical. It becomes clear from the article and captions that personal and

<sup>63</sup> Logan, “Social Fabric,” accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/social-fabric>.



cultural history play a significant role in the imagery and techniques that Hampton uses. Her textiles are richly layered in techniques that Hampton describes to meaningfully convey the painful history of racism in America. She sometimes pierces, burns, weaves and create layers in her textiles that accrue meaning. These are skills that are partially evident in these two photos, through the tools, materials and textiles on display. I would love to further understand if skill and techniques are directly linked to Hampton's personal history and research and how she selects specific techniques to communicate these narratives in her textile art.

The methods I employed for this analysis included AEIOU, a range of descriptive field notes capturing cycles of observation about Hampton's process and space. Simultaneously, I looked for signals that provoked embodied memories, sensations, and perceptions cycling through my analysis, again and again, to encourage more to emerge. Over time, I began to understand that the knowledge I bring to each visual analysis will always influence my understanding of what the photograph represents. Rather than try to set this aside, I actively engage my prior knowledge through memories and perceptions rather than try to suppress them or leave them to my subconscious. In this way I began to more consciously forefront my explicit and embodied knowledge of textiles, space and materials to bring them into my analysis.

I paid close attention to qualities such as direct gaze and actions, which helped me distinguish embodied and tacit knowledge of weaving, skills, and labor. I understood that Hampton's gaze (punctum) toward her weaving and the action (extent) in Figure 9 engaged my embodied memories of weaving and evoked a felt sense of weaving. Through the cycles of analysis, I placed my attention on memories of the small movements required to weave which evoked my tacit and embodied knowledge of the process. These photographs elicited memories

of sensations, implicit and explicit knowledge of materials and tools, and my perception of how weavers interact with these. Though neither studio portrait extended my knowledge of Hampton's weaving or other textile process clearly, the text did expand my understanding of some of the skills and techniques Hampton uses. If one of the two images were to include a closer perspective demonstrating hands in action or details of materials, perhaps they could have helped me understand more of her process. The accompanying text did not include specific information about Hampton's weaving; still, it did help me develop my knowledge of Hampton's overall studio process and her use of multiple techniques in each artwork. These two similar photographs do little to provide the reader with a better sense of Hampton's studio process. The mystery of the artist remains, partially elevating thinking over making. I'm left wondering what happens when weavings come off the loom how and where does she create other artwork, and what other types of materials does she use?

### **Case Study III: Tanya Aguiñiga**

In my next analysis of photographs in the article "Artist without Borders" (2011), the first image (Figure 11) is one that overlaps between a studio portrait and hands-in-action photograph. This photograph shows wet green felt and bubbles on Tanya Aguiñiga's hands. It aroused a felt sense in me, which was accessible through my memory of textile experiences.<sup>64</sup> Both her gaze and the actions and interactions between her hands and materials provided punctum which affected me differently than other images in this analysis. I found myself returning to this image again and again to try to understand what else I could learn. The punctum is merely a tool in my method to indicate that there is something more to be understood and this photograph in

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<sup>64</sup> Joyce Lovelace, "Artist without Borders," in *American Craft Magazine*, (April/May 2011), accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/artist-without-borders>.

particular, marked a turning point in my research. I notice that the close perspective provides details to animate my memories and sensations. I have a felt sense of soap and wet felt; I can see myself through her process. My ability to remember, perceive, and understand her actions and materials as lively enriches my experience of this photograph.<sup>65</sup> As I draw upon my memories and perceptions of felt making, I realize how challenging it is to peel them apart from one another. When I remember acts of felt making, I also imagine the feelings that correspond with what I think Tanya must feel when she is making felt. I remember and can imagine sensory details because I have embodied knowledge of making felt. This knowledge includes my sensory memory of feeling the wool as it binds into felt, a moment that is not easy to describe but can be felt as it happens. The fact that this image aroused such personal, embodied memories signaled an important consideration for my analysis.

I return to my analysis and look again allowing my memories of embodied, sensorial making to bubble to the surface. As they do, I can better describe what I see and what I perceive from my embodied knowledge of felting. Looking at Aguiñiga felting the chair, I remember the smell and feel of soapy, wet felt.<sup>66</sup> I wonder how she made the felt stick to the surface. I try to perceive the wet, soapy wool on the chair's slick, cold surface, but I cannot fully since I have never felted onto a metal surface. I recall the way felt feels as the fibers seize together through the manipulation of temperatures and friction. This photo's vivid detail helps me identify embodied sensations of slippery, soapy, wet, hot, then cold—soft, smelly wool becoming stiff, scratchy felt.

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<sup>65</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 20. He believes there is no such thing as an active image but refers to an animating principle as 'adventure.' Without this, images drift between perception and sign.

<sup>66</sup> The smell of wet wool is similar to the smell of a wet dog—not unpleasant but pungent and distinct.



Figure 11. Tanya Aguiñiga hand felting. *Source:* ACC, April/May 2011. Photograph by Douglas Kirkland.

I wonder how Aguiñiga applies felt to a slippery metal surface that is comprised of multiple planes. Does she turn the chair upside down to reach the underside of the seat? Seeing her work with felt in this manner extends my knowledge of the possible uses for felting but does not give me the explicit ability to do so. The article and photograph demonstrate the possibility for this process, but do not give me enough information to know how to do this myself without repetition, trial, error and perhaps eventually success. In this way, photograph enables me to appreciate Aguiñiga's skills, but much like the image of Hampton at her loom (Figure 9), it doesn't provide me with enough information to understand her process fully. I recognize the labor and actions demonstrated partially because of my embodied knowledge of felting. Yet, by simply looking at such a photograph of someone in action, I cannot fully understand the skill required. Without a tacit understanding on my part of the actions represented, the sensations, and the labor involved, I see nothing in this photograph more than a mysterious process.

I turn to the article to see how it further informs me about Aguiñiga's process. The article states, "She gave each chair a soft new 'skin' of felt, each in an emphatic color further explaining that she reassembled them to prevent them from folding." The article goes on to describe the chairs as "warm and fuzzy alter ego channeled the tactile, familial exuberance of Latino culture."<sup>67</sup> Aguiñiga further explains the symbolic transformation of these "institutional" metal chairs into something more fun and vibrant.<sup>68</sup> Without the text, I would not have understood anything about the cultural relevance of her choices of materials. Here, warm and fuzzy represents more than the tactile sensations of felt; the materials are a partial expression of Aguiñiga's personal and cultural identity. The focus of this article, much like the article about Hampton, "Social Fabric" (2016), is the artist's identity as a Mexican-American furniture designer, craftperson, and artist.

Here again, the article refers to a range of Aguiñiga's skills and processes without specifically addressing them individually or as they are represented in the photos. "She works in metal, fiber, wood, clay, plastic—whatever suits her purpose—using methods that range from welding to weaving on a primitive backstrap loom. She's at home in the design and craft communities."<sup>69</sup> I consider how images of "process" teach us about craftspeople's identity when they don't explicitly address the skills and knowledge partially represented. The lack of clarifying text creates tension in my understanding of Aguiñiga as an artist or craftperson because her skill is only partially conveyed by the image. I begin to understand that when

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<sup>67</sup> Lovelace, "Artist without borders," accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/artist-without-borders>.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

making is represented in the image but not the text, it conveys a continuation of the art-craft dichotomy that elevates thinking and represents making as mysterious.

