

RY

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QUEER HANDMAKING

even you, fellow creature, sister
sitting across from me, dark with love,
working like me to pick apart
working with me to remake
this trailing knitted thing, this cloth of darkness,
this woman's garment, trying to save the skein.

Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken"

In a poem from Adrienne Rich's 1973 collection *Diving into the Wreck*, she metaphorizes same-sex desire as a "trailing knitted thing," a cloth that might be collectively undone and remade, a garment perpetually in process. In this Rich suggests a resonance between textile making (especially needlework) and crafting a self in relation to other selves—or what has been termed world-making. As they work to re-create themselves and actualize new forms of consciousness, the figures in Rich's poem envision themselves as fiber workers alongside mythic knitters, crocheters, and sewers like Penelope of Greek legend, who endlessly weaves and unweaves her shroud.

A more sexually explicit invocation of queer craft in the 1970s is found in Dorothy Allison's memoir *Skin: Talking about Sex, Class, and Literature*. In an essay about sex toys used by lesbians, she narrates her first experience using a dildo with a female lover. She describes the pleasure that it brought to her as well as her surprise upon discovering that the toy was not a purchased object, but rather handmade by her butch lover Marty—"a large-sized glove finger stuffed with cotton." As Allison recounts, the "ingenuity impressed me but clearly embarrassed" Marty, who did not necessarily want Allison to see and hence demystify this erotically charged appendage.²

The year was 1973, and though commercially made dildos had been produced in the United States starting in 1966 (shaped in a factory in North Hollywood and sold by mail order),³ this was decades before mass-manufactured

sex toys would be widely available in well-lit, women-owned emporia. In the US South, where Allison was living, resources for alternative sexualities were scarce, and lesbians often had to go north to buy their sex toys or, like Marty, invent and construct their own versions. Allison goes on to describe how another lover, Carey, made her own harness in the 1970s, “stitched . . . up out of a couple of old belts and carpet thread.”⁴ Frustrated with the ill-fitting mechanism that came with her mail-order dildo, Carey had “sat down with her old belts and begun to put together the lesbian equivalent of the wheel.” Notes Allison with admiration, this makeshift design “worked better than any harness I subsequently discovered.”⁵

The stuffed phallus and sewn-together harness arose from a combination of need and resourcefulness—truly *crafty*, to invoke several senses of that word, both cunning (and possibly devious or deceitful) in design and crafted by hand. These objects are also *crafty*, to use the suffix in its diminutive, in that they are craftlike, or craftish, not always hewing to classic traditions of skilled manual effort but rather approaching the category of craft elliptically, or at an angle—that is, queerly. One says something is “arty” when it is not quite art and may or may not aspire to be considered such; similarly, these crafty textile-based creations take direction, but also definitively stand at some remove, from conventions of craft.

This chapter considers the centrality of textile craftiness within queer culture in the early 1970s in the United States, homing in on two case studies that unfold on each coast. I opened with the memories of cotton-filled gloves and hand-stitched harnesses because Allison’s anecdotes gesture to a crucial aspect of making things oneself, even in a late capitalist era when almost everything—almost—can easily be bought. Though the 1970s were awash in an abundance of fabricated commodities, handmaking remained a creative and necessary act for some subcultural groups, a key part of forging queer identities and the enabling of queer sexual practices, such as the fashioning of custom dildos for lesbians in the southern United States. Crafting was a resource to physically bring objects, and new forms of representation and self-expression, into the world in a time when the marketing of queerness and its accoutrements, and the molding of gay and lesbian subjects as a demographic of consumers worth targeting, had not yet taken hold.

In these years around and just after the explosion of gay liberation in the United States, hybridized and unexpected techniques of fiber-based production such as stitching, sewing, and braiding (and, yes, cotton-stuffing) were the vehicles by which many queer subjects enacted their desires.⁶ To say that handicraft textiles became a queer resource in this moment is not to generalize (all forms of making are resources, by definition) but rather to emphasize its urgencies—and its eccentricities—with respect to queer countercultural

economies. I mean this both symbolically and materially: these techniques are used to make the tangible things that surround bodies and that organize, structure, and lend meaning to the contours of everyday life.

In what follows, I consider two formations of textile making in the early 1970s vis-à-vis the historical emergence of the queer liberation movement in the United States—first, the elaborate handmade (and not so handmade, semi-skilled, or “crafty”) costumes of the Cockettes and the Angels of Light, San Francisco-based countercultural theater troupes, and second, lesbian artist Harmony Hammond’s braided rag-rug paintings (the *Floorpieces*), which she began in 1973 while living in New York City. (Though there is some overlap, I recognize that *queer* and *lesbian* are by no means interchangeable terms; I deploy *queer* to gesture to a broad spectrum of nonnormative sexualities, practices, and subject positions, while keeping alive the specificities of lesbianism.) Thus this chapter is organized around two discrete but conceptually or thematically related case studies: one that grew out of regional, hippie performance formations and one that is more firmly ensconced within fine arts discourses. At some level this distinction is based on presumed audience—the Cockettes stitched together their outfits for each other and for their initially slapdash productions, while Hammond was making her works for a gallery or museum context. Yet both fit within their respective categories uncertainly, as they consistently challenge high-low assumptions; indeed, intended venue of reception only goes so far in indicating how these crafted objects circulated differently. At the same time, both partook of larger dialogues around fabric, piecing together, and queer making in this moment.

Throughout the book, I aim to suggest that low-high divisions within textile handicraft are insufficient and faulty, as it frays these neat binaries. By juxtaposing two registers of making, I suggest that these spheres are crucially coconstitutive, feeding each other in a multitude of ways, as the perpetually intersecting realms of the amateur and the fine arts motor a greater visibility for textiles more generally. I do not mean to imply causality, or even mutual awareness, between my two case studies—rather, I hope to illuminate how different makers were working through questions of queerness *through textiles* at around the same time. On the face of it, this is a highly unlikely pairing: one, lavish but rough-hewn drag wear; the other, abstract art that is euphemistically nonrepresentational. Yet by looking first at the Cockettes and their artful self-ornamenting and then turning to Hammond’s process of making the fabric-based *Floorpieces*, I emphasize that these textile-based projects both craftily comment on consumerist excess, overflow, waste, and the queer vitality of reuse. In addition, campy decoration and décor—in the sense of embellishing domestic space as well as theatrical settings—threads

throughout these case studies. As theorized by Susan Sontag, camp is a conversion operation that transmutes low into high, and here I place camp's procedures alongside textile craft's related ability to transgress the line between the everyday and the refined.⁷

The Cockettes' Crafty Genders

In 1974 Alexandra Jacopetti's book *Native Funk and Flash: An Emerging Folk Art* chronicled the resurgence of traditional craft techniques within alternative hippie subcultures in California.⁸ Amongst its colorful pages, which included documentation of intricate embroidery, hand-carved woodwork, and Jacopetti's own macramé children's park (discussed in the introduction), sit photographs of what the book refers to as "Glitter Boys"—gender-bending performers who were affiliated with San Francisco-based groups the Cockettes and its offshoot the Angels of Light in the 1970s. These collectives were equal parts experiments in communal living, theater troupes, and active promoters of radical new modes of queer and feminist self-fashioning. Category-defying in every sense, the Cockettes and the Angels of Light were known for their outrageous performances wearing handmade outfits both in the theater and in the street. One vivid picture from *Native Funk and Flash* features Pristine Condition ("known as Prissy to her friends"), bedecked in a pink dress with cascading tiered sleeves, a large headdress of gathered fabric and silk flowers, and an appliquéd apron (fig. 1.01). Scraggly threads drip from the skirt's uneven hemline. A diamond-shaped piece repurposed from a granny-squares blanket is affixed to the bodice, and the ensemble is festooned with long ragged streams of lace trim. The overall effect, with Prissy perched in pink high heels on a quilt and framed by a light pink wall decorated with a giant rose (made by Billy Orchid and sprinkled with glitter), is fantastic excess.

Yet it is a form of excess marked not by wealth but by thrift: outfits such as these were made from scavenged materials and trash-picked treasures and relied upon the inventiveness of scarcity to achieve their distinctive glamour. The caption for Prissy's photograph states, "As she hitched up his dress, s/he said, 'I'm a firm believer in safety pins!'"⁹ Such text not only points to the thrown-together, impromptu style that was integral to the "Glitter Boys" but also underscores their fundamental gender indeterminacy. Within this one brief sentence, three gendered terms are used in rapid succession in reference to Prissy—first female ("she"), then male ("his"), then bigendered ("s/he"). It is as if no one singular pronoun could encapsulate the ever-morphing iden-

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Fig. 1.01. Pristine "Prissy" Condition in *Native Funk and Flash*, Scrimshaw Press, 1974. Photograph by Jerry Wainwright. Courtesy of Alexandra Jacopetti Hart.

tities Prissy is taking up, playing with—or perhaps *putting on*—as with the exaggerated headdress and bright red eye shadow.

These garish getups could be situated within long-standing traditions of *camp* and *drag*; within the academy these two dense, related, but distinct terms have been productively circulated, debated, and revised by thinkers such as Susan Sontag, Esther Newton, and Judith Butler.¹⁰ Sontag's influential 1964 essay theorizes camp as a mode of interpretation, sensibility, and taste: "Camp is a certain mode of aestheticism. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon."¹¹ For Sontag, camp serves a destabilizing function, as it obviates distinctions between good and bad, flippantly erasing the lines between the morbid and the merry. At the same time, she demarcates her own binary categories, most notably drawing a line between "naïve and deliberate" camp, with the latter, self-aware version dismissed as "usually less satisfying."¹² As I discuss, the extravagant plumage of the Cockettes fits unevenly into the realm of what she calls deliberate "camping," while other aspects of camp articulated by Sontag apply to the group somewhat more clearly, as when she writes: "To perceive camp in objects is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater."¹³

Drag was a word used frequently by members of the Cockettes; rather than narrowly designating a modality of gender inversion, they understood drag as their daily process of getting dressed. It was how they referred, generically, to their clothes, in an acknowledgment that their outfits jumbled the norms and codes of legibility of the "straight" world. Butler's work on drag reminds us that the notion that gender might be like a metaphoric change of clothes—worn and then discarded at will—is highly problematic, as it disregards the punitive, regulatory force of the law to maintain and uphold compulsory gender conventions. As she clarifies in *Bodies That Matter*, "I never did think that gender was like clothes," arguing that drag is not "unproblematically subversive," as it can entrench and augment heterosexuality's hegemonic reach.¹⁴ For the Cockettes and Angels of Light in this historical moment, however, gender *was* treated like clothes, as handmade outfits were part and parcel of a utopian vision in which smashing gender binaries seemed to them entirely possible. They wanted to devise their own discourse of drag, one whose iterative daily momentum might ignite a total transformation of the self. That they did not dress "as men" or "as women" did not shield them from the expectations and lived realities of gender, but their daily experimentations with sartorial codes quite earnestly endeavored to suspend those realities.

I investigate the handmade costumes of the Cockettes and the Angels of Light to propose that the upsurge in crafting in the late 1960s and early 1970s

overlapped in provocative ways with a simultaneous emergence of some gay and feminist cultures in Northern California in the post-Stonewall era. I focus on the specific material practices that went into constructing these garments and ornamentations and how the Cockettes and Angels of Light, like many in the California alternative craft movement, aligned handmaking with countercultural worldmaking—as an individualist practice of differentiation but also within a larger, if somewhat inchoate, communalist project. (In the end, this utopianism had its limits, as ruptures around race and sexuality disproved their fervent beliefs that their riotous dress allowed them to step outside of enforced categories of identity.)

In his book *Ways of Worldmaking*, published in 1978, philosopher Nelson Goodman claimed: “We start, on any occasion, with some old version or world that we have on hand and that we are stuck with until we have the determination and skill to remake it into a new one.”¹⁵ Goodman was not the first to theorize worldmaking; earlier in the twentieth century, Hannah Arendt importantly connected labor (defined by her in relation to both work and political activity) to bringing the material and affective conditions of the world into existence.¹⁶ Yet Goodman’s ideas about worldmaking as essentially a method of recycling or repurposing—that is, making do—resonate with wider 1970s ecological rhetorics of the “enoughness” of consumer culture and the political importance of salvaging. As he notes, “Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking.”¹⁷

More recently, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, among others, have turned to worldmaking with regard to the formation of queer counterpublics. For them, queer subjects have been denied a world and must conjure one into being, by virtue primarily of intimacies that are outside the normative realms of heterosexual coupling. They write, “Queer and other insurgents have long striven, often dangerously or scandalously, to cultivate what good folks used to call criminal intimacies. Making a queer world has required the development of kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation.”¹⁸ As will be discussed, the Cockettes forged their queer intimacies—the knowing of others and the knowing of oneself—in part through their garments, handcrafting their outfits as they simultaneously handcrafted new conceptions of ownership and the proper boundaries of the body.

Genderfuck

The Cockettes were born in San Francisco on New Year’s Eve 1969–70 and lasted for a little more than two years, staging regular theatrical extravagan-



Fig. 1.02.
Hibiscus as a
luminous peacock
in *Myth Thing*, in an
outfit designed by
Martin Wong, ca.
1972. Photographer
unknown. Courtesy
Estate of Martin
Wong and the
Martin Wong
Foundation.

zas at the Palace Theater that garnered an avid cult following.¹⁹ These performances, rowdily embellished by their flamboyant, gender-bending costumes, showcased irreverent parodies of Hollywood musicals and integrated solo numbers, music, group reviews, and dance as they flaunted their general disregard for traditional codes of sexuality. Though the troupe included a diverse assortment of characters, including soon-to-be disco celebrity Sylvester, the Cockettes circled around one primary charismatic figure, Hibiscus, who wore makeup on his face and glitter in his long beard, and innovated in his dress style with evocative sartorial flair. In figure 1.02 Hibiscus is transformed into a luminous peacock from the production of *Myth Thing*, in a costume designed by fellow Cockette Martin Wong, with flame-colored cardboard feathers arrayed around the upper torso to augment and enhance a glitter-encrusted beard.²⁰

(Wong later moved to New York and became central to the New York queer art scene.)²¹ A wide sash around Hibiscus's chest holds the splashy feather-fan in place on his back, and his sparkly lamé dress is cinched at the waist with more sashes. His skin glows in the light of the stage like an ember, shining with the glitter that covers the surface of his body and his outfit.

Anarchic in both spirit and practice, the Cockettes made little distinction between stage and street or between public and private, as they wore their fantastical regalia as much in everyday life as they did at the Palace Theater, such that Hibiscus would pass out flyers for their shows wearing layers of skirts, a veil shrouding his face, and a tall headdress. Jewelry and other ornaments were worn constantly, even in bed, as in a photograph showing Sylvester seemingly naked but for a large metal necklace, wrapped in sheets and eating next to his lover/husband Michael Lyons (they had a marriage celebration in Golden Gate Park), a cat resting at their feet (fig. 1.03). Despite the seclusion implied by such a bedroom scene, the couple and the cat gaze directly into the photographer's lens, and indeed the Cockettes became increasingly used to being watched, and documented, even while not on stage.

Audience member and poet Allen Ginsberg wrote of their performances: "Their productions were transvestite-glitter-fairie-theatre masques. Trans-



Fig. 1.03.
Sylvester in bed
with his husband
Michael Lyons, ca.
1970. Photograph by
Bud Lee. © bud lee /
budlee.net.

sexual dressing is a gay contribution to the realization that we're not a hundred percent masculine or feminine, but a mixture of hormones—and not being afraid of that natural self which the hormones dictate. The Cockettes brought out into to the street what was in the closet, in terms of theatric dress and imaginative theatre.”²² With his reference to hormones, and his quick switch between “transvestite” and “transsexual” and “gay,” Ginsberg appears to speak to a biological basis for several versions of transness and gayness. His remark highlights the crucial role of the imagination and of dress in attempting to push open a space for fluid sexual openness—or what is now called genderqueer, though that was not the term used at the time. Instead, Hibiscus was a touchstone for a nascent neologism—*genderfuck*.

Encompassing a wide spectrum of queer, trans, and assertively nonnormative sexualities, the term *genderfuck* was first used in reference to phenomena such as the Cockettes in a 1974 article in the magazine *Gay Sunshine*.²³ Its author, Christopher Lonc, wrote that to clad oneself with accretions of accessories that scrambled the gender binary was to transform into a “one-person guerilla theater” and a “revolutionary army attacking the entire straight structured world.”²⁴ If there is an implied violence evoked by this attacking army, akin to the feminist terrorist society T-shirt, it is one aimed not at bodies but at social norms. Another key precedent for this kind of West Coast psychedelic drag/genderfuck was Cyclona (Robert Legorreta), the queer Chicano performer who was active in East Los Angeles beginning in 1966, though Cyclona had a more gothic sensibility and a more pointed critique of racism than did Hibiscus.²⁵



Fig. 1.04.
Fayette Hauser with
feathers and beads,
1972. Photograph
by Roger Arvid
Anderson.

For those affiliated with the Cockettes, the theatrical outfit that “comes out of the closet”—never has that wardrobe metaphor been so appropriate—was one that had been lovingly emblazoned with broken jewelry, Mardi Gras beads, silk tassels, glitter, and detritus from the street. At its core, theirs was a transformative rag-picking enterprise, part of what Susan Strasser calls “trashmaking,” that involved elaborate procedures of gathering, sorting, and reusing.²⁶ “We’d take acid and go to the Alameda Flea Market and the magical elements of drag would just come to us,” explains former Cockette Fayette Hauser, whose limbs in a photo from the era are garlanded with beads and strands of plastic cherries such that it is hard to distinguish what are clothes and what is adornment, as a fountain of fake feathers crowns her head and crimson outlined with cobalt rings her eyes²⁷ (fig. 1.04).

