

a soft felt logic.

by

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ABSTRACT

A *soft felt logic* is a textile exploration situated in the ‘soft felt’ experience, one which questions, prioritises, and plays with the sense of touch. I posit that this *soft felt logic* methodology can make sense of how touch - through tactile/textile experiences - is grounded in embodied action. I focus on the areas of “Touch, Colour, and Space” to explore the subject matter. The accompanying show *hands holding, holding held* at Ignite Gallery, Toronto displays a series of wall and floor-based hand-woven forms that present an invitation to feel. Through the development of these forms, I ask how the use of material creates visual and physical textures that stimulate a yearning to touch both for the perceiver and myself as the maker. To this end, what is this yearning? Through close material study, I look at factors like scale, pattern, placement, fibre, and colour to understand the impact of my designs and their relationship to *a soft felt logic*. Through the development of these forms, I investigate how colours, tones, and hues create dialogue and interactions that incentivise the perceiver to touch. Will distortion through colour selection impact the ability for a multi- or merged-sensorial experience of perception? I investigate the world around me, what spaces do craft objects occupy? Can building a *soft felt logic* create space for new methods of textile interaction to emerge? In touching these works, can a greater understanding and appreciation for the tactile/textile body emerge? I identify as a maker/craft practitioner, and this influences the methods I use within my making and research; it’s situated on the loom and betwixt my hands.

Keywords: Touch, Colour, Space, Textiles, Craft, Hierarchy of The Senses, Logic

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INTRODUCTION

I love the grid, if I didn't, I don't think I could be a weaver. I love the relationship between up and down, horizontal and vertical/warp and weft. The creation of a complete cloth through the over and under motion. The stability to be found with the proportions of one to the other. They hold each other in place. I think if I didn't like the grid, I'd find weaving insufferable, it's a constant conversation between what did I right and what did I wrong. The grid will make your smallest mistake glaring.

But in that, I find a place. Somewhere that emphasises consistency and practice.

Process.

The line is solid yet sings. Position it right and it feels like it could hold up the earth, shift it and suddenly it looks malleable and mobile.

The walls of order create something to push against boundaries to inhabit/inhibit and hold.

I'm trying to find ways of creating work that make sense with the way I interact with the world.

I like to touch, and pick, and stroke, and fiddle. I was constantly getting told off for making annoying noises, clicking hairclips or picking my nails. When I walk, I keep time tapping my fingertips, the physical resonance keeping me on the ground. I interact with the world through touch and talk, and while all this is happening in my head, I like structure and order. Consistency in experiences.

What is compelling about the repeat? About the known? And the found. Finding solace in the repetition of a task, a song, a sentence, a visual

The brain's urge to think fast and to think slow

What does it mean to make work that trips our fast brain, makes it think it's failing/falling?

Why am I drawn to the rhythmic process of weaving?

The grid holds it, there are those who want to break the grid to find 'abstraction' to find looseness and openness but what can be found in the walls of the grid? There is comfort there – in the known – and there is discomfort in the application of the known. I want you to go 'Yes, red, blue, red, blue, red, blue but wait yellow? Why yellow? Why now?' the tripping of the brain to force an embodiment, a recognition of the inability to simply 'fill in the blanks' and keep walking.

I hold the grid and the questions above close as I begin this exploration into my practice, one which is centring woven textiles created with an emphasis on touch. With this, I'm proposing a logic of object orientation¹ that is grounded in the 'felt' experience. Felt is an important word for this paper. I like its applicability to a variety of instances. I'm considering the 'felt' hand - the skin it touches. Felt like the textile - a cohesive coalescence, and the emotive relation of 'felt' being the past tenses of feel - the emotional tie the word carries.² Now with the felt logic I incorporate a 'soft logic,'³ as presented by Pennina Barnett who asks "What if the poetics of cloth were composed of 'soft logics', modes of thought that twist and turn and stretch and fold? And in this movement new encounters were made, beyond the constraint of binaries?" (183) Together I make a *soft felt logic* that asks to be held. An understanding that to view textiles is not enough, I want an embodied sensorial experience that encompasses the depth that our senses hold. This proposed logic prioritises the enmeshing/folding/overlapping of the senses (while touch will be the primary focus) and is founded on the way that I create my textile work. I aim to illustrate the value of physical interactions with work and how this can change its relationship with you — the reader/toucher/perceiver.⁴ I hope this will allow for the investigation of the sense of touch outside of the skin.

To contextualise this research at the beginning. I'm a settler in Tkaronto (Toronto), I work and live on the Indigenous Land of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. I benefit from the inherent powers afforded to me through colonialism. While I won't speak to the specific craft traditions of the different communities indigenous to this Land, I want to acknowledge the deep knowledge and care that Indigenous communities have in relation to craft, in my case textiles. Weaving is an ancient practice developed by Indigenous peoples across the world. On Turtle Island we have a rich textile history.

¹ Object Orientation in respect to this paper is the framing I have for how I interact with objects and spaces. It is a thinking that holds and values the inanimate and asks to consider their place within the narrative of the everyday.

² While I'm not fulling or felting my work I'm applying 'felt' to represent a more general understanding of fabric. Fulling is the process of agitating protein fibers so that they bind together and create a dense non-woven fabric. I will not be expanding on the ties to the Deleuze and Guattari theory of Smooth and Striated spaces that uses felt as an example of their theory but am referencing that the knowledge of their work and practice is present.

³ Weaver Shelia Hicks has used the term *Soft Logic* in her thinking and writing though her definition and understanding is not the one I am referencing to build this logic.

⁴ I have decided to use the term perceiver to refer to the audience when speaking about my work and thinking. This is because I want to decenter sight (i.e. not using viewer) and create a space to consider how we perceive work fully, perception as a term feels in line with the *soft felt logic*.

My purpose currently is to understand my relationship as a settler to the Land I stand on and the material I use. In weaving I understand the intricacies of its historical significance and cultural heritage. In creating this body of work I have taken refuge in High Park and the black oak savannas; I have breathed the wind off Lake Ontario and ridden my bike up the up the Gabekanaang-ziibi river trying to find space and quiet in this loud new city I've found myself in. I am grateful to be on this Land and have the time to do this work. I think about craft broadly and with intersectionality in mind, but I am speaking as a white/queer/able bodied person. Therefore, in this paper, I acknowledge the modes of thinking and knowledge that are outside the standard canon, but in this research rests within the lens of the Western/Eurocentric understandings and discourse. The field of sensorial research is too vast, I have chosen to narrow my gaze to look directly at touch as it relates to textiles. While the questions I ask can splinter in all directions, this narrowing of the field is to build a cohesive ground for this body of work.