I look back at the photograph to see what else I can learn about Aguiñiga's studio space or other steps in her process. Due to the flat backdrop and perspective, it is difficult to understand these. A slight shift to show more than one wall would provide a better sense of space to understand how she works in her studio. I wonder if she has room to spread out and work on multiple projects or if she works side by side with others. I wonder if she completes one project at a time or works at numerous workstations. I wonder where the water source is, what her work surface and the floor are made of. This photograph provides only a small glimpse into Aguiñiga's material engagement and the space required for her process.



Figure 12. Tanya Aguiñiga in her studio. *Source:* ACM, April/May 2011. Photograph by Douglas Kirkland.

The next photograph is a studio portrait of Aguiñiga seated in front of another flat backdrop, this time her blackboard studio wall (Figure 12). Her project notes and schedule appear as a coded language, almost illegible. I try to decipher their meaning from letters and abbreviations to see what they might tell me about her process. Red boxes; M, T, W, are

surrounded by what I presume are other monthly, weekly, and daily tasks to be completed. The scale of the blackboard makes me further curious about the size of her studio. I don't know what she sits on. I am not invited to understand how her studio is situated, which leaves me frustrated and keenly aware that I have certain expectations about what I want to see in studio photographs. Like Alexis's portrait (Figure 2), this perspective tells us very little about Aguiñiga's studio or process. She could be a teacher, a business person, or something else. This image does little to educate the reader about Aguiñiga as a craftsperson, but it identifies her as a busy businesswoman and designer. If this is the intent, I wonder why technology tools, such as computers, phones, or other business tools that speak directly to the business side of Aguiñiga's craft are not included.



Figure 13. Tanya Aguiñiga's yarn and other studio textiles. *Source:* ACM, April/May 2011. Photograph by Douglas Kirkland.

Figure 13 is a tight shot of yarn balls crammed into a small space. This photograph of materials evokes my tactile memories of various yarns. If you have never held or stroked yarns, I

wonder what this image conveys about their feel? Some yarns appear smooth, lofty or silky; others are uneven or rougher looking. For example, in the top center, the two dark purple yarn balls appear thicker and more loosely spun, creating a soft, spongy yarn. The bright green yarn just below the purple looks shinier and thinner, indicating it may feel slick or silky. Down several rows, the thinner and more tightly spun thinner teal yarn will likely not be as squishy as the purple yarn. Some yarns are barber-pole, a two-tone effect created by plying two yarns together, while retaining the texture of the twist. From this description, I hope to demonstrate that through close looking at how materials appear in relationship to one another, even if we have never felt them, we can begin to perceive differences in textures from the visual cues. This photograph of materials stands apart from the process shots in the article and provides a different entry point to embodied sensations. The caption indicates this is part of Aguiñiga's stash, a loaded term that deserves some deep unpacking (which I will refrain from). Her stash may have less to do with her specific process and more to do with reminders, inspiration, or future possibilities. Dedicating a photograph to a cubicle of yarn may have less to do with demonstrating her process and more to do with its aesthetic function.





Figure 14. Tanya Aguiñiga's Tools. *Source:* ACM, April/May 2011. Photograph by Douglas Kirkland.

The final photograph I analyzed from this article is an image of tools and materials against a wall (Figure 14). Another photograph that provides limited information about Aguiñiga's process or space but tells us something about the range of tools and materials she works with apart from those associated with felt and textiles. These tools might be used for carpentry, jewelry, or metalsmithing, all of which I have tried over the years. However, I do not consider myself exceptionally skilled or knowledgeable in these practices. I have used tools similar to these and can perceive the feeling of the jigsaw's wooden handle in my palm or how it feels to run my finger its blade. I understand their weight and size based on my memories and can imagine the sound and smell of sliding a blade across the surface of metal or wood. I can remember and imagine the feeling of fine dusty metal particles landing on my fingers, my clothing, and my work surface. Like felting, this is not a neat and clean process, and I wonder if this work with wood and metal is done in a different area of her studio. There are multiple safety

considerations when working with these materials, but there is no evidence of masks or a ventilation system in these images.

More than other articles in this analysis, this one helped me discover the critical role that memories and sensations play in evoking embodied knowledge. I realized Aguiñiga's felting photograph was exciting because it foregrounded action, process, and material engagement, and these provoked a felt sense of the knowledge represented. The most exciting part of this analysis was the way in which my imagination and memories of the feel of yarns, smell of wet wool, and action in specific photographs sparked my lively interpretation of embodied knowledge of felt-making. By even partially being able to "see myself" in the processes represented, I was better able to understand interactions and activities as they unfold in time. I was able to identify and connect with the physical sensations of the craftsperson and her process through my own embodied understanding of labor and skills. In this way, these gestures of skill connected me through a shared knowledge that brought me into a community of textile makers.

#### **Case Study IV: Natural Dye Artists**

The final images in this analysis are from the article "Color Vision" (2020).<sup>70</sup> I will not analyze all the images in this article, yet I have selected three from the category that has been least represented in my analysis. I selected these hands-in-action shots for the way they demonstrate a close perspective of the use of natural indigo dye, which I've had significant experience with over the past six years. For me, each of these three images reveals what Barthes calls an imprecise, imaginary identity, even if only a "fragment of oneself."<sup>71</sup> Other images in

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<sup>70</sup> Hope McLeod, "Color Vision," in *American Craft Magazine*, (August/September 2020), accessed April 16, 2021. <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/color-vision>

<sup>71</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 100, 103.

this analysis have allowed me to see myself in their representation, but hands in action photographs in particular create a type of disembodied focus on precise actions and body parts that offered me a different understanding of how my identity (even fragmented) overlaps with those of the craftspeople represented.

The first image (Figure 15) is a close-up of two hands in a stainless-steel bowl, wrists resting on the edge. This image provokes a familiar impression of natural dyeing I have done. I recognize that this familiarity animates my sensory memories of dying. There is my felt sense of small-batch, hands-on, natural dyeing. The dyer's left forearm and right wrist rest upon the rim of the bowl with most of her fingers submerged in the frothy blue-green water. I recall how the particles of plant matter feel as they stick to my hands, the sides of the bowl, and the material I dye. I see a pale, almost undyed fabric in the left hand, not much darker than the white shirt the dyer is wearing. Because of the pale color of the material and the rich green-blue in the water, I infer that dyeing has just begun.



Figure 15. Sasha Duerr using fresh indigo. *Source:* ACC, August/September 2020. Photograph by Joe Coca.

