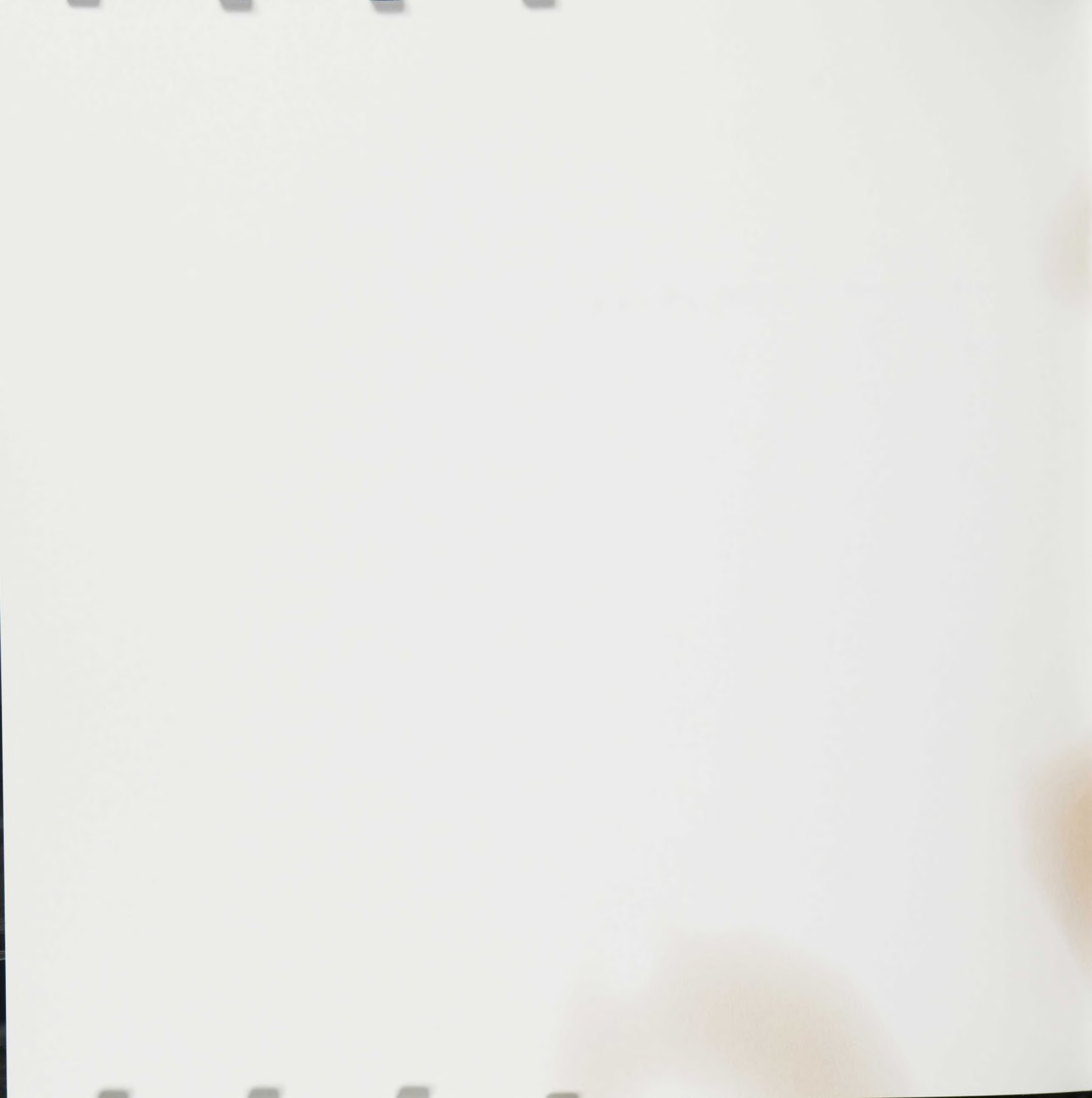




GONE **VIRAL**

MEDICAL SCIENCE IN
CONTEMPORARY TEXTILE ART

Curated by Leesa Rittelmann



GALLERYSCIENCE

YARNBOMB DISCOVERIES

Museums and galleries today operate in a world where entertainment is inextricably linked to technology. Finding ways to connect with the public is a road that has many potential side streets and museum professionals continually seek the right side street that will lead to the community and forge a meaningful connection with those who might not find their way to the carefully researched and planned exhibitions.