I have been compelled within the research by the words that makers find to describe their practices, to find the vocabulary that explains the ephemera of muscle memory and embedded/embodied making. In my research, I hold these thoughts and expressions in the same regard as academic and theoretical texts because the words of the maker are valuable and hold tacit knowledge (Langlands 31)⁵. This has been an exploration of making, writing, and self-determination. I have tried to find my voice as a maker, and you'll see moments of it in the text - in the italics. I bring you into the thought process and try to find the words that float away. To do this I will build an understanding of three aspects that I hold onto when making with the *soft felt logic*: Touch, Colour, and Space.

In the first section, Touch, I ask how the use of materials creates visual and physical textures that stimulate a yearning for touch. I refer to the hierarchy of the senses to build an understanding of the sensorial order that I aim to disrupt. The concept of 'desire' – whether viewed as an impulse/compulsion/calling – frequently emerges in my creative process and writing practice. I look at desire as it pertains to touch, what is the desire and how can I facilitate the fulfilment of my desires? Desire so often walks hand in hand with touch, I look at why. I introduce the idea of embodied understandings of making which will reoccur in sections to follow. Finally, I look at how

⁵ The way that I have come to understand tacit knowledge is it represents the knowledge held within the body. It represents forms of knowledge that are hard to communicate fully and, on some level, exist on the 'felt' plane. In relation to this paper tacit knowledge is in some way what I hope to explain with my *soft felt logic* in that it is the knowledge held between the fingers of the weaver and the knowing when something is 'right.'

artists engage with touch in their practices. What can be learnt and understood in their approaches? What is the framework that already exists, and I am contributing to?

In the Colour section, I investigate my practice more deeply. I'm exploring ideas of visual distortion, material selection and the thought process behind the making. I look at the facets of my practice and explore what role repetition, colour, and texture have in creating woven textiles that invite touch. Through this section, I explore the specific vernacular that feels relevant to my practice and merges sensorial experiences. With the help of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick - who was an American poet, artist, critic and teacher with a focus on queer theory and modalities (H. Sedgwick) I look at the role that texture plays within my research and making. I contemplate the why of this project and the human/object/human relationship I aim to enlighten.⁶

The Space section will focus on building an understanding of some craft history in relation to my work. I feel tied to the relationship between craft and material/function/labour/care. I'm building the framework for my individual definitions of craft to have a place within this research. I look at different ways that the thinking and making - the tacit knowledge - outlined in previous chapters can be applied directly to my work and my conception of craft. I discuss the functionality of textiles and investigate how the spaces that objects exist in impact their object orientation through discussing my installation practices. In directly referencing craft fairs, galleries, museum structures, and the home, I ponder the question of can building a *soft felt logic* create space for new methods of object orientation to emerge?

⁶ The Human/Object/Human idea that I am working with is the relationship that is formed between the hand that touches and the object and the hand that follows this touch. The caress of the object leading to a connection with another human who has touched before or after you.

TOUCH

We touch things to assure ourselves of reality. We touch the objects of our love. We touch the things we form. Our tactile experiences are elemental (Albers 62).

Touch is the catalyst from which everything else begins. I remember making the decision to go to art school and only applying to places that had textile programs because even though I had never woven and was mediocre at sewing I knew that I liked to work with my hands. I had an affinity for tactility. I credit much of my interest to my nana who painstakingly taught me how to knit at seven and always shared her love of wool with me. When I wove for the first time, I knew it fit like a worn glove. And in building my relationship to textiles, I learnt a new language, a new way of thinking, that felt grounded in how I have always been in the world.

I want to feel. I want to touch.

Touch is essential for me to understand my surroundings. I have always been a toucher. In textiles, there is an emphasis on tactility because it determines much of the craft. There is consideration of ‘the hand’ of the fabric which is the feel of the fabric against your skin, it’s a way that craftspeople speak about and understand their materials. Following this thought, will the touch match the intended use? What effect/affect do you hope to elicit with this hand feel? How does the nap or pile of a fabric impact the way you can interact with it?⁷ Can I create work that stimulates this yearning for tactile exploration?

I don’t touch just to feel - I feel to learn. This is the root for the yearning for me. It’s a compulsion that goes deeper than my other senses for me. It truly is a yearning - a siren call - that is asking for contact. The yearning is something I wish to create/speak/communicate. The questions above are guiding me, and I’ve come to realise they aren’t guiding everyone.

In this section, I explore the notion of the hierarchy of the senses, focusing primarily on sight and touch. I consider how sight is still thought to be the highest within the order of the senses and what role touch occupies. I mull over how we engage with touch within our increasingly visual culture. I question and explore the role that desire has within tactile experiences. Within this section

⁷ Pile refers to the additive weft on that stands off the base fabric. If you can imagine velvet or corduroy, the ridges of the cord would be the ‘pile’ of the fabric. Nap refers more to an overall texture and the fiber direction of a fabric. If a fabric feels smooth, you’re moving with the nap of the fabric and if it feels prickly of with resistance you’re moving against the nap, think of petting a cat with or against their fur direction.

I will present artists who may or may not be working with touch and their relationship to my research as well as a look at why artists and galleries may shy away from welcoming tactility into their spaces.

Because touch is such a driving force in the work's creation it feels like a shortcoming to be unable to present the work to be touched. Textiles, for me, feel unfulfilled when they're not held.

HIERARCHY OF THE SENSES

The phrase hierarchy of the senses feels formal and grounded in a larger context, and it is. But it's also a fancy way of saying that some senses get to take up more space than others. In my work, I'm aiming to destabilise the hierarchy of the senses — shifting from one that is primarily sight-focused to a combined visual and tactile sensory experience. This hierarchy of the senses foregrounds the way textiles are interacted with. The form of object orientation that I crave - one which allows for the emergence and engagement of touch is not currently upheld within the gallery and museum complex as well as general societal interaction (Bond). There continues to be a dominance of the ocular-centric lens, where the privileging of a person's sight creates a distance between them and what they observe (Zanditon 236). This practice subordinates' other senses—such as touch—as a primary way to engage with the world (Zanditon 236). There is an onus on ocular engagement but also in the prevalence of screens and visual communication surmounting human interaction. It's not out of the ordinary now to meet someone over Zoom and never shake their hand or share space. In these ways there is a loss of touch connection.

When I think about the hierarchy of the senses I wonder how and why they came to be, because they feel foreign to what I have experienced. Catheryn Vasseleu uses Luce Irigaray's thinking to build an understanding of how tactility is interwoven into the perception of sight.

First, Irigaray argues, the look cannot take up the tangible, because the tangible body is not constituted in terms of the visible. Second, the visible is reliant on touch, but the reverse is not the case. Tactility is the primordial sense in which the body's interiority is constituted. Irigaray observes that consciousness is not possible without the sense of touch, which organises a dwelling - place or interiority for consciousness (72).

