

Sensing Texture:
Exploring Senses and Affect Through East Asian Art and Fashion

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Abstract

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Sensing Texture explores touch and affect through textures of East Asian textile art and fashion designs. This exhibition aims to provide a sensory experience where the viewer explores textile-making techniques and unique themes under East Asian cultural influences. Focusing on East Asian cultures and the ongoing experiment of fusing techniques and themes from both past and present, the exhibition proposes a re-introduction of contemporary East Asian art, which differs from the stereotype familiar to the western world. The exhibition features a group of young artists from China and Japan whose works include paintings, art installations, and fashion designs that evoke affect and the sense of touch of the viewer while highlighting textures of the textile. Through these works, the artists not only have exposed their inner worlds to the viewer, but also have showed the inheritance and innovation of East Asian culture. As an online exhibition, *Sensing Texture* challenges and redefines the kind of multisensory art-viewing experience provided by conventional physical exhibitions. The exhibition achieves sensory stimulation with an indirect tactile experience through images and sounds in a way that the viewer is encouraged to feel the texture and the touch of the artwork without physically touching it.

Keywords: Affect, Touch, Texture, Textile, Fashion, East Asian Art/Artist

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Sensing Texture:

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East Asian art is based on a strict geographic definition as well as a recognition of common bonds forged through the acceptance of the same religion – Buddhism – by many cultures. Visual arts, performing arts, music, and literature of China and Japan have been uniquely linked for several millennia by the common written language of Hanzi or Kanji, and by close cultural and political connections. To fully understand East Asian art, one must be able to recognize its diversity and its dynamic nature. However, the Western world so often ignores the fact that East Asian art represents the wisdom and cultural heritages that exist outside of all the fantasies and have been evolving over time – beyond porcelain, ink painting, and calligraphy.

The Western world's first impression of East Asian art predominantly came from the boom of Japanese art in Europe during the nineteenth century – so profound that it has turned into a stereotype that still lingers today. The French term Japonisme, first described by French art critic and collector Philippe Burty in 1872, has witnessed the popularity and influence of Japanese arts among a group of Western European artists in the late nineteenth century following the forced reopening of foreign trade with Japan in 1853. During the period of Japonisme, Japanese decorative arts, including ceramics, enamels, metalwork, and lacquerware, were highly influential in the West. The first major international exhibition in which Japan has an independent section happened in London in 1862. According to art historian and curator Ayako Ono, this exhibition marked the point when Japan started to have a distinct cultural identity from the general category of the 'Orient'.¹ Following the Louvre and the Museum für Ostasiatische

¹ Ayako Ono, *Japonisme in Britain: Whistler, Menpes, Henry, Hornel, and Nineteenth-Century Japan* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), p.6.

Kunst Köln in Cologne, exhibitions in major museums in Britain, Germany, Denmark followed and eagerly added Japanese art to their collections. As design theorist Christopher Dresser said in a lecture in 1878 at the Society of the Arts, Sir Rutherford Alcock was the first British diplomatic representative to live in Japan who has introduced many of the Japanese arts to the English public for the first time:

It was in the year 1862 that I first formed an acquaintance with Japanese art, your Excellency, my chairman [Sir Rutherford Alcock], having in that year brought together a number of objects from this strange country, such as were then altogether new to us I need not tell your Excellency that you have the honour of having first made Japanese productions known to the English public.²

Even then, Japanese art was still strange, mysterious, and very much ‘Oriental’ to most European art collectors. The majority of the collections from the Japonisme period foregrounded temples, *kimono*, *geisha*, and *ukiyo-e* as the signature artifacts of Japan.

With the demise of the first-generation Japanese art collectors and the change of ownership of important collections, Japonisme no longer held its primary influence. In the early twentieth century, Chinese art made its re-entrance as an equally popular replacement for Japonisme as the collision of Eastern and Western cultures and arts continued. At the time, the term *Chinoiserie* describes western imitation of Chinese art, the patterns, and motifs such as

² Christopher Dresser, *The Art Manufactures of Japan*, from *Personal Observation*, given at Eighth Ordinary Meeting, 30 January 1878. Printed in the *Journal of the Society of Arts*, vol.26, 1 February 1878, pp. 169-77; quoted on p. 169.

Chinese silk, blue-and-white porcelain, dragons, exotic birds, and strangely dressed Chinamen.³

In the end, Chinoiserie became so influential that it altered what Western people knew about authentic Chinese art. While a systematic collection of East Asian arts was formed in Western museums with mostly prints and handcrafts, the most valuable paintings, sculptures, and other works of art cherished by Chinese and Japanese collectors were carefully kept at home in Asia. The collections of the museums reflected the political environment and cultural characteristics of Japan and China at that time, yet they created an overwhelming impression of East Asian art that continues to influence how the Western world perceives it today. East Asian art pursues the fanciful rather than the real, ambiguity rather than truth, nothingness rather than existence. The aesthetics and ideas embedded in the art are highly culture-oriented, inseparable from the influence of religion and philosophy. Thus, the divergence between Western and East Asian cultures has impeded the communication between Western and Eastern arts. In fact, the Western world might have never fully seen or comprehended East Asian art.

What is East Asian art in today's era? Having gained worldwide popularity, East Asian artists depict a different image of contemporary East Asian art. Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, trained in traditional Japanese painting style *nihonga* and inspired by abstract expressionism, works in paintings, performances, sculptures, and installations filled with accumulations, obsessions, and repetitions of motifs – notably dots. Through her infinite, repetitive works, Kusama chose to prioritize the desire of sharing her own mental world over highlighting characteristics of Japanese art. Artist and activist Ai Weiwei has been constantly deconstructing, re-claiming and re-imagining histories and traditions. The photographic series *Dropping a Han*

³ Michael Clarke, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*, 2nd ed. (Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Dynasty Urn (1995) documents Ai dropping a valuable antique vase that was approximately 2,000 years old. Incorporating what he has called a “cultural readymade”, Ai forces viewers to consider issues of cultural transformation and destruction of the past – “building a new world by destroying the old one”, as himself explained.⁴ Artists like Kusama and Ai have been refreshing the Western world's knowledge of Eastern art beyond the stereotypes of Japonisme, Chinoiserie and the ‘Orient’. Perhaps the best way to apprehend East Asian art is not to try to define it, but to experience it dynamically.