One mission of the Cathy and Jesse Marion Art Gallery is to promote community involvement through community outreach. During the planning stages of *Gone Viral: Medical Science in Contemporary Textile Art*, the idea of incorporating a community outreach project was conceived through the research conducted by exhibition curator, Dr. Leesa Rittlemann.

A series of crochet workshops to teach members of the campus and Fredonia community how to crochet were held. After a brief presentation on yarnbombing, the act of creating public installations of large pieces of colored bands called "cozies" that are then placed around a wide range of objects, and with the assistance of a few experienced crocheters, more than fifty individuals were instructed in the basics of crochet. Through these workshops a more elaborate plan emerged -- create a community yarnbomb project! To promote the contemporary textile exhibition, the group planned to "bomb" a prominent area of the SUNY Fredonia campus to promote and coincide with the opening of this exhibition. Dozens of individuals from age seven to seventy from the campus, community and even farther away contributed to the final "bombs." Those with more advanced crochet skills were encouraged to work on crochet doilies that resemble the blue-green algae that bloom on Lake Erie. This Algae Bloom installation will open in the Emmitt Christian Gallery of the Rockefeller Arts Center in conjunction with *Gone Viral*. Those with beginning crochet skills contributed to an outdoor "surprise" campus yarnbomb that was installed in a prominent "mystery" location shortly before the exhibition's opening.

Another mission of the Cathy and Jesse Marion Art Gallery is to begin exhibiting the work of more national and international artists. With the generous support of the many sponsors, international artists Anna Dumitriu and Paddy Hartley as well as national artists Sonya Clark, Lindsay Obermeyer, and Laura Splan were invited to contribute work to this show. Each artist produces uniquely compelling works in various media that challenge traditional categories of textile art and conceptually address current research and practices in bio-medical science.

Reaching out and connecting with the community is a critical goal of museum professionals who are not always certain which "side street" to take. Through the related workshops, installations and artists' lectures offered in conjunction with *Gone Viral*, we hope to have made productive inroads with the local and regional community but successful collaboration is also a two-way street. Talking to the museum professionals in your community is one way to share your interests and facilitate their ability to bring to light topics that you find meaningful.

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GONEVIRAL

MEDICAL SCIENCE IN CONTEMPORARY TEXTILE ART

Mounted on inky velvet squares and encased in glass, artist Laura Splan's diminutive white lace doilies beg careful study. Such ornate tatted motifs recall fine family heirlooms passed down from generation to generation. Their complexity and delicacy bespeak an intense degree of labor and skill and their function as decorative coverings for other treasured heirlooms conjures powerful associations with maternal gestures of devotion and protection. In Splan's iteration however, these familiar domestic artifacts "manifest the psychological heredity of our cultural anxieties" rather than the material wealth typically symbolized by family heirlooms.¹ Where traditional doily patterns are lovingly handcrafted and named after natural forms like "Rosette" or "Pineapple," Splan's precious *SARS*, *Hepadna*, and *Influenza* doilies are computer replicated machine embroideries of epidemic viral structures. As such, they are the kind of shared "heirlooms" that call for eradication rather than preservation. It is precisely this sublime tension between desire and fear, physical beauty and abjection, rational science and purportedly irrational or subjective art that characterizes all of the work in the exhibition *Gone Viral: Medical Science in Contemporary Textile Art*.

But just what do we mean when we refer to a phenomenon as having "gone viral"? Once indicative of the rapid spread of a deadly virus, in today's parlance this phrase more often refers to the rapid popularization of a verbal or visual utterance via social media. Videos, Tweets, Instagrams™ and text messages can turn a would-be pop star or clever cat into a global sensation overnight. At the same time however, these media are also the viral carriers of national security threats, political scandals and violent social revolution. In an era of bio-terrorism, global capitalism and nearly ubiquitous advertising and social media, to refer to an action or event as having "gone viral" is an ambiguous endeavor at best.

What makes the works in *Gone Viral* so powerful and compelling

is the degree to which these five artists embrace rather than refuse such ambiguity. Diverse in their formal approaches, they share an ability to keep a range of conflicting, even opposing concepts connected and twisting around one another like the spiraling ladder-stepped strands of DNA. They achieve this in part, by pitting our nostalgic attraction to handcrafted textiles against the cultural anxieties and debates symptomatic of an era marked by genome mapping, stem cell research, and questions of what it means to be human in a so-called post-human, post-biological era.