Vasseleu's and Irigaray's work helps to centre this thought - that the visible is reliant on touch therefore the hierarchy of placing it above other senses is flawed even if done subconsciously. This discussion extends past sight and touch to encompass more sensorial modes, they are

interdependent. I'm not arguing for a replacement of the hierarchy with touch on top but rather a destruction of the hierarchy to create the *soft felt logic*, the merging of sensorial experience.⁸

The hierarchy of the senses is an understanding brought forth by Aristotle – a Greek philosopher who lived between 384 and 322 BCE — who is credited with the classical hierarchy of the senses in which he deems "sight" the highest, followed in order by hearing, smell, taste, and touch (Jutte 61). The ordering of the senses is deliberately distancing from the body in prioritising the mind. The reason this is relevant is because of the lasting impact that this ordering has had on sensorial understanding.

I believe the hierarchy of the senses upholds old ideals of relationality which only serves to limit the way interactions can take place. Brian O'Doherty outlines an interesting reading of the hierarchy in his text *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Within the second section, O'Doherty refers to "The Spectator" and "The Eye" and their perceived roles in the gallery and visual culture more broadly. O'Doherty demonstrates the way sight dominance has been brought into the museum space, and how it occupies art engagement, they represent ideas of taste. For instance when referring to the curation of the gallery shot, the 'white cube' aesthetic; "the Eye is the only inhabitant of the sanitised installation shot. The Spectator is not present" (O'Doherty 42). The disembodiment of the sense of sight plays into its upheld power and how these spaces are being curated for it alone. It is the removal of the person from space to keep the illusion of separation and sanctity. If the Spectator is present then a person is present, a breathing/moving/hurting/feeling body occupying the space and bringing with it the outside world, turning up the corners of the carpet and tracking in mud. By removing the person, the very possibility of touch is removed. Constance Classen stipulates a notable factor missing from visual culture is that "we live in a society of the image, a markedly visual culture, in which, while there may be many representations of touch, there is often nothing actual to feel" (2). O'Doherty's white cube is void of touch, void of feeling.

Ponder the many facets of the word feeling.

⁸ I understand I refer to the merging of the senses and will spend most of my time contrasting sight and touch. This is because they are the ones I am harnessing in my personal textile practice and have the most relationship to. However, I do touch on other sensorial experiences throughout. I made the choice to narrow the field of investigation for the purpose of clarity within this paper.

While thinking about touch, I find myself picking up on any time tactility is used in a process, especially when it presupposes sight. Take for example sanding something; I work as an apprentice cobbler and while a lot of aspects are done by sight there are still elements of the work that you must do by feel. When sanding something I'm not just looking for it to have a flat surface, I'm rubbing my hand across the corked surface to expose the inconsistency and bumps that might not be visible. In this way, my hand is helping me level the sole (*soul*) of a shoe. I try to find the flush surface with my hand, to guard/guide me. The repetition of the action builds up muscle memory and knowledge held beneath the skin – a tacit knowledge.

Returning to my proposed *soft felt logic*, the destabilisation of the hierarchy of the senses allows for the emergence of a logic that is reliant on the urge of the moment, the sense that is screaming to be used. By creating textiles born to be touched there an active distancing from this hierarchy and engaging with the *soft felt logic* it creates space for expressive and embodied living – feeling/sniffing/holding/tugging/savouring/slipping/falling/perceiving.

I fall into these moments of want, of need, of not knowing and of finding. The act of writing has created more space for different modes of communicating, what are the words that hold touch?

What words feel like they prod? Poke? stroke?

What words am I grazed by?

Touchable words:

Cinch/tantalizing/tender(tendril)/splice/haggard/spindle/throb/tingle.

DESIRE

My desire for touch comes from my want to share emotional states with objects and others and harness the ability to create affective spaces/experiences. I'm interested in that feeling deep in the belly when there is something I want to touch - the tingling - excitement. There is a tension present with an urge like this. Within certain spaces and contexts this emotion cannot be acted on, you're not allowed to let the feeling rise from inside and reach out. This self-restraining exercise - the want and restraint relationship - the push and pull - exemplifies desire.

When conducting preliminary research into an urge to touch the results were bodily centred. Many studies have looked at why physical contact between people is important. Yet, it was more difficult to find research looking at building a diverse touch vocabulary with things/objects/places. But there is value in exploring how we interact with objects as an “exercise to develop tactile

understanding: the sense of touch, more than any other, may be divided into a number of separately sensed qualities, such as pressure, pricking, rubbing, pain, temperature, and vibration” (Smith 93). All this information informs our tactile histories and experiences. It builds our sensorial memory bank of felt knowledge, helping to train the hand and mind and create embodied tactile knowledge. This is key in the *soft felt logic*, the pulling upon/apart of the known experiences of touch.

Have you ever tried to pull apart foam? Like the kind of foam used in futon mattresses, airy but with some resistance. The act of pressing in and pulling apart the pliable foam with my thumb and forefinger is a sensation I can manifest through my imagination. These sensorial touches leave imprints on my sensory history. I’ve always gravitated to touch as a form of self-soothing and calming, but also as a form of desire. When working with a new material so much of its applicability comes down to hand feel – whether it conjures a pleasing, soft, and supple feel or a slippery, and sticky texture – it is necessary information for me to glean as a maker. I like visceral sensations – such as the soft hairy texture of mohair that clings to your fingers and sticks to your clothes to be carried with you all day—or the sensation of fingernails running across my palms as I pick beneath them.

When speaking about desire the conversation inevitably ends up veering towards sexual or erotic touch. This space has been generative for past works and something I consider now but it is not my guiding desire. I came to understand erotic touch within my work with the help of the following quote from artist Alize Zorlutuna:

Sensations of misplaced desire through touch transgress normative prescriptions and boundaries around what is and should be desirable—a queer touch. At once strange, enticing and unsettling, this touch disorients...a desire that is truly transgressive, that pushes against the very boundaries of what we consider to be appropriate, is a desire that exceeds limits (48).

Touch is this desire. To engage with said desire goes against the conditioned understanding of touch that is taught/ingrained/upheld/inculcated/understood that it is something to be apprehensive of and is a tool to maintain social structure. Touch between bodies and emphasis on skin is rife in the discourse. But as a maker and toucher, I turn my attention to touch and the object - the desire that exists between inanimate and skin. Sartre speaks to the relationship I feel - object-oriented logic - of pairing self with the item to create a new connection, a new language:

Objects then become the transcendent ensemble which reveals my incarnation to me. A contact with them is a caress; that is, my perception is not the *utilization* of the object and the surpassing of the present in view of an end, but to perceive an object when I am in the desiring attitude is to caress myself with it. Thus, I am sensitive not so much to the form of the object and to its instrumentality, as to its matter (gritty, smooth, tepid, greasy, rough, etc.). In my desiring perception I discover something like a flesh of objects. My shirt rubs against my skin, and I feel it. What is ordinarily for me an object most remote becomes the immediately sensible; the warmth of air, the breath of the wind, the rays of sunshine, *etc.*; all are present to me in a certain way, as posited upon me without distance and revealing my flesh by means of their flesh. From this point of view desire is not only the clogging of a consciousness by its facticity; it is correlatively the ensnarement of a body by the world (392).