I further deduce a confidence level that the dyer won't splatter green onto her clothing or watch. This photograph captures the movement of the water, partially blurred by the bubbles on the surface. On the inside edge of the bowl and the dyer's wrists, there are green flecks of something. Since she is not wearing gloves, I presume that the dye material is not harmful and I look to the article to see what else is said. This article is an interview with the Author, colorist, and artisan activist Keith Recker about the virtues and use of natural dyes today. He states that the skills demonstrated by natural dyers are in relation to their perception of the environment these materials come from, the sensations they use to understand their process and "actual technical knowledge of the steps required for fiber preparation that goes into the actual dyeing

session.”<sup>72</sup> I am grateful to hear the skills of these dyers referred to in a range of ways, including their ecological impact, material knowledge and skill and use of perception and embodied knowledge. Although it is not an in-depth description of process, this description helps me better understand the body, mind, material engagement of these artists.

I return to the image and notice the bowl rests on a gray surface, not suspended over a heat source. I imagine the water temperature is somewhere between warm, room temperature, and cold. I cannot be sure what’s happening, yet it provokes my memories of fresh leaf indigo dyeing from which I can infer more. The signs—the specks of green, the color of the liquid in the bowl, the room temperature water—all track with my experience of using indigo for direct dyeing. I recall the smell of fresh indigo leaves, sweet and vegetative and feel of the wet indigo pieces, as well as the friction required to rub cloth and leaves to extract the blue-green pigment. My memories and what I can identify from the photograph help me understand the early stage of dyeing when this photo was taken.

I look for signs to understand this, including the color of the water, still quite green, and the fabric, still almost white. As the process unfolds in my mind’s eye, I understand the time, motion, and agitation required for the leaves to break down and transfer their blue-green pigment into the cloth. This direct-dye indigo process requires very few tools or materials and can be done almost anywhere, indoors or outdoors. One crucial factor is that the leaves must be fresh. All that’s necessary are hands—even feet—fabric, and indigo plants. This process takes time, but not a predetermined amount; it is accomplished by sight and feel rather than precise time and materials. The amount of plant material needed depends on how much pigment is in the plant

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<sup>72</sup> McLeod, “Color Vision,” in *American Craft Magazine*, accessed April 16, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/color-vision>

used and the desired color. What is conveyed in this photograph visually, is something quite simple, yet my knowledge of this process helps me to understand the considerable time and plant matter needed to yield a rather pale blue-green color.

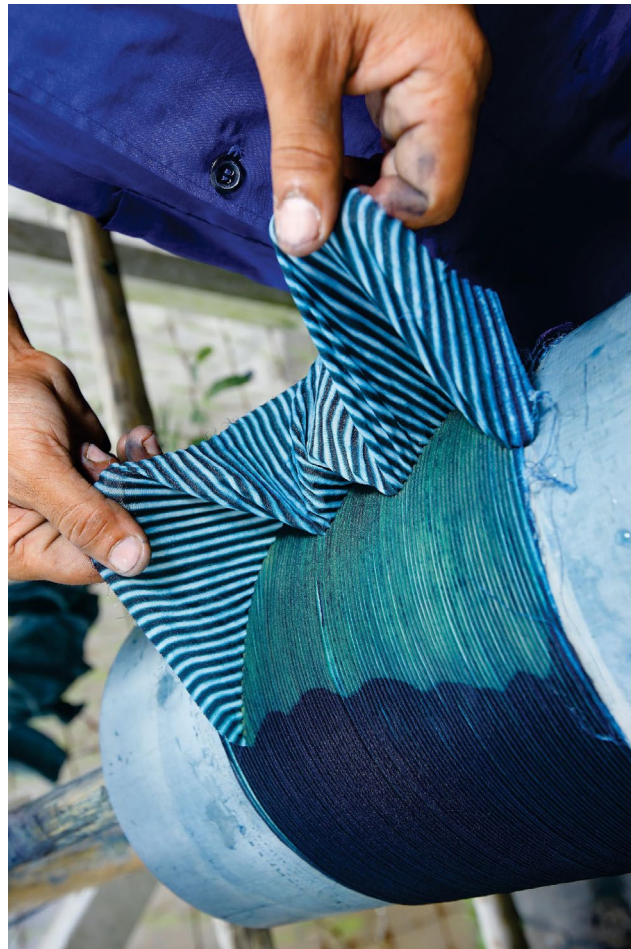


Figure 16. Shibori design created with indigo. *Source:* ACC, August/September 2020. Photograph by “Living Blue.”

The next image (Figure 16) shows two hands holding a blue-and-white striped fabric as it is being unwound from a large cylinder. I can’t be sure what the cylinder is made of, but it’s pale blue and appears white underneath the edge of the fabric. I have used PVC pipe<sup>73</sup> for *shibori*, a

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<sup>73</sup> PVC, polyvinyl chloride pipe is low cost, light weight, inexpensive and frequently use for this type of wrapped shibori pattern making.

Japanese dyeing technique that produces patterns on fabric. In this photo, the hands of the dyer appear to be dry. Some of the fingers are lightly stained with indigo, especially around the fingernails. There is a dark-blue wavy line that runs horizontally across the cylinder where the fabric has been peeled up toward the dyer's torso. Above this horizon line, the unwound fabric is a blue-green shade where the indigo has not yet fully oxidized. As the fabric is unwound from the cylinder, it is exposed to oxygen, and the indigo turns from green to blue. This photograph captures both the fully oxidized deep shade of indigo and the moment before the oxygen transforms it to blue. This always excites onlookers, partially because it only lasts a few moments. I liken it to a polaroid photograph developing before your eyes.

The forefingers and thumbs that hold the edge of this are clean, which is vital because this fabric has undyed white vertical stripes that might easily be stained, ruining their precision. The fabric is folded precisely around the cylinder to create tiny alternating undyed white and dyed blue stripes. Their narrow width—four stripes fit across one thumb indicate the tremendous skill and time required to create this pattern. In fact, as I return to the article to better understand what I see, instead of giving an explicit description, Recker indicates his belief in the importance of asking artisans to tell their stories of making.<sup>74</sup> But rather than tell the story of this fabric, I am left to analyze it further based only on the photograph and my knowledge of dyeing. As the fabric is unwound, the white reveals where indigo did not penetrate the folds. The material appears to be a type of silk with a smooth surface, not sheer or shiny. I am no master of this shibori technique, but I have tried it on occasions with much wider folds and less precise outcomes. Understanding this process makes me appreciate the masterful skill and time

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<sup>74</sup> Hope McLeod, "Color Vision," in *American Craft Magazine*, accessed April 16, 2021. <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/color-vision>

necessary to create this type of dye pattern. This deep blue color requires multiple dips into the indigo vat, with time between to allow the indigo to oxidize. I can imagine that this fabric took many hours, maybe even a full day, to pleat and dye.

Finally, I turn my attention to space and lighting. Slightly out of focus in the background, there appear to be leaves of a plant and some other dark-blue material. The strange angle of the photograph makes it challenging to tell if the person unwarping the fabric is indoors or out, standing or seated. Most of the time, when I work with indigo, I do so outside because it is messy and sometimes has a strong odor.