GERMINATE

Anna Dumitriu's work with infective textiles and communicating bacteria explores the way in which public fears of bacteria and viruses can spread through a culture faster than the bio-organisms themselves. Her collaboration with colleagues in the sciences effectively erases the demarcation between scientific lab and artist's studio. In a kind of Helen-Frankenthaler-meets-Dr.-Frankenstein process, Dumitriu and her collaborators created the Jane Austen-era *Infective Textiles Dress* from cotton stained with pigments produced by the interaction between environmental microbes cultivated from local soil and public spaces and lab-cultivated "DIY" bacteria from supermarket products. Prior to its immersion into this "giant petri dish," the garment was embroidered with silk thread treated with natural and clinical antibiotics and stitched into patterns based on microscopic images of bacteria and Regency-style designs.

Dumitriu's *MRSA Quilt* is stained with dyes produced by MRSA (Methicillin or multi-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) bacteria that have interacted with antibiotics used to treat this much-hyped "superbug." One of its aims is to "communicate the impact of new technologies in microbiology and how they will improve understanding, diagnosis, treatment and control of infections."² In the manner of traditional story quilts comprised of squares narrating important scenes from an

individual's life, this quilt narrates the MRSA pathogen's response to various standard clinical tests. Because MRSA is a mutation of a type of bacteria harbored by at least one-quarter of the world's population, the quilt calls attention to the way corporations and the media play on public fears to promote anti-bacterial products and influence public health policies. By applying these "frightening" bacterial cultures to domestic objects intended to cover and comfort the body, Dumitriu brings our cultural associations with each into sharp relief.

In *The Art and Science of Linen*, Dumitriu and video artist Alex May examine the historical and cultural importance of linen production and the process whereby "beneficial" microbes are used to break down or "ret" the flax fibers. Footage illustrating key aspects of the linen production process offers an homage, of sorts, to 19th century microbiologist Sergei Winogradsky, who isolated the bacterium *Clostridium pasteurianum* that greatly facilitated the industrial production of linen.

All of Dumitriu's work involves collaborations with other artists, scientists or volunteers. Created with the assistance of microbiologist Dr. John Paul and volunteer crocheters, *Bed Flora* is patterned after microscopic images of bacteria from the artist's own bed but is intended as a universal example of the normal flora or the often beneficial, "ubiquitous bacteria, molds and yeasts that form an absolutely key part of the complex ecosystems" that surround each of us everyday.³

INCUBATE

Sonya Clark's beaded *Chromosomes* and wrapped copper *Mitosis* sculptures are part of an ongoing series of work examining the botanical and familial roots and branching structures found in nature, physiology, and technology. Minimal in scale and form, Clark's choice of subject and media imbue these pieces with powerful cultural significance. In addition to her exploration of genetic markers as metaphors for identity, Clark's interest in African and African American history is reflected in the medium of glass beads. Such beads were afforded a high cultural status in many African cultures, which reserved expensive beadwork for sacred, royal objects. The Yoruba, for example, employed beads to convey the deep spiritual and ancestral connections practitioners feel when creating their work. Beads have functioned as markers of identity and status, were used in rituals, and as objects of barter. *Chromosomes* and *Melanin* also reflect beadwork's metaphorical associations with linking individual community members together.

As Clark notes:

The more beads, the less likely the beadwork will break apart. Just as with communities, there is safety in numbers. The holes in beads are like the orifices we use to communicate. One to the next, beads are strung in the same way that from mouth to ear, sound waves connect us. Beads have been with us for 75,000 years. As archaeological heirlooms, they remind us of our ancestors and genetic pool.⁴

Referencing the Greek word for color, *Chromosomes* offers a visual interpretation of the structures in the human cell that bear the genetic material. Twenty-three intertwining forms constructed of red, yellow and blue beads represent human chromosomal pairs and refer to race and color theory (in that mixing these primary colors produces a variation of the color black) as well as debates over the value of DNA testing to identify a subject's racial and ethnic make-up. On the one hand, such tests indicate that the majority of the world's population is of mixed, not "pure" racial heritage and that all humans descend from "The Mitochondrial Eve"—an African woman who lived 100,000-200,000 years ago.⁵ DNA testing indicates the degree to which racial discrimination is socially constructed by providing evidence of the fact that 99.9% of the human genome is the same in everyone. On the other hand, the ability of genomic testing to reveal higher rates of certain diseases in some minority ethnic groups has led to fear of increased racial discrimination against groups already historically mischaracterized as "genetically inferior."