Venturing far outside purely gendered frames of reference, these costumes blended animal/human/machine/myth: papier-mâché horse heads sprouted manes of rubber dildos, and flowing biblical robes were worn with headdresses of fresh calla lilies. In contrast to Allison’s memoir of constructing a dildo out of materials on hand (an object that is kept secret, meant to give pleasure but remain unseen), here ready-made sex toys are incorporated into disorienting and perverse garments. However embraced by admirers of their theatrical productions, their outfits also courted rage and hostility. “People became angry at us for looking so different,” recalled Beaver Bauer, noting that sometimes on the street passersby would throw objects at them.²⁸ They also faced resentment from older members of the drag community who were more eager to pass or to comport themselves according to conventional genderings.

In 1971 an ideological rift led to the formation of a splinter group, the Angels of Light, which was dedicated to free performances and was active throughout the 1970s. Several of the Cockettes became Angels of Light members; in contrast to the tenuous, ad hoc organization of the Cockettes, the Angels established many tenets of collectivity, lived together in a communal house that had no locking doors, espoused the eradication of private prop-

erty, and shared all their resources. The Angels' group house was part of a larger social movement of alternative living that was in full bloom across the United States in the 1970s.²⁹ While there are important distinctions to be made between these two groups, I am primarily interested in the common ground they shared—namely their investment in and pioneering of hand-crafted clothing, worn both at home and in their theatrical presentations. Both believed they embodied the revolutionary edge of a new society that began with such textile crafting. As former Angel Beaver Bauer says, “How we lived and what we made were part of what we wanted to see the world become.”³⁰ By all accounts, the communal Angels' group house had its personality clashes, logistical problems, and petty infights, but it was also an attempt, however compromised, to create an idealistic projective space—the world of *what-if*.

As a photo from the 1973 Years Ahead Fashion Show demonstrates, both the Cockettes and the Angels were defiant about nonconformity and self-fashioning on many axes, not least gender (fig. 1.05). Here a Cockette known as Wally—pictured on the far right—is adorned from head to toe in hot pink



Fig. 1.05.
Models from the
Years Ahead
Fashion Show, San
Francisco, 1973,
modeling Billy
Bowers's clothes
and their own
ensembles; Wally in
a self-made outfit
on far right, bottom.
Photograph ©
Wendy Mukluk.

and red. Sporting a feather boa, a bird perched atop a red wig, a beard dyed pink, and a flowing gown trailing swaths of sheer material, this ambiguously gendered figure is a vision of extreme fashion confection. According to Hauser, Wally “spent hours on his gear, then he’d be gone for days tripping around the city, and when he came back it would be in shreds.”³¹ Such costumes were not always recognizable within the usual rubric of drag’s gender inversion. In an interview in 1980, Hibiscus said: “Instead of dressing in drag, I was dressing more as gods. We were all creating mythic figures.”³²

As the Cockettes garnered their own particular brand of groupies, they became a source of fascination for both national and local press. They were featured in *Rolling Stone* in October 1971, described as “more than a drag show, a tribe of outrageous cockflapping transvestites, but more than just a stageful of swishy fellas camping it up in ratty old dresses from the Goodwill.”³³ Contrasting the Cockettes with their gender plurality to old-school queens (“swishy fellas” in thrift-store dregs), the article heralded the former as “true freaks” whose ostentatious costumes allowed them to “live out fantasies” in what were described, in awe, as “rags. Capes. Dresses made out of curtains.”³⁴ In 1971 a book of paper dolls based on the Cockettes was issued by Last Gasp Eco-Funnies in San Francisco, selling for two dollars a copy.³⁵ It featured photographs by Clay Geerdes of various members striking glam poses in their skivvies next to some of their actual outfits, complete with little paper tabs that one could cut around to dress up and stylistically recombine (fig. 1.06). The figures are inserted into scenes drawn by John Flowers, with the members’ names above in a hand-rendered show-light font and a catchphrase below. Conceived by Flowers and Hauser, who grew up surrounded by paper dolls, the book was like an expanded program for the Cockettes shows in which they were able to be depicted in more than one costume, showcasing their multiple identities with the kinetic ingredients of their clothing. “We brought gobs of drag to the photo shoot in huge shopping bags,” recalls Hauser. “We filled a truck.”³⁶

The paper dolls emphasize the importance of outfits in their self-fashioning and extend the process of playing dress-up out to the viewer. In the page featuring Wally, the “before” figure is already depicted in an improbable mix of genitally affixed balloons, fishnet stockings, and a cone-shaped bikini top made of what looks like mounds of tinsel. A small cross dangles delicately between the two breasts. In the accompanying “after” outfit that is meant to be superimposed on the “before,” Wally’s human shape is obscured by a massive headdress of large plumes, fabric flowers, and strips of fabric with pinked edges that tumble down to the taffeta and tinsel skirt. One arm is outstretched, holding out a bespangled cape fringed with shiny tinsel, and the upper figure is ringed with small balloons. With sketchy palm trees in the

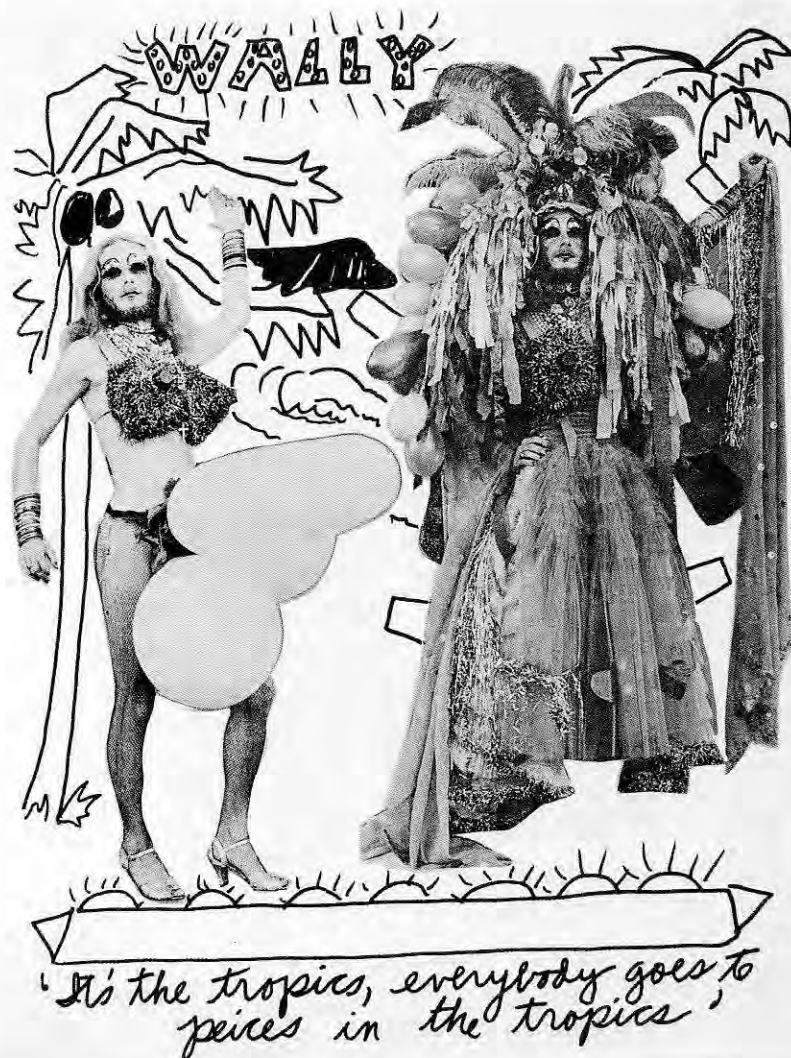


Fig. 1.06. Wally, featured in *Les Cockettes: The Official Cockettes Paper Doll Book*, 1971. Art by John Flowers, photography by Clay Geerdes.

background, the slogan “It’s the tropics, everybody goes to pieces in the tropics” suggests an abandon that accompanies the “exoticism” of a faraway locale.

The newsprint paper doll book, the only official publication produced by the Cockettes, has the feel of an instant collector’s item and does not seem genuinely intended be sliced up by the owner. It utilizes photomontage and collage as imaginative queer strategies, ones that build upon the crafting techniques of sewing, cutting, gluing, and rearranging so familiar to their outfit production. It also invites the holder of the book to participate conceptually in the process of chopping up and recombining, as it implies that the cut-out garments can be swapped between the different figures. Placing outfits on the “wrong” bodies to produce a comic mismatch is one of the

standard amusements of paper dolls, for one delights in the clashes made possible by a switch in clothes and the incongruities of scale and shape (a big vest on a tiny torso!). The paper dolls also emphasize the importance of the make-believe in dressing the Cockettes, since playing with the outfits does not have to take place materially, with scissors actually curving around the outlines, but can unfold in the mind.

Finding and Making

The aesthetic of the San Francisco queer counterculture put a great emphasis on dazzle: you were to make a stunning first impression with an overload of eye-catching detail and leave a trail of spangles in your wake. A ruling mantra was “Glitter covers a multitude of sins.”³⁷ These sparkly surfaces were built up by hand using glue, staples, and whatever else was available. Sometimes an outfit might require little more technique than draping linen in a togalike form, accessorized by toys that were safety-pinned on. Some, like Scrumbly Koldewyn of the Cockettes, owned their own sewing machines and knew how to use them; Koldewyn had been taught by his mother growing up and was accomplished in designing his own pants and shirts.³⁸ Others, like Wally, could not sew and relied more on assemblage and accretion—affixing plastic Halloween jack-o'-lanterns to his chest, for instance, to punctuate the shock of tall pale feathers erupting from his headdress, and carrying both a polka-dotted paper parasol and a tambourine to augment his rustling garb with a further, distinctly audible, component (fig. 1.07). This kind of making

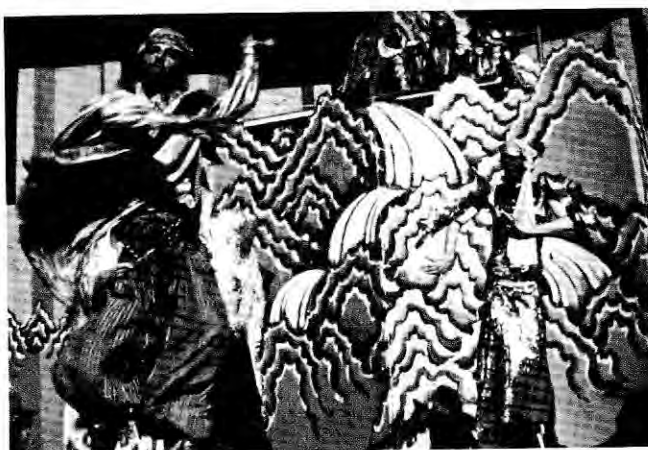
Fig. 1.07.
Wally with jack-o'-
lanterns, ca. 1970.
Photograph by Bud
Lee. © bud lee /
budlee.net.



was untrained, and such gathering of unlikely objects together is amateur “handmaking” in its most loosely defined, crafty sense. In the Angels’ group house there was only sporadic access to one used (frequently broken) sewing machine. Former Angel Jessica Copen recalls many drug-fueled all-nighters gluing rhinestones into place.³⁹ Most were defiantly uninterested in professional polish; in fact, their New York theatrical premiere, chronicled in the documentary *The Cockettes*, was disastrous precisely due to the perceived disgrace of amateurism.

Since everyone was in charge of their own costumes, and skill sets varied widely, many improvised their methods of crafting with little care for how things “should” fit the body. In fact, especially in the beginning years, there was an overarching disregard for the natural shape of the figure.⁴⁰ For example, the red outfit from 1973 turned Wally’s human form into a bright pyramid of color and texture, aspiring to living statuary. This disregard for pattern or precedent, combined with a sense that anything at all—from taffeta to tattered curtains—might be used as potential material, promoted experimentation. Within the space of the theater, too, the sets were cobbled together from castoffs and found objects such as painted sheets, cut-out cardboard shapes decorated liberally with glitter, and lights stuck in coffee cans. Background and foreground often merge in these production shots, as the patterned figures and the cardboard shapes among which they stand blur together in an optical flickering (fig. 1.08).

Many of their base garments were recycled—dumpster-dived, stolen from costume shops, or found in cheap thrift stores, where used clothes from the 1930s and 1940s were still prevalent. Marshall, one of the few Cockettes who earned a paycheck, worked at a store called the Third Hand and set aside choice pieces for his friends. Vintage boas, velvet gowns, and grungy ripped-up castoffs alike all became part of communal “drag rooms” where piles of other fabrics, scraps, and possible accessories were stored. In fig. 1.09 Wally, naked but for bracelets and a headdress, crouches to assess his visage at the mirror propped against the wall, perhaps before deciding what next to put on. Occasionally they would make a pilgrimage to Lew Serbin’s Dance Art Company, a boutique of “party beads, marabou feathers, strips of sequins, and boxes of turquoise and emerald rhinestone. Located downtown on Pow-



1.08. Martin Wong, stage set for an Angels of Light performance of *Paris Sights under the Bourgeois Sea*, ca. 1971. Courtesy Estate of Martin Wong and the Martin Wong Foundation.



Fig. 1.09.
Wally, nude with
headdress, ca. 1970.
Photograph by Bud
Lee, © bud lee /
budlee.net.

ell Street, the place housed more fantasy clutter than a Hollywood five-and-dime and was revered in our circle as a holy shrine.”⁴¹ As Bauer put it, making a trip to Lew Serbin’s to rummage through its collection of boas, fabric, sequins, and faux jewelry was like “going to the promised land.”⁴²

Because they had to either make their outfits themselves or beg/barter someone else to do it, they learned quickly how to take shortcuts and to create the most effect from the least expense. Adrian Brooks’s memoir *Flights of Angels: My Life with the Angels of Light* recounts the minimal means that they lived on—few had jobs, and they lived pri-

marily from a fund of pooled welfare checks. “In 1973, San Francisco revealed in the Glitter Age, its prevailing style coming from retro fashions found in thrift stores or salvaged from ‘free boxes.’ . . . [A] new culture was inventing itself.”⁴³ No one found it paradoxical that the new was being refashioned from the old; they relied on the anachronistic as well as the futuristic, borrowing especially heavily from the deco drawings of Erté and the ethos of art nouveau, its sweeping organic lines as well as its problematically orientaling tendencies (including heavy use of yellow-face in productions like *Pearls over Shanghai*; fig. 1.10).

Indeed, when considering the seemingly casual racism that accompanied many of the Cockettes productions, we might ask: whose world, exactly, is being made here? The claim to worldmaking is bound up in questions of identity that are inevitably unevenly articulated. Here it is instructive to return to Jacopetti’s *Native Funk and Flash*, which documents a regionally specific phenomenon in the 1970s—the rebirth of what was called in her subtitle “an emerging folk art” in the San Francisco Bay Area. Jacopetti’s inclusion of the Cockettes folds them into the rubric of folk art, which she elaborates from a white American viewpoint that emphasizes yearnings toward cultural otherness and “authenticity.” As she writes in the book’s introduction: “Many of us have hungered for a cultural identity strong enough to produce our own version of the native costumes of Afghanistan or Guatemala, for a community life rich enough for us to need our own totems comparable to African and Native American masks and ritual objects. The native funk and flash in this book tell us something of that hunger and what we are doing to fill it.”⁴⁴ But who is the “we” here? The book is filled with examples of ethnic annexation as a way to “fill” this hunger, including crafting traditions that integrate motifs and techniques from historical sources and non-Western customs; her language of ingestion partakes of larger tropes of presumably unmarked white



populations “hungrily” consuming “foreign” cultures.⁴⁵ Jacopetti was in this respect responding to larger trends of the 1960s and 1970s, including debates in the US studio craft world about its contested connections to global “folk” or “native” art. One key moment in this history was the formation in 1964 of the World Craft Council, whose institutional formation exacerbated many tensions between non-Western craftspeople (whose work, in shows sponsored by the council, was frequently exhibited as anonymous artifacts) and non-Native makers from nations like the United States and Canada (whose work was displayed accompanied by the artists’ names).⁴⁶

Jacopetti was inspired by a range of heritages and tribal traditions that included Native American, African, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Eastern European crafts, and in 1974 she cofounded a clothing pattern company, Folkware Patterns, which provided “ethnically inspired” designs such as Syrian dresses and Romanian blouses for the at-home sewer. This version of worldmaking is a hybrid affair, as it exists within and among ideologies of international incorporation while also insisting on the specificity of locale. Jacopetti has recently emphasized that the use of the word *native* was not a specific invocation of indigeneity or Native Americanness (though there are many mentions of Native American crafts throughout *Native Funk and Flash*)—but rather was meant to convey a sense that this resurgence of folk craft was “native to this ground, native to who were are. We were yearning for a sense of our own

Fig. 1.10. Cockettes in *Pearls over Shanghai*, 1970. Photograph by Bud Lee. © bud lee / budlee.net.

roots. It was not about stealing things from elsewhere.”⁴⁷ Others are more frank about the appropriations that fed new styles, including Hauser, who claims that “the essence of the hippie” look came from the Michoacán peoples of Mexico, transported via the wives of rock groups who traveled there for marijuana.⁴⁸ Native American ritual dress is also evoked in some of the feather headdresses worn by Hibiscus, Hauser, and Wally.