Figure 17. Han Shan lifting fabric out of dye vat. *Source:* ACC, August/September 2020. Photograph by Joe Coca.

The final photograph in this article (Figure 17) also involves indigo dyeing. The perspective of this image enables me to peer down over two hands that are gently cupped together to hold a small tennis-ball-size bundle of fabric wrapped with yarn. Both the hands and the fingernails near the cuticles have the telltale blue stain of indigo. Indigo can stain the skin for several days but comes off gradually or with vigorous washing or use of lemon juice. Stained fingernails can become quite dark, and the color can last for weeks or longer, being a mark of the



indigo maker. In addition to sometimes telltale blue pigment on the skin and fingernails, the high pH in some indigo vats can leave skin extremely dry due to very alkaline conditions and deserves close personal attention. Due to the perspective and focal distance, it's hard to gauge the size, type of container, or location of the vat. I can see thread wound around the fabric ball, and I recognize this as a patterning technique. Below the hands holding the bundle, the water is deep blue, and on the surface, there are bubbles clustered in the center. Another small area in the center of the bubbles is a lighter blue-green shade, similar to the color of the bundle in the hands. I wonder if this is another bundle that has floated to the surface of the vat.

These bubbles are called the “flower;” they indicate the vat's health. It may seem strange to look at a photograph for evidence of the health of a material, yet there are visual and other sensual cues that cannot be read from photographs (such as the feel and smell). I recall the slippery feel and sweet, pungent smell of a reduced indigo vat. Indigo is different from other dyes in that a reduction of oxygen in the water must be present before pigment can adhere to materials.<sup>75</sup> Indigo users refer to the health of a vat when it is properly reduced and ready for use. In this case, health can also be considered in terms of productivity, when the vat is ready for production, it is healthy. The cloth in this person's hands is the ubiquitous blue-green color of material just removed from a vat before it has had time in the air to fully oxidize.

A fully oxidized fabric discloses the strength of the indigo vat. Before the fabric is fully oxidized, it can be difficult to tell how dark the shade of blue will be. The green hue is always present when removing materials from a reduced vat. After removing the fabric, it must oxidize for several minutes before it is returned to the vat for another dip or before it is dried.

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<sup>75</sup> To set up and maintain an indigo vat, chemicals (natural or synthetic) are used to remove the oxygen to allow for proper dyeing. The pH must also be adjusted to maintain an ideal range for the type of material to be dyed.

Developing dark shades of blue often requires up to twenty short, thirty-second to one-minute dips. Usually, small bundles of yarn and fabric are hand submerged beneath the surface of the dye before being gently removed from the vat. Even with all the oxidation necessary to develop the indigo color, air is the enemy of the indigo vat; avoiding bubbles when putting the material in or taking it out keeps the vat in better health. It may seem that avoiding drips, splashes, and air bubbles is a simple task, but it is a skill that requires practice. Imagine slipping into a bathtub or diving into a pool without making a splash, and you begin to understand a bit of the skill needed for this one step of the indigo dye process.

This photograph captures an exciting moment of removing the material from the vat. I'm always transfixed as I watch the material change color before my eyes. When I look at these three indigo-dyeing photographs, I understand that each of these moments represent small steps in a sequence of actions that, when strung together, complete the task of indigo dyeing. Dyeing the fabric would likely fall somewhere in the middle of a range of activities, including setting up the indigo vat (requires days to weeks), dyeing the fabric (requires hours to days), and constructing something with the fabric (requires hours to days). I can't help but imagine a timeline unfold as I witness these suspended moments. The rewarding moment of removing the material represents many hours of skill, knowledge, and labor that might be invisible to anyone who has never used indigo.

These hands in action shots communicate elements of skill and the time involved in some craft processes that are less understood in other types of photographs. The close range and sensual engagement between materials and bodies provides a punctum that evokes memories of embodied knowledge of natural dyeing. Even though these photographs do not clearly demonstrate the use of space or makers themselves, their representation of material engagement

allows me to personally identify with the process. This article provides a range of photographs, including materials and studio portraits as well as other photographs of finished objects which demonstrate how singular articles can use a range of photographs to more fully tell stories of craft processes. Together the spectrum of images in this article relays a sense of value for natural dyeing, yet the hands in action shots in this analysis left me with little personal understanding of the identity of these makers. What I understand is a common set of skills and value for natural dye process and materials, which conveys shared emotional and social intelligence.

### **Part III: Conclusion**

This visual and comparative analysis was, in many ways, a continuation of my interest in “the studio,” which began with a project called, “*Inside the Artist Studio*” seven years prior to my graduate work. This analysis extends my understanding of craft makers and their studios practice through their visual representation. It quickly became clear that this analysis would require my critical consideration of not just *what* was represented but *how* I, as a textile craftsperson came to understand these representations. Part of my analysis was recording my self-reflection and revisiting images to allow alternate sensory knowledge to expand my understanding of these studio representations. My research intent was never to critically analyze the ACM photographers, writers, or editors; yet the nature of this research required me to analyze how and why specific photographs portray or conceal what was represented.

I realized that in looking at images of craft studios, I had been looking in the same old way—looking past, looking over, looking through, unconsciously looking. This analysis became as much about shifting my attention to foreground embodied knowledge as an analysis method as it was about understanding visual representations of studios. At times, this left me with what the

psychologist Gendlin describes as a sense of “discomfort” or what I previously would have considered a sense of dissatisfaction about what understood studio photographs to represent. By defining a spectrum of photographs used in the ACM and looking at how each type of photographs demonstrated different ways to access knowledge of process, space and craftspeople, I came to understand which images provoked memories and sensations more clearly.

I concluded that no particular image type could give me an in-depth understanding of a studio’s entire space, the unfolding of actions in time, or the perception of skill required for artists to make their works. Photographs of materials and tools as well as studio portraits often required my reliance on implicit knowledge of space, users and objects. Hands-in-action and process shots I was familiar with provoked rich memories of embodied knowledge of activities and interactions between my body and materials and tools. Articles that contained a variety of image representation types gave me the richest understanding of studios and craftspeople. When the text and images did not align or expand upon one another, I felt a missed opportunity that left me to wonder, imagine, and make assumptions. Articles that combined a range of photographs and text gave me more clarity as they allowed me to identify signs—punctum, extent, and felt sense—to understand various forms of my knowledge—embodied, tacit, implicit, and empirical.

One of the most significant challenges of this analysis was identifying and communicating different forms of knowledge that emerged through analysis. The following three short questions guided my cycles of analysis; what does this image do, what does the text do and what do I know about what I see? These questions enabled me to capture the many ways I understood what each image represented, how the text expanded or challenged what I saw, and how, together, these could help me communicate what I understood. Berger and Barthes were

influential in providing me a critical way to frame the connection between images and text to further my understanding. These questions along with specific methods for analysis helped me know when there was something more (especially alternate sensory knowledge) for me to analyze and communicate.