These objects caress back, and, in a way, you caress yourself through feeling. The desire to hold and be held, to feel and be felt.

I think then of why? Why is there a distance from touch when there is desire and impulse? I can call back to the hierarchy for this but also to another societal pressure of ‘the taboo on touching.’ In the essay “Touching and Not Touching: The Indirections of Desire” Segal expands on this:

The taboo on touching helps to differentiate orders of reality that are confused in the early tactile body-to-body experience of infancy: your body is different from other bodies; space exists independently of the objects that populate it; animate objects behave differently from inanimate objects (48).

This taboo informs a distancing/clamming up/pulling in of the self to create a delineation between self and other - be that people or things. Desire forces a broaching of these norms. Desire pushes towards touch. It creates a space for the emergence of the between, the contact between self and other.

Further on, Segal states “the whole point of the fantasy is hovering, its inability to touch” (60). While I love the tension held in the hovering inability to touch, within the *soft felt logic*, I don’t want to live in my fantasies of imagined contact. I don’t want to only stare at tapestries/gowns/rugs/rocks/moss/a small piece of plastic on the road wondering what they might feel like, I want to fulfil my desires. In my fantasy, my work awakens/engulfs/disturbs/insights these desires within others and they get the opportunity to not only dream or fantasize of the hand feel but to reach out and touch.

Touch can pull me into place and memory, it can recentre and refocus my attention. It’s a physical extension of the energy sitting within my body.

These structured and formed works I create move and undulant to play with that need for rhythm and pacing. A momentary glance will only get you so far.

There's a deep sense in my body that a structure or form is "right." I look at it and it makes me go 'mm mm' like it's satisfying. Can't that be the impetus for why I make, for pure satisfaction in form and execution?

ARTISTS AND TOUCH

I have been influenced by certain practitioners to build out an understanding of the touch landscape and I want to distinguish between artists where touch is an aspect of the work versus artists who are engaging with touch during the conception and creation of the work. The three artists below are people I greatly admire and whose work has similarities to and differences with my own.

Diyar Mayil is a Turkish artist currently working out of Tiohti: áke (Montreal). I found her work and it made my tummy flip. It was the perfect mix of gross and gorgeous. Her works explore themes of comfort and discomfort, and her "hope is to create an intuitive dialogue between the viewer and [her] work that might translate into new bodily orientations and sensibilities" (Mayil). At first, I was disappointed to find out you weren't supposed to touch it, or at least this was not an evident motivator of the practice because the work feels tied to body/skin for me as a viewer. However, in the documentation of her recent solo exhibition at Circa Art Actuel (Montreal) titled *Taş Yerinde Ağırdir (The stone is heavy in its place)* you can see hands brushing against the bristles (see fig. 1), physically touching the work. It made me think of the longing I had to tap *Sweep* (see fig. 2) the first time I saw it and the fulfillment of that desire that can come with this new piece. The work feels like a calling in, an ask for contact. Putting the bristles on the inside of a handrail-esque sculpture creates an intimate moment between self, hair, and wall. The relationship between self and object is held in the *soft felt logic* and this work feels like it illustrates the joys of allowing for touch. Mayil creates work that excites me and makes me want to enter the gallery. It is welcoming, alien, and unknown but familiar.



Fig. 1. Diyar Mayil, *untitled*, photo by Diyar Mayil, 2023.



Fig. 2. Diyar Mayil, *Sweep*, 2022, cherry wood and natural fibers, 5" x 8" x 120", photo by Alberto Porro.

Lia Cook is a very established and influential fiber artist working out of California. Her practice is rich and deep, she considers the theme of emotional memories of touch and cloth in her woven work. In her collaborations with neuroscientists, she aims to map the emotional responses in the brain when presented with a woven face (see fig. 3) (Cook). She uses jacquard weaving to create intricate and detailed images that feel real and present with an emphasis on skin. What I respond to in Cook's work is the emotion held in the faces and hands she weaves, to me, she weaves feelings. And the touch that she depicts is visceral, I can feel the hands stroking the fur (see fig. 4) or squeezing themselves, but the physical contact is not present. While Cook is deeply thinking with touch and her work is held by the hand, there remains a disconnect between what she

is doing and what I am striving to achieve. Her work is focused on the visualisation of touch and intimacy while I am focused on the experienced touch.

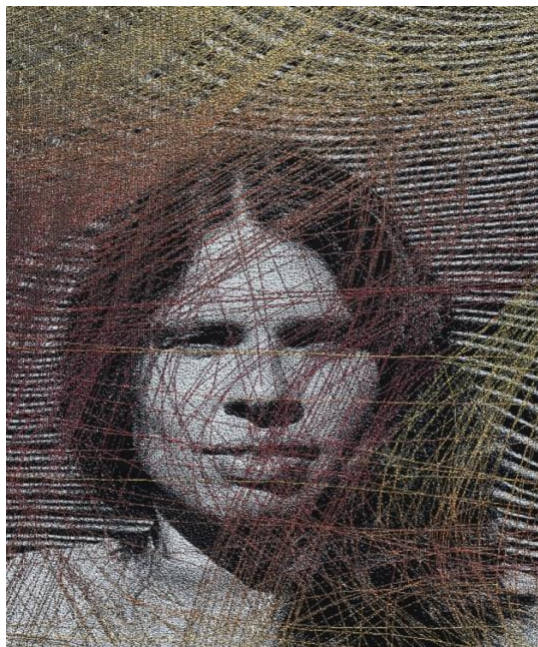


Fig. 3. Lia Cook, *Connectome*, 2013, 72"x51", cotton and rayon, photo by Lia Cook.



Fig. 4. Lia Cook, *Presence/Absence: Fur*, 1999, 51" x47", cotton and rayon, photo by Lia Cook.

Textile artist Sarah Zapata creates expansive tactile spaces to explore textile lineages, gender, and queerness within craft. She is an American/Peruvian artist based in New York city. Zapata is asking similar questions to me, and I immediately fell in love with her work when I stumbled upon it. Her interest in creating 'foul' colour combinations and unexpected tactile installations resonates with how I wish to create. While some of her works are made with the

intention to be interacted with, her work flips back and forth between ‘to touch and to not touch’. From interviews engaging with her work, Zapata contends with the difficulty of having some aspects touchable and others not, people will do as they please (Zapata). She seems to be shifting away from a viewer’s experience of physical touch post pandemic. I include her because I think she is creating with similar goals to me and asks questions around audience interaction. The two images below show the contrast in what the work looks like when it is made for touch versus sight. There is a contrast in composition and installation, but the human form is considered in both approaches. In *Of This World Rather* (fig. 5), the path is determined, a labyrinth laid out for the body to move through. In *A Famine of Hearing* (see fig. 6) at Performance Space New York, everything was touchable and there was a relinquishing to the audience, an abundance of touch.