An Online Exhibition

The COVID-19 global pandemic forced art institutions to swiftly adapt to an entirely new situation that left galleries and art fairs with highly restricted access and forced them to close to prevent the spread of the virus.⁵ While the global art world is looking for an alternative space for art to exist, digital space came out as a solution with new methods available for building art communities – virtual art tours, live-streamed artist talks and online interactive sessions. Art historian Sheila Hoffman argues that many major museums – such as MoMA, the Louvre, and the Guggenheim – understood the creation of online art exhibitions as a process of copying physical objects and practices to an online space, and thus relied primarily on the formats of online archives, AR and VR tours, educational videos and podcasts.⁶ Simply moving everything

⁴ Lukas Feireiss, “Why Artist Ai Weiwei Doesn't Believe in Having a Personal Legacy,” *FRAME*, May 10, 2020, <https://www.frameweb.com/article/why-artist-ai-weiwei-doesnt-believe-in-having-a-personal-legacy>.

⁵ Mary Rowe, “Will the Increase of Online Exhibitions Kill the Physical Gallery?,” *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, October 14, 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/oct/14/online-exhibitions-art-galleries>.

⁶ Sheila K. Hoffman, “Online Exhibitions during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Museum Worlds* 8, no. 1 (January 2020): pp. 210-215, <https://doi.org/10.3167/armw.2020.080115>, 211-213.

from a physical exhibition to a digital space often results in the failure to replicate the kind of experience acquired through physical movements and interactions. In previous attempts at creating online exhibitions during the past few years, art institutions have failed to utilize the unique experiences online platforms offer. Online exhibitions are not merely a compromise with the current situation of the pandemic. They are a necessary addition to curatorial practice as online art exhibitions are likely to become the new normal for both creators and viewers.

In a comparison between physical and online exhibitions, critics and viewers often put forward the importance of physicality in experiencing and perceiving art. The key to curating an online exhibition is a full utilization of digital resources. As curator Wang Xin argues, technology has made communal interactions possible for participants of online exhibitions:

One thing that is tricky to recreate virtually is the communal experience of viewing art. The viewing experiences are never perfectly synchronized, but that social space is crucial. At the same time, that communal aspect has already become technologically available: user-generated commentaries alongside screened content, for example, can produce the sensation of shared participation.⁷

A new form of connectedness between the viewers can be reinforced through embracing technology. For the viewer of *Sensing Texture*, being able to sense the artwork is fundamental when engaging with textiles. Yet for many reasons, artworks are most likely to be untouchable, regardless of where the exhibition takes place. *Sensing Texture* experiments on delivering the

⁷ Xin Wang and Jakob Kudsk Steensen, "Virtually Ever after: Art in the Post-Digital Era," *Art Agenda*, May 21, 2020, <https://www.art-agenda.com/criticism/331915/virtually-ever-after-art-in-the-post-digital-era>.

sense of touch in two ways – through the activation of other senses (vision and hearing) and through indirect haptic interactions with the artwork. The latter refers to testing the effect of vicarious touch, or “mirror touch”, the automatic simulation of touch observed on the body of another person, which is linked to the activation of a broad somatosensory cortical network during the visual perception of tactile sensations.⁸ *Sensing Texture* invites artists into the construction of the exhibition by filming videos of themselves making, styling, or interacting with textiles so that the viewer can feel the touch and the texture through image and sound.

Sensing Texture

Texture appeals to the senses. Referencing the tactile quality of a surface or a substance, texture can evoke initial reactions and feelings, such as pleasure, discomfort, familiarity, strangeness and even uncanniness. Artists are constantly exploring inventive ways of using texture to convey meanings and express emotions. The term “textile” shares the same Latin root with “texture” – *texere*, meaning “to weave”, “to braid”, or “to construct”.⁹ With fabric, one can see and feel its texture affected by the type of fabrics, method of manufacture, or finishing. Textile designers create textures through knotting, looping, braiding, weaving and dyeing threads of fabric. As an essential component in textile art and fashion design, texture decides the balance, proportion, and emphasis of a design piece, which further influences how viewers perceive it. Derived from the Latin word *affectus*, meaning “disposition”, affect refers to the underlying experience of feeling,

⁸ Helge Gillmeister et al., “Inter-Individual Differences in Vicarious Tactile Perception: A View across the Lifespan in Typical and Atypical Populations,” *Multisensory Research* 30, no. 6 (2017): pp. 485-508, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134808-00002543>.

⁹ Danielle Carla Hogan, “Just Making It: The Stain of Femafect on Fiber in Art,” 2017, <https://unbscholar.lib.unb.ca/islandora/object/unbscholar%3A9521/datastream/PDF/view>, 25.

emotion, or mood in psychology, and is pre-personal.¹⁰ The type of experience affect involves is nonconscious – it reveals the inner dynamics of the individuals who are experiencing art. Affect is the most direct reflection of the senses that are activated, and thus is essential to the viewer's communication and understanding. Therefore, the technique of textile making greatly determines how the viewer generates meanings when engaging with a textile art or fashion design.

In ancient China, textiles had been developed to indicate the wearer's place in the social order. A complicated system was invented that would offer a wide variety of textile-making methods to match the complex structure of this feudal society with strict, hierarchical principles. Clothes not only satisfied the diverse needs of people but also served as symbolic representations to differentiate the social classes. Historians Feng Zhao and Le Wang have sorted out a glossary that presents eighty items of textile terminology through careful research and study of the documents from the cities of Dunhuang (敦煌) and Turfan (吐鲁番) – two important sites on the Silk Road in Chinese Central Asia.¹¹ According to the glossary, there are several kinds of silk corresponding to different weaving techniques including plain weave (*juan, lian, ge, zhi, gua, jian, man, shi*), damask (*ling, qi, qi zheng*), gauze (*luo, sha*), polychrome compound weave (*jin, Zhuang hua*), with resist-dye design (*xie, lu tai*), embroidery (*xiu*) and other techniques (*cai, hu, jian*).¹² While there were dramatic differences between the time, labour, money and other resources needed to perform these techniques, the appearance alone could convey the value of the fabric and assert the status of its wearer. Some of these textile terms also indicated the

¹⁰ Hogg, M.A. and Abrams, D., “Social Cognition and Attitudes,” ed. Martin, G.N., Carlson, N.R., and Buskist, W., *Psychology*, 2010, pp. 646-677.