Articulating my implicit and embodied knowledge required me to speak and think from within my body, to give voice to my senses—to what has not yet been said.<sup>76</sup> This translation of felt sense, functioned in tandem to link wordless ideas to images. In this way, communicating sensations and perceptions became an unexpected method of enriching my understanding of visual representations. By saying what I thought I saw, describing what I imagine I could feel, I opened the door to perceive the unfamiliar through my familiar interpretation. This is what I understand Pink to be saying when she describes how interdisciplinary research methods can expand our understanding of how we experience visual representations of culture.<sup>77</sup>

While conducting this research, my ongoing reading about the senses, including selections from David Howes's book, *Empire of the Senses* (2005), and other studies of phenomenology and embodied knowledge, became pivotal to my research.<sup>78</sup> I repeatedly explored how various sensations affected my understanding of the spaces, processes, and materials used by artists and craftspeople. By not looking at the visual with an embodied understanding, I would have missed a large piece of what I came to understand. Using interdisciplinary methods that included my embodied sensations and memories did not discredit other forms of implicit or explicit knowledge. Instead, they expanded my ability to analyze

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<sup>76</sup> Gendlin. *Focusing*, 32.

<sup>77</sup> Pink. "The visual in ethnography: photography, video, cultures and individuals," 123–144.

<sup>78</sup> David Howes, *Empire of the Senses*. (Oxford, UK: Berg Publishers, 2005).

images using various forms of knowledge not always associated with analysis of visual materials.

Visual culture surrounds us in print, digital and other formats and yet I found through this research that my way of looking needed to slowing down and cycling back to images to place my critical attention on what and how these visual representations were communicating. As I came to reflect on these visual representations as forms of education, I felt the need to use methods of analysis that veered from a strict pedagogy of reproducing dominant ideology<sup>79</sup> about craftspeople and craft studios in America, if there is such a thing. Researchers that have been influential to this process, including Sarah Pink, Rachel Esner, Ann-Sophie Lehmann, Ira Shor, and Paulo Freire advocate for interdisciplinary research. Though this approach is not totally new, it offers rewarding possibilities for further analysis of visual representations of culture, not just craft studios.

By situating my memories of craft practices and embodied knowledge of skills and materials, I came to foreground alternative forms of knowledge for understanding visual representations. This analysis required significant conscious awareness of kinds of knowledge used to understand these representations of craft studios. I hope that it demonstrated not just my understanding of these studios but an interdisciplinary approach to research available to other researchers and craftspeople to help us understand visual representations of actions, space, and skill through our memories and a variety of alternate sensory knowledge. Whether applied to craft spaces or the representation of skills and process, the various types of knowledge and

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<sup>79</sup> Shor, and Freire. *A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education*, 37.

experience we bring to research can and should be combined for a critical approach to visual analysis.

### ACM Fiber Studio Article Findings

Date	Article Title	Link to Article	Name	Mediums (Defined by ACC)	Author	Number of Photos	Number of Studio Photos	Photographer
2001	?	<a href="#">Quilt article from ACC Library</a>	Valerie Hector	quilt	n/a	1	1	?
2008		<a href="#">See article from ACC Library</a>	Lenore Tawney	weaving		3	3	?
Apr/May 2009	Urban Fabric	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/urban-fabric">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/urban-fabric</a>	Kathryn Pannepacker	weaving	Mimi Zeiger	1	1	Ana Wolf
2009		<a href="#">Quilt article from ACC Library</a>	Peter Collingwood	quilt		1	1	?
2010	Father Andrew	<a href="#">Fiber article from ACC Library</a>	Father Andrew	various	?	10	5	unspecified
Dec/Jan 2010	Aileen Osborn Webb Awards 2009	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/aileen-osborn-webb-awards-2009">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/aileen-osborn-webb-awards-2009</a>	Katherine Westphal	mixed media, paper art quilts	?	20	1	Tom Grotta
Feb/Mar 2010	Deeply Felt	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/deeply-felt">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/deeply-felt</a>	Janice Arnold	fiber	Elizabeth Lopeman	11	4	Bob Lyall
Feb/Mar 2010	Hands on Shoes	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/hands-shoes">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/hands-shoes</a>	Various-CYDWOK	(none specified) shoes	Amy Shaw	8	6	unspecified
Oct/Nov 2010	Weaving the Sea	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/weaving-sea">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/weaving-sea</a>	Kay Sekimachi	jewelry and fibers	Deborah Bishop	6	2	Leslie Williamson
Feb/ Mar 2011	Defined By Daring	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/defined-daring">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/defined-daring</a>	Joan Schulze	mixed media quilts	Suzanne Smith Arney	13	4	Mark Tushman
Apr/May 2011	Artist without Borders	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/artist-without-borders">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/artist-without-borders</a>	Tanya Aquiniga	fiber, furniture, mixed media	Joyce Lovelace	28	4	Douglas Kirkland
Jun/Jul 2012	Grand and Mysterious	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/grand-and-mysterious">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/grand-and-mysterious</a>	Walter and Margaux Kent	leather bags and accessories	Monica Moses	11	2	Chris Crisman
Jun/Jul 2012	Masters: Lewis Knauss	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/masters-lewis-knauss">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/masters-lewis-knauss</a>	Lewis Knauss	weaving	Staff	4	1	Chris Crisman

Jan/Feb 2013	Craft of Design: Denyse Schmidt	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/craft-design-denyse-schmidt">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/craft-design-denyse-schmidt</a>	Denyse Schmidt	quilt	Joyce Lovelace	7	1	John Midgley
Jan/Feb 2013	Wandering Eyes	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/wandering-eyes">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/wandering-eyes</a>	Lisa Klakulak	felt fiber	Melissa Reardon	19	4	Michael Mauney + various
Jan/Feb 2013	Lincoln, Grant and two other guys	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/lincoln-grant-and-two-other-guys">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/lincoln-grant-and-two-other-guys</a>	Ignatius Creegan and Rod Givens	milliners—mixed media, fibers	Diane Daniel	13	5	Robert Severi
Aug/Sept 2013	Art of Reinvention	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/art-reinvention">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/art-reinvention</a>	Rebecca Hannon	jewelry	Christy DeSmith	17	3	Aaron McKenzie Fraser
Feb/Mar 2014	Impractically perfect	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/impractically-perfect">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/impractically-perfect</a>	Briana Babani	fiber, paper	Rachel Schalet Crabb	6	1	Briana Babani
Aug/Sept 2014	Art + Science	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/art-science">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/art-science</a>	Erik and Martin Demaine	glass and paper	Joyce Lovelace	26	3	Cary Wolinsky & Martin Demaine
Aug/Sept 2014	The Slow Way	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/slow-way">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/slow-way</a>	Various-4	fashion	staff	32	7	Talisman Brolin, Stefano Giovannini, Matt Wittmeyer, Mark Tushman
Aug/Sept 2014	Turn Style	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/turn-style">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/turn-style</a>	Juliana Cho	fashion and fibers	Monica Moses	3	3	Talisman Brolin
Aug/Sept 2014	Masters: Jane Lackey	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/masters-jane-lackey">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/masters-jane-lackey</a>	Jane Lackey	textiles—various	Staff	5	1	Brian Foulkes
Dec/Jan 2015	Deeply Felt Statements	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/deeply-felt-statements">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/deeply-felt-statements</a>	Kiwon Wang	jewelry and paper	Joyce Lovelace	9	1	Barbara Bordnick
Aug/Sept 2015	To Be Seen	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/be-seen">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/be-seen</a>	Colette Fu	paper (pop-up books)	Joyce Lovelace	10	2	Chris Crisman
Aug/Sept 2015	Clear Focus	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/clear-focus">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/clear-focus</a>	Melissa Cody	tapestry weaving	Joyce Lovelace	11	2	Reed Rahn
Aug/Sept 2015	Store House	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/storehouse">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/storehouse</a>	Claire Van Vliet	artist books—paper	Betty Bright	10	3	Irvin Serrano + Various (Books)
Febr/ Mar 2016	Social Fabric	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/social-fabric">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/social-fabric</a>	Karen Hampton	weaving	Liz Logan	11	3	Douglas Kirkland
Febr/ Mar 2016	Power of Place	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/power-place">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/power-place</a>	LJ Roberts	embroidery	Monica Moses	2	1	Talisman Brolin
Aug/Sept 2016	Good Stuff	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/good-stuff">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/good-stuff</a>	Lisa Sorrell	boot making	Joyce Lovelace	11	2	Shevaun Williams
Aug/Sept 2016	Road Warrior	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/road-warrior">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/road-warrior</a>	Nika Feldman	costume—fiber	Deborah Bishop	26	7	Aaron McKenzie Fraser