Metaphorical references to genealogical identity are also evident in the low relief sculpture *Mitosis*, comprised of five branching pairs that reach towards one another across a patinated green background with varying degrees of success. Like the two sides of a family tree, the branches connect vertically but are increasingly detached towards the top. The title references the division of a single cell into two identical cells carrying the same genetic content as the original. And while copper wire has a long history in the textile arts, Clark's use of copper is symbolically charged by the disparity between its high value as "a metaphysical, social, political, and medicinal element in traditional African cultures," and its low value in U.S. currency.⁶ Clark's detailed but deceptively minimal visual forms are imbued with powerful historical and cultural metaphors of familial, communal, racial and gendered identities.

DISSEMINATE

Laura Splan also employs spare visual forms to convey complex cultural concerns. Her vampiric *Blood Scarf* diptych depicts a pale figure in a shapeless white gown sporting a thick red scarf draped casually around her neck. What at first seems a woolen hand-knit source of comfort is upon second glance revealed as a web of intravenous tubing that acquires its deep red hue only when filled with the wearer's own blood. As Splan explains, "the implied narrative is a paradoxical one in which the device keeps the user warm with their blood while at the same time draining their blood drop by drop."⁷

A somewhat less Gothic narrative informs *Exam Gown*—a hand-knit gown neatly folded on a stainless steel hospital cart that promises a kind of protection and warmth sorely lacking in standard-issue hospital gowns. According to Splan:

The labor-intensive quality of the knitting process evokes ideas of a more personal, less disposable institutional environment; images of a patient knitting one's own gown during an extended stay in a hospital or perhaps the hospital staff themselves caring so much about their patients that they knit such gowns.

A blurring of the boundaries between corporeal vulnerability and the detached clinical gaze also underpin Splan's most recent work created specifically for this exhibition. This interactive sculpture featuring eight modified stethoscopes invites viewers to listen to one another's beating hearts by standing at opposite ends of a woven network of tubing that obscures their ability to know who is listening to their heart and whose heart they are listening to.

REGENERATE

Lindsay Obermeyer's #74-12036 series challenges the scientific view of the body as a mere vessel or container with a clearly delineated "inside/outside with the skin acting as border." Taking her own hospital number as an identifying marker, Obermeyer explores the way patients' memories and experience of hospitalization differ vastly from the clinical charts and graphs used to record and monitor their condition. Works like *Halo*, *Bull's Eye*, and *Stained* refer to the dehumanizing function of medical jargon which the artist likens to washing hospital linens clean of "bodily fluids and their living organisms...killed in the rinse cycle with a solution set at a pH level of 11."

In this series, Obermeyer reinforces the corporeal traces that remain with intricate free-form hand embroidery as "a testament of survival and resistance" and an attempt to "put the body back into the cloth and the self into the chart."⁸

Obermeyer's *Chirurgi* series draws upon the etymological links between the words "surgery" and "embroidery." As she explains, *Chirurgi* is the Greek root for "surgery" which translates into "hand-work" and is a term now used in reference to embroidery. In *Sacred Heart*, decorative French knots typically used as embellishments for sentimental designs form a protective halo around the body's most allegorical internal organ. Begun as a response to Obermeyer's experience as a cancer patient, this series was taken up again years later following her emergency appendectomy. As an embroiderer, Obermeyer was intrigued by the precise vertical mattress stitch her surgeon used to suture her wound. The smaller embroidered pieces featuring microscopic cellular forms are glamorously re-interpreted as a dazzling array of sequins and beads framed by embroidery hoops that mimic the view through a microscope's lens.