¹¹ ZHAO, FENG, and LE WANG. “Glossary of Textile Terminology (Based on the Documents from Dunhuang and Tufan).” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23, no. 2 (2013): 349–87. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43307671>, 1.

¹² ZHAO, FENG, and LE WANG.

specific patterns and colours of fabric. For instance, *Kongque ling* (孔雀绶), literally, “peacock *ling*”, refers to a damask with a pattern showing a pair of symmetrical peacocks that Zhao and Wang describe as being “face to face, holding one knot in their beaks,” a highly exclusive pattern during the Tang Dynasty that only government officials could wear.¹³ Patterns like *Kongque ling* were so delicate that they required extra labour to produce and thus were valuable enough to designate those of higher social class. Similarly, colours such as yellow, purple, and gold were strictly regulated in both ancient China and ancient Japan since they symbolized wealth, power and royalty. The Chinese considered yellow of a golden hue the most prestigious colour – representing the centre of the earth and everything that generates *Yin* and *Yang*.¹⁴ Overall, textiles from ancient China and Japan mostly reflected the political structure, social values, folk cultures, and religious beliefs of the time, rather than expressing the ideas and emotions of particular individuals.

Contemporary East Asian artists and fashion designers are reinventing meanings for textiles without abandoning traditions or history. Recent Japanese textile design draws on the traditions of its ancient craft practices. In order to preserve both the practical and aesthetic expertise in traditional Japanese textile practices and sustain its value for today, artist and scholar Tim Parry-Williams argues that contemporary artists and designers should apply textile-making techniques based on comprehensive studies:

Contemporary textile needs to embrace traditional practice in its fullest sense, operating out of the fields, workshops, and factories of both urban and country locales, employ

¹³ ZHAO, FENG, and LE WANG, 10.

¹⁴ St Kasia Clair, in *The Secret Lives of Colour* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2018), pp. 84-85.

willing hearts, minds and hands, sustain the fullest portfolio of material and fibre, and, while acknowledging and partnering tradition, inspire a new hybridity and textile future.¹⁵

A new generation of artists eager to innovate and experiment with materials and techniques have inherited the traditions while using textile to create images and express ideas. *Sensing Texture* brings East Asian art and culture to a Western audience and introduces them to traditional Chinese and Japanese dyeing and weaving techniques, which the artists apply to express contemporary themes. These artists represent a generation whose creations are based on cultural traditions yet also reflect on modern notions of self, time, and change.

While studying traditional textile-dyeing techniques, artists create symbolic images on various fabric surfaces that activate affect and senses of the viewer. Japanese illustrator and textile artist NOGCHI YUKA's textile paintings express how human minds are influenced by the outside world and how that influence leads to the formation of various emotions. She has used several techniques including *Yuzen* dyeing (友禪染), *Katazome* (型染), discharge printing (抜染) to apply colours to the fabric. Rather than adopting traditional Japanese decorative motifs, NOGCHI YUKA's illustrations frequently depict a female animation character as a reflection of herself. In her series of works, including *Things That Move* (2021), the artist purifies her overwhelming emotions that have been accumulating inside by “drawing” on fabric, as an act of exhaling out the inner chaos from her body. Chinese fashion designer Syoei Ko made *NEWS* (2018) – a pair of monochrome shirts – with *Katazome* and *Batik* (wax printing). The artist has

¹⁵ Tim Parry-Williams, “Made-by-Hand: [Re]Valuing Traditional (Japanese) Textile Practices for Contemporary Design,” *Craft Research* 6, no. 2 (January 2015): pp. 165-186, https://doi.org/10.1386/crre.6.2.165_1.

selected two sets of keywords trending on Chinese social media, one of which includes scandals and negative reports that were exposed on the Internet while the other includes words extracted from the official news program of China, CCTV News, that promotes the prosperity of the country. Ko printed the set of negative keywords in white against black on one shirt, and reversed the colour use for the set of positive keywords on the other shirt. With such a design, the artist forms a comparison between two opposite sides of reality, reminding viewers that even things written in black and white can be true and misleading at the same time. Ko intentionally blurred the line between fashion and art by making *NEWS* both wearable and meaningful. Like Ko, Chinese artist DODO also applied *Batik* in the creation of her textile painting, *Commensalism* (2020), which depicts a harmonious marine ecosystem where animals and plants are interdependent. Japanese fashion designer and photographer No.44, on the other hand, combined a modern technique, thermal transfer print, with a traditional technique, Edo Embroidery (江戸刺繍, or silk gauze embroidery), experimenting with the ultra-thin material to deliver the sense of touch as well as an intimate relationship with the human body. Her fashion design *Ikebana* (2019) adopts ideas from the Japanese art of flower arrangement, which symbolizes the conventional definition of “beauty” that the artist stands against.

Artists also re-imagine traditions with modern expressions and technologies. Chinese artist Zhe Wang created her installation *Prologue* (2020) with self-developed 3D-printing technology. Instead of using common 3D-printing materials such as resins, plastics, or metals, the artist turned her own calligraphy works into paper pulp and let the machine stack layers of paper pulp with random textures on top of each other. Expressing the artist's reflection on the collision of cultural heritage and modern industrialization, Wang's unique technique endows

Prologue with two opposite tactile qualities: the coldness of machines and the warmth of handmade works.

Combining multiple techniques and experimenting with uncommon materials, the artists have given textile diverse forms and rich textures, bringing infinite possibilities for contemporary textile design. Japanese graphic and textile designer Runa Takeuchi went through a complex process that involves silk screen printing, cutting, foil processing, foaming, and bonding to produce her multi-piece installation *Composition and Structure* (2020), which offers a variety of textures that evoke the viewer's desire to touch. Takeuchi turned flat fabric surfaces into three-dimensional objects and gave volume to the textile so that it can maintain its shape without being attached to the human body or other objects. Japanese artist Ime Taso's work *Heaven until the end* (2020) combines colourful yarn threads and variable memorable items through knitting and embroidery. Such a combination represents times and memories that cannot be expressed in words. Ime Taso focuses on showing the complexity and the flamboyance of the textures, which invite the viewer into a mysterious space. Applying Kausri (緋, or ikat), Chinese artist Jingyi Guan and Japanese artist Nozomi Saikai both explore transformations of fabrics and create abstract textile art that affects the viewer's perception of space and senses. In her work *Fluttering Line* (2020), Nozomi purposefully disrupts the regular patterns to reinvigorate them while making them unpredictable. Guan created the textile installation *Castle, Light, Building, People* (2022) by transforming a figurative image of an urban night scene into regular geometric patterns based on her impression and feelings. The texture of the textile adds a sense of space to the work.