Fig. 5. Sarah Zapata, *Of This World Rather*, Deli Gallery, Brooklyn, NY, March 8-April 14, 2019. In this work Zapata was directly responding to other works that were interactive and so this work was not able to be touched, she was considering ways to activate the space without physical contact, creating this labyrinth like layout (Vaccaro).



Fig. 6. Sarah Zapata, *A Famine of Hearing*, 2019, September 28 - January 19, photo by Performance Space New York. This work was fully interactive and served as the lobby for the performance space, everything was touchable.

I want to use one case study around an approach to tactility within the gallery space. Kapwani Kiwanga's exhibition *Remediation* ran from February 24, 2023, to July 23, 2023, at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Toronto approaches a way to incorporate touch into the gallery. Kiwanga's work *Elliptical Fields*, 2023 is a site-specific piece made from steel and sisal fibre that was presented in the museum lobby (Taylor). It consisted of large elliptical shapes filled with supple sisal fibre, cream in colour and almost hair-like. Viewers were asked to not touch the works but rather were directed to a table in the back which held a sample of the sisal fibres that they could interact with. This approach of giving a concentrated area for physical interaction makes sense for the work the Kiwanga does. Having many hands push or manipulate the fibre would damage the work and would have had to be considered in the installation or conception of the piece. In allowing for tactility to exist somewhere in the space I interpret it as an understanding of the audience's curiosity and in some ways a preventative measure to try and limit unwanted touch. I feel a conflict with how this does not allow for what feeling the piece would truly be like. It doesn't replicate the scale of touch possible on the larger pieces. It also continues the idea that work must remain in one state. A clean, undisturbed, unaltered state. While I understand this, I think there is something exciting/intriguing/alluding in making work that is transitory or shifting. Functional craft or used objects will wear the marks of use, the touched object will have the impact of the hand. I'm understanding or contending with this in my practice and note that it is not transferable to all media or fields. Kiwanga's intention was not to have the installation touched and the intention is paramount. What functions in this approach is that it creates a space for touch, it creates an opportunity for further exploration and learning to take place within the gallery-going experience.

OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES OF TOUCH

There are clear reasons why touch is not applicable in all spaces and for all artworks. The matter of oils from the skin affects textiles risking damage and degradation. I make knowing this, I have thought about how the materials will age and wear, but the larger practice has been to embrace the imperfections and allowance for alteration within the lifetime of the textiles. There is a relinquishing of control when you allow others to interact, you can no longer leave the perfect impression of the work because it will change. This is something the *soft felt logic* asks of me and conceptually I enjoy. Practically as a control freak, it's a great exercise in learning how to let go. There is also the narrative within the current understanding of the art world that preservation is key

and king. The goal is to have works that outlast the maker and outlast time, to inform the future generations. I understand and concede to seeing the value in this approach however it feels inverse to how craft objects or tactile objects were made to exist. Natural materials used in the making of these works will degrade, they will age and change and that is part of their beauty. A crafted object does not stay static yet wears with years of patina from use, stains from spilt coffees, and mends from where your sweater got snagged on a door. These moments add to the life and history of the item. Textiles carry the story of their relationship to us; the human impact is visible on their skin. While I know my works will bear the oily fingers of all who touch them and this will change their colour, their feel, and in many people's eyes their value, I see their value being held almost outside their aesthetic composition. Their value is in the interaction, in the touch that can be found between the work and the audience.

I want my work to exist outside the need for preservation and within the grasp of craft, where the life of a piece is part of its story. I see this work occupying the spaces that uphold the hierarchy – galleries/institutions – but also as individual moments that may exist apart from the others in a variety of spaces. *butter* (the bench) (see fig. 7) could live in a community space and create a place for rest, *a corrugated nudge* (see fig. 8) wrap the bar at the plumb gallery again, as it once did and become a permanent fixture, *big bird* (see fig. 9) might exist in someone's hallway, being stroked as they walk past. Maybe they exist in a playground to interact with little hands and new minds. These pieces feel like they can move and disassemble and reassemble with time. The *soft felt logic* here is asking for the works to not be static but malleable, to build a life and fullness through interaction and use.

Through thinking about interaction, I've come to hold touch as abundant, the skin is the largest organ in our body, and it's primed to help us learn, experience, and feel. This relegation of touch outside of the gallery limits the growth and understanding that can come from making and interacting with art. How much does something weigh? What is its texture? Is it hard or soft? It's in touch that these questions can be pondered, and new understandings of tactility developed.



Fig. 7. Foreground: *butter*, 2024, wool, foam, wood, 18" x 64" x 16", made in collaboration with Cait Kalb. Background from left to right: *bumpy road*, 2022, wool, cotton, plastic, 18" x 58". *beep beep*, 2024, wool and cotton, 20" x 39". *big bird*, 2023, mohair and cotton, 3.5" x 3.5", photo by Laiken Breau.



Fig. 8. *a corrugated nudge*, 2023, cotton, 42" x 131", photo by Alison Postma.



Fig. 9. *big bird*, 2023, mohair and cotton, 8" x 3.5", photo by Laiken Breau.

COLOUR

Colours have settings. They have resonance when placed next to each other or they overtake one another and turn to mud, too close, too similar, they become one together. I like a bold combo. A pairing that could induce nostalgia/glee/disgust, could be used for a children's toy or candy. The unusual, slightly off hues are some of my favourites. They feel like CITRIC ACID on your tongue. The putrid pea greens or yellows paired with purple. The orange and blue – so clashing and complimentary – that they feel like they're yelling at each other. In this way, they become another medium/material to respond with and to.

Colour has been central to my approach to the *soft felt logic*. How do colours, tones, hues create dialogue and interactions that incentivise the experience of touch? This section is a closer look at the nuts and bolts of the making. Within, I look at the role of repetition scale, and texture. I think about the role that dyeing and creating unique colours has for this work. There is an exploration of material and a defense of material selection. I integrate more of myself into this section and find a way to explore sensorial merge which feels paramount to continuing the *soft felt logic*, the creation of a liminal and shifting understanding of the senses.

REPETITION

It is in the rigidity of the loom that I play. I find the task to be almost like a memory or mind game, I keep score in my head and count out the beats as I weave. The structure of weaving gives me boundaries and walls to lie against when my brain gets heavy and tired. Repetition in many ways lets my brain rest, while the vibrancy and textures please me, so does the simplicity of form and a repeatable action.