Vivid colors referencing those found in MRI scans saturate Obermeyer's *Micropatterns* sculptures. These needle-felted forms of enlarged viral structures also reiterate patterns found in the wool used in their construction, which retains the DNA pattern and structure of the sheep from which it is derived. Rooted in her own deeply personal experiences as a patient, Obermeyer nevertheless highlights the underlying "beauty of the microscopic landscape" rather than the "abject horror frequently associated with the body."⁹

In a decidedly different fashion, Paddy Hartley also manages to find beauty in tragedy. The embroidered and embellished vintage uniforms in his *Project Façade* series respond to the medical and personal histories of facially injured World War I veterans. Hartley's work sutures together the histories of ten British servicemen who underwent countless reconstructive surgeries at the hands of pioneering plastic surgeon Sir Harold Gillies, imbuing otherwise clinical narratives represented by physicians' charts, notes and graphs with intimate personal details.¹⁰

Project Façade reflects the organic progression of Hartley's earlier work as a designer of Bioglass facial implants to his 2004-2008 collaboration with Dr. Andrew Bamji at the Gillies Archive in London. Such collaboration is fitting as Gillies himself worked closely with artists, photographers and sculptors to document and plan his innovative

surgeries. The use of fabric and precise embroidery stitches is appropriate as well in that Gillies used the “fabric” of the men’s bodies in the form of skin grafts to stitch and repair their ruined visages. As Hartley notes, the project took on an additional layer of meaning with his discovery that many of the injured men took up hobbies like embroidery as part of their rehabilitation process.

Each uniform features facial garments illustrating how Gillies grafted healthy skin to repair the site of injury. While Gillies reconstructed the servicemen’s damaged or missing facial features, Hartley reconstructs their individual identities by layering biographical details onto their vintage uniforms like a kind of memorial bandage. William Spreckley’s jacket, for instance, includes correspondence between the artist and Spreckley’s granddaughter and the fact that Spreckley’s father worked as a commercial lace-maker is poignantly referenced by the lace doily and family portrait sewn in to the jacket’s upper right pocket. Although these works refer to the way in which Gillies moved skin from one part of the body onto the face to reconstruct missing facial features, Hartley is careful to note that the work is less about directly replicating their injuries and “more about the communication of repair.”¹¹

RUMINATE

The “handmade” and the “human imprint” are central characteristics in search for authenticity that meets the needs of the alienated consumer in our industrialized age.¹²

In an era when the phrase “gone viral” refers less to the uncontrolled spread of contagious disease than to the mercurial spread of digital information, there is much to recommend the de-acceleration associated with handmade textiles. Indeed, a nostalgic desire to return to slower, simpler times is evidenced by the recent boom in DIY (do-it-yourself) crafting as well as the number of recent scholarly exhibitions and publications devoted to artists who consciously engage with labor-intensive craft media.¹³ But the artists featured in *Gone Viral* move beyond an engagement with the facile disputes over art versus craft to create textile-based objects that expand the discourse between contemporary art and medicine. As a result, their work functions as a kind of visual inoculation against the viral spread of media-induced anxiety and loss of identity incurred when human subjects are reduced to cell samples, patient charts, and DNA codes under a seemingly omnipotent scientific gaze.

¹ Laura Splan, “Doilies,” <http://www.laurasplan.com/projects/doilies.html> (accessed January 12, 2013).

² Anna Dumitriu, “Modernising Medical Microbiology,” <http://annadumitriu.tumblr.com/ModMedMicro> (accessed January 10, 2013).

³ Anna Dumitriu, “Normal Flora,” <http://annadumitriu.tumblr.com/NormalFlora> (accessed January 11, 2013). See also Alexandra M. Kokoli, “Normal Flora and The Bacterial Sublime: An Interview with Anna Dumitriu,” *n.paradoxa*, vol. 20 (July 2007), 5-12.

⁴ Sonya Clark, “Beads,” <http://sonyaclark.com/medium/beads/> (accessed January 2, 2013).

⁵ Mark Schoofs, “How Genetics Is Changing Our Lives,” *Village Voice*, September 30–December 30, 1997, Part 3 “The Myth of Race” reprinted online via “RaceSci: History of Race in Science,” http://web.mit.edu/racescience/in_media/what_dna_says_about_human/index.html (accessed January 16, 2013).

⁶ Jean Robertson, “Sonya Y.S. Clark,” *Sculpture*, vol. 21, nr. 10 (December, 2002), 72.

⁷ Laura Splan, “Blood Scarf,” http://www.laurasplan.com/projects/blood_scarf.html (accessed January 21, 2013).

⁸ All artist quotes cited from <http://www.lbstudio.com/gallery/number.html> (accessed December 29, 2012).