Oct/Nov 2016	Masters Issue	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/issue/octobernovember-2016">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/issue/octobernovember-2016</a>	Various (Nick Cave & Françoise Grossen)	various	various	8	8	Various
Apr/ May 2017	Kicks Meister	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/kicks-meister">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/kicks-meister</a>	Jacob Ferrato	leather shoes—cordwainer	Deborah Bishop	6	1	Jacob Ferrato
Jun/Jul 2017	Run Jump Explore	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/run-jump-explore">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/run-jump-explore</a>	Toshiko Horiuchi MacAdam and her husband, Charles	crochet installations, fiber	Philip Moscovitch	14	2	Masaki Koizumi
Jun/Jul 2017	Rare Form	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/rare-form">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/rare-form</a>	Amara Hark-Weber	shoemaking	Andrew Ranallo	3	2	Mark LaFavor
Aug/Sept 2017	Making It Work	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/making-it-work">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/making-it-work</a>	Various	various	Robert O'Connell	6	2	Brooke Adams
Apr/ May 2018	Cane Clan	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/cane-clan">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/cane-clan</a>	Brandy Clements & Dave Klingler	chair caning	Diane Daniel	6	3	Nathan Rivers Chesky, Courtesy of Southern Highland Craft Guild
Dec/Jan 2019	Gray Area	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/gray-area">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/gray-area</a>	Jordan Nassar	Embroidery, fiber	Kavitha Rajogopalan	11	2	Michael O'Neill
Jun/Jul 2019	India-Weaving it Together	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/india-weaving-it-together">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/india-weaving-it-together</a>	Various	textiles—various, fiber	Alia Jeraj	7	5	Archana Shah
Jun/Jul 2019	Road Tripper	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/roadtripper">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/roadtripper</a>	Laura Preston	quilt—fiber	Sabine Heinlein	21	2	Laura Preston
Aug/Sept 2019	Made to Move	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/made-move">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/made-move</a>	Ibiwunmi Omotayo Olaiya	costumes (no medium defined)	Paulette Young	6	2	Michael O'Neill
Oct/Nov 2019	Emerging Voices	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/emerging-voices-announcing-2019-awards">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/emerging-voices-announcing-2019-awards</a>	Dierdrick Brackens, Aram Han Sifuentes, & Other (non fiber)	Various, fibers	Unspecified	17	2	Various
Dec/Jan 2020	Encountering Alice Kagawa Parrott	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/encountering-alice-kagawa-parrott">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/encountering-alice-kagawa-parrott</a>	Alice Kagawa Parrott	weaving and natural dye	Sara Archer	6	3	unspecified
Dec/Jan 2020	Ten Dot Textiles	Not on Website	Ten Dot Textile	rope basketry	N/A	6	1	unspecified
Apr/May 2020	Enter the Plaidaverse	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/teaser-enter-plaidaverse">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/teaser-enter-plaidaverse</a>	Robert Tagliapietra and Jeffrey Costello	weaving—tartans	Emily Freidenrich	8	3	Evan Sung
Apr/May 2020	Reclaim, Remake, Relove	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/reclaim-remake-relove">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/reclaim-remake-relove</a>	Llane Alexis	reclaimed textiles (no medium defined)	Deborah Bishop	5	2	Peter van der Pas
Aug/Sept 2020	Funk and the Spirit	Not on Website	Xenobial Bailey	crochet installations, fiber	Paulette Young	8	1	unspecified
Aug/Sept 2020	When the Shoe Fits	Not on Website	Amara Hark-Weber	shoes	Amara Hark-Weber	5	5	Mark LaFavor

Aug/Sept 2020	Color Vision	<a href="https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/color-vision">https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/color-vision</a>	Various (4)	natural dye	Hope McLeod	11	11	Various
<b>Totals</b>	<b>48 Articles</b>				<b>23</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>29+ provided by artist</b>

## Craftways Symposium and 2021 MA Critical Craft Presentation<sup>80</sup>

I am happy to share this visual and ethnographic analysis of studio photographs in the *American Craft Magazine*, conducted for the MA in Critical Craft at Warren Wilson for my practicum over the past two years. First, I acknowledge with gratitude and reverence that I am a settler on borrowed land coming to you from Camden, SC, the land of the Catawba, Cherokee, Cusabo, Sewee, and Wateree Nations. I want to express my gratitude to the MA Critical Craft Director, Core Faculty and Advisors, and the many visiting faculty during residencies, my cohort, and mentors, all of whom helped enrich my understanding of craft histories and the critical thinking required to embark upon this research.

Before I share this research project, I'd like to share some background regarding my history of interest in studios. In 2011, I attended a two-week workshop at *Penland* that inspired me to launch an "Inside the Artist Studio" project." Between 2013 and 2018, I visited, photographed, and published interviews on my blog of over seventy-five artists and craftspeople across the United States to learn about their studio practices. Although this project began seven years before my graduate work, this analysis extends my understanding of craft makers and their studio practice through their visual representation.

### *American Craft Council Magazine*



Figure 18. Slide of ACC cover images from 'Craftways Symposium' presentation. *Source:* ACC, various.