Like *native*, *funk* was a racialized term in the early 1970s, with its associations with black funk music (though the mostly white funk art movement and ceramics of the Bay Area were Jacopetti’s more likely connection).⁴⁹ What is more, *flash* had African American connotations in the early 1970s. In a 1971 *New York Times* review of Melvin van Peebles’s musical *Ain’t Supposed to Die a Natural Death*, African American writer, professor, activist, and actor Clayton Riley explains that “flash, as a register of Black American life, is style gone beyond, behavior, and appearance taken past the perimeters of respectability, taken outside. Brother glitters on the weekend. . . .”⁵⁰ He describes a Sister with “spectacular clothes and freakish shoes to match or not, knowing how to use the word *fly* as an admiring adjective . . . flash—all flash” (ellipses in original). Riley emphasizes that while “flash” pushes the boundaries of respectability with clothes, shoes, and style—qualities that much of the work in *Native Funk and Flash* demonstrates, especially photos of the “Glitter Boys”—it is a distinctly African American phenomenon, related to a political sense of self that relishes taking up space in a white world. Despite the prominent use of *flash* in the title, no visibly black makers are depicted in Jacopetti’s book.

No less than in *Native Funk and Flash*, questions of racial appropriation are central to the story of the Cockettes. *Pearls over Shanghai* was angrily denounced by some Asian American commentators for its racist stereotyping when it was restaged in San Francisco in 2009. It was apparently also seen as offensive in its own day by some, as when it was performed on the UC Berkeley campus and a woman jumped up and screamed, “This is the most sexist, racist piece of shit I’ve ever seen!”⁵¹ In response to the 2009 criticisms, when the musical was revived five years later by the Thrillpeddlers theater troupe, Koldewyn wrote an open letter directly addressing the issue, and it was posted on the theater’s wall. He explains that Link Martin, who wrote the script, was fascinated by the absurd and distorted clichés of China he had received in popular culture as a child. Koldewyn states that Martin grew up in San Francisco, “which had the largest Chinese origin population anywhere outside of China, and [he,] of mixed race himself, dismissed this all as camp.”⁵² (Martin was partly of Cherokee heritage.) This invocation of camp as a way to defuse politically charged material treats it as a conversion operation or a translation machine, permitting the most repellent aspects of society

to be switched into something more lighthearted—though of course this reinterpretation is wholly contingent on reception.

When I went to see the restaging of *Pearls over Shanghai* at the Hypnodrome in San Francisco in May 2014—it featured some of the original cast members—what struck me was how generic the comedy was, reliant on old-fashioned bawdiness and predictable plot turns. The costumes, designed by Billy Bowers and Tahara, were the most interesting part of the production; with liberal use of dragon motifs, fishnets, and corsets, they drew inspiration from the opulence of Chinese opera and the grungy make-do look of gutter glamour. The inventiveness of some of the gravity-defying headpieces kept my interest in the show, suggesting that the production was in part a vehicle for the costumes rather than the other way around. Rumi Missabu, playing Madame Gin Sling, was outfitted in a dress of green sequins with a matching tasseled headdress; large fake breasts protruded from the chest, covered with a bikini of dollar signs. Examined up close, they looked like much theatrical garb—in order to be durable enough for the stage, the garments had to be overconstructed and evidenced many clunky junctures. Yet they were also underconstructed in the sense that what appeared finessed from the stage was in fact fairly rough edged—rough edges that ramify into the play itself. Did the grafting of drag conventions onto Asian “dragon lady” clichés undermine those clichés? In the end, the exaggeration of stereotypes did not for me lessen their sting.

The lingering controversy about *Pearls* is just one instance of widespread indifference toward structures of racism among the Cockettes. As mentioned, Chinese American Cockette Martin Wong designed many Cockettes and Angels of Light costumes and sets, including for some of the very plays accused of being anti-Asian, raising questions about his own relation to the productions’ orientalizing. And though there were a small handful of black Cockettes (including Anton “Reggie” Dunnigan and Lindon “Bebe” Mbutu), Sylvester felt that the group held him at a distance and ultimately “wouldn’t let me in, and I thought it was because I was black.”⁵³ A rare photo that shows two of the black Cockettes together captures Mbutu and Sylvester, along with Martin Worman and others, at the airport in 1971 (flying to New York for their much-touted East Coast premiere). In a festive invocation of group identity, Mbutu, wearing a turban, holds a handmade cloth pennant reading “COCKETTES”; he or Worman (it is not clear who) is also clutching a garland of tinsel, redefining what we think of as travel-related necessities to include—why not?—Christmas decorations in one’s carry-on (fig. 1.11).

Sylvester’s statement about perceiving his own exclusion stands in sharp contrast to statements by many white Cockettes that “we didn’t look at differences.”⁵⁴ In the paper dolls book only one black member is depicted: Mbutu

Fig. 1.11.

Lindon Bebe Mbutu, Martin Worman, and Sylvester at the airport, 1971. Photograph by Clay Geerdes. Courtesy the Estate of Clay Geerdes.



(whose first name is here spelled Lendon), encircled by a feather halo and by tiered skirts on his lower half. His caption, the only one in the book that makes any direct mention of race, is “Black Fire,” and he is surrounded by hand-drawn flames (fig. 1.12). It is a privilege of whiteness to ignore racial distinctions, and it is crucial to note that in the grab-and-steal aesthetic of their countercultural practice, the Cockettes were racially inclusive in their membership while generating racist fantasies in their productions and in their everyday dynamics. The Cockettes fostered the interracial closeness depicted in the previously illustrated photo of Sylvester and Lyons in their conjugal bed (fig. 1.03) and encouraged the talents of artists like Wong, but the stereotypical and abrasive racial characterizations in their productions continue to draw condemnation.



Fig. 1.12. Lindon Bebe Mbutu, featured in *Les Cockettes: The Official Cockettes Paper Doll Book*, 1971. Art by John Flowers, photography by Clay Geerdes.

Crafting Selves

As stated, many came to the Cockettes and the Angels with no background in craft or sewing at all; Bauer reports having previously only made an apron in her Ohio middle-school home economics class, and it was, she told me, “a tragedy.”⁵⁵ Learning by making on the spot, she went on to create some of the Angels’ most memorable outfits, including costumes for the 1978 production *Sci-Clones* (fig. 1.13). Here the space aliens wear gowns of transparent shower curtains and extraterrestrial helmets fashioned from plastic champagne flutes found at Community Thrift for an effect that was equal parts Aubrey Beardsley drawing and Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*.⁵⁶ In another example of reusing surprising materials, Bauer took from a garbage pile a wad of the sticky material that goes under rugs to keep them from skidding to make an elaborate frog outfit complete with psychedelic patterning. The bubbly texture of the industrial material perfectly suited her character’s reptilian skin. Bauer transformed trash to become a resplendent creaturely princess, fully upending the legend of lowly frog that turns into a prince.

Indeed, queer drag and textile craft could be considered closely aligned, parallel practices—historically, non-gender-conforming folks like drag queens, drag kings, butch lesbians, and femmy fags (as well as transgendered folks who aim to pass “seamlessly,” to invoke a sewing metaphor) have had to make their own clothes, significantly tailor garments, and invent body-altering modifications like breast binders and packing cocks. Jennie Livingston’s 1990 documentary about black and Puerto Rican ball culture in Harlem, *Paris Is Burning*, tracks a generational change between older drag queens hunched over sewing machines making their own spangled dresses and younger ball-walkers who state that they would much rather buy or shoplift name brands from department stores.⁵⁷ The reality TV show *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, which premiered in 2009, has insisted upon sewing as fundamental to drag, and making clothes is as vital to the competition as lip-synching; many contestants have been ousted due to their inability to create outfits from scratch, whether with a hot-glue gun or with a needle and thread.

Larger shoulders, poorly scaled sleeves, ill-fitting crotches, or the simple desire to amp a garment up and make it one’s own: alterations for non-normative bodies—whether too big, too small, or otherwise “wrong”—necessitate a kind of skilled invention, design sense, and improvisational skill that, like artisanal knowledge and tradition, is often learned by doing and passed down through mentorship, example, and demonstration. The logic of crafted production—and of reproduction—is not hereditary or heteronormative but is instead managed within the queer kinship of counter-



Fig. 1.13.
Beaver Bauer and Jessica Copen in *Sci-Clones*, an Angels of Light performance, 1978. Photograph © Daniel Nicoletta.

publics forged through shared affiliation and activity. In one photograph, some of the Cockettes are lounging in the group house on Oak Street, with every possible surface rippling with fabrics and other materials. As a child is being nursed in one corner, in another corner, at left, someone is working at a sewing machine—the act of textile making is fully integrated into the bustle of daily life (fig. 1.14).

None of the outfits created by the members of the Cockettes and Angels were ever considered purely *theatrical*, taken in its most basic definition to mean “destined for the stage.”⁵⁸ Ensembles were not exclusively meant for performances but assembled to be worn around town, for instance, as Hibiscus stood on a street corner and passed out handmade flyers promoting upcoming shows. Yet even when at home popping popcorn or making dinner or hanging out in the backyard, group members elaborately enrobed themselves *for themselves* and for each other (they never missed a chance to pose for the camera; fig. 1.15). They were interested in creating personas unveiled first



Fig. 1.14.
Cockettes at home,
83 Oak Street, with
sewing machine, ca.
1970. Photograph by
Bud Lee, © bud lee /
budlee.net.

at home or on the street and later rehearsed and integrated into a show—an “urban carnival” in which the viewers were as richly attired in rhinestones as the performers.⁵⁹ As their own best and first audience, they dressed to outdo and impress each other, as well as to command attention within the vibrant tapestry of San Francisco. The outfits were understood as outward manifestations of their mutable inner lives. There was little investment in an “authentic” or stable self; instead, “what resonated deep beneath the glitter,” as one memoir puts it, was a constantly shifting “spirit.”⁶⁰ Distinctions like natural versus artificial were dissolved and made irrelevant within the unfolding theater that the Cockettes and the Angels of Life attempted to embody.

If, as Sontag writes in “Notes on ‘Camp,’” “the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration,” then these outfits might not be properly called camp—some saw them instead as sincere manifestations of complex internal landscapes.⁶¹ On the stage, masks and costumes were used to obviate the division between reality and fantasy, but they were also charged with the special power of psychic illustration. Especially in the early years of the Cockettes and, later, the Angels, the shows were only loosely scripted, and everyone more or less designed their own costume based on who or what they wanted to become that day. Because they were conceived by each person for each show, individual outfits gave form to each distinctive personality. By extension, they were meant to embolden the spectator to see

a range of possibilities for how life could be lived at its most extreme and imaginative. "We believed," states Bauer, "in the transformative power of our masks and outfits and costumes, to change us but also to change the people who saw us."⁶² Such crafting was a social sphere; members would together scavenge, staple, and hand-sew their outfits, or make jewelry that might be given away spontaneously on the street. Over time, the Angels experimented with elastic headdresses and masks; their main mask-maker, Tony Johnopoulos, also worked with other alternative theater groups such as Bread and Puppet and the Living Theater. As productions became more organized and coherent in later years, the Angels also made preliminary sketches to unify the design themes and would develop these concepts communally.

For some the *process* itself of handmaking was a forceful means of individual expression and communication. For instance, after a drug-induced episode of psychosis in which she became unable to speak, Cockette Hauser invented her own intricate visual language of crafted scraps. "The aesthetic was 'more more more,' and every layer conveyed meaning as we created eclectic mystical collage on our bodies. With my drag, I was collaging myself together," she recalls.⁶³ Unlike many others, Hauser had an art background as a painter and had learned to sew as a child from her grandmother. Handmade textiles, especially the quilts that she surrounded herself with, became a potent metaphorical, almost cosmic vehicle for Hauser; for example, shredded red velvet upholstery layered against an ochre gold tablecloth came not only to signify but to potentially reorder her own blood and flesh. ("I don't really know how to express it now," she confessed to me.)⁶⁴



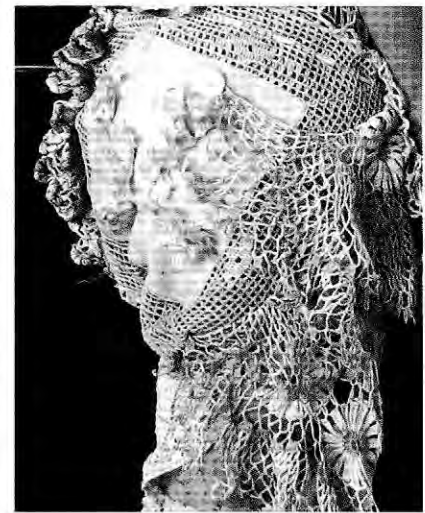
Fig. 1.15.
Cockettes in a field
of lavender, San
Francisco, 1971. Left
to right: Pristine
Condition, Marshall,
Bobby, Danny
Isley, Link Martin.
Photograph by
Fayette Hauser.

This nonverbal sign system, pieced together from colorful fabrics, was not necessarily readable by others but had a logic through which she was able to communicate with herself, as she surrounded herself with fabrics in “an organic swirl of color and objects that came together like a Sufi flame.”⁶⁵ As Pam Tent (aka Sweet Pam) recounts, “Her mind was so fragmented that assembling her drag became her only focus—a kind of psychological puzzle to help her put herself back together.”⁶⁶ In other words, crafting drag was not about disassembling (or falsity) but about assembling an earnest, if provisional, self by which she could engage in a conversation with herself. The knowing archness that is a hallmark of drag (and of “deliberate” camp) does not quite fit in the case of Hauser, who used it not as a self-aware wink to the world but as a route to a sort of fugitive authenticity.

Folk and Flash

Let me return to the appearance of the “Glitter Boys” within the specific context of Jacopetti’s *Native Funk and Flash*. Next to the picture of Prissy, Koldewyn is featured in his intricate doily outfit (fig. 1.16). Koldewyn, like Nikky Nichols and a few others, was skilled at constructing garments out of unconventional materials due to his long experience with sewing, and he felt, as they all did, that the impetus was to “display trash as treasure.”⁶⁷ With his “panoply of frou-frou” and over twenty doilies that he recalls cost no more than fifty cents each, he collaged together pants, a top, and a jacket of thin metallic fabric with chubby pink chenille trim. (He sometimes sold similar tops at the Third Hand.) Sewn together with a “quick and dirty zig-zag stitch,” the crocheted doilies with their loose diamond net are pulled at the body’s side, revealing flesh. The outfit has no underlayer, as the skin was meant to show through, though the doilies are strategically placed around the crotch for more coverage (in the fig. 1.17 detail, the outfit is modeled by someone wearing striped boxers). A back pocket made of solid material—a table scarf—is adorned with silk flowers and affixed with a button, as the pants were pulled on and closed using a few buttons to hold it all in place. Modeling his outfit for *Native Funk*, Koldewyn stands in his bedroom, itself a showroom of textiles and pattern, with his drapery fabric behind him, Chinese scarves hung like molding, a heart-shaped pillow he made himself, a found plaid bedspread, and a pile of doilies and blankets at the foot of the bed, just out of reach of the viewer.

This series of photos is notable, and not only because of the book’s casual, unassuming incorporation of radically undefined gender identities within what is an otherwise fairly heteronormative framework. Jacopetti chronicles



the revival of traditional folk arts by mostly San Francisco-area crafters, including everything from neoprimitive jewelry to stitched-together dolls to hand-decorated denim shirts, with a decided interest in showcasing finely done work, emphasizing the time, care, creative inspiration, and effortful labor of the hand—what we have come to think of as “craftsmanship.”⁶⁸ Her inclusion of Scumbly’s doilies and Prissy’s dress therefore legitimizes them as *craft*—with some significant disclaimers. Though she celebrates these raw, lively outfits, Jacopetti’s explanatory captions also state: “So here’s the art of costuming, not craftsmanship, and the use of common elements like patchwork pieces and old doilies. It’s all joined with a fantastic ability to achieve an effect, rivaling the scary shamans of past times for sheer outrageous impact.”⁶⁹ The book thus makes a distinct differentiation between these hodgepodge, safety-pinned concoctions and the intricate, precise work in the rest of the book—Prissy’s costume is heralded for its lack of finesse, its *disregard*

Fig. 1.16. Scumbly Koldewyn in *Native Funk and Flash*, Scrimshaw Press, 1974. Photograph by Jerry Wainwright. Courtesy of Alexandra Jacopetti Hart.

Fig. 1.17. Detail of Koldewyn’s doily outfit. Photograph by Scumbly Koldewyn.

for skill. Though *Native Funk and Flash* draws a line between “costuming” and “craftsmanship,” in fact, some of the outfits documented here were early designs by Cockette Billy Bowers, who went on to be a legendary fashion designer for the stars, heralded for his handcrafted work using nontraditional materials that was featured in *Italian Vogue* and *Women’s Wear Daily*.