⁹ Lindsey Obermeyer, “Micropatterns,” <http://loops.typepad.com/home/2012/12/micro-patterns.html#more> (accessed February 2, 2013).

¹⁰ As physician and historian Meredith Jones has noted, “It was not until the First World War that plastic surgery became a powerful and fully recognized branch of medicine,” due to shrapnel, trench warfare, and advances in medical and emergency treatments, which meant that more soldiers survived their injuries. Dr. Meredith Jones, *Skintight: An Anatomy of Cosmetic Surgery* (Oxford: Berg, 2008), 8.

¹¹ All artist quotes cited from <http://paddyhartley.com/introduction/> (accessed January 17, 2013).

¹² Louise Mazanti, “Super-Objects: Craft as an Aesthetic Position,” in *Extra-Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszkirk (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 60.

¹³ A few notable recent U.S. craft-related exhibitions and catalogs are: David Revere McFadden, *Pricked: Extreme Embroidery* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2007), David Revere McFadden, Jennifer Scanlan, and Jennifer Steifle Edwards, *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* (Woodbridge: ACC Editions, 2008), and Nicholas R. Bell, *40 Under 40: Craft Futures* (Washington, D.C.: 2012).

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SONYA CLARK

We are networks of communication. We house libraries of ancestry in our cells. Like a biologist, I observe, identify, and describe our structure, function, growth, origin, and evolution. Roots and branching structures found in nature, physiology, and technology inspire this work.

Sonya Clark was born in Washington, DC to a psychiatrist from Trinidad and a nurse from Jamaica. Clark gained an appreciation for craft and the value of the hand-made primarily from her maternal grandmother who was a professional tailor. Many of her family members taught her the value of a well-told story and so it is that she values the stories held in objects.

Clark holds an MFA (Cranbrook Academy of Art), a BFA (Art Institute of Chicago), a BA in psychology (Amherst College) and a high school diploma from the Sidwell Friends School in DC. She has had the privilege of learning the craft of thinking through making from many makers throughout her travels. Her work has been exhibited in over 250 museums and galleries in Europe, Africa, Asia, South America, Australia, and throughout the USA. Clark has been able to pursue her studio practice because of generous honors and opportunities such as a Pollock-Krasner Award, a Rockefeller Foundation Residency in Italy, a Red Gate Residency in China, a Wisconsin Arts Board Fellowship, a Virginia Commission for the Arts Fellowship, a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, an Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Award, a Civitella Ranieri Fellowship in Italy, and most recently as a United States Artist Fellow.

Currently, Clark chairs the Department of Craft/Material Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. Formerly, she was a Baldwin-Bascom Professor of Creative Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



Left: MITOSIS, 2002. Copper and Wood.
Right: CHROMASOMES, 2002. Glass Beads.

ANNADUMITRIU

We have these irrational fears of normal flora. A lot of the misunderstanding is conveyed through the media and advertising and that's symptomatic of a wider misrepresentation of scientific information. It's also important to realize that they are highly underresearched, since they are considered to be of no medical or commercial interest.

Anna Dumitriu's work blurs the boundaries between art and science with a strong interest in the ethical issues raised by emerging technologies. Her installations, interventions and performances use a range of digital, biological and traditional media including live bacteria, robotics, interactive media, and textiles. Her work has a strong international exhibition profile and is held in several major public collections, including the Science Museum in London. Dumitriu is known for her work as founder and director of "The Institute of Unnecessary Research", a group of artists and scientists whose work crosses disciplinary boundaries and critiques contemporary research practice. She recently completed a Wellcome Trust commission entitled "The Hypersymbiont Salon," is collaborating as a Visiting Research Fellow: Artist in Residence with the Adaptive Systems Research Group at The University of Hertfordshire (focusing on social robotics) and (Leverhulme Trust 2011) Artist in Residence on the UK Clinical Research Consortium Project "Modernising Medical Microbiology" at The University of Oxford. Her major international project "Trust me I'm an artist, towards an ethics of art/science collaboration" (in collaboration with the Waag Society in Amsterdam and The University of Leiden) investigates the novel ethical problems that arise when artists create artwork in laboratory settings. She is also a contributing editor to Leonardo Electronic Almanac, and winner of the 2012 Society for Applied Microbiology Communication Award.



Left: BED FLORA (DETAIL), 2008. Cotton yarn, dimension varies.