Working with textiles in adventurous ways, the artists in this exhibition experiment with new possibilities of applying time-honoured techniques and skills to express new ideas. Their

works introduce the current trends of East Asian art and challenge the long-standing western filter of 'Oriental' aesthetics. While each artwork revolves around different ideas and themes, they all activate the sense of touch through texture. With paintings, installations and fashion designs exhibited in a virtual space, the viewer is invited to re-discover contemporary East Asian art through an uncommon sensory experience.

Support Paper

Introduction

Contemporary artists and fashion designers from China and Japan have brought themes and concepts to texture different from those in the past while preserving and reinventing the traditional textile-making techniques. As a representative contemporary artist who has been active globally, Chiharu Shiota has shown a modern yet unfamiliar side of East Asian art to the Western world. The Mori Art Museum's 2019 exhibition *The Soul Trembles* overwhelmed its visitors with the largest and most comprehensive exhibition devoted to the Berlin-based Japanese artist whose signature installation works consist intricate networks of threads spanning and stretching across the gallery rooms. Shiota makes textile symbolic as she explained that the tangled threads represent blood, lives, and relationships.¹⁶ The way textile evokes affect and emotions has highlighted the sense of touch as the viewer observes and feels the texture of the works. Shiota's show contrasts with many major art institutions that still exhibit porcelain and silk textiles from the twentieth century as the only constituent of their East Asian collections. Such out-dated and stereotypical exhibits have prevented viewers from seeing the full picture of contemporary East Asian art. My thesis addresses the question of how contemporary East Asian artists express new ideas and deliver the sense of touch that activates affect through the texture of the textile.

While Covid has forced galleries and art institutions to move artworks to the digital realm. Major institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, the Louvre, and the Guggenheim, though actively experimenting, failed to utilize the online platforms and the unique experience an

¹⁶ Ana Bogdan, "Chiharu Shiota," *The Talks* (CHIHARU SHIOTA: "THE FEAR IS NECESSARY", April 18, 2019), <https://the-talks.com/interview/chiharu-shiota/>.

online context can offer by simply moving everything from a physical exhibition to a digital space. Inspired by “The Soul Trembles” and the problematic of recent online exhibitions, online exhibition *Sensing Texture* investigates the method of presenting East Asian textile art and fashion designs in a digital space, one that evokes affect and emotions of the viewer by delivering touch through images and sounds.

Theme

One of the world’s largest and most comprehensive Asian art collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, though including more than 35,000 objects dated from the third millennium B.C. to the twenty-first century, collects mainly traditional Chinese and Japanese arts from the nineteenth and the twentieth century.¹⁷ While the collection emphasizes the diverse cultures and rich history, it reflects the stereotypical idea of East Asian art being limited to what is indicated by Japonisme and Chinoiserie – the European interpretation and imitation of Japanese and Chinese art established in the nineteenth century. No matter how contemporary artists such as Yayoi Kusama, Ai Weiwei, and Hajime Sorayama reminded the world of the diversity and potential of East Asian art, Western art institutions miss an opportunity to recognize its evolution during the past few decades. Due to the art institutions’ lack of interest in showing non-typical East Asian art and the shortage of contemporary East Asian artists who are globally influential, Western viewers lack the access to learn what Chinese and Japanese art have become today.

As textile art and fashion exhibitions rapidly gain global popularity, viewers are still experiencing textiles in an old-fashioned way – simply looking at the works while walking

¹⁷ “Recent Acquisitions | The Metropolitan Museum of Art,” Met Museum, <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/collection-areas/asian-art/recent-acquisitions>.

through the gallery space – same as they experience other art forms such as painting and sculpture. Only a few exhibitions allow visitors to actually touch textiles, primarily because of the danger of causing damage, which makes many artists and curators shy away from such a display strategy. During the pandemic when online exhibitions are replacing physical exhibitions, which has further limited the direct interaction with artworks, it has become even more difficult for viewers to truly experience the texture of textiles.

Sensing Texture highlights the texture of a series of Chinese and Japanese textile works by young artists, ranging from installation to fashion design, from flat surface to three-dimensional object. This thesis project addresses the question of how to deliver the sense of touch to the viewer in a virtual space by incorporating moving images and sounds, while expanding the understanding of what East Asian art is and what it can be in the contemporary context.

Methodology

The past few decades have witnessed a dramatic change in East Asian art in terms of form, technique, style, and theme. Recognizing that East Asian art offers more than the conventional definitions of Japonisme and Chinoiserie, *Sensing Texture* positions itself as a necessary prelude to a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary Chinese and Japanese art by providing the viewer with an educational art experience. Among the rich varieties of contemporary East Asian art, those that have fused traditional and current practices while expressing new themes will better communicate the changes to the viewer. In order to introduce art through a sensory experience that highlights touch to evoke affect, the exhibition focuses on presenting various textile arts and fashion designs created by young Chinese and Japanese artists who received

education in traditional arts and still reside in East Asian countries. In consideration of the experimental nature of the thesis as well the availability of resources, I gathered a group of emerging artists who are not well-known in the West. Through studio visits and activating my personal network, I chose artists who best exemplified the exhibition's theme. The featured artists worked simultaneously with traditional textile-making techniques and contemporary ideas in contemporary East Asian art. As such, this thesis draws from the interdisciplinary contexts of art history, cultural theories, cognitive science, sensory studies, affect theories, new media studies, and curatorial studies.