My methodology is iterative and autoethnographic. I am considering the viewer/toucher/participant/perceiver but also inherently implicating myself in the work. When I weave, I do a lot of planning before getting on the loom. The research includes sketching, sampling, and weaving. My practice is rooted in doing the same action repeatedly. Weaving is an additive and repetitious act that I find methodical and regimented enough to occupy my active brain. I strive to reach a moment of synergy with the loom — where the world floats away creating space for quiet escapism as a thought-silencing act. I use repeated and regimented patterns to communicate the

repetitions that are present in the making. My brain also finds patterns calming, maybe yours does too. There is a pull to order things/thoughts/feelings/understandings around me. In distorting these patterns, I hope to create visual disruptions and a release from an expected outcome, an incomplete pattern which is in tension with weaving and in tension in some ways with myself. For instance, in *tic tac toe*? (see fig. 10) I lean on my comfort in the grid to determine the background pattern and then the overall pattern is formed in the moment, on the loom, in relation to me, feeling the want and need that the piece is asking for. This kind of working, semi-improvisational, takes more out of me than following a predetermined pattern because there is more thinking, more back and forth, more consideration of what has been done and what remains to do. There is more room for error and a lack of control. In this way there is the tension of not knowing how they will turn out. There's power in the tension. Weaving works on a grid structure which I continue to work within/around/and through. I'm tied to the rigidity of my craft and the bodily involvement — touch — required to maintain my practice. Every thread is held, my body moves the loom, and design elements are measured to my scale, therefore, making is an embodied act and bodies hold relevance in my work.



Fig. 10. *tic tac toe*, 2023, cotton, 17" x 19", photo by Laiken Breau.

In working with bodies and making with the *soft felt logic* there is a reliance on intuition and skill to reach an aesthetic entity (Constantine and Larson 7). In extending the meaning of the medium and working with intuition ties back to the use of tacit knowledge. There is the ability to find space for creative freedom when the knowledge is held within the body, it creates more space for the unknown.

Now why repetition? Well, the reasons outlined above also because of the relationship repetition has to craft in general, the need to explore/expand/develop a skill set, I'm drawn to repetition as a tool.

August 16th:

Counting as I go to track the pattern changes.

One one

Two two

Three three

Four four

Five five

Six six

Switch to fuchsia

One two

Back to pink

Repeat

Beat harder and I feel the pressure in my shoulders stretching to work on the large piece.

42" slowly shrinking as it builds and becomes a fabric, taking form and drawing in

I beat harder trying to insert the cord picks/pile picks while also keeping the base fabric in line, in the right ratio. It's physically tiring. I only have a metre left and want to keep going, to push through but I stop.

I force myself to stop.

DYE

The choice of the colours featured in my works is influenced by aesthetic preference and research into colour theory and perception. I work with a semi-restricted palette to create continuity. The primary colours that I use are referential to childhood and playful in their saturation which

activates the gallery space and calls upon learned/experienced behaviour – pushing the toy cars across the carpet/clutching a much-loved stuffed animal and feeling its fuzz go up your nose – of interacting with said tones. Understanding the pattern clashing furthers the distortion of the visual plane and creates an optical blend. I am often frustrated with my colours. They won't act right; they pull each other's hair and create muddy muted messes. They can so quickly change a piece; it goes from modern and contemporary to dated and stagnant within a simple choice. For that reason, I try hard to think through and test different combinations of tones/hues/saturations. I think about proportion, scale, and relationships between tones, what story is being told by their proximity to one another? Placing complementary colours next to each other creates movement and vibration within the works which furthers that optical mixing and allows for discovery upon closer inspection. Weaving is a fantastic tool for colour blending because working with the grid system I can create a third tone from the interaction of warp and weft. Say I have blue and orange strips across the warp and weft, creating a gingham of sorts. The blocks where the blue pass over the orange creates a pixelated effect. Going under and over it creates a new tone on the woven surface, there is true blue, true orange, and their combined offspring. This mixing changes with proximity, from a distance they blend and up close the true tones are revealed and, in that way, they have brought you within touching distance of the work.

I like the idea of placings next to each other to see their beauty in relation, like a poem, building line by line. There is also a disruption in that side by side, for instance the simultaneous contrast in the work *mom it's making my eyes hurt* (see fig. 11) is so significant that the viewing experience is altered, it asks for the visual to be tactical and visceral, all through colour. In a *corrugated nudge* series, the colours are bright, bold and vibrating. Take for example *a corrugated nudge* (see fig. 8 above) the tones of the green corduroy catch the light differently and move around the surface of the pink grided ground. The wide wale corduroy is technique I have honed and utilize a lot within this show. The wales (the raised texture strip on the fabric is the wale) are created to the scale of my fingers and in this scale the original purpose/familiarity of the fabric is disrupted. What is left is something new yet familiar. The ridges of the wales flowing up and down the work are beckoning for a touch, a hand to be placed between them. This technique is utilized across *a corrugated nudge series* in a variety of materials, distances, widths, and densities to create diverse touch experiences. The colour in *big bird* (see fig 9. above) is very important, with its bright yellow pile, almost incandescent, but with layers of depth as you approach the work. *big bird* is a weft face weaving made of a cotton warp and hand dyed mohair weft in a variety of yellow to yellow-green

shades. It's finished with a traditional tapestry finish with a long dangling braid falling from one corner. The work is brushed, and the pile stands high off the surface. The size of the work is scaled to my palm and fingers when held out flat. These colours resonate with an energy that is bumping around the walls of my body, a frantic frequency. The yellows and blues are what I feel called to. They're loud and punchy. When I first started weaving, I only used white and neutrals to the extent classmates would tease me about it. At the time, I didn't know why, but there was something about the mass-dyed yarns that lacked a certain quality, a certain energy. I always found them hard to match and build with. So, I used white. In my second year of undergrad, I learnt how to dye with acid dyes and my whole work changed in what felt like overnight. There were now gross yellows, pea greens, royal blues and hot pinks to choose from. I had such an opulence of colours that I had to relearn how to use white/neutrals and their role in composition. This body of work has a mix of lot dye and hand dye.⁹ I challenged myself to better understand the colours available to me and be selective in when and where the hand dyed was truly needed. This was to save myself time and energy but also to expand my skills in using what is readily available. The loudness, I hope, will create a new relationship between self and object and demand to be felt. They're so loud and bright they're yelling at you to say hi.

⁹ I use the hand dye process of acid dye in my work. It involves creating unique colours using powdered chemical dye solutions. The ratios are mixed based on weight of goods in relation to pigment, and vinegar in a hot water solution. The process of hand dyeing allows for unique hues, tones, and colour and gives me more control over the colour at large. Lot dye refers to material that is dyed in bulk by the manufacture using predetermined receipts and creates a consistent reproducible colour. The benefit of lot dyeing is it saves considerable time and allows for easy reproducibility because you can order the exact same colour again and again.