<sup>80</sup> Virtual presentations of this practicum research were required for the completion of the MA Critical Craft program during the Craftways Symposium, July 22, 2021, co-sponsored by MA Critical Craft, Warren Wilson College and Center for Craft. A second presentation followed for the program faculty and students on August 1, 2021. <https://www.centerforcraft.org/craft-ways-2021>

Restrictions of the pandemic required I find an alternate method for researching craft studios. In lieu of studio visits and interviews, I turned to the digital archive of the *American Craft Council Magazine*. Their librarian, Beth Goodrich, helped make it possible for me to conduct this analysis of fiber studios from 2000 to 2020, which also required an understanding of studio photography. As a preeminent national nonprofit organization, the American Craft Council magazine conveys knowledge and educates readers through stories about craft culture, objects, and makers. One key finding in this twenty-year analysis revealed photographic shifts that increased the number and types of studio photographs published. I define these as photographs of craftspeople, materials, space, and actions. By constructing a timeline, it became clear that their focus shifted away from objects, as shown on the covers in Figure 18, towards craftspeople, materials, and studio processes, as shown on the covers in Figure 19. There was a steady increase in the number of studio photos focused on process, starting in the first five years with only one, culminating in the last five with seventy. To further interpret this shift, it helps to place this publication in context with the ‘lifestyle’ genres that became popular in the nineties and early 2000s, which focused new interest on homes, hobbies, and workspaces. Also, during this time, the rise of the internet and technology put visual culture into more hands via more mediums, and the ACC began to publish across platforms on their website and in print. These undoubtedly influenced how the ACC was shifting the representation of visual culture of craft within their magazine. Since I could not speak directly with the managing editor due to staff changes, I am left to wonder about this impact upon the magazine and its readers.

### *American Craft Council Magazine*



Figure 19. Slide of ACC cover images from ‘Craftways Symposium’ presentation. *Source:* ACC, various.

This comparative analysis included research methods centered on observation techniques borrowed from visual and sensory ethnography and design studies to examine how my experience in fiber processes and corresponding embodied knowledge expand my understanding of these studios. I began by using focused observation; specifically, I turned to Christina Nipper Eng and *Watching Closely*. This gave me the framework to understand people, their environment, and their social and physical connections. To direct my observations more specifically, I used the AEIOU Design Research toolkit, developed by a team of ethnographers as a lens for observing and recording Activities, Environments, Interactions, Objects, and Users. These were especially helpful in mapping out patterns, concepts, and categories such as behaviors, characteristics, functions, and interactions between people and the material culture surrounding them in studios. To further complement these methods, I turned to visual and

sensory ethnography guided by the theoretical framework of Sarah Pink. She recognizes the need to bring reflexive knowledge and sensory understanding of culture into research. This inquiry foregrounded how images can communicate sensory knowledge through the viewers' embodied knowledge of craft techniques and materials—distinguishing qualities that provoked these embodied experiences aided my analysis. I recognize that the knowledge one brings to any analysis will always influence its outcome; my goal has been to determine how embodied and other alternate forms of knowledge influence interpretations of visual representations.



Figure 20, Slide of ACC studio photographs from ‘Craftways Symposium’ presentation. *Source:* ACC, various.

I identified and defined a spectrum of studio photographs that demonstrate unique characteristics and overlaps by examining a wide discipline of textile processes and spaces. The four primarily used and included on this slide (Figure 20) are portraits, hands-in-action, process, and materials and tools. I gathered observations in a fieldnote journal and a spreadsheet through a series of slow and rapid-looking exercises from the print and digital images on the ACC website. In adopting this practice-based approach, I drew upon my understanding of objects and environments to descriptively code materials and tools, kinds of people, impressions of emotions, interactions, activities, environments, and more. I came to understand which images evoked memories and embodied knowledge of process, skill, and space. In some photographs, myopic foregrounding of materials amplifies objects as commodities that stand in for culture and formulate a didactic aura of their creator.

While no singular type demonstrates an in-depth representation of a studio, some images required me to rely on implicit knowledge—while others inspired rich memories of sensations and interactions between my body, materials, and tool. In this way, I was using what Sarah Pink refers to as reflexive or sensory understanding of culture. By identifying these four predominant archetypal images, I realized that portraits and some process images confine the craftsperson while elevating particular aspects of craft practices. Each type of image offers a glimpse into the maker’s story, yet no singular image can fully convey thinking or making and the sensations they evoke.

As John Berger explains in *Ways of Seeing*, images are often the first line of communication for sighted people and, as such, have the power to convey and preserve notions about the visual arts, their physical manifestation, and the experiences we associate with them. A “new language of images” illustrates visual arts as more accessible and less cut off from the

masses. Yet, as Berger states, what is really at stake in these representations is a broad range of considerations about who and what constitutes the visual arts.

In order to interpret these image types, it helps to understand the historical context of studios. The American art studio has its roots in enlightenment humanism, which emphasizes the identity of the individual. This continues throughout contemporary art, with some exceptions during the postmodern period. Art historians Ann-Sophie Lehmann, Sandra Kisters, and Rachel Esner assert that visual representations of studios reveal the art-craft dichotomy by elevating thinking over making. Applying tropes to studio representations may appear to elevate craft to the status of art. Yet, at the same time, these tropes relegate spaces that look like workshops or homes to a lower status that deemphasize creativity or intellect while emphasizing labor. Most books about studios have an art focus; therefore, Craft studios are often ‘lumped in,’ making it challenging to understand their differences and correlations directly. There were few representations of craft spaces, some seen on this slide, that were industrial, residential, or otherwise fell outside a more traditional definition of ‘the studio.’ As craftspeople practice, the studio unfolds when and wherever making happens, on a subway platform, in a car, on the ground, in a lap. What is required to make are tools, supplies, bodies, and resources.

My analysis did not aim to interpret or translate these studios or their contents but to understand the educational nature of these representations that depict moments of making within sometimes idealized studios. Very few studio representations included the business of craft, technology used, or the social activities of craftspeople. Relying on such a narrow definition of ‘the craft studio’ has implications for our understanding of what a studio is, where they are situated, and the kinds of activities that happen within them. In her 2018 essay, “Studio Conversations,” researcher and educator Alison Shields defines studios not just as rooms but as places for thinking, processing, and learning.

This analysis drew upon photographic signifiers, including punctum and extent, terms coined by Roland Barthes to describe how some images are familiar and grab our attention. Specific qualities, such as interaction with tools and materials showing familiar activities or processes, helped evoke experiences that I knew in my mind and through my body. These photographs created an expansive quality, bridging my memories and sensations. By using photographic signifiers, I understood that the four different types of photos revealed or concealed specific aspects of the craftsperson’s skill and process.

As I began to look for punctum and extent consciously, I discovered they could be combined to create an expansive quality bridging visual representations to my perceptions, memories, and sensations of textile making. Identifying and communicating sensations and perceptions became an unexpected method for enriching my understanding of visual representations. By saying what I thought I saw, describing what I imagined I could feel, I perceived the unfamiliar through familiar interpretations.

I adopted the term philosopher, and psychologist Eugene Gendlin coined felt sense to describe the physical awareness that “encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject at a given time.” To further examine embodied knowledge in this research, I turned to Merleau-Ponty, who defines understanding as a perception of the body-space-object relationship. I could “see myself” in some fibers’ studios images through materials and phenomena that were familiar to me, which gave me an intersubjective understanding of craft

processes as represented. In this analysis, it became essential to articulate both implicit and embodied knowledge. By learning to speak and think from within the body to give voice to my senses, I translated felt sense by linking ideas to images.