Art history and cultural theories examine East Asian art in light of its history and subsequent evolution under social, cultural and political influences. It reveals the origin of Western art world's stereotypical understanding of Chinese and Japanese art. Cognitive Science and Sensory Studies introduce touch as the medium for haptic and sensuous engagements. The theories explain how texture perception can be facilitated by both direct and indirect tactile experience. Affect theories expound on the autonomous feelings and emotions responding to external sensory stimuli, which helps to unfold stories and ideas that are woven into the textile. New media studies explore the effects of digital technology on traditional forms of media as well as how new forms of cultural representations are created, consumed, and shared, which inform the possibilities and challenges in the contemporary transformation from physical exhibitions to online exhibitions. Curatorial Studies provide aesthetic analysis and critical reviews of historical and contemporary approaches to curatorial practices that elucidate how art's sensorial aspects are fundamental in producing meanings and evoking emotional interactions. These methodological approaches provide a basis for addressing themes of understanding East Asian art, delivering the sense of touch through the texture of textile, and evoking affect through the sense of touch.

In developing *Sensing Texture*, it became essential to seek out precedents and artists who have provided inspirations and frameworks for exhibiting textile art and fashion designs in interactive ways, as well as recent online exhibitions that have experimented with alternative curatorial approaches in an attempt to replace physical exhibitions. The research involved engaging with textile and fashion curations on both a theoretical and physical level. In addition to relevant texts by art historians and curators such as Constance Classen, Jennifer Fisher, Jessica Hemmings, and Alexandra Palmer, I also analyzed online displays and textile exhibitions as case studies and references for my thesis exhibition. I visited online museum displays such as the online collections of MoMA, the Louvre, and the Royal Ontario Museum as well as recent online exhibitions including *Yayoi Kusama: Recent Works* (2020), *WELL NOW WTF?* (2020), and *Fruit Salad: A Series of Queer and Gender-Nonconforming Videos & Performances* (2020). Due to the pandemic, I revisited textile exhibitions that I have previously experienced in combination with those that are well-documented in reviews and critiques to better understand the breadth of contemporary curatorial practices as well as their perceived strength and weakness.

Conveying the sense of touch to the viewer through texture is a main challenge for this thesis project. In seeking to construct an effective sensory environment for exhibiting textile at a virtual space, I also conducted conversations and collaborations with all featured artists who reside in China and Japan. As the foundation of my curatorial practice, having in-depth conversations with artists regarding their artistic practice allow me to better comprehend their works in terms of concept and technique. My collaboration with artists continued with ongoing discussions concerning how to enhance the expression of texture and touch by utilizing images (still and motion) and sound in a way that also respects their interests.

Literature Review

In the contemporary world where the concept of multisensory art is gaining increasing interest of art practitioners and the general audience, touch, as the fundamental sense to human communication, has attracted considerable attention for its influence on delivering information and evoking affect in the field of art and culture. In arguing the significance of touch, scholars have engaged in associating cultural and social theories to the history and science of bodily sensation, with a focus on studying the relationship between the sense of touch and affect. Cognitive science considers skin the sensory organ of tactile sensation as the sense of touch is mediated by mechanosensory neurons that are embedded in the skin.¹⁸ Through an historical examination of the theories of the skin through language, images, and scientific and artistic discourse, cultural theorists though have recognized that body (i.e., skin) enables touch, they have also emphasized that the body is formed by the senses. Art historian Claudia Benthien highlighted the semantic and psychic aspects of touch in which the skin is conceived as a boundary, contact surface and identity.¹⁹

In studying the interactions between touch and affect, scholars have come to the conclusion that humans communicate with the body (skin) as the boundary, while touch bears feedback and has become the reflection of things. However, there are different interpretations of what is reflected by touch. A group of theorists, including Mark Paterson and Paul Rodaway, consider the sense a product of time and society while others have brought up a perspective that

¹⁸ Blair A. Jenkins and Ellen A. Lumpkin, "Developing a Sense of Touch," *Development* 144, no. 22 (2017): pp. 4078-4090, <https://doi.org/10.1242/dev.120402>.

¹⁹ Claudia Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

touch facilitates individuation and is beyond social, biological, and political identities.²⁰

Philosopher Erin Manning specifically discusses tango (a form of art) as a tactile, rhythmic, and improvisational dance as an instance of the body's ontogenetic potential being unlocked by the sense of touch.²¹ While scholars have brought up contradictory views on whether touch is a reflection of the macro history and human society, or an intimate connection that is private, understanding that touch influences the body on both spiritual and physical levels provides a foundation for understanding the interaction between the body and textile as a cultural product.

Other studies particularly focus on discussing the positive role of touch in curatorial practice and general artistic experience, among which Dimitra Christidou and Palmyre Pierroux identify touch as an interpretive resource for multi-sensory art interpretation for it assists one's discernments of the artwork's shape, texture, substance, and creation process.²² Scholars such as David Howes, Annamma Joy and John Sherry have all written about the significance of incorporating sensory interactions into curatorial practice and aesthetic experience, especially in the contemporary time where museums and galleries are no longer pure sites of spectatorship.²³

²⁰ Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2011).

²¹ Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

²² Dimitra Christidou and Palmyre Pierroux, "Art, Touch and Meaning Making: An Analysis of Multisensory Interpretation in the Museum," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 34, no. 1 (August 2018): pp. 96-115, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2018.1516561>.

²³ David Howes, "Introduction to Sensory Museology," *The Senses and Society* 9, no. 3 (2014): pp. 259-67, <https://doi.org/10.2752/174589314x14023847039917>; Annamma Joy and John F. Sherry, Jr., "Speaking of Art as Embodied Imagination: A Multisensory Approach to Understanding Aesthetic Experience," *Journal of Consumer Research* 30, no. 2 (2003): pp. 259-282, <https://doi.org/10.1086/376802>.

For more information on senses and curatorial practices, see Constance Classen, *The Museum of the Senses: Experiencing Art and Collections* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017).

Joy and Sherry have examined the links between embodiment, movement, and multisensory experience insofar as they help elucidate the contours of art appreciation in an exhibition space. Undoubtedly, these scholars jointly pointed out the importance of integrating touch experience for the enhancing exhibition experience especially when major art institutions still resistant to touching art.