Fig. 11. From left to right: *squish*, 2024, cotton, mohair, repurposed stuffing, 45" x 60" x 3". *crosseyed*, 2023, cotton, 19" x 33", photo by Laiken Breau.

PATTERN

Throughout this work, I've always been pulled in all directions. One idea propels another, propels another, shifting away from the initial concept until I've fallen down a long corridor of decision fatigue and creative exhaustion. With that we come to pattern. Pattern is a powerful tool in the weavers' tool kit. It can create movement, create nostalgia, and disrupt the visual plane. While making samples, they kept feeling dated in an odd way, like they were unintentionally paying

homage to the 70's. Much of this was due to pattern and colour. Plaid in a certain material or weave structure will read inevitability as a dish towel, a tight gingham gives a picnic blanket. These visual connections are made through the deep and rich banks of object memory. Immediately the brain tries to pull, place, organize, and form connections between what is being seen and what has been seen. And so, for these works I restricted my pattern choice - the grid. Giving myself the grounding and framework of a singular pattern repeated and slightly altered over the pieces created a sense of unity for the works and allows me to hone in on its formal qualities. I also selected the grid because as mentioned in the intro, it's something I love. The formality and walls of the grid make the work feel held and solid but moving. I like its relationship to weaving language of grid/warp/weft/vertical/horizontal and how it plays with other textures put upon it. The grid can be found in home furnishings but doesn't pull from the same memory banks as the plaids, herringbones, or checks do. It exists close and familiar but not over saturated in our textile world. Implanting patterns on top of patterns (see fig. 12 and 13) creates a further distraction and allows for a distancing from the original patterned form. While it is still using the grid, just imposing it on one another, it creates a visual disruption and a lack of completion for the brain. You can see the lines lead and follow but you can't follow them directly across the whole plain. In this way there is an interruption to the viewing, and it is in the interruptions where I hope the urge to investigate the works closer will be ignited.



Fig. 12. Samples of double weave, 2024, wool and bamboo, 10" x 10", exploring pattern on pattern, the two pieces show the front and the back of the work.



Fig. 13. *sisters not twins*, 2024, mohair and bamboo, 8" x 7.5", photo by Laiken Breau, an example of pattern exploration and looking at the idea of grids within grids.

TEXTURE

Something that I have thought continuously about during this making process is ‘What will the tactile experience be like?’ I found myself gravitating toward soft and supple textures that you can caress and fall into but wanted to make sure there were multiple touch experiences represented. This and my constant need for new ideas kept pushing the work into different directions, like should there be something slimy? Should I use found or rough materials? Fuzzy? Fluffy? Soft? Hard? I continue to ask these questions. In making and describing my making to others I did come upon a consistent feeling that I am looking for; I want to touch and to be met with resistance - to have something to push against. I have created the works to give that experience to some extent. I think of texture often and deeply, I sometimes struggle to find the words to describe it. The texture is an integral part of the touch experience. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her book *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* articulates texture:

I haven’t received a texture until I’ve instantaneously hypothesised whether the object I’m perceiving was sedimented, extruded, laminated, granulated, polished, distressed, felted, or fluffed up. Similarly, to perceive texture is to know or hypothesise whether a thing will be easy or hard, safe or dangerous to grasp, to sack, to fold, to shred, to climb on, to stretch, to slide, to soak... To perceive texture is never only to ask or know What is it like? nor even just How does *it* impinge on *me*? Textural perception always explores two other questions as well: How did it get that way? And What could I do with it? (13-14).

The questions Sedgwick asks are guiding, true, and helps ground ideas around object orientation and the *soft felt logic*.

MATERIAL

I use natural fibres as I find they communicate a texture I’m drawn to and the process of working with them is pleasant.¹⁰ Wool is a material I return to for its soft but scratchy properties, and the duality of its tactility as well as its sentimental qualities, it conjures hand knitted sweaters and the itchy scarfs I was forced to wear on the coldest days of winter. I’ve always enjoyed the fact that it is uncomfortable to some and pleasant to others. In speaking with my advisor Dorie Millerson one day, I realised that my personal bias for wool had affected its representation in the

¹⁰ Natural fibers are fibers derived from plants and animals. They’re divided into cellulose (plant) and protein (animal) fibers. Synthetic fibers are made using chemical synthesis, some common examples would be polyesters or nylon. There are some materials that are semi-natural like rayon which starts from a natural cellulose source but undergoes chemical processing to be created. Silk is also a unique fiber that falls between categories being able to be treated both like a cellulose and a protein fiber therefore bears similar qualities to both groups (Miao and Xin 3).

show. Everything was soft/fluffy/scratchy but not smooth. I realised that I needed a smooth shiny surface so turned to cellulose fibres to utilise their high sheen/shine and soft/smooth/cool hand feel.¹¹ What I find overwhelming in material selection - similarly to choosing colour - is the never-ending options. You turn the corner and encounter another material, another idea, another possibility. It remained important for me to use natural fibres in the creation of this work. While I see value in synthetics and understand the role that they could play I want my work to degrade/age/exist. This is a personal choice and I feel creates a more cohesive material landscape to walk within as the natural fibres speak to each other, in different tones and at different frequencies but their relationship is present.

Textiles are great storytellers. They hold the marks/smells/history within their weave. These works will hold the residue of the hands that touched them. They will age and change. They will bear the scars/signs/marks of their relationship to us, our hand, our touch. In this way, I ask the textiles to not only activate the haptic experience but to also illustrate relationality between object and self, object and other, self and other. The relationship between the textile and you feeling it and the relationship between your hand and the hand that has felt.



Fig. 14. *muppet*, 2024, mohair, cotton, plastic, 11" x 10.5", photo by Laiken Breau.

¹¹ Silk is a lovely material that exists across these understandings. It acts like a protein and plant fiber. Therefore, it too is soft and silky and smooth. I haven't utilised it in this work but do see the value of its properties.