The resurgence of folk art that Jacopetti records, like hand-thrown ceramics, leather tooling, and woodworking, was broadly connected to the concomitant growing environmentalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s and was seen as a path to a “gentler” lifestyle.⁷⁰ Thus it was loosely part of a countercultural politics of anticommercialism and a rejection of mass production that would pave the way to a living with more integrity. The term *counter culture* was put into wide circulation by Theodore Roszak in 1969; he theorized that the turn to “cultural” modes of protest such as hippie living was a response to the imperious face of industrialization, mass production, and the destruction wreaked by the Vietnam War.⁷¹ At the same time, some of those documented in *Native Funk and Flash* saw handmaking as adjacent to consumer culture rather than a complete opting out. A two-page spread in the book features the Berkeley Telegraph Avenue crafts market, where vendors sell their goods, including batik shirts that cost \$5 each, rainbow pillowcases, and jewelry. The text explains that many but not all of the items for sale are made locally: “some stuff has been brought back from travels across the borders and seas, but much of it is homegrown.”⁷²

Indeed, the Telegraph Avenue craft market was one of many markets that sprang up in the United States during the early 1970s as the handmaking ethic became more mainstream. According to a small book that sketches the history of the Telegraph market, vending permits to sell crafts in Berkeley surged in 1974 (just around the time of the publication of *Native Funk and Flash*).⁷³ Along with woodcuts that depict some of the vendors and their goods, the book includes an illustration of what the market looked like before the city instituted its licensing process. A man who appears to be Native American, with two long braids framing his face, stands in front of a table full of moccasins as a woman with a fringed bag bends to inspect his wares; this could be an acknowledgment of the growing Native crafts market being officially promoted across the United States, but perhaps hints at even deeper histories of handmaking in an area once populated by the Ohlone peoples.⁷⁴ The caption describes this as a scene of selling “viable, usable crafts” (fig. 1.18). Rather than being regarded as a space apart from consumerism, these markets were understood as *models* of neoliberal capitalism, which was then taking hold as a dominant economic and ideological system with its emphasis on individual marketing, business savvy, the monetization of social transactions, and self-promotion. “Craftspersons and the street vending tradition

are good examples of a small-scale free enterprise system at work," states the book approvingly.⁷⁵

Obviously the "free enterprise" entrepreneurialism of the craft market was at odds with the self-made costumes and handcrafted gift economy promoted by the likes of Hibiscus. (For his part, Hibiscus left the Cockettes to found the Angels because they "got too commercial.")⁷⁶ Thus while the ideals promoted by craft markets could be seen as in accordance with the utopian dreams of the Angels, there were also significant divergences. For instance, the imperative to make as much as you could by hand was violated when the Angels' costumes freely incorporated cheaply made consumer goods like plastic glasses and jack-o'-lanterns. Their craft practices and politics were much more heterodox, and due to the pressures of putting shows together quickly and with very little money, they were unabashed about using whatever they could find (or steal).

In the 1970s, strict divisions between handmade and store-bought within the craft scene were dissolving. Writing in 1975, folklorist Michael Owen Jones connects skills sharing in textile work to storytelling and oral histories but does not discount the role played by mass-produced kits and instructions. For instance, he describes "contemporary urban tie-dyeing" as an example of the rich mix of standardization and individual innovation. He writes: "A young college educated housewife in Los Angeles learned to tie-dye T-shirts; she relied in large measure on the instructions that accompanied a bottle of commercial dye, though other sources of information about textile work were available."⁷⁷ This "young housewife" goes on to make her own discoveries as her knowledge and skills grow in part through printed instructions and in part through face-to-face interactions and through purchasing objects at craft fairs like the one on Telegraph Avenue. Owens writes that the spread of technique happens in part via "small interactional networks, each with its own special identity and set of values."⁷⁸ Cultural transmission is understood not as generational (passed down from mother to



In the early 1970's, before any of the street merchants had to be licensed, there were craftspeople and importers of crafts. They all sold viable, usable crafts.

Fig. 1.18.

Page from *Telegraph Avenue Craft Market*, text by Claudia Levin, drawing by Michael Fram, 1984. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

daughter, for instance) but rather as reliant upon promiscuous circuits of exchange both store-bought and informal.

Though women's liberation and gay male liberation have often been historicized as parallel yet somewhat separate movements sometimes pitted against each other, the Angels of Light provide a crucial, different narrative.⁷⁹ As discussed in the introduction, the upsurge in traditional textile techniques (sewing, embroidery, quilting, knitting, crocheting) in the early 1970s was integrally related to feminist art's reclamations of previously denigrated "women's work." In fact, feminism is vital to this story—not least because it drove much of the return to craft within both the art world and in the hobbyist countercultural movement.

Koldewyn sought to recognize and dignify women's work when he used doilies in his handmade creations. And openly feminist participants like Bauer and Copen advocated for strong female roles in the performances and for gender parity in the labor of the communal house. They even made an all-female film (now lost) to showcase their talents and to emphasize that they were sick of "playing second fiddle to the men," according to Copen.⁸⁰ As Bauer states, "We didn't want to be fan-carriers for drag queens making a grand entrance." Perhaps because fashion design is gendered female and coded homosexual, one place where equality was relatively easily established within the Angels was in the creation of costumes—in other words, textile handmaking was a sphere where female and gay male labors could be equally valued.

Decadent Décor

In the 1960s and 1970s, California in particular was a space where the revitalization of handicraft fed on and into gay liberation, feminism, and communal living. The literature on the decade's craft revival details the regional blossoming of local artisan communities.⁸¹ The fact that the Cockettes and the Angels surfaced in the Bay Area is significant, reflecting certain economic and architectural circumstances such as the availability of rambling, low-rent Victorian houses that were well suited to large groups.⁸² The formation of the Cockettes in late 1969 demonstrates that despite the widespread assumption that the June 1969 Stonewall rebellion (just six months earlier) was the singular origin point of gay liberation in the United States, the genderfuck movement had a unique formation in the hippie counterculture of California.⁸³

Furthermore, the turn to handmade fashion, dripping with sequins and beads, resonates with negative stereotypes of California as a place obsessed

with “the superficial” and with appearance—politics as style, rebellion reduced to aesthetics. One of the signature features of genderfuck groups and their costumes is decorative flourish. *Decoration*, of course, is a charged word within the history of art and design. In the 1950s Clement Greenberg warned that decoration was the “specter that haunts modernist painting,” threatening to devolve art into kitsch.⁸⁴ Earlier in the century, Adolf Loos in his 1900 essay “Ornament and Crime” cast self-decoration as “criminal” and “degenerate,” writing that “the evolution of culture marches with the elimination of ornament from useful objects.”⁸⁵ Loos was especially disgusted with the art nouveau style that so enchanted the Cockettes and the Angels of Light—its hyperbole, its disregard for the categories of high and low, and its mixing of art, design, and craft. In his important reconsideration of Loos, Hal Foster notes that Loos’s terror of art nouveau is related to his revulsion for how it “commingles subject and object”—just the sort of fantasy of the ecstatic hybridized merging the Cockettes and Angels celebrated.⁸⁶ (For her part, Sontag believed art nouveau to be “the most typical and fully developed Camp style.”)⁸⁷ What Loos saw as degradation and decadence, they understood as an emotionally charged remaking of both self and society as they draped their bodies and their sets in boas in every color and shining lamé.

Though decoration is never explicitly queered in either Loos or Greenberg, Richard Dyer in his book *The Culture of Queers* discusses the negative association of homosexuality with the decorative and the superficial.⁸⁸ The Cockettes and the Angels reveled in extending the self with florid, oversized headdresses and trailing garments, pleasuring in artifice and showing little concern for the difference between surface and depth. Or, better, they demonstrated what it might look like when those terms converge to become, to quote a phrase sometimes attributed to Andy Warhol, “deeply superficial.”⁸⁹

There was sometimes a more explicit politics to their dress-up, as in 1971, when Hibiscus, painted gold and wearing an enormous shredded-paper headdress, picketed Varig Airlines (a Brazilian company) to protest the Brazilian dictatorship’s mistreatment of members of the Living Theater.⁹⁰ A benefit for the Living Theater members “busted and behind bars” was held in August 1971 at the UC Berkeley Pauley Ballroom, featuring Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and the Cockettes (fig. 1.19). Such a protest demonstrates how these groups identified themselves not only as regional freaks whose mission was entertainment but as crucially participating in bigger social movements, following the radical precedents set by groups such as the Living Theater. Whatever class or race background they might have had growing up, some Cockettes understood themselves to be “poor gays—oppressed people,” and “the ragtags and rejects of society.”⁹¹ However overstated, this language connects their scrapwork aesthetic to their own sense of margin-

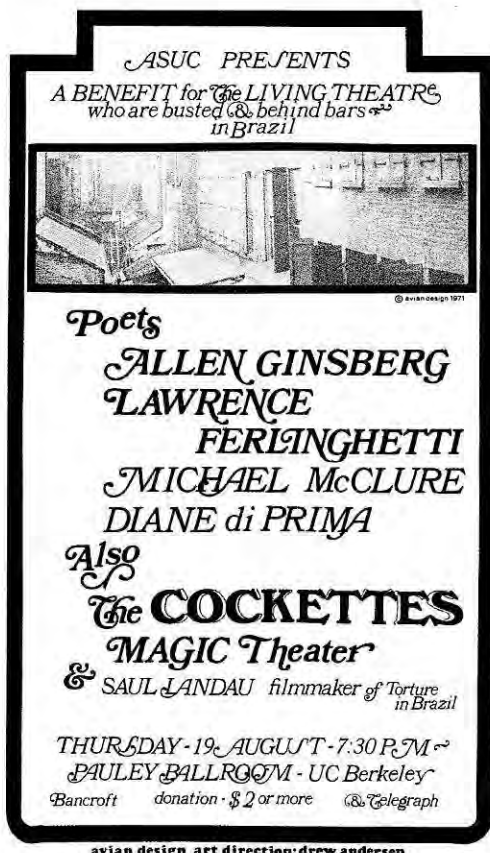


Fig. 1.19.
ASUC [Associated Students of the University of California] Presents a Benefit for the Living Theater, UC Berkeley, poster, 1971. Designed by Drew Andersen at Avian Design.

it feels like sitting ground zero during an explosion of sexuality and hedonism and dope and sensation-seeking unparalleled in American history.”⁹⁴ Indeed it is important not to overly nostalgize or romanticize groups like the Cockettes and Angels of Light, which, along with schisms around racism and sexism, had their share of jealousies, infighting, overdoses, and the like. Yet for the Angels the center did hold together for almost a decade—they lived and worked together until the early 1980s. That decade saw a further devastation as gay men began to contract HIV. Hibiscus—inspiration and figurehead—became an early casualty of AIDS in the United States when he died in 1982. Many other men involved in the Cockettes and the Angels also died of AIDS-related illnesses, including Sylvester, Reggie Dunnigan, Martin Wong, Wally, and Prissy.

Art and design historian Christopher Reed has declared, “There is something queer about archives.”⁹⁵ That statement has been borne out in this research project in unexpected, and unsettling, ways. When interviewing Bauer, for example, I asked to see some of her photographs of her time with the Angels. “I’ll need to think about that,” she responded. “To be honest,

alization, suggesting that when the low meets the low, transformation is enacted: garbage for garbage, made ecstatic.

When Memory Surfaces

In the late 1960s, not everyone saw utopian potential beneath the sparkles and the makeup in San Francisco. Joan Didion’s famous 1967 account of Haight-Ashbury, “Slouching towards Bethlehem,” registers a numbed discomfort with drug culture and a free-wheeling hippie approach to living: “We were seeing the desperate attempt of a handful of pathetically unequipped children to create a community in a social vacuum.”⁹² Didion, riffing on a poem by William Butler Yeats, bleakly asserts that all these art-into-life experiments were proof that American society was rotting from within: “The center was not holding.”⁹³ The writer of a 1971 feature in *Rolling Stone* likewise saw something ominous in what the Cockettes portended: “We are seeing the beginning of the 21st century, and

dredging up that past is very painful for me. When I look at those pictures, I am reminded of tremendous loss and death." Talking with former members constantly reminded me of the fragmented, piecemeal nature of history itself, the unraveling fabric of time. Some of their stories were detailed and precise; other times they confessed to large gaps in memory. Tent's memoir emphasizes the communally crafted nature of recalling this heady era; its first sentence describes the book as a "collective memoir, and much like a Cockettes show, [it] was pasted together from scraps in our closets and our shared experiences."⁹⁶ She is quick to acknowledge holes in the narrative. Likewise, Brooks interrupts his memoir with the phrase "memory fails."⁹⁷ Lost films, missing photographs, vanished costumes: it is easy to lose the thread.

In the wake of the Cockettes documentary and the publication of memoirs by former members, this history (and, to a lesser extent, that of the Angels of Light) is being rediscovered for a new generation.⁹⁸ Unfortunately, the majority of the costumes made by the Cockettes and the Angels did not survive. Though they made spectacular first impressions, many of the outfits were in constant states of disrepair, and some of them were disassembled and reused to make other garments. The performers shed sequins as they staggered off-stage. Sylvester rhapsodized that "you lived in glitter and you ate glitter—the whole thing was glitter."⁹⁹ Tent says, "We ate and even pooped glitter."¹⁰⁰ With these handmade costumes, outside decoration was incorporated inside, ingested and excreted, traversing the porous membrane between exterior surface and what lies beneath. In a time and place that seemed ripe for social revolution, these groups dreamed of a queer and feminist politics of handmaking, worldmaking, and self-making that would eradicate the lines between performing theatrical numbers and performing a new way to live. They used their outfits as a laboratory site to craft multiple skins.

Handmade costumes—not to mention radical queer culture—are still considered somewhat marginal within art history, perhaps rightly so. Yet despite this marginalization, and despite the destruction and loss of many of these outfits and stage sets (as well as the deaths of many former members), the residue of this textile craft stubbornly lingers. For example, Wong is represented in a 2008 textbook on Asian American art history for his Angels of Light stage designs (seen in fig. 1.08)—an important recognition of the cross-racial nature of this group that was at the same time internally riven by racism.¹⁰¹

I conclude this section with one last anecdote: in the early 1970s, Allen Ginsberg had a sexual liaison with Hibiscus. Ginsberg later commented that the erotic encounter was less than comfortable: "His bed was a little gritty because he had a lot of sequins in it. And it was difficult to sleep on the sheets

because there was sort of like difficult glitter stuff there."¹⁰² It is a peculiar conjunction: glamour so excessive that it can admit and embrace its own decrepitude. This is one lesson of the queer textile handmade aesthetic—it exists where grit and glitter meet, ostensibly right on the surface of things, yet also profound.

In what follows, I continue to consider questions of surface and depth, remaking and queer worldmaking, examining a very different kind of textile—braided abstract rag-rug paintings made in New York City in the early 1970s. Turning from the West Coast hippie genderfuck costuming to East Coast lesbian-feminist reclamations of amateur “women’s work” within the fine arts, I explore how such reclamations were in dialogue with thrift and waste. While the Cockettes and Angels of Light perverted, frayed, or transformed high-art traditions of theater and costume with their exuberant campiness, Harmony Hammond, with a more muted form of camp, dragged crafted rags from the low hobby arena into a fine arts realm.

Fig. 1.20.
(facing, top)
Harmony
Hammond, *Floor-*
piece II, cloth
and acrylic, 46"
diameter, 1973. Art
© Harmony Ham-
mond / Licensed
by VAGA, New
York, NY.

Fig. 1.21.
(facing, middle)
Harmony
Hammond, *Floor-*
piece III, cloth
and acrylic, 65"
diameter, 1973. Art
© Harmony Ham-
mond / Licensed
by VAGA, New
York, NY.

Fig. 1.22.
(facing, bottom)
Harmony
Hammond, *Floor-*
piece V, cloth
and acrylic, 59"
diameter, 1973. Art
© Harmony Ham-
mond / Licensed
by VAGA, New
York, NY.

Harmony Hammond Goes Down

In 1973, US artist Harmony Hammond came out as a lesbian. That same year, she created a series of watershed artworks—her *Floorpiece* sculptures (figs. 1.20, 1.21, 1.22). Made using traditional braided-rug techniques, the circular, spiraling *Floorpieces* recycled cloth found during Hammond’s rag-picking excursions in New York City’s Garment District. These industrial cast-offs were braided together, tightly coiled, stitched to a heavy cloth backing, and then selectively painted with acrylic paint. Hammond has called the *Floorpieces* her “most radical works.”¹⁰³ The term *radical* invokes its Latin origins—a rooting or return to foundations—while it also suggests a strident politics. I consider the *Floorpieces*’ radicalism anew within two related contexts: Hammond’s craft-based textile process and the concurrent emergence of her queer identity as a form of worldmaking. (To be clear, Hammond did not use the word *queer* in the 1970s, as the term had not yet been reclaimed; like most gay women of the time, she called herself a lesbian. In recent years she has identified as queer, and throughout this section I frequently interchange these words.) However, one need not have recourse to the biographical to make claims, as I do, about the queer orientations of her *Floorpieces*.