Expanding the scope from art and culture to textile exhibition, scholars argue around a main dilemma of whether to touch and how to touch artworks. Fashion historians and curators such as Alexandra Palmer, and fashion historians, Marie Riegels Melchior and Birgitta Svensson amplify the complexities of working with museum collections and mounting costume exhibitions – while the curator’s intention is to retrieve the social, cultural, and economic history of high-end fashions, exhibiting these pieces raises conflicts between curatorial and conservation practices because exhibits could be damaging to the objects.²⁴ Their examination of contemporary fashion curation also prompts a pertinent question: when exhibiting textiles, is physical contact necessary for generating affect and emotions of the viewer? In response, some argued that touch should not be limited to the physical sense of perceiving things through the skin.²⁵ Cultural historian Constance Classen considers it problematic to simplifying “experiencing art” into “seeing art”

²⁴ Alexandra Palmer, “Untouchable: Creating Desire and Knowledge in Museum Costume and Textile Exhibitions,” *Fashion Theory* 12, no. 1 (2008): pp. 31-63, <https://doi.org/10.2752/175174108x268136>; Marie Riegels Melchior and Birgitta Svensson, *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury academic, 2015). For more information on textile culture, see Jennifer Harris, *A Companion to Textile Culture* (Hoboken, US: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020); For more information on textile exhibition, see Jessica Hemmings, “Floppy Cloth: Textile Exhibition Strategies Inside the White Cube.” *TEXTILE* (2019), 17:4, 412-434. doi:10.1080/14759756.2019.1588688.

²⁵ For more information on tactile perception, see Hideyoshi Yanagisawa and Kenji Takatsuji, "Effects of Visual Expectation on Perceived Tactile Perception: An Evaluation Method of Surface Texture with Expectation Effect." (*International Journal of Design* 9, no. 1 ,2015).

when “seeing” is likely also to include touching.²⁶ Art historian and curator Jennifer Fisher has pointed out that haptic sense functions differently than visual sense and it “renders the surfaces of the body porous, being perceived at once inside, on the skin's surface, and in external space.”²⁷

East Asian art historians have examined the area’s visual and material culture to date and emphasize the sensuous surface of art, which offers a method of interpreting traditional East Asian art in relation to affect and sensory studies.²⁸ Jonathan Hay proposed that the affective surfaces of art objects evoke states of mind, such as stillness and decorum, which are bound with specific cultural practices.²⁹ Hay’s argument also supports the idea that traditional art merely speaks for the cultural environment of specific historical period, while understanding contemporary East Asian art requires research and interpretation of current art trends.

Overall, the considerations put forward by contemporary art theorists and practitioners offered motivation and guidance for curating textile and fashion exhibitions that deliver the sense of touch through indirect tactile experience.

Exhibition Review: Relevant Curatorial Precedents

As a textile exhibition taking place in a virtual space, the curatorial design of *Sensing Texture* will answer to two thematic concerns – highlighting the texture of textile and conveying the

²⁶ Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

²⁷ Jennifer Fisher, “Relational Sense: Towards a Haptic Aesthetics.” *Parachute*, #87 (Summer) (1997): 4-11; Jennifer Fisher, “Tangible Acts.” *The Senses in Performance*. Edited by Sally Banes and Andre Lepicki (New York & London: Routledge, 2007): 166-178.

²⁸ For more information on sensuous theories, see Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

²⁹ Jonathan Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China* (London: Reaktion Books, Limited, 2020). ProQuest Ebook Central.

sense of touch through digital expressions. Thus, the curatorial precedents most relevant to the project are textile and fashion exhibitions that trigger emotional responses of the viewer through indirect haptic experience as well as online exhibitions that utilize technologies to experiment with various methods of digital presentation.

Having witnessed the rapid development of digital entertainment, museums and galleries have recognized the urgent need and great potential of developing online exhibit platforms using interactive technologies. During the COVID-19 global pandemic, the Louvre decided to transfer its enormous collection onto its website. Consisting of entries for more than 480,000 works of art, the Louvre's online collection has taken a similar form of a traditional archive with photos, basic information, and other index of artworks.³⁰ Intending to imitate the experience of a physical museum visit, Louvre also provides virtual tours for those who prefer to visit the museum rooms and galleries while having a sense of moving around the palace architecture. The Louvre took an approach favoured by many major art institutions in the world including MoMA and the ROM as they respect the traditional exhibition format and continue to follow the conventional curatorial strategies in developing online displays.

In 2020, Contemporary Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama exhibited *Recent Paintings* at Ota Fine Arts Shanghai, featuring fifteen monochrome paintings from her My Eternal Soul series and a cloud-based sculpture installation consisting of mirror-finished stainless-steel three-dimensional pieces.³¹ Also affected by the pandemic, the Ota Fine Arts opened its online viewing rooms in addition to physical exhibitions. Transferring a physical exhibition to the online

³⁰ "LOUVRE: ABOUT THE COLLECTION," Louvre Collection, n.d., <https://collections.louvre.fr/page/aPropos>.

³¹ "Yayoi Kusama: Recent Paintings," Ota Fine Arts, n.d., <https://www.otafinearts.com/exhibitions/251-yayoi-kusama-recent-paintings-yayoi-kusama/>.

platform, the gallery has included photographs of the exhibition site and the artworks, as well as a video that guides the viewer through the entire installation of the white cube gallery space.

The growing popularity of online exhibitions during the past few years has spawned art created specifically for online exhibitions. In response to the close of galleries and museums due to the COVID situation, *Well Now WTF?* (2020), an Internet art exhibition accessible by computer and smartphone, has set off a net art reclamation, as its co-curator Wade Wallerstein described.³² The curated collection primarily includes gif works and non-repeating videos hosted on YouTube, which are displayed in a series of “rooms.” The communicative potential of gif images provides a sense of ease and connectivity as they easily slide in through messages in the public’s daily social life. Similarly, organized by Umbrella Projects in collaboration with the Owens Art Gallery and Struts Gallery, *Fruit Salad* (2020) was a video screening presenting a mélange of videos and filmed performances that explored gender performativity and celebrated masquerade, personas, and other fluid forms of identity.³³ Both *Well Now WTF?* and *Fruit Salad* provided viewers with an affective and inclusive experience through moving images and sounds. What makes gifs and videos particularly engaging is the way artists and creators share their perspective with the viewer like a conversation.

Exhibition Design

The online interface of *Sensing Texture* consists of an entrance, artworks, artist biographies and the curatorial essay. The entrance welcomes the visitors with a gif created by Chinese artist

³² Wade Wallerstein, ““Well Now WTF?”” *Silicon Valet*, 2020, http://www.wellnow.wtf/enter/WNWTF_Essay_Wade_Wallerstein.pdf.