Karen Hampton sits at her loom in this studio portrait (Figure 10) next to a cart holding various weaving and textile tools and materials. I look to the article and find the following partial description of the process used to create one of her textiles, “Flora’s Daughter”; the “artist weaves together difficult historical and personal truths in her complex, startling textiles, using a broad array of materials and techniques, from natural dyeing to digital photo printing on fabric.”<sup>81</sup> It was clear from the article and captions that personal and cultural history play a significant role in the Hampton process. A rich layering of imagery and techniques conveys the painful history of racism in America. She sometimes pierces, burns, and weaves her textiles to build up their meaning. While some of her skills are displayed through tools, materials, and textiles, I would love to understand further Hampton’s selection of techniques that tie to her research and communicate personal and cultural narratives. Neither the photo nor text unfolds these aspects of her process. In many photographs, such as on this slide, I was able to perceive the feel, sound, and smell of materials and tools through memory and imagination. By situating myself in experiential terms, I explored my body-mind interactions with body positions, materials, techniques, and the time they require.

This process photograph (Figure 2) captures Lane Alexis in the act of making. Here, they work on a recycled, braided textile. The article describes Alexis as a “proud magpie” using recycled and upcycled materials, giving context to the collection of objects on the wall beside him and the recycled denim used. This photo represents skill through a close encounter with repetitive, meticulous cutting, ripping, braiding, and hand-stitching. By situating Alexis against a wall, though, viewers are cut off from further understanding this studio’s scale, workflow, and materials. This example demonstrates how photographs and text can work together to convey skill through explicit descriptions where text or image sequences unfold time and expand on what is seen.

Early in my analysis, I found myself lingering and returning to close-up shots of hands in action. Hands-in-action shots provided the most sensory-rich representations that allowed me to have experiences between my memory of craft and what I saw represented. These photos capture ideas as they come to life through the act of making as it unfolds between the eyes, the brain, and the hands. In this example (Figure 3), Jordan Nassar holds the fabric in one hand, gathering material into his palm to keep the section he’s stitching smooth. He appears to be doing this in his lap, and the perspective cuts the reader from understanding this environment. I look to the caption, which reads, “The artist layers sharply delineated grids over soft, landscape-inspired color fields. Each piece uses about 75,000 stitches.” This reinforces my understanding of skill by describing a process. Nassar also describes his cultural identification with the Palestinian patterns he uses. Without the text, these cultural connections might be misunderstood or invisible to many readers. What we see is dependent not just upon our cultural interpretations and assumptions but also on our perceptions. If people cannot see themselves represented, they risk being cut off from present moment choices and history. This type of close-up photograph of

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<sup>81</sup> Logan, “Social Fabric,” accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/social-fabric>.

hands and materials becomes an invitation to both remember and imagine how it feels to embroider.

In this image (Figure 4), we see a wall and bookshelf in the studio of Kay Sekimachi. Unlike the wall beside Alexis, this wall does not function as a backdrop; it foregrounds what the viewer sees. By hanging work, the wall serves as a kind of worksurface, where she can step back and view how pieces drape or look together as a collection. Seeing work grouped gives me a sense of the artist's materials, color palette, and technique. I observe a series of boxes and containers holding materials on top of the bookshelf and the shelves below. These seem to contain a series of works in progress, with more frequently and recently used materials likely to be most accessible. My memories of knot-making begin to demystify rather than objectify her process and skills. Since many people have tried knot-making, they too might be able to understand some of her processes. Looking for the familiar seems simple, yet this kind of familiarity is what Barthe refers to as extent. Despite this familiarity, representations that leave interactions between bodies, materials, and space out of the picture can leave readers cut off, creating an aura of mystery that does little to unfold the story of makers' lives.

I recognize the significant role that photography plays in the magazine. Although the ACC includes many aesthetically beautiful images, the framing and compositions often cut the viewer from understanding their range of activities. This viewpoint parallels the perspective of the white cube, as viewers face these craftspeople directly or peer as a voyeur into the tableau of the studio. Lighting and vignetting further romanticize the scene, glamorizing the studio and perpetuating the notion of the studio and artist as private and separate from the social world, as the artist-genius. Craft plays a significant role in the gig economy, social practices, and teaching, yet I was surprised to see so few representations of these forms of collaboration and community engagement. Not doing so sets up a confusing polarity that presents craft practices as private, easy, and fun while also involving considerable labor. There is a missed opportunity to explore representation that includes a broader range of activities and spaces such as social interactions, apprentice and teamwork, business activities, making in non-traditional settings, or making situated in living spaces. These expanded representations would allow readers to have a more diverse understanding of the reality of the life and work of craftspeople. This has important considerations for the future of craft, where the site of the studio may be pushed to play an even more elastic role in the life and work of craftspeople.

Including embodied sensations and memories expanded my ability to analyze images using various forms of knowledge not always associated with visual analysis. This possibility exists for each of us. By looking into images, for qualities that pierce us and evoke memories and sensations, we better understand how materials, bodies, and space come together. Rather than relying on the evocative or aesthetic nature of photographs, when combined with text, they are illustrative, giving readers an intentional and instructive story. When text and images did not align or expand upon one another, I was left frustrated to wonder, imagine, and interpret.

Whether applied to craft spaces or the representation of skills and processes, what and how we bring ourselves into research can be combined for a critical and caring approach by using various types of knowledge and experiences. I hope this interdisciplinary approach demonstrates a method available to researchers and craftspeople to help understand visual culture through implicit knowledge, memories and embodied-sensory knowledge.

Each of us can look at photographs that represent something familiar and have a felt sense of a place or activity through embodied knowledge and memories. Tapping into these offers rewarding possibilities for further analysis of visual representations of culture, not just craft studios. While I speak from personal experience, I hope craftspeople and other researchers will consider extending their methods beyond propositional knowledge to include an array of alternative knowledge.

Panel Discussion Questions with three craftspeople and researchers<sup>82</sup>; Hinda Mandell, matt lambert & Emily Winter.

1. Where does your practice take place, and do you refer to that place as a studio or something else? How does location impact your practice?
2. What are the personal and cultural influences of where you make?
3. Part of the ACC's mission is to tell "behind the scenes stories of makers and artists," what does "behind the scenes" mean to you, and have you given consideration to the way that your practice has been represented in media?
4. What is most important to you when considering how your practice or workspace is represented?
5. What might be missing that could help us better care for the representation of studio practices of artists and makers?

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<sup>82</sup> This practicum included a presentation of this research and panel discussion with Hinda Mandell, matt lambert and Emily Winters at Craftways Symposium, July 22, 2021. The virtual symposium was recorded and may be accessible for research via Center for Craft, <https://www.centerforcraft.org/craft-ways-2021>.

<sup>83</sup> Chicago Style used is Turabian, 9<sup>th</sup> ed.



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