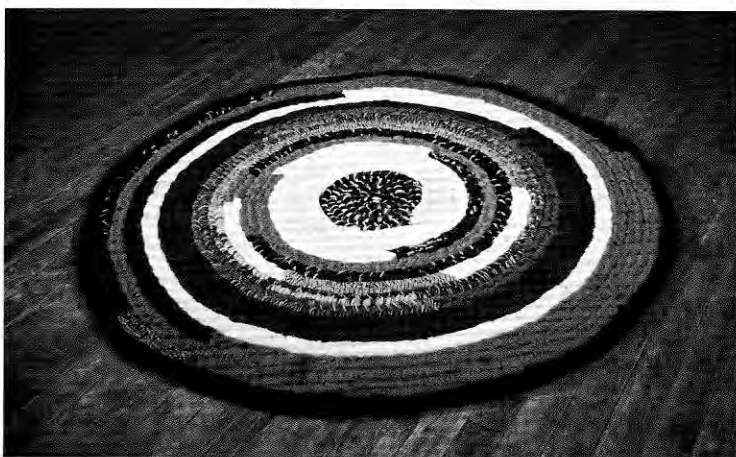
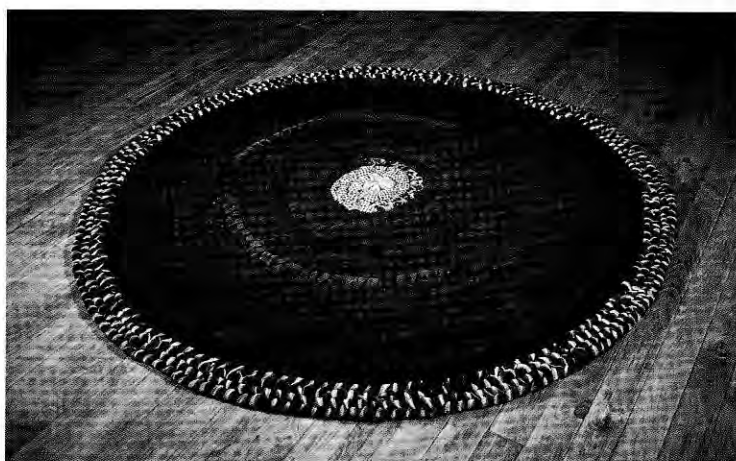
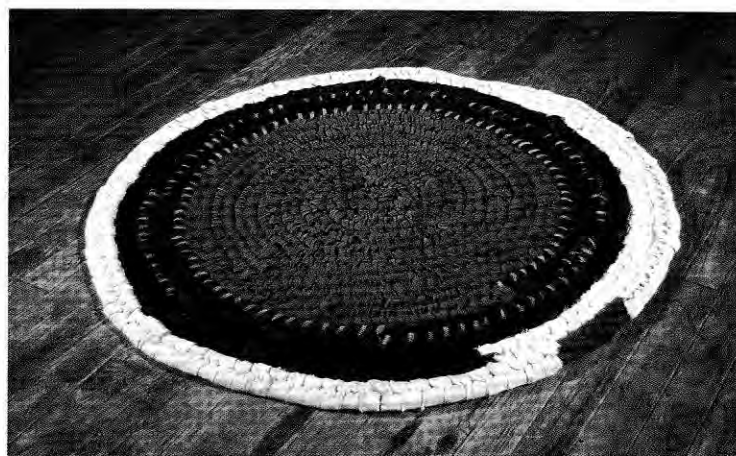
To understand the *Floorpieces* as queer craft is to assert a feminist art history that is defiantly lesbian as well as sensitive to class. Few artists in 1973 were as dedicated as Hammond was to bringing art down while also bringing textile craft up. In a statement for her solo show in 1973 at AIR (Artists in

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Residence), the women-only alternative cooperative gallery of which she was a cofounder, Hammond wrote of her “desire to break down the distinctions between painting and sculpture, between art and women’s work, and between art in craft and craft in art.”¹⁰⁴ Many other textile craft-based fine arts rely upon a spatial shift from horizontal to vertical as they are institutionally framed and legitimized as art—think of Robert Rauschenberg’s *Bed* (1955; fig. 1.23). Leo Steinberg might have famously categorized Rauschenberg’s use of the horizontal as a “flatbed picture plane,” but *Bed* is importantly not meant to be displayed on the ground.¹⁰⁵ Rauschenberg’s *Bed* with its prominent quilt—which had belonged to Dorothea Rockburne—as a foundation or base for his messy painting (invoking a sexualized site of bodily fluids and gestural expressions), like Hammond’s work, highlights the fact that textiles often exist at the intersection between public and private, a queer place that transgresses the border between the sites of erotic activity and artmaking.

Yet Rauschenberg’s move to the wall cancels out the quilt’s utility; such use-value, of course, is one standard dividing line between craft and art. As Susan Bernick snappily comments regarding Rauschenberg’s work and its effortless acceptance into the realm of high art, “A quilt is an art object when it stands up like a man.”¹⁰⁶ Hammond’s *Floorpieces*, however, stubbornly resist that change in orien-

tation. They are rugs laid on the floor as rugs—insistently low, although any functionality they have in that capacity is partial and is intentionally compromised. They may exist on the ground, but they are also fragile paintings that require carefully considered conditions of display. If you owned one, you would not put it in your living room with a coffee table over it. Rauschenberg’s *Bed*, with its copious drips, evident handiwork, vertical orientation, and wooden frame, insists upon its status as art—and not only that, as *painting*, which is given pride of place in the hierarchy of artistic

genres. Hammond riskily, and confidently, forgoes such blatant markers, as her careful, nearly camouflaged application of paint on top of the braided textile threatens to obscure her artistic intervention.

Hammond's work is positioned within several overlapping art-historical movements. The *Floorpieces* have been exhibited alongside other gendered handmade art (*Division of Labor: "Women's Work" in Contemporary Art*, curated by Lydia Yee at the Bronx Museum of Art, 1995), as well as seen as expanding the definition of painting in the late 1960s and early 1970s (*High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967–1975*, curated by Katy Siegel, 2006). While these are relevant critical contexts, Hammond's work also exceeds them, bringing together feminist politics, avant-garde abstraction, queer sensuality, and "middlebrow" hobbyist crafting. As Elissa Auther has argued, fiber crafts and fine arts, while sharing common ground aesthetically, were often segregated in this era and subject to hierarchical divisions.¹⁰⁷ Some of this separation was challenged by feminism, and the *Floorpieces* reference a range of 1970s feminist concerns: namely, the elevation of the domestic arts, the dismantling of gendered hierarchies of art and craft, and the dignifying of historically feminized labor.

They also key in to other social and political issues of that decade; Hammond's use of remnants from garbage dumpsters had an ecological component, for instance, resonating with the nascent environmental and do-it-yourself anticapitalist movements. And the braided pieces are embedded in a kind of feminist primitivism of the time that attempted to link women's art cross-culturally and transhistorically with indigenous and traditional craft practices. Like the *Native Funk and Flash* invocation of "native" production, the *Floorpieces*' spiraled forms cite Native American pottery and basketmaking, which are based on similar coiling, and Hammond immersed herself in research about coiling techniques across time.¹⁰⁸ In addition, Hammond has long been concerned with the ritualistic stitching of much women's work, drawing connections between her process and the repetitions intrinsic to domestic fiber-based chores like sewing and mending.

The Labors of Handmaking

Within art history, the *Floorpieces* are most often retrospectively understood as being in dialogue with other 1960s and 1970s floor-based artworks, primarily the metal sculptures of Carl Andre. Much has been made of the differences between Hammond and Andre, in language that is routinely and hyperbolically gendered: circular versus square; soft, warm fabric versus hard, cold metal; saturated applied color versus neutral inherent tones; and

Fig. 1.23.
(facing) Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed*, 1955. Oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and sheet on wood supports, 6'3¼" x 31½" x 8". Collection of Museum of Modern Art, New York. Art © Robert Rauschenberg / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

hand-crafted domestic surfaces versus found industrial material. Hammond's integration and braiding together of her cloth strands to create a unified spiraled rug is at odds with Andre's placement of individual units that remain separate even when subsumed within his precise grids. Yet such easy dichotomies disregard the fact that these two artists shared an interest in flatness, baselessness, and the phenomenological activation of the viewer's space. In addition, according to Rosalind Krauss, the grid has been endlessly returned to by modern artists in part because of its ability to evoke the spiritual as well as the logical; the form also echoes the material basis of the canvas with its woven (that is, gridded) cloth—one could conjecture, then, that Andre's sculptures are from the outset haunted by textiles.¹⁰⁹

What is more, Hammond's materials—strips from the end cuts of large bolts of machine-knit fabric—are just as industrial as Andre's metals. Andre's grids were in oblique dialogue with the late capitalist urbanization of New York and the closing of its factories; meanwhile textile manufacturing in New York was undergoing its own transformation in the early 1970s. Long associated with an immigrant workforce, the feminization of labor, and attendant injustices (as in the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire), apparel production in New York peaked in 1970 and then went into rapid decline.¹¹⁰ In a photograph from the era, a man pulls a cart full of bolts of cloth through the intersection of Seventh Avenue and West Thirty-Sixth Street (the area where Hammond would gather her scraps), straining with all his weight to move the heavy load; his bandaged thumb registers some of the bodily costs of this type of work (fig. 1.24). Though Manhattan in general had undergone a widespread "deindustrialization" starting in the 1950s, textile and garment manufacturing was still evident in the early 1970s, reaching a high of some quarter-million workers in the industry (many of them unionized).¹¹¹ That number saw a steady decline throughout the late 1970s as factories fought unionization and moved to the US South, or overseas, where wages were lower and workers had far less protections.¹¹²

It was in these years that Hammond turned to textile leavings for her materials. She lived at 87 Bowery Street just off Canal, south of the Garment District, and found the cotton and synthetic knit cloth in garbage bags and dumpsters in the form of one- to four-inch-wide strips (the end cuts of bolts of knit fabric rolled around cardboard centers). Her loft's proximity to these workspaces that employed low-paid women and her use of their waste materials were significant to her project. As she has written, "This work must be considered in relation to labor and the geographic and social spaces of lower Manhattan garment districts being colonized by artists, such as myself, as we began to live and work in these neighborhoods. . . . Using this discarded fabric . . . I was able to reference the women working in the sweatshops and



Fig. 1.24.
Man pulling cart
with rolls of fabric,
Garment District,
New York, 1970s.
Photograph by
Ozzie Freidman.

myself—a woman and an artist in a capitalist patriarchal culture—with what I called an ‘esthetic of survival.’”¹¹³ Hammond attempts to reckon here with the gentrifying presence of artists, the gendering of textile work, and the manufacturing procedures from which she was culling her supplies, though one cannot equate these incommensurable labors—that of an artist in her studio and that of an underpaid worker in a factory. Her 1977 declaration that “art is essentially work” does not fully account for the discrepancies of valuation and privilege embedded in these categories, especially as the contours of industrial textile labor were being reorganized in that moment of neoliberal restructuring.¹¹⁴

Perhaps the most important difference between Andre's grids and Hammond's *Floorpieces*, which she views as "lateral paintings," is that the latter are not meant to be walked on. Andre's metal pieces—stepped onto and trod upon—are in clear dialogue with utilitarian floor coverings, but the artist himself was strongly opposed to this reading, as it pushed his sculptures dangerously close to the long-dismissed realm of textile craft. Phil Leider referred to them as "rugs" in his 1968 review of Andre's solo show at Dwan Gallery in New York, a terminology that had wide circulation despite Andre's objections.¹¹⁵ In a letter to the editor in *Artforum* in 1973—the same year that Hammond made her floor-based sculptures—Andre asserted, "My work derives from the working-class crafts of bricklaying, tile-setting, and stonemasonry. I have pointed this out over and over again and yet my works are described as 'rugs.'"¹¹⁶ Andre's insistence that his art derives from (masculine) artisanal labor ignores the fact that rug making might as easily be considered a "working-class craft." Rug becomes a pejorative term—all the more so because it is a textile—and Andre distances himself from its low feminine origins. Andre's class and his masculinity were especially at issue in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a time when he was a vocal member of the Art Workers' Coalition and proclaimed his identity as an "art worker" by sporting a daily uniform of worker's overalls.¹¹⁷ What Andre's letter does not mention is that rugs, too, are in dialogue with labor. Hammond's *Floorpieces* are feminist, class-conscious comments on work—floors are, after all, loaded sites of women's housekeeping.

If Andre is one "father" of floor-based art, Lynda Benglis might be considered a "mother." Starting in the late 1960s, Benglis poured pigmented latex directly on the ground in large colorful swaths. Benglis also used industrial materials such as polyurethane foam to create droopy, bulbous forms on floors. With their almost fluorescent, intentionally vulgar colors and debased materials, Benglis's "fallen" paintings were, like Hammond's work, meant to challenge fine art hierarchies. Though Benglis was similarly interested in tactility and the registering of the body in her art, her process was distinct from Hammond's investment in handwork. A *Life* magazine article from 1970 titled "Fling, Dribble and Dip" famously placed Benglis's art on a continuum with Jackson Pollock's actions¹¹⁸ (fig. 1.25). The photographs accompanying the article depict the artist at work, wielding a bucket of latex with gloves on. Keeping such materials at arm's length, Benglis was clearly divorcing her actions from the presumed preciousness of the hand. By contrast, with the *Floorpieces*, Hammond deftly integrated the modernist fixations on support, flatness, and edge seen in both Andre and Benglis with an investment in touch and traditional women's fiber crafts.

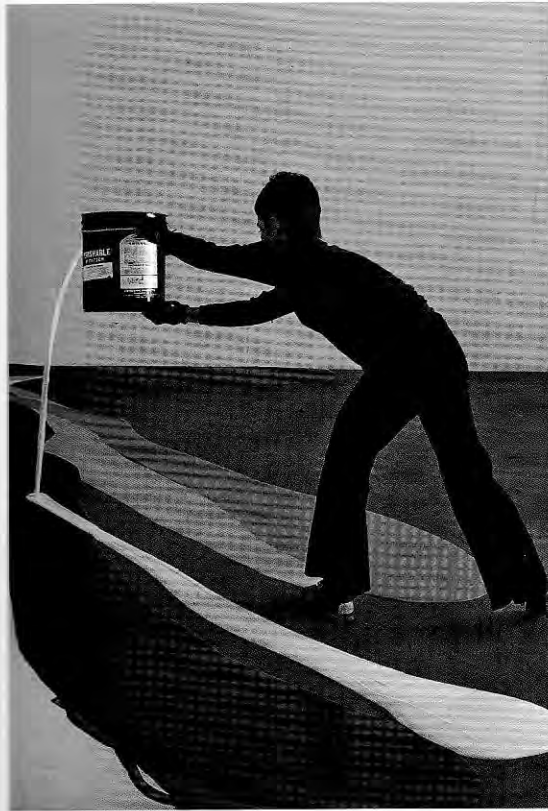


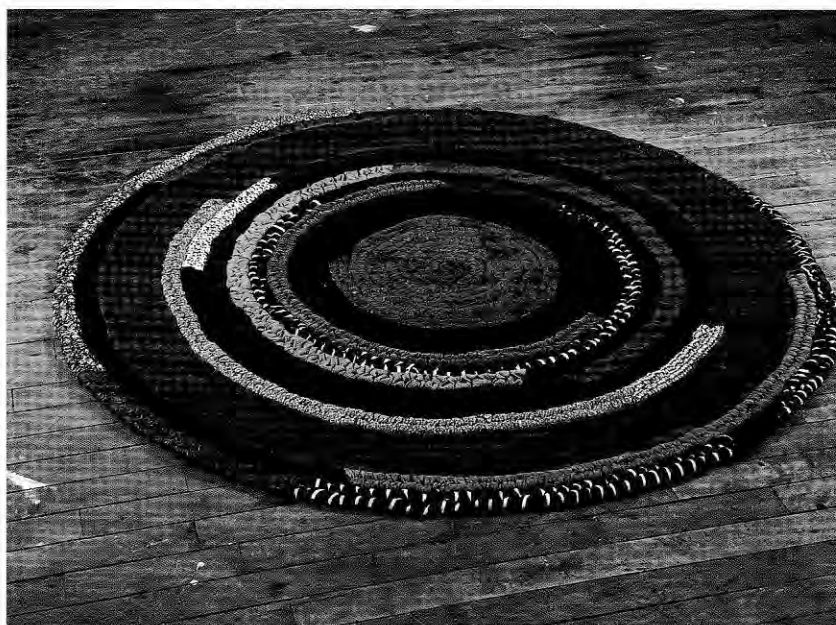
Fig. 1.25.

Lynda Benglis at work pouring latex, University of Rhode Island, 1969. Art © Lynda Benglis / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Photograph © Henry Grosinsky / The Life Picture Collection / Getty Images.

How to See the Floorpieces

Because Hammond's work troubles the line between art and craft, it does not sit easily within strict categories. More recently the *Floorpieces* have been understood almost as conceptual works or assisted readymades—fairly straightforward appropriations of the traditional form of the braided rag rug. This reading proposes that Hammond is performing a Duchampian act, injecting inappropriate objects into a fine art context, as if the *Floorpieces* are exactly what they resemble—barely altered rag rugs that have been moved from the domestic sphere into the art institution.¹¹⁹ This misreading is due in part to the fact that the works are somewhat difficult to read in reproduction; their vividly painted passages, which make them quite unlike actual rag rugs, are evident only when viewed in person. Especially since much of the paint has soaked into the fabric, their surfaces rely on subtle textural contrasts not clearly visible in photographs. Hammond let the patterns of the found rugs guide her painting and mimicked their colors, using paint

Fig. 1.26.
Harmony Hammond,
Floorpiece VI,
cloth and acrylic,
65" diameter, 1973.
Art © Harmony
Hammond /
Licensed by VAGA,
New York, NY.



to only slightly brighten or intensify the fabrics' hues. In some respects the works are also produced via the operations of chance and contingency, for as she braided and spiraled the knit fabric strips together, unexpected patterns were created, which she responded to with her selective painting (some areas remained untouched; fig. 1.26).