³³ Hannah Bridger, Emily Falvey, and Lucas Morneau, “Fruit Salad,” UMBRELLA PROJECTS, n.d., <https://umbrellaprojects.ca/>.

Syoei Ko, which is a recreation of a photograph of the artist's knitting sample that imitates a television screen with too much snow. By adding a filter and effects to the image, the artist reversed the original creation process and re-infused dynamism back into the work, so that the textile could restore the original texture that inspired its creation. Ko's gif work serves as a playful introduction to the exhibition, signifying how the artist's participation in recreating the art grounded the concept of the exhibition.

Entering the page "ARTWORKS", the viewer will see an artwork lineup, which include images and titles of works by nine young artists from China and Japan. Each image shows details of the artworks instead of full views so that the texture will be foregrounded at the beginning. Based on the initial experience of the works, the viewer can then explore the works in any order they wish. Each artist has provided a short video (with sound) and a set of photographs, allowing viewers to observe artworks in both static and dynamic situations. Through video, *Sensing Texture* intends to make up for the fact that online viewers lack the movements obtained in physical exhibitions, which would allow them to engage in a sensory experience as they move toward, away, around, or within the artworks. The sound of the video also enhances the viewer's perception of texture and touch.

The video is a derivative of the artwork as the artists needed to re-install their works in places other than the original setting where they were exhibited. The curator gave the artists guidelines regarding the size of the image and the length of the video, as well as the fundamental principle of highlighting the texture and touch of textiles. Therefore, the artists had great freedom in controlling how they wanted to represent their works. For instance, fashion designers were able to present their works on a human body so that they conveyed the relationship of fabric and skin in various types of movement. As a result of this experimental attempt, the videos vary in

form and expression. Some videos demonstrate the creation process, others illustrate how the textile transforms as it interacts with its surroundings. Similarly, some artists incorporated the original ambient sounds of the video while others recorded their own voice describing the work. Most artists used close-ups from multiple angles to show details of the fabric, which highlighted the feeling of texture. Overall, the process of making the videos involved an ongoing dialogue between the artist and myself regarding the content and the effect of the media. During this process, most artists engaged with revisions of their video after receiving curatorial suggestions.

One challenge emerged involving language during this experimental show. Working with South Asian artists required in-depth communication in which a terminology gap became evident. Many technical terms for knitting or textile-making in Chinese or Japanese were translated in a literal way, which may have made it difficult for English speakers to fully understand their meanings. Bridging this gap between languages will be addressed in future iterations of this project.

Conclusion

Sensing Texture has a dual thematic of overturning the Western stereotype of East Asian art and introducing the current trend of combining traditional artistic techniques with contemporary ideas. Nowadays, young East Asian artists still struggle for the lack of opportunity to show their techniques and concepts to the world, while Western art institutions fail to fully recognize the panorama of current Chinese and Japanese art. The rising popularity of online exhibitions has accelerated the cultural and artistic exchange between the East and the West. *Sensing Texture* not only initiated a dialogue between the viewer, textile, and artist through indirect tactile interactions, but also introduced emerging East Asian artists and their works to the Western

world. Addressing both the problematic of relevant curatorial precedents and the opportunities brought by technologies, this project experimented with curatorial strategies to utilize sensory experience in a virtual space. By inviting artists to create videos that amplified texture and touch, the exhibition articulated how textiles could be engaged more experientially and sensorily. Overall, *Sensing Texture* provides a prototype for curators to explore the possibilities of online exhibitions as well as the potential challenges of facilitating cross-cultural communications through art.

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Appendix A: Artist Biographies

Guan Jingyi (管静怡)

Guan Jingyi was born in Wenzhou City, Zhejiang Province, China in 1995. She graduated from Shanghai Film Art Academy in 2016. In April 2018, Guan was admitted to Joshibi University in Tokyo, Japan, majoring in textile design, focusing on weaving. She graduated in March 2022.

Experience in Japan –

2019 Edogawa Traditional Crafts Industry-Academia-Public Project Works Products.

2020 Hachioji Textile Industry Association Necktie Competition Tokyo Governor's Award.

2022 Joshibi University of Art and Design Graduation Exhibition Exhibit

DODO (Jingxian Lin 林静娴)

DODO, Jingxian Lin, is a Chinese artist who has graduated from TAMA Art University, Japan.

DODO is skilled in wax dyeing and silk screen printing. Bearing pressure from high hopes,

DODO particularly enjoys drawing and painting all kinds of patterns as a way out. The artist finds relief and happiness in the process of painting.

Ime Taso (Tokime Ime 根本 芽生)

Age:24

Tama Art University Textile Design (2016 -2020)

After graduating, I'm been doing various activities freelancer.

Launched a handmade accessory brand 『me me idea』 2020～.

Japanese idol 『ARTNADOLL』 producer 2022～.

NOGCHI YUKA (Noguchi Yuka 野口 裕香)

1998/03/26 Age 23

I work on the themes of "creating and being created," "circulation of life and death," and "mother."

Master of Art, TAMA ART UNIVERSITY, Tokyo (2022)

Bachelor of Art, TAMA ART UNIVERSITY, Tokyo (2020)

Nozomi Saikai (西海 望)

Fibre Artist / Interior Designer lives in Kanazawa Japan.

MA Department of Fiber Art, China Academy of Art (2019-2021).

BA Department of Textile Design, Tama Art University, Japan, 2018. Exchange semester at Fashion and Collection Design, Aalto University, Finland, 2016.

She is interested in the Ikat technique used in some Asian countries and applies it to artworks, exploring the boundary between craft and art. Rather than painting figurative objects, she is often inspired by the beauty and meaning of the materials themselves. She is also strongly influenced by Virginia DAVIS, who attempted to metaphorically remove the divide between art and craft by colouring and weaving the threads themselves, embedding colour and image within the weave structure.

No.44

2020 Graduated from Tama Art University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Production Design, Department of Textile Design

2020 Tama Art University graduation work excellent work collection selection

2020 Solo Exhibition "stereotype"

While studying at school, No.44 taught herself photography while majoring in textile design. The artist was a street snap photographer at Japanese fashion media -- FASHION PRESS. Since graduation, she has been active as a photographer. No. 44 mainly shoots portraits. Recently, she has been creating works inspired by her inner complexity and her lack of a sense of belonging in society. Currently, No.44 presents her works through exhibitions and online social media.