Right: Anna Dumitriu and Alex May, THE ART AND SCIENCE OF LINEN, 2011. Digital video still.

PADDY HARTLEY

These were real lives I was dealing with, real experiences and real emotions. They were stories that have never been acknowledged, but must be told.

Originating from Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, Paddy Hartley holds a Master's Degree in Sculpture and Ceramics from the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff. He is currently based in London's East End and runs his practice from his studio base in London Bridge.

One persistent theme in Hartley's work is the way in which the human body is changed, modified and reconfigured either by choice or circumstance. Addressing subjects such as steroid use in bodybuilding, the discourse between faith groups and biomedical research, the ethics of human cloning and conflict acquired injury, his work has taken the form of installation, ceramic, assembled objects, garment creation and modification and digital embroidery.

Hartley's artistic inquiry focuses predominantly on how the face can, and is, transformed or manipulated both through deliberate and unintentional intervention and the way in which viewers respond to these changes. In the design and production of his 'Face Corsets,' Hartley produced facial implants for clinical use and later for his 'Project Facade' series, which responded to the surgical and personal stories of facially injured WWI servicemen.

Hartley's work has been exhibited and published widely and is included in the permanent collections of a number of museums in the UK and USA including the Wellcome Trust Collection and The Museum of Arts and Design New York. He also speaks extensively about his work and lectures on artistic professional practice at events and conferences at art institutions and universities throughout the UK.

Hartley's Face Corset designs have recently been featured under his brand name 'Patrick Ian Hartley' in several premiere fashion publications including *AnOther*, *Vogue* (Italia/China/Germany/Turkey), *V* and *W*. His work has been shot by leading fashion photographers including Rankin, Tim Walker, Michelangelo Di Battista (for Noomi Rapace) and Nick Knight (for Lady Gaga). Hartley is currently collaborating with several designers and photographers in the development of his facial garments and will launch his first collaborative collection with Designer Kat Marks in early 2013.



Left: WILLIAM MICHAEL SPRECKLEY (DETAIL FROM PROJECT FACADE), 2006. Officers' uniforms, digital embroidery, digital fabric print, felt, vintage lace.

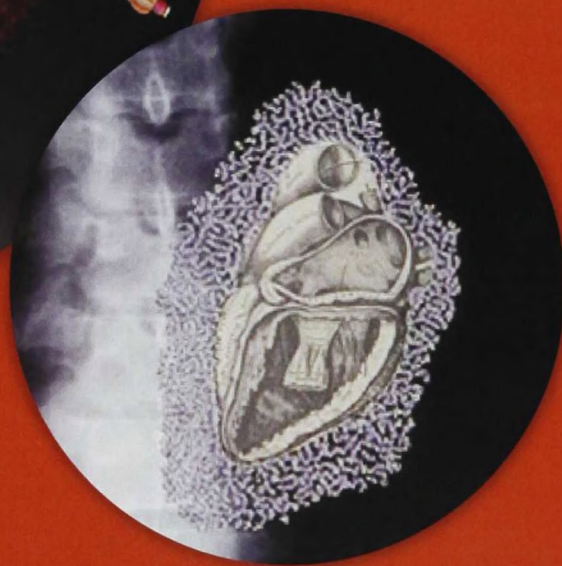
Right: WILLIAM MICHAEL SPRECKLEY (FROM PROJECT FACADE), 2006. Officers' uniforms, digital embroidery, digital fabric print, felt, vintage lace.

LINDSAY OBERMEYER

My investigation into the intersections between the surgical and textile crafts began with my own struggles with cancer. I returned to this work in 2003 after an emergency appendectomy. The surgeon used a vertical mattress stitch to suture my abdomen. As an embroiderer, I could not help but admire his needlework skill.

Born in St. Louis, Chicago-based artist Lindsay Obermeyer is an author, educator, and artist with a passion for textiles whose work has been exhibited in galleries and museums around the world for more than two decades, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the Museum of Art and Design in New York. Her designs have been included in six instructional books published by Lark Books, while her writing has been published in *Fiberarts*, *Knit.1* and *Reinventing Textiles: Gender and Identity*. Obermeyer views her role as artist as synonymous with that of an educator and as such, has always included teaching as part of her art practice. She has taught at schools, universities, guilds, and shops with students ranging in age from three to 92.