In *Floorpiece VI*, which has more paint on its surface than some of the earlier works, Hammond has over time repainted some areas that had faded or become besmirched; this process maintains the color choice of the original work as she mends and repairs the painted portions as well as redresses the piece's frailty and aging process. Its bright blue center, which is ringed by a black circuit (the name for a length of braid going once around the circumference of the rug) like an iris, is dynamically set against the orange-red that dominates the middle rows of the spiral. Patterned sections—which braid together complementary colors orange and blue—interrupt the solid colors at the very outer edge and again about one-third of the way in. The central blue “pupil” is saturated, but the paint is slightly mottled and not totally uniform. And though you can see a bit of the crusting of paint on the outer red band, these tactile aspects are hard to discern in photographs.

This fugitiveness, characterized by their difficult-to-see quality as well as their resistance to singular interpretations, is central to the *Floorpieces*, as Hammond insists on the importance of the spectator's presence, and skirts the border between visibility and invisibility. They are precisely *not* readymades; Hammond did not purchase these rugs but made them herself as a

basis for her painterly interventions. In addition, Hammond pointedly used acrylic pigment, not fabric dye, to apply color, because for her the braided rug was a support for the painting; this refusal to adopt rug-making techniques whole cloth further hybridizes the works as craft, painting, and sculpture.

Their large scale (another quality hard to capture in a photograph) makes them different from “real” rag rugs in other ways. It is crucial that the *Floorpieces* are exaggerated and outsized. Hammond’s tight coiling method has rendered them firmer and more rigid than actual rugs, and at about five feet in diameter each and almost two inches in height, they are too thick to comfortably walk upon. To step from the bare floor onto one of these awkwardly elevated surfaces would cause a slight stutter in gait. In photographic documentation, the works shift from circular in shape to oval—they are difficult to comprehend as *round* unless one is standing directly on them looking down, which is not permitted by the protocols of the work. One cannot see them head on but rather must view them obliquely; they thus skew or bend perception.

Hammond’s first *Floorpiece*, which the artist considers transitional and has not shown publicly, illustrates somewhat more clearly how her sculptures differ from regular rag rugs (fig. 1.27). Still experimenting with an earth-toned palette, she painted this piece with the same muted tans and browns used in her 1972 *Presences* series, the large-scale cloth bodies that immediately preceded her move to the floor (she has described her textile work from these few years as increasingly succumbing to gravity as it dripped down from the *Presences* to yield to the plane of the ground).¹²⁰ In *Floorpiece I* the acrylic paint is stiff, almost leathery, as it is heavily layered on top of the fabric, and the form has been unified by the allover color into a series of concentric circles. By contrast, in the remaining, fully realized five works of the series, Hammond respected the patterns of the found rags themselves—the way her spiraling misaligned the various rows of fabric, the arbitrary designs made by braiding.¹²¹ After *Floorpiece I* Hammond began to only selectively paint the surfaces of the works, using the pigment to accentuate the fabrics’ colors or to clarify their edges or boundaries; each has surfaces marked by painted and unpainted passages.

Thus it is not quite right when Blake Gopnik writes in his 2006 review of the *High Times*, *Hard Times* exhibit that Hammond’s works “borrowed intact”



Fig. 1.27.
Harmony Hammond,
Floorpiece I, cloth
and acrylic, 52"
diameter, 1973.
Art © Harmony
Hammond /
Licensed by VAGA,
New York, NY.

techniques of fabric art, as they were “laid out on the gallery floor rather like a circular rag rug.” He continues, “Almost exactly like a rag rug, in fact. Folk art gave Hammond access to an informality and modesty that earlier, prissier abstraction had avoided . . . [as she was] making objects that barely register as more than slight conceits, modestly realized.”¹²² “Almost exactly like a rag rug”—the painted passages and the thickness register here as very subtly taking the forms away from their utilitarian cousins, to the point of near disappearance. Note the coded gendered language of Gopnik’s review: the word *modest* is used twice—not to mention *prissy*. To the contrary, immodesty, shamelessness, and vulgarity are flaunted in these works, especially as they exist in tension with their own restraint and handcrafted “hominess.” Hammond’s insistence on fusing art and textile craft and her repositioning of painting at ground level are strident, not modest, gestures—assertively feminist and complexly queer. She contests the primacy of verticality by insisting on horizontality as active rather than passive.

What did the horizontal composition of the *Floorpieces* mean to Hammond? Her description of her process—“I would literally sit on the floor in the center of one of the pieces, coiling the fabric, pushing it out from the center to fill a space and create a circular boundary”¹²³—reflects, first of all, her growing interest in martial arts. She took up aikido in 1973, the same year she made the *Floorpieces*, and the discipline’s emphasis on channeling spirals of energy has been central to her work ever since. Like the work of many feminists of the time, who were concerned with reclaiming space, the braided works grew larger to mark out an ever-wider area. Further, this creation of a circular space drew upon her contemporary investment in feminist consciousness-raising, a process she describes as going around “the proverbial circle.”¹²⁴ In fact, the *Floorpieces* were first shown in January 1974 in the show *A Woman’s Group* at the Nancy Hoffman Gallery in New York. The exhibition included work made by women in Hammond’s feminist art and consciousness-raising group, including Louise Fishman, Patsy Norvell, and Jenny Snider, although little of it had direct reference to the issues they discussed.

In figure 1.28, an installation shot from that 1974 show, *Floorpiece IV* with its large white center is seen in relation to wall works by Hammond that explored methods of weaving and interlacing, including her oil-on-canvas work *Oval Braid*. Each artist had her own delimited area of the exhibition; though the artists had created their pieces in awareness of each other’s art, the art itself did not intermix in the show. The exhibition was framed within the context of feminist politics, but those politics were far from obvious. As Hammond has reflected, “Like the early work of many women my age my work was personal. But we learned to hide this aspect for fear that the work would be ignored or ridiculed. . . . So we hid our sources and disguised the



Fig. 1.28. Installation of Harmony Hammond's *Floorpiece IV*, cloth and acrylic, 56" diameter, in *A Woman's Group*, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York, 1974. Art © Harmony Hammond / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

meaning of our imagery in formal concerns."¹²⁵ One result of this "disguising" was an engagement with abstraction that is thick with metaphor and layered with shades of meaning. Hammond's investments in formalism—and in metaphor—help untangle how the *Floorpieces* are bound up in queerness, even if that queerness was not overtly legible.

Some of the earliest reviews of the *Floorpieces* took them to be unproblematic instances of "mere" craft, ignoring their painterly verve, or described them (incorrectly) as "circular hooked rugs."¹²⁶ They are only briefly mentioned, rarely described or analyzed. One of the longer considerations of them came when Carter Ratcliff wrote in 1976:

Some of Harmony Hammond's recent works—her *Floor Pieces* [*sic*] in the form of rag rugs, for example—looked very much like the products of women who hadn't arrived at a feminist self-consciousness. These "rugs" were, of course, rescued from being seen that way by the artist's choice to exhibit them in art galleries during a period when the art world was filled, as it still is, with discussions of feminist issues.¹²⁷

He went on to declare, "Not everyone recognized Hammond's ironies." As this passage demonstrates, textile politics in the early 1970s were fraught around gendered issues of the denigration of craft and high-low hierarchies, which were inverted in what Ratcliff refers to as Hammond's "ironies." Be-

cause the *Floorpieces* were not seen as different enough from their source material of rag rugs, they could only be “ironic,” rather than genuine homages to a material form that has been significantly altered. Feminist writers too were critical of Hammond’s project, as when Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis discussed how the “valorization of crafts . . . can be seen as an essentialist position” and dismissed Hammond as a “pattern painter” whose work was not as “tough,” or as theoretically advanced, as that of Jackie Winsor.¹²⁸ Rather than applauding her use of textile craft, such critics believed that the structural sexism intrinsic to domestic handmaking could not be overcome or resignified. These responses demonstrate how Hammond’s use of textiles was often perceived as nostalgic, regressive, or essentializing.

Queer Spaces

Hammond has written: “I came out as a lesbian artist—meaning the two are connected and affect each other.”¹²⁹ Created as Hammond was beginning to realize her lesbianism and proclaim it (to herself and to others), the *Floorpieces* are now widely acknowledged as her breakthrough pieces. The tactility of the works and the act of physically making them were crucial to this breakthrough; she had to bodily enact the various handiworks of braiding, spiraling, stitching, and painting. Hammond writes, “I find that materials which suggest direct hand manipulation . . . seem to carry with them sexual references.”¹³⁰ This new exploration of bodily processes connected her work to onanistic sensuality, as she aligned making by hand with “touching oneself” and reveled in the “heightened erotic sense” she felt in her studio.¹³¹ The corporeal process of making the works in 1973 was aligned, then, with the simultaneously deepening awareness of her own desires, desires that included same-sex attractions.

Importantly, the *Floorpieces* are not hooked—nor knit, woven, or crocheted—but *braided*. The braid for Hammond is a potent carrier of queer identity; as she wrote in the introduction to her book *Lesbian Art in America*, “I like to think of lesbian art as a braid with three strands, gender, sexuality, and art, though from time to time other strands, such as history or identity, are woven in and out.”¹³² The three strands of the braid invoke what I want to argue is for her a radical queer “third space”—an orientation beyond the heteronormative binary.¹³³ So, too, does braiding evoke for Hammond a kind of power in collectivity; she writes, “The strands remain discrete, but the final braid is stronger than any one strand—how’s that for metaphor!”¹³⁴ For Hammond, the braid is a multifaceted symbol for lesbian community formations, which are famous for their enmeshments and entanglements.

Unconnected to any head and lying flat on the ground, the *Floorpieces* suggest piles of cut-off braids. According to Paul Eli Ivey, "In 1974, after a devastating fire in the her Bowery loft, [Hammond] cut off her long hair. Her new crew cut was a cleansing, a visual sign of chance in her life, and a proclamation of her gender and lesbian sexuality."¹³⁵ Hammond has continued to use hair as a substitute for bodies as well as words. In *Speaking Braids*, from 2000–2002, a hemp braid emerges from the mouth of a bronze woman's head, projecting like a tongue, an elaborately woven sentence (fig. 1.29). The braid tumbling onto the ground in a loose circle connects this work back to the coiled *Floorpieces* as it heaps up around a sculptural element that resembles a book. As charged bearers of sexual codes, the braid, the crew cut, and the bald head all signify or "speak."

For Hammond, the spiral form of the *Floorpieces* was also significantly gendered, and in later works it became an animated female figure. In her 1982 painting *My Little Fan Lady*, the spiral is a woman, and the artist has referred to this motif as a "spinning spinner"¹³⁶ (fig. 1.30). As this phrase indicates, Hammond is a keen wordsmith who frequently employs double meanings. The *Fan Lady* encapsulates Hammond's use of spirals and braids as erotic female stand-ins, as well as her irreverent wordplay: "A woman who whirls and twirls and turns things upside down. Wrapping/spiral. The spiral of the oval braids and floorpieces is the spiraling of the wrapped shapes. The spiral becomes Fan Lady's body . . . Insidious. Outrageous. She goes where she wants and opens herself up. She does not take herself too seriously."¹³⁷

Beyond the queer indeterminacy of the "third term" of the lesbian braid, Hammond suggests that a spiral is suggestive of female sexuality, as it is one continuous line that autoerotically folds back in on itself, a formulation that mirrors French feminist Luce Irigaray's theory of the "two lips" of the female "sex which is not one."¹³⁸ As mentioned, the gratifications wrought by the spiraling action were integral to Hammond's process of making and related to other pleasures; as she has written, "I think it is highly significant that in private conversation many women artists will mention that they frequently masturbate and enjoy masturbating in their studios and in the process of working."¹³⁹ The braided spiral becomes a metaphor for self-touching as well as for touching a realm beyond the distinctions

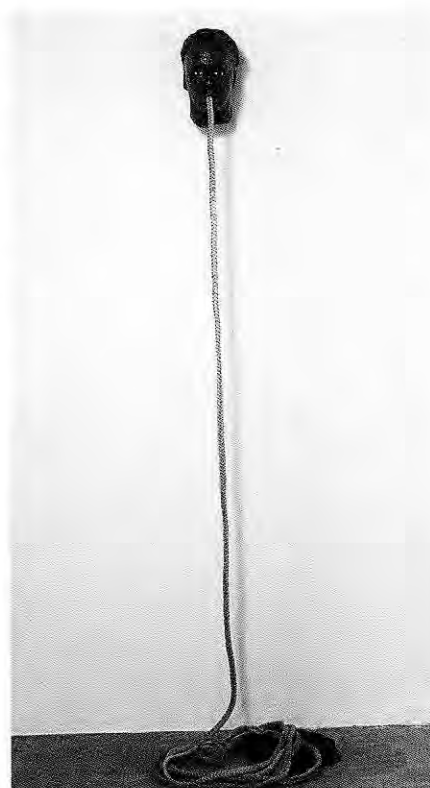


Fig. 1.29. Harmony Hammond, *Speaking Braids*, bronze, acrylic, hemp, and wax. 83 × 22 × 22", 2000–2002. Art © Harmony Hammond / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.



Fig. 1.30.
Harmony Hammond,
My Little Fan Lady,
acrylic and oil
crayon on paper,
30 × 20¼", 1982.
Collection: Jo
Ann Teter.
Art © Harmony
Hammond /
Licensed by VAGA,
New York, NY.

processes of weaving and plaiting. These activities stemmed, in his thesis, from penis envy, as women's shame—what he called “a feminine characteristic *par excellence*”—drove them to try to braid their pubic hair together to conceal their “genital deficiency.”¹⁴² (Women's textile activity was further connected to their “pliancy,” a kind of bodily teachability, which Freud saw as endemic to femininity.)¹⁴³ While positing braiding as an anxious compensatory activity for the lack of the penis is ludicrous, for many lesbians the notion of a stand-in phallus is not necessarily offensive (recall Allison's lover with her stuffed glove finger). Hands, tongues, and dildos can be eagerly pressed into service as queer surrogates; they do not imply replacement or substitute penises in place of “lack” but rather indicate the invention of new tools. Maybe Freud was onto something with his sexualization of women's textile handwork: one definition of craft is “skill in making or doing things, especially by hand.” This could be a line from a women-seeking-women personal ad; many lesbians take pride in their dexterity in erotically “doing things” (that is to say, to other women) “by hand.”

Might the *Floorpieces* be understood as *burlesques* of rag rugs—or better, rugs in drag, like a partially made-up queen whose fabulous makeup sits somewhat unevenly on the surface of her face? Like that of the Cockettes, this

between self and other. While Hammond was coming out, she began seeking models that moved beyond binary divides. She was drawn to the work of French feminist Monique Wittig, in particular her novel *The Lesbian Body*.¹⁴⁰ Written in 1973 in vividly corporeal language, Wittig's experimental novel plays with language and dismantles the rigid boundaries between its subjects, to suggest an indeterminacy between the *I* and the *you* as well as the *he* and the *she*. Hammond's spiraling three-strand braids indicate that she was formally drawn to the imaginative possibilities opened up by this queer thirdness.¹⁴¹

It is worth noting that braiding itself has long had gendered connotations. In Sigmund Freud's 1933 lecture on femininity, he discussed what he singled out as the premiere women's contribution to the history of civilization—indeed, the “one technique which they may have invented”—the

drag exaggerates in order to undo, highlighting the “rugness” of the hybrid sculptural object. Think of how the paint on the rugs, like drag makeup, emphasizes, limns, or edges; in fact, Anna Chave has called the *Floorpieces*’ bright reds and blues “gaily colored.”¹⁴⁴ Sontag understands one mode of camp as a way of seeing the world in quotes: “It’s not a lamp but a ‘lamp’; not a woman but a ‘woman.’”¹⁴⁵ Similarly, the *Floorpieces* are “rugs,” not rugs. Understanding Hammond as camp puts a different, queer spin on the presumed essential femininity taken for granted in the comparisons between her and Carl Andre. The *Floorpieces* parodically inhabit that feminine stereotype to such excess that any suggestion of essence collapses. Hammond heightened some clichés of women’s art to the point of ultimately triumphant absurdity, as if to say: if you think what we do is crafty and low, I’ll show you just how crafty and low I can be. By performatively citing the rag rug but then skewing it and thwarting its utilitarian purpose, the works point to a new understanding of the queer potential of textile craft as practiced by Hammond, to transgress the oppositions of “authentic” versus “sham,” functionality versus decoration, private versus public, furniture versus art.

In the catalogue of the 2007 exhibition *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, curator Helen Molesworth writes about the marginalization of feminist abstraction, while artist Catherine Lord discusses the invisibility of lesbian art within feminism.¹⁴⁶ Despite the recent smattering of attention given to Hammond’s *Floorpieces*, the works still hover beneath the sightline of most histories of art—not only because they are feminist abstractions (Molesworth), or because they are lesbian (Lord), but also because they are indebted to vocabularies of textile craft. Hammond’s crafty lesbian abstraction, that is, faces a triple erasure compounded by her use of widely denigrated folk techniques. By recuperating the *Floorpieces* as flat sculptures or as pure citations of domestic objects, critics have ignored the subtle distortions (including use of paint and outsized scale) that make them both craft and noncraft.