<https://www.no-44.com/>

Runa Takeuchi (竹内 瑠奈)

Runa Takeuchi is a Japanese designer born in 1996. She graduated from Tama Art University, Department of Textile Design in March 2020. She continues her client work and independent production activities from three axes, centring on textiles, graphics, and editorials.

Especially in textile design, she has been focusing on the relationship between "plane and solid" since she was in school. Moreover, she is still exploring the possibilities of textile and surface design from expressions that make use of "materials and technology".

She also continues to consider and record the textile production process and output methods as an experiment. Her graduation work "Composition and Structure" (2019) was selected as an excellent work for graduation work at Tama Art University and introduced in several web media. It became a major theme research that will lead to her future production activities.

Web: runatakeuchi.com

Instagram: @runa_artworks

Mail: runa.takeuchi.96@gmail.com

Syoei Ko (胡书睿)

Syoei Ko is from Ningbo, China. She started professional painting training in high school and majored in Fine Arts Education at Hangzhou Normal University in 2014. In 2016, She was admitted to Tama Art University, Textile Design in Tokyo, Japan. During her undergrad, she learned a variety of textile design technologies, such as screen printing, weaving, knitting, tailoring, sewing, etc.

Ko integrates traditional techniques with pioneer concepts. The artist focuses on fashion design and has established her unique design style. She transferred to OCAD University in 2019, majoring in Materials Art and Design. She will continue her design career after graduation.

Zhe Wang (王哲)

Zhe Wang is an artist based in Beijing, China. With a B.A. from the Central University of Finance And Economics (Beijing) and studies in graphic design at the University of The Arts Utrecht (De Kunst Van HKU) in the Netherlands, She was admitted to Tama Art University in 2016, majoring in Product Design in Tokyo, Japan. The artist's interests bridge the worlds of business, contemporary art, and design.

Wang is currently working as a designer for Hara Design Institute of NDC (Nippon Design Center). Meanwhile, she has recently been working with designers from Tokyo on furniture and graphic projects as a design group called Studio Shaping.

Appendix B: Artwork List

Castle, Light, Building, People 「城、光、ビル、人々」

Jingyi Guan

2022

hemp, cotton, silk, wool, acid dye, plant dye, neutral dye

Ikat, hand-spun yarn, waffle weaving

Commensalism (共生)

DODO

2019

Batik | Cotton | Wax

Heaven Until The End

Ime Taso

2019

Mixed media

Things That Move (うごめくもの)

NOGUCHI YOKA

2021

Rust Dyeing 錆染め | Cotton 綿布 | Rust 錆

Fluttering Line

Nozomi Saikai

2020

80cm x 60cm

Silk | Cherry blossom | Ikat

Ikebana 「生け花」

NO. 44

2019

polyester, silver thread

thermal transfer printing

Edo embroidery 江戸刺繍

Composition / Structure (コンポジションとストラクチャー)

Runa Takeuchi

2019

H1150 × W1150mm

Polyester, Ultrasuede®, Stainless steel mesh, Pigment, Foil

Silkscreen printing, Cutting, Foil printing, Bonding, Puff printing, Thermal processing

NEWS

Syoei Ko

2018

Katazome 型染 | batik | cotton | acid dye

Prologue - Printing with Paper

Zhe Wang

2019

Paper paste | Chinese ink | 3D Printing

Appendix C : Figures



Figure 1. Sensing Texture - Online Exhibition - Entrance

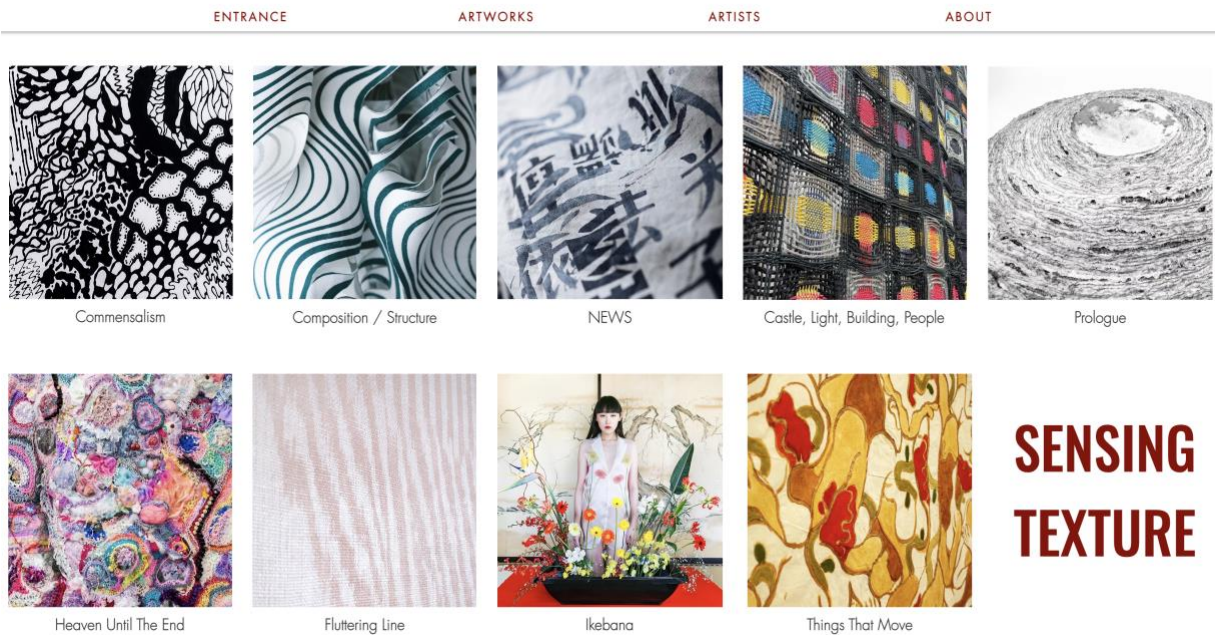


Figure 2. Sensing Texture - Online Exhibition - Artworks