Since its inception in 2004, Obermeyer's community artwork The Red Thread Project™ has involved thousands of knitters from around the world who have created more than 6,000 handmade hats donated to charity. The project has received national media attention and been awarded the prestigious Kresge Foundation grant in collaboration with the St. Louis art education agency Springboard.



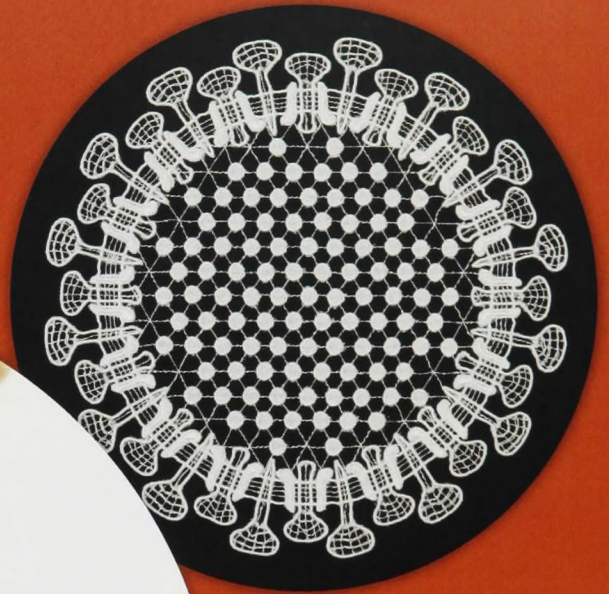
Left: C-VIRUS, 2009. Needle-felted wool, glass beads and sequins, 5".
Right: SACRED HEART (DETAIL, FROM THE CHIRURGI SERIES), n.d. Silk embroidery thread on x-ray.

LAURASPLAN

I try to create work that evokes a dichotomous experience with formal imagery that upon closer inspection reveals some uncomfortable truth about our cultural and biological conditions. My work attempts to challenge our constructed responses to these images by triggering a double take in which the viewer re-evaluates their initial perceptions.

Laura Splan is a Brooklyn, NY based visual artist. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California, Irvine where she originally studied Biological Sciences but ultimately studied Studio Art. Her conceptually driven work employs a variety of media including sculpture, video, photography, digital media and works on paper. Her objects and images interrogate the visual manifestations of our cultural ambivalence towards the human body. She often uses found objects and appropriated images to explore socially constructed perceptions of beauty and horror, order and disorder. Much of her work is inspired by experimentation with materials and processes including blood, cosmetic facial peel and computerized embroidery.

Splan's work has been exhibited in a broad range of curatorial contexts including craft, feminism, technology, design, medicine and ritual. Her work has been exhibited widely at such venues as Museum of Art & Design, International Museum of Surgical Science (Chicago), New York Hall of Science and Jönköpings County Museum (Sweden). She was recently awarded a commission from the Center for Disease Control. In 2007, she received a Jerome Foundation Travel Grant to research the history of the invention of medical instruments. She received an Artist's Grant for her recent residency at the Vermont Studio Center. She was a visiting lecturer at Stanford University in 2011 where she taught "Art & Biology" and "Digital Art". She currently teaches interdisciplinary workshops that explore intersections of Art and Science at Observatory Room (Brooklyn).



Left: BLOOD SCARF, 2002. Chromogenic prints mounted on aluminum. 24"H x 20"W each.

Right: DOILIES (SARS), 2004. Freestanding computerized machine embroidered lace mounted on velvet. 16.75" x 16.75" with frames.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cathy and Jesse Marion Art Gallery Endowment
Visiting Artist Program, SUNY Fredonia
Carl J. Nordell Art Gallery Endowment
Friends of Rockefeller Arts Center
Fredonia College Foundation's Carnahan-Jackson Humanities Fund
John Kijinski, Dean – College of Arts and Sciences
Women's and Gender Studies Program, SUNY Fredonia
Walmart Corporation, Dunkirk Branch, NY
Department of Biology, SUNY Fredonia
International Education Center, SUNY Fredonia
Department of Visual Arts + New Media, SUNY Fredonia
All the yarnbombers

CATALOGUE PRINTING

Register Graphics
Randolph, NY

CATALOGUE DESIGN

Elizabeth Horne

Unless otherwise indicated, all photos courtesy of the artists.



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