The works themselves thematize and trope that invisibility. Lesbian writer Jill Johnston wrote in 1972, “Recently a prominent feminist told me ‘we want to sweep the lesbian issue under the rug.’”¹⁴⁷ This metaphor crops up again in a review of Hammond’s groundbreaking survey book *Lesbian Art in America*, published in 2000: “Lesbian artists have been swept under the rug of history—but a thought-provoking new book seeks to give them their due.”¹⁴⁸ Hammond’s *Floorpieces* literalize the metaphor of the rug as a secret place where dirt is gathered and hidden. The language of sweeping things “under the rug” activates a sense of domestic space and invisibility that is similar, perhaps, to the metaphor of the closet (also a dark enclosed place where things are meant to be kept out of sight). Closets and rugs and other queer domestic sites—with the *Floorpieces*, the spatial dimension of

the sculptures matters, as they delineate an area or an arena for action; this is worldmaking as placemaking.

Speaking Euphemistically

The *Floorpieces* are polyvalent utterances, as all artworks are, and one thing they might propose is a coded “talking back” to a straight feminist aversion to emerging lesbian sensibilities. Lesbian handiwork explodes one persistent assumption about craft as rooted in the primarily straight, domestic sphere and made in relation to “men’s” work. Lesbian art critic Laura Cottingham critiqued the 1995 exhibition *Division of Labor*, which included Hammond’s work, for the way that it “heterosexualizes the feminist art movement”; its overarching representation of women thematizing housework meant that they were exclusively “cast as men’s domestic servants, housekeepers, and wives.”¹⁴⁹ What happens, Cottingham asks, when craft is removed from that connotation, when the domestic is not predicated on a male–female divide? She raises important questions about the marginalization of lesbians from a feminist art history that has become increasingly consolidated. While most lesbians in the 1970s were feminists, some straight feminists saw themselves at odds with lesbian concerns. Betty Friedan was quoted in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1973 as saying that lesbians were at the center of a CIA plot to infiltrate and discredit the National Organization for Women, in an article titled “Up from the Kitchen Floor” (suggested movement away from and against the lowly domestic).¹⁵⁰ The so-called lavender menace threatened at times to splinter the feminist movement.

These are conditions under which the *Floorpieces* were made—a time not long after the 1969 Stonewall rebellion when declarations of lesbianism could be treated with suspicion or outright hostility, when announcing one’s homosexuality could have negative repercussions in one’s family life and workplace. Yet Hammond’s coming-out story is not dominated by secrecy or repression. Beginning in the early 1970s, Hammond has played an active, vocal role in shaping both feminist and lesbian art history. To list just some of her artistic activism: she was a founder of the alternative women’s cooperative gallery AIR and was one of the first AIR members to come out; she was also one of the openly lesbian board members of the collective that published *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*. Since the 1970s she has advocated for lesbian visibility, and she curated the first US lesbian art exhibition, in 1978, at 112 Green Street, called *A Lesbian Show*, which consisted mostly of abstract work. The show was in some respects difficult to organize, as many lesbian artists were too afraid of discrimination and stereotyping to

participate; in the introduction to the exhibit's accompanying publication (a photocopied and stapled compilation of artists' statements), Hammond wrote that due to "the attitudes in this society towards lesbians, there were some women who felt that they could not participate, and some were forced to withdraw."¹⁵¹

Hammond's own contribution to this publication continues her work with the braided form: a drawing of an elongated oval is placed in the center of a page dense with handwritten notes. The text states, in part, "I know that . . . being a lesbian is connected to my art making. I also know I don't understand it. Perhaps I am afraid of it. It is not simply a matter of imagery . . . more likely its [sic] our approach to making art" (fig. 1.31). She has conjectured that throughout *A Lesbian Show*, explicitly sexual content may have been rechanneled into allusion and abstraction along with a direct and bodily engagement with materials. As she wrote in 1978, "I believe there is something as yet undefinable in my work, and other work that we might call 'lesbian sensibility,' but for the most part it is hidden."¹⁵²

Queer codes and gossip have long been important for queer epistemologies.¹⁵³ With Hammond's "undefinable" sensibilities in mind, I suggest that along with gossip, the related concept of *euphemism* is a vital way of spreading queer knowledge: gay men and lesbians were forced to speak in code among ourselves, for example, indicating lesbian relationships with terms like *sisters*, *dear friends*, or *companions*. Queerness often employs sexual puns, and an in-language flourishes within communities bracing themselves against hostility. Since Hammond's floor-bound works treat horizontality as a different, sexualized orientation, the *Floorpieces* could be euphemistic for "going down"—oral sex between women—thus resonating as visual lesbian slang, one not meant to be visible to the entire population but made legible within specific subcultural contexts.

Hammond has said that museums often want to show her works hung on walls, but she is insistent that they stay on the ground. *Going down*, *rug licking*, *carpet munching*, and other coded lingo for oral sex between women render this horizontality and lowness specifically lesbian. Given the unofficial, "underground" nature of such lingo, it is difficult to know exactly which of these terms were in circulation in the early 1970s; "going down" certainly was.¹⁵⁴ Lesbian language has been even less documented than gay male slang, which was collated into the first queer English dictionary, *The Queen's Vernacular: A Gay Lexicon*, published in 1972.¹⁵⁵ That dictionary is not an ideal resource for researching lesbian-specific terms, because, as was noted at the time, "one must speak of a 'gay community' with caution, since only the most fragile bonds link the lives of lesbians with those of gay men."¹⁵⁶ Hammond's "rugs"—also slang for the female pubic region—exemplify the sexual vulgar-

~~When I have time I make paint-~~
 ings and sculpture. Sometimes I
 make drawings. Sometimes I ~~not~~
 write. I do ~~not~~ have ~~enough~~
 enough time to do a lot of
 work. Work for money. Poli-
 tical work. Mothering.
 There is not enough time
 to make all the paintings
 I want to make. I need
 continuous time. Time for
 flow. To hear my own thoughts
 thoughts, and to transform
 them visually. I know
 that in an intimate way being
 a lesbian is connected to
 my art making. I also know
 do not understand it. Perhaps
 I am afraid of it. It is
 not simply a matter of imagery.
 Content, the deepest meaning has
 never been confined to an image. More
 likely it's our approach to making art
 or its function for us. Whatever the con-
 nection, it's more complex than
 we imagine. I know Harmony Hammond

Fig. 1.31. Harmony Hammond, contribution to *Statements by Lesbian Artists*, exhibition catalogue for *A Lesbian Show*, 112 Greene Street Workshop, New York, 1978. Image courtesy of the artist and White Columns, New York.
 Art © Harmony Hammond / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

ity of much “central core” imagery in feminist art. (Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party*, with its elaborately designed cunts on plates, has likewise been seen as reference to “eating out” a woman.)¹⁵⁷ The slang could be seen as derogatory or demeaning but is also cunningly reclaimed and resignified.

Hammond’s abstractions thus operate on some level as dense and elaborate visual puns; in her hands, nonfiguration becomes queer euphemism. These rag rugs have an understated yet wicked and knowing humor. The *Floorpieces* could function as jokes about embarrassing female bodily processes: being on the rag, for instance, is a euphemism for menstruation. They also slyly burlesque the alignment of women with passivity and floor-based textiles. Horizontality is not just lesbian-specific; it is the primary position of women in art history, as evidenced by the ubiquity of the odalisque or reclining nude. With their defiant, even shameless lying down, the *Floorpieces* also prefigure the flip in orientation suggested when the feminist journal *Off Our Backs* spawned a counter publication, *On Our Backs*, in 1984. The upright stance implied by the title *Off Our Backs* was sassily laid low by the lesbian porn magazine, which implied that horizontality need not be a position of powerlessness.

Class Matters / Race Matters

While Hammond’s *Floorpieces* are inextricable from issues of sexuality, they are also bound up in economic questions and questions of race. Hammond’s decision to leave her artwork-cum-rug on the floor took place within a wider reconsideration of the place of women’s textile craft, one that is fundamentally connected to class and race. Hammond herself broached these connections in her 1977 article “Class Notes,” published in the “Lesbian Art and Artists” issue of *Heresies*. In this text she puts her “lower middle class background” in dialogue with her queerness. She argues, contentiously, that since lesbians often (but not universally) have less access to capital and have less class privilege than do straight women, who can “marry up” to men who earn higher wages, few have had the time or resources to make art. Of course, a number of out lesbian artists who preceded the era of gay liberation were independently wealthy; not so Hammond, and her lower-middle-class status was implicated in her use of found rags. As a white single mom in the 1970s with limited funds, she scrounged for materials, enacting her own version of trashmaking.

“Class Notes” calls for the explosion of “esthetic hierarchies” such as good and bad taste.¹⁵⁸ As Lucy Lippard has commented, traditional handiwork like quilting is not just at the bottom of the high-low, art-craft division, for

“there are also ‘high’ crafts and ‘low’ ones,” freighted with different levels of respectability.¹⁵⁹ For instance, the rhythmic opticality produced by the *Floorpieces*’ integration of form and pattern recalls the target-like colors of Sonia Delaunay, as seen in the tapestry *Syncopé* from 1970 (fig. 1.32). Beginning in the early twentieth century, Delaunay was at the forefront of artists blurring the line between fine art and crafts such as textiles, rugs, and costume design. Yet Delaunay’s crafts were always dignified by their association with her painting and other fine art practices. Destined for decorative arts museums or a collector’s walls, such woven Aubusson tapestries are examples of “high craft.” “Low craft,” by contrast, is classed as “middlebrow” and usually put into service as a functional object. It is often gendered female (though craft can be gendered at both high and low registers, depending on medium, format, etc.).

While Hammond’s use of the braided rug form stemmed in part from genuine practicality, it is reductive and anachronistic to think of the *Floorpieces* simply as manifestations of thrift. The 1970s were not the pioneer days, or even the 1940s, when the expediencies of wartime economy led to a national obsession with frugality. In the World War II era, countless newspaper and magazine articles urged women to recycle used stockings or discarded neckties into braided rugs. But by the early 1960s it was just as cheap, and definitely quicker and more convenient, to buy a factory-made rug than to make one. Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*, published in 1963, makes this point:

Once when I visited Buddy I found Mrs. Willard braiding a rug out of strips of wool from Mr. Willard’s old suits. She’d spent a week on that rug, and I had admired the tweedy browns and greens and blues patterning the braid, but after Mrs. Willard was through, instead of hanging the rug on the wall the way I would have done, she put it down in place of her kitchen mat, and in a few days it was soiled and dull and indistinguishable from any mat you could buy for under a dollar in the five and ten.¹⁶⁰

Plath notes a generational shift away from utilitarian handmaking to the emerging field of hobbyist craft. Such a generational shift was already afoot in the years before second-wave feminism. Postwar industrialism, with its surplus of cheap manufactured material goods at the five and dime—or what Mike Davis calls the “overconsumption” stage in late capitalism—started in the early 1960s.¹⁶¹ It was this economic shift, even more than second-wave feminism, that made it increasingly unlikely that well-off white women such as Plath’s narrator would make a rag rug out of necessity.

In the immediate postwar decades, such handiwork began to signify a leisure-time activity whose product would be admired on the wall, rather



Fig. 1.32.
Sonia Delaunay, *Syncopé*, woven
Aubusson tapestry, 77½ × 68¾", 1970.

than the grind of domestic labor resulting in something to be dirtied underfoot. The women who would make such objects were increasingly unlikely to be working-class women who worked to make necessary goods for the home, and the domestic crafts become a middle-class free-time pursuit—in other words, a hobby. These years saw an upsurge in mass-market store-bought “make it yourself” kits—manufactured instructions and tools to assist with, simplify, or speed up the making of handmade objects. The kit-ification of “spare time” making has been referred to as the “deskilling” of craft, with a consumer base of presumably “heterosexual females living in a nuclear family unit.”¹⁶²

Paradoxically, as women entered the work force, many turned to domestic activities formerly coded as chores (such as knitting or rug making) not out of duty but for pleasure. For instance, the packaging for a hobby kit by the Henry Seligman Company gives its users the tools to make everything from hot pads to handbags using the traditional three-strand braiding technique (fig. 1.33). The instructions claim that if followed correctly, they will provide “hours of fun” at a great time saving over previous methods of making, which might require days or weeks. The graphic rendering of the rug-in-progress curiously echoes Hammond’s Fan Lady, as the metal folders—wildly out of scale—become little legs that animate the braided form as if it might scurry

Fig. 1.33.
New! Braid It
Yourself Hobby Kit,
Henry Seligman Co.,
ca. 1950. Collection
of the author.



away. Another kit, distributed by the Braiding Post in Atlantic City in 1948, advertises that with its “braid-eze” folders—called “marvelous new machines” though they are not remotely mechanical—it is “easy” to make a rug in a day. (The braiding, however, is the quickest work in making such rugs, as one must first assemble uniform strips of fabric and then, as the rug is in process, periodically stitch the coiling strands together with strong thread so that the rug lies flat.) In other kits and instruction books in the 1940s and 1950s, braided rugs both oval and round are shown with names such as the Florissant (a town in Missouri and French for *flourishing*), emphasizing their regional and aspirational flavor.

Because making rag rugs has been considered a “mundane” activity for children, women, and the infirm, it has fallen somewhat out of traditional accounts of history, though it is well documented in material culture studies.¹⁶³ As the 1973 short publication *The Braided Rug: Our American Heritage* announces, braided rag rugs were understood as a distinctly American form-

ation, dating back to the colonial era (but were not, in these accounts, necessarily connected to Native craft traditions).¹⁶⁴ However, braiding likely emerged slightly later than that, between 1830 and 1850, and became common both in America and in England, though “more braided rugs were made in North America than the British Isles.”¹⁶⁵ By the mid-nineteenth century, easily movable rugs (as distinct from larger carpets) were found in homes throughout most of the United States, and rag rugs made of scraps by women “adorned the hearths and hallways of even the poor.”¹⁶⁶ Important to this history is the Colonial Revival within the United States, which started around the 1876 Centennial International Exhibition in Philadelphia and peaked in the 1920s, canonizing the spinning wheel and other domestic handmade textiles as symbols of Americana.¹⁶⁷ Handmade rugs surged in popularity along with the rise of the textile industry, and newly available store-bought fabric meant a sudden surplus of cloth for garments as well as for rugs.¹⁶⁸

In the 1930s the Great Depression created national pressure to salvage and reuse materials, including textiles. Yet these pressures were exerted somewhat differently, inflected by region and race. A photograph taken in 1938 at the Lakeview Project in Arkansas shows four young African American women braiding rag rugs with a pile of rags snaked together on a wooden table and braided rounds already begun on the left-hand side (fig. 1.34). (The Library of Congress labels this image “Pupils at school making rag rugs.”)



Fig. 1.34.
Russell Lee, *Rag Rug Making, Lakeview Project, FSA, 1938*.
Courtesy of the
Drapkin Collections.

Absorbed in their work, they attend to thread, strip, and coil, while behind them other students sit at a row of sewing machines. The photograph depicts an atmosphere of diligence and focus, with much visual interest provided by the patterned elements on the makers' cotton-shift dresses. Taken by white photographer Russell Lee under the auspices of the Farm Security Administration, the image was carefully framed to show the Lakeview Project—a site of forced relocation in which black farmers and sharecroppers were collectively “resettled” to maximize the “efficiency” of their land—in a positive light. These photos traveled in exhibitions that depicted the resettlement projects in a “determinedly upbeat, determinedly safe” manner.¹⁶⁹ Note that the chosen activities for this deceptively sunny photograph are braiding and sewing, activities that signify “respectable” and appropriately gendered work; the rag rug here functions within a wider representational strategy to visibly evidence the skills and productivity of black women. While Hammond employs the braided rag rug as a threshold object that pivots from high art to lower registers of making, the Lakeview students are depicted as if on the reverse path, using the rug as a device of upward mobility. Such a photograph serves as a reminder that textiles are always contingently situated in race, gender, and labor histories of material.

Within nineteenth-century literary works, rag rugs were understood as symbolizing, nostalgically, “a great and enduring simplicity of working-class life.”¹⁷⁰ However, over the course of the twentieth century they also began to be associated with middle-class whiteness. A photograph from circa 1964–69 of a community education class at Elgin Community College in Illinois shows four primly dressed white women in the process of learning and making braided rugs.¹⁷¹ In front of a cabinet labeled “triangles” and “t-squares” and perforated hardboard on which hang various wooden shapes (such tools align their class with a technical workshop rather than the quasi-domestic scene common to many “home economics” classrooms), the oldest, who might be the instructor, holds a narrow roll of fabric in her hands as her pupils are busy braiding with their hands. The roll indicates that they are not using cast-off rags but rather purchased uniform strips. With their rugs-in-process laid out on the table in front of them, the photograph presents an image of white suburban learning in a pedagogical setting and emphasizes that not all who came to rug making in this decade did so using kits.

Hammond did not grow up with such rugs in her Illinois house, not so far from the braided rug class in Elgin, and does not recall them being underfoot in her childhood. Instead, she taught herself braiding techniques from books as she immersed herself in research about basket making and women's weaving (her “weave drawings” of the early 1970s were based on this research). Such books might have included Helen Howard Feeley's *The Complete Book*



Fig. 1.35.
"The Plymouth" rug
design, from *How
to Braid a Rug in
One Day*, Nu-Flex
Company, 1949.
Collection of the
author.

of *Rug Braiding*, from 1957, whose dust jacket shows a classic example next to a spinning wheel, as if to suggest an entire sensibility of frugality and textile homemaking in which the entire chain of production, from yarn to completed object, might be contained within a single room of the house. There are many such instruction guides for handmade rag rugs, including pamphlets dating back to the early twentieth century that showcased a variety of techniques (hooking was particularly popular).¹⁷²

For many women in the postwar era of overconsumption in the United States, craft projects such as braided rugs offered a measure of hands-on control that was lacking in their jobs and were seen as a positive creative outlet. The instructional manual *How to Braid a Rug in One Day*, published by the Nu-Flex Company in 1949, describes braiding rugs as the "work of women" and "a happy work." It features photographs of some of the most popular designs in situ, including "The Plymouth," a name indelibly associated with US colonial histories (fig. 1.35). Here the rug is placed in an interior scene, demarcating a cozy area of domestic relaxation. A welcoming easy chair is set in the corner next to a wood-paneled radio. The (presumably female) spectator is beckoned into this scene of comfortable bourgeois leisure—distinct from its earlier evocation of nonwhite and/or working-class scrappiness—with a magazine left open to an image of a fashion model, and a pair of house slippers waiting on the edge of the rug. The rug's contrasting rings of light and dark pick up the wooden detailing of both the chair and the radio, and its design bears a

strong formal resemblance to the photodocumentation of Hammond's *Floorpiece VI* as it skews from round to oval.

Comparing her art with this photo reminds us of the distance between her museum-sited works with their applications of paint and the space of the home. Yet the similarities between Hammond's piece and this handmade rug also demonstrate that she was in dialogue with white middle-class hobby culture as well as indebted to the traditional "high" crafts such as Delaunay's tapestries (not to mention her debts to fine arts textile-based abstraction such as the unpainted cotton duck of a Helen Frankenthaler canvas, the *thangka* paintings of Faith Ringgold, or the soft, drooping grids of Howarda Pindell). As has been suggested, other histories of the rag rug situate the *Floorpieces* in an oblique, unresolved conversation with Native basketmaking, sweatshop factory work, and working-class African American textiles. In addition, they participated in a wider interest in rugs produced with all types of techniques at that moment. A seminal show dedicated to US rug traditions, *Hooked Rugs in the Folk Art Tradition*, was mounted at New York's Museum of American Folk Art in 1974—the same year Hammond's braided "rugs" were on display at the Nancy Hoffman Gallery—further indicating that fine arts and folk visibilities often mirror each other or coemerge.¹⁷³

Hammond does not recall how long it took to make a given rug—"braiding doesn't take all that long"—but emphasizes that the entire coil, once complete, was stitched onto a fabric backing and then painted.¹⁷⁴ The *Floorpieces* carry within them the traces not only of industrial fabrication and mass waste but also of the labors of women's craft—the remnants, debris, and fragments of these histories that cannot be unraveled. The *Floorpieces'* reference to folk floor coverings, which starts quite literally with braiding rags, is thus not an ironic citation of the "low" but an earnest appreciation of this form of making in all its classed and raced cultural iterations. This leads us back to understanding Hammond's rugs as a sort of camp, for, according to Sontag, camp is the "genuine reveling in the base or the low," viewing bad objects with "a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation," and transforming them with something like love.¹⁷⁵

The claim that Hammond's work implicitly refers to lesbian sexuality is open to debate, but there is no question that she experienced handmaking as a means of physical gratification that was motored by bodily desires and pleasures. It is a desire that, due to its falling out of favor within some circles of postwar art that eschewed such overt hands-on making, has been repressed. As analogous "illegitimate" passions in the 1970s, textile craft resonates yet again with queerness. The *Floorpieces* align handmaking with queer worldmaking to propose art as a disruptive and libidinal terrain and lay the ground for alternative identities within both domestic and institutional contexts.



Fig. 1.36.
Installation of
Harmony Ham-
mond's *Floorpieces*,
High Times, Hard
Times, Museo
Tamayo Arte Con-
temporáneo, 2007.
Independent Cura-
tors International.
Art © Harmony
Hammond /
Licensed by VAGA,
New York, NY.

In their ideal installation, Hammond envisions all five of the completed *Floorpieces* (not including the early transitional piece) together in one space with nothing on the walls. With this geometric configuration, they would move distinctly away from having domestic associations and instead would become a site-specific installation that holds the ground with its multiple spirals that activate negative space between the sculptures. If viewed together on the same plane, they would become relational, each spiral a distinct personage that might also refer to the leveling of difference within same-sex relationships or evoke a collective conversation vitally occupying the ground. Unfortunately, she has never been given the opportunity to display them this way. (As of this writing in 2016, she still owns all of these works.) Instead they are usually exhibited singly, in isolation from the rest of the series, or placed near wall-based works. Because of this, although they were originally exhibited directly on the floor, she now shows them on top of low, inch-and-a-half-high round platforms, preferably painted to match the gallery floor, so people do not accidentally trample on them as they back up to see the nearby wall work; this is how they were displayed in *High Times, Hard Times* (fig. 1.36).

Desiring Craft

After the catalyzing process of creating the *Floorpieces*, Hammond began making the geometric, abstract sculptures for which she is best known, such as *Duo* from 1980 (fig. 1.37). These ladderlike structures refer back to

braids (there is a type of braid called a ladder braid), and their visceral bodily shapes also suggest interdependency, leaning in, and mutual support. (They also recall *The Ladder*, the magazine for the pre-Stonewall lesbian organization Daughters of Bilitis.) Two similar objects set side by side have come to obliquely signify homosexuality—from Jasper Johns's *Ale Cans* (1964) to Félix González-Torres's wall clocks in *Perfect Lovers* (1991)—and *Duo* echoes this abstract same-sex dynamic.¹⁷⁶ With their biomorphic skeletal armatures covered in soft cloth in an interplay between strong black and ruffled, frilly pink, *Duo*'s forms also allude to a butch-femme dynamic. Hammond undergoes a tactile, full-body process when making such sculptures (many of them are larger than life size), and there is a muscular eroticism to works like *Duo* with their swollen forms, ligatures, and obsessive bandaging. These are reminiscent of bodies described by Wittig, as in these forms Hammond seems to “build something out of itself, with its insides visible on the outside.”¹⁷⁷

In this work and others, Hammond continues to draw inspiration from textile craft techniques, but none of her other works have flaunted their crafty origins as flagrantly as the *Floorpieces*. Those were unique in her oeuvre, singularly unembarrassed about their debt to craft as well as their allusions to female bodily processes such as menstruation and lesbian sex that are often the source of shame and pleasure. Given this, they are also about vulnerability; they are paintings that could, after all, get stepped on. Within the *Floorpieces*, pleasure and desire, vulnerability, and a measure of shame about “inferior” status complexly bind queerness to textile craft.

Among artists and art historians alike, textile craft has been unfairly opposed to conceptual practices; in some scholarly circles it has been cast as a bad object choice, unworthy of serious contemplation. Despite cyclical embraces of craft within the art world, there is often a lingering taint of embarrassment about it as “low,” a formation that is articulated through class and race as well as gender. The drive to get distance from craft is demonstrated in the decisions, in the 2000s, to excise the word from the names of the California College of Arts and Crafts (now the California College of the Arts) and the American Craft Museum (now the Museum of Arts and Design). (In a 2005 guerrilla installation, queer artist LJ Roberts placed a hand-knitted sign reading “& CRAFT” at the college's San Francisco campus as a defiant assertion of the ongoing importance of craft.) Yet many artists and art historians are recognizing that conceptually oriented art need not be separated from craft-based practices and that to utilize traditional handiwork techniques is not necessarily to nostalgically fetishize the touch of the artist's hand. Many younger queer artists have been influenced by Hammond's use of textile craft (as have some straight male artists like Mike Kelley, who used appropriated braided rugs extensively in his work). For instance, Fritz Haeg's



Fig. 1.37. Harmony Hammond, *Duo*, 1980, wood, cloth, gesso, acrylic, rhoplex, beads, and glitter, two units, 84 x 45" each. Collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art. Gift of Judith Danziger, 2006. Art © Harmony Hammond / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

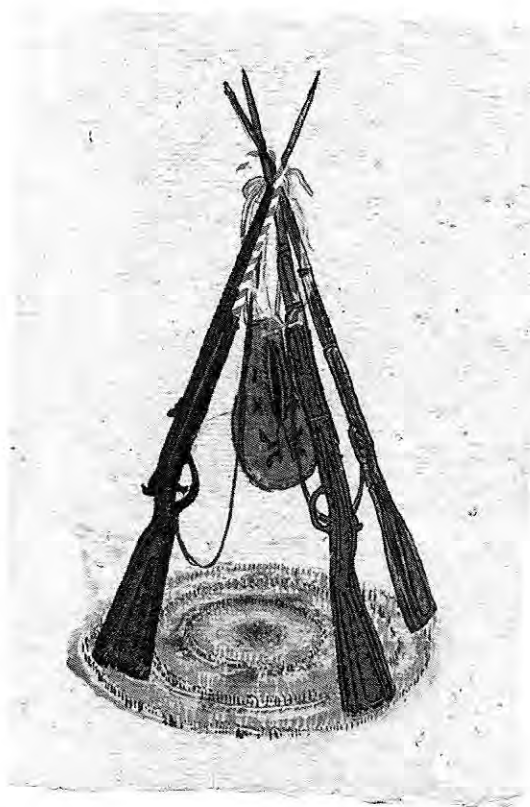


Fig. 1.38. Allison Smith, *Stack-Arms*, gouache and colored pencil on handmade recycled paper, 8.5" x 5.5", 2004, illustration of installation featuring coiled rug, handmade wood and aluminum guns, and a cloth bandanna. Courtesy of the artist and Haines Gallery, San Francisco.

paisley bandanna. The bandanna refers to gay male flagging through the hanky code, the practice of men signaling their particular sexual desires by placing handkerchiefs of different colors in their back pockets, thereby rendering those desires visible in spaces of cruising but illegible to those unfamiliar with these codes. Its queerness also involves specifically lesbian associations: Smith calls the pouch an "erotic pocket" and a "pussy pocket," noting that the paisley pattern has vaginal connotations.¹⁷⁸

Smith utilizes handiwork and conventional modes of making as conceptual methods to investigate historical artifacts and their interpretation. Her installations are rich with allusion: the rag rug is Smith's way to honor Hammond's queer craft and bring it into the present. For Smith, Hammond's painted floor-bound sculptures offer up a profoundly flirtatious encounter. Hammond's important activism in lesbian arts, as well as her use of textiles, paved the way for queer feminist artists interested in handmaking, and in *Stack-Arms* her work becomes a literal support. With this piece Smith also activates the sexual euphemisms embedded within the *Floorpieces* (though, with its reference to the hanky code, they still remain on some level encoded).

Hammond's objects themselves articulate a kind of queer theory, a theory that resists being limited to her biography and exceeds attempts to tether

monumentally sized, ever-growing, and participatory rag-rug project *Domestic Integrity* (2012–ongoing) incorporates rags from the locations to which it travels, and when it is displayed, viewers are invited to sit upon it as a way to create a sense of common ground or a shared social space.

To cite another example, a work by Allison Smith called *Stack-Arms* from 2004 features as its centerpiece a circular rag rug (seen in a drawing made of the installation: fig. 1.38). Smith's work refers to Civil War reenactments, among other interests; here, in a conscious homage to Hammond's *Floorpieces*, the rug becomes the foundation for a stack-arms formation of handmade guns, a configuration that indicates readiness for battle. Draped over the guns is a small handmade pouch. Based on the small pouches women carried before clothes had pockets, this historical object was distinctly queered by Smith as she made it out of a

her art securely to her “essential” identity. Cottingham states that “an examination of Hammond’s work from the 1970s does not immediately reveal the lesbian identity of its maker; nor does it indicate—through any abrupt alteration in content, color, style, or form—at what point she underwent this transition from straight to lesbian.”¹⁷⁹ However, Hammond’s going down to the floor does indicate a queer shift in her own methods of production and her formal means (regardless of her “lesbian identity”). While Hammond never conceived of the *Floorpieces* as explicitly lesbian statements, I argue that an unruly queer desire was embedded in, latent in, and complexly constitutive of the process of making these works. Revisiting them with a queer lens produces a lesbian art history that polemically does *not* rely on intention but is motivated by productive misreadings, metaphoric leaps, and imaginative provocations. (Since the original publication of my thoughts on this work in 2009, many have asked me what Hammond thinks of my reading. The answer is that she has embraced it and has assigned my essay to students during guest-lecturing visits at art schools. Rather than understand this as a mark of her full endorsement of its argument, I see it as part of her long-standing commitment to critical generosity.)

My queering is less a forensic hunt for hidden codes that might magically unlock the “real” meaning of the art, as if such things are ever totally knowable, stable, or unified, than an intentionally open-ended engagement with the work, with its potential to mean in many different registers through time as they are continually resignified for new audiences—queer and not. This does not involve the “unmasking” of hidden symbols but instead posits that some readings attach themselves, belatedly, to art in ways that their maker might not have foreseen. In fact, the *Floorpieces*, with their unmoored multiple meanings, challenge the spectator to reconcile painterly abstraction with ordinary floor coverings. In a similar vein, lesbian filmmaker Barbara Hammer argues that “radical content deserves radical form,” and she defines that radicality as both queer and nonrepresentational.¹⁸⁰

In recent years Hammond’s *Floorpieces* have been positioned as readymade sculpture, seen as formal examples of the expansion of painting, or recuperated as examples of feminist craft. But they are none of those things—or, rather, they are *all* of them. Beyond their braided and painted materials, the sculptures interweave somewhat disparate conceptual strands—sexuality, abstract painting, and hobbyist textile craft culture. They exist in a liminal, queer in-between space that also conjoins lesbian handiwork with feminist labor. Indeed Hammond stages an encounter between class, camp, and the handmade. She has never been interested in a simple inversion of craft and art. As she explained about the boundaries of what is included in the white Western male art tradition: “Women are out. However, many of us are ques-

tioning if we even want in. Getting 'crafts' into the 'fine art' museum is not the answer."¹⁸¹ As exemplified by Hammond's braided rugs, textile craft objects, like queer desires, can be multiple, crossing beyond the high-low divide: they are props, they are surrogates, they are functional, they are decorative, they are frivolous, and they are usable. Mostly they refuse to be any one thing. Gregg Bordowitz writes: "Queer things don't yield easily to comprehension. They refuse to recognize, or to be recognized. They work from, or occupy a place of shame or embarrassment."¹⁸² Hammond's textile-based works exemplify this generative definition.

In 1982 a roundtable related to the exhibit *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art* was convened at the New School to discuss the question: "Is there a homosexual aesthetic?" Hammond was there, as was gay art critic John Perreault, who said:

On a deep level, we are male or female or both. We're examples of both-ness rather than either/or-ness. Art work is not form *or* content. It is both. Craft is craft *and* art at the same time. We must apply insight to other artificial binary models. The gay aesthetic should yield good art, be against the dull, the drab, and against the pretentious. It should be biographical, personal, universal, embarrassing; it should celebrate the arbitrary nature of gender, be against "good taste." If we are outsiders, act like it.¹⁸³

Perreault's statement has the ring of a manifesto; Hammond's *Floorpieces* go as far as any artworks do to enact his exhortations. With their insistence on the slipperiness of categories, their blurring of binary identity, their embrace of the embarrassing and the shameless, their investment in pleasure, their transgressive reveling in lowness, they demonstrate how craft and queer-ness might be braided together. The "places" activated by *Floorpieces* are also multiple: the works insist on the place for textiles within contemporary art, the place of class within formations of gender and sexuality, and the place of lesbian desire within feminist art history. These histories have not always been openly stated but now refuse to be swept under the rug.

Coda: Heterodox Handmade

This chapter has examined how queer makers in the early 1970s turned to hybrid forms of textile politics to define themselves in relation to new genders and new forms of feminist lesbian art. In the costumes of the Cockettes and the *Floorpieces* of Hammond, debris, scraps, rags, and fragments have been re-

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purposed into something more vivid and colorful. The techniques examined have been decidedly heterodox within the rubric of craft—gluing, safety-pinning, painting, set alongside sewing, stitching, and braiding. In both cases I emphasize how the textiles unevenly bring their histories along with them, their pasts as conventional tablecloths from the 1940s or machine-knit remnants from New York's then thriving garment industry.

The concept of "heterodoxy" relates, too, to queer conceptions that complicate notions of singular identification. The internal multiplicity of the Cockettes and of Hammond's practices implies a productive fracturing of authorial identity, as what was previously taken to be stable is exaggerated, encoded with double entendres, and textured by material significance. The Cockettes and Angels, along with Hammond, were dumpster-diving, rag-picking, and transforming their foraged finds into unforeseen constructions, yet leaving traces of their former lives as intact doilies or unpainted industrial fabric waste. Each of these objects is in the fray of debates about the intersections between sexuality, class, and race; indeed they cannot be seen apart from the frictions that continue to inhabit these intersections. That is to say, these textiles hover in an in-between space between the economics of mass production and the imperfections of handmaking as they gesture to the privileges of consumerism. The skin of paint applied over one of Hammond's rugs does not fully cancel out its softness, its connection to labor, or its familiarity, and the Cockettes' agglomeration of feathers and trinkets does not diminish the tender and distinct bodies underneath.