SELF

Building on the idea presented above I want to look at the implications of the human in this work. My interest in this is because I deeply value touch within my life and craft. I view it as essential. The way that I feel/stroke/fiddle is unique and exciting. Through creating these works I hope to reignite/activate/expose the sense of touch for others. The selection of the bright colours pulls on childlike memories and taps into our sensorial memory which is strong and rich. The child feels held in this work because of the relationship to tactility that I see in children. There is an openness to learn through the hand, they want to grab and hold and squeeze their worlds. In touch there can be safety and comfort. There is the ability for it to recentre and reaffirm my place in the world, the tactile sensory history that can be traced to childhood for me. There is an urge to pull on these memories with the chance that they are shared and in accessing them the perceiver is more likely to fall into the *soft felt logic*. Apart from that, I'm interested in the relationship we have with objects. How do we touch objects? How does that contact change the way we relate to one another? The underlying idea of creating visual cues to the other humans' present – a fingerprint, a broken thread, a depressed cushion on a bench - is a call to relate us to our bodies and to one another. Classen writes that "sight requires distance to function properly, detaching the observer from the observed. Touch, by contrast, annihilates distance and physically unites the toucher and the touched" (277). You are touching those that have touched before. In textiles the lineage of physical impact is present on the surface, you see the hand of the maker, the hand of the user upon the surface of the cloth. It immediately relates you to others.

SENSORIAL MERGE

From dye, material, and texture I want to explore a sensorial merge that I feel is part of this *soft felt logic* I'm using. I was speaking with Dorie Millerson one day and was describing the different textures I had presented in the show when I said, "You know I need soft smooth textures to cleanse the palm." At which point Dorie paused and said, "Talk more about that" So here I am, talking more about that.

In my relationship to making/touching/feeling/creating/existing I can muddle and merge sensorial experiences. Sometimes, the words of one sense help accentuate the experience of another. In this case, with the cleansed palm, I was trying to find a way to understand why I might need a contrasting texture present in the show. When you've touched too much fluff, you'll need somewhere smooth to rest/recover like the coffee beans at the perfume counter or the palette

cleanser between courses. Using this kind of language and merging gives a grounding for others who might not be sure of my tactile use of language, it helps contextualise what I'm saying. In my proposed logic and way of thinking, sensorial merge is present because it feels like it upends the hierarchy, pushing against the separation of the senses into little boxes when they are truly all interwoven. This falls within my conception of tacit knowledge. This term is battered around craft bulletins and discourse. The way that I am looping it into this conversation is the understanding (and this is my definition) that tacit knowledge is held within the body. I understand it as the knowledge held by the muscles in my fingertips and the deep sense of knowing when a piece is right/done/complete/finished. Tacit knowledge is deeply tied to craft practice where bodily intervention is core to creation. It goes beyond muscle memory into muscle knowledge, not simply applying the skill but living and embodying it.

SPACE

Space is a beautiful loose term that encapsulates a lot of the questions/sections I have yet to explore. What are the spaces between threads/colours/patterns/textures? What kind of spaces am I making? How will the work relate to one another in space? In this section I think about space broadly.

I'm looking at the world around me, what space do I and my craft exist within? Whose categories do we fall under? In this section I want to look briefly at the historical context of craft. The craft I am referring to here is a category of made objects. I'm looking at the relationship between labour, taste, and the lifecycle of craft objects. I speak to the way that touch is prevalent in craft. Within the conversation of craft, the topic of function is a major consideration. Here function allows for a conversation around intention and uses Louise Mazanti's 'Super-Object' to build a discourse around the objects I create and their orientations in space. I look at how spaces can impart and input value onto objects using the gallery as a primary example. There is a conversation about exhibition design and the choices made when staging the show *hands holding, holding held*.

LABOUR

Let me deviate from the woven to the sewn for a moment. While my quilting practice does not factor into the works being shown for this exhibition it does inform my relationship to making and labour. I think of my quilts as a way to wrap my loved ones in my labour. When I speak about textiles, I anthropomorphize them to the extreme. Because for me they are living, they are big, and they deserve to be held and cared for. My quilting practice has been one of gifting. I create the work, and, in the creation, I learn who the piece is for - the quilt will tell me. Yet it isn't always time for the work to be gifted - sometimes it needs more time with me before it's ready to be loved by another - or I need more with it. The quilting process is the essence of labour. Labour in cutting/stitching/ironing/layering/pressing/piecing/stitching again. The quilt sits on me while I work, covering my body as it labours. I can look at the quilt and be brought into moments/hand motions/conversations surrounding me while I stitched. And the gifting is hard. I know it is beautiful but there is also a little ripping sensation, a moment of fear that the labour/love won't be understood. That they will view it as what it is, a blanket, not what it is to me, a vessel for emotion and a rhythmic exercise in commitment to a task. But the idea and essence of wrapping my loved ones in my labour feels real and right and like what we're supposed to be doing. Even if not all

aspects of the work are carried or held by the receiver/perceiver, they're held within me, and they were held within the work, and I like to think that remains. I wrap my loved ones in my labour gladly. I feel this way about the woven works staged in this show, they are a labour of love and an opening of the *soft felt logic* which is asking for interaction.

With this grounded self-examined relationship to labour, I want to speak to some other logics of labour. The Scandinavian concept of 'Slöjd'¹² which translates to handicraft, was developed into a Swedish educational model by Otto Salomon. He describes the practice in *The Teachers Handibook of Slöjd* as a method which prioritises:

pleasure in bodily labour, and respect for it, habits of independence, order, accuracy, attention and industry, increase of physical strength, development of the power of observation in the eye and of education in the hand (2).

I'd like to highlight the idea of 'pleasure in bodily labour' and the idea that the labour of the craftsperson is beneficial to them and their creation. When looking at craft practices the labour aspect of making is overwhelming. I hear in weaving communities the saying 'weavers are built differently' being tossed around because the process is such that if you didn't love it, you wouldn't do it. The labour in every aspect is lengthy, and in this labour, there is a connection. Connection to self/to body/to tool/ to history/to thought/to potentiality.

I was weaving recently and realised how imbalanced the workload is. I spend hours thinking/drawing/planning/charting/setting up to weave for a couple of hours and then the work is done. The proportions of labour are disparate.

People love to ask, "How long did that take?" and I can tell they're asking about how long the act of weaving took because that is how the work is understood, in the product. When I think of how long my work takes to make it's hard to understand. I've timed it and could say 'Oh about 4 hours' but it doesn't account for the time spent in my mind, the practice of weaving takes place apart from the loom as much as it does on it. When I finally get to weave there is a satisfaction in living in the moment, one that has taken so much work to get to. But there is also a hastening of the task, a want and need for completion, a blowing through of the action that took so much work to get to.

¹² This is a teaching method developed by Otto Salomon in the 1800's and had a focus on handicraft, practice through making, and a linking of motor and mind skills. It was thought to find benefit in handicraft for character building, intelligence, and industriousness (Salomon 1-18.)

I wager that this form of labour within the work and the practice further supports the idea of the handmade as being able to communicate effective/affective intentions. The hand of the maker is present in the creation of the work and in that way, the hand can be communicated to the viewer. When thinking about craft and labour the conversation inevitably migrates to William Morris, a renowned craft maker and key figure in the Arts & Crafts movement.¹³ I will use this quote from the chapter “The Revival of Handicraft” to frame some of my thinking, “almost all goods are made apart from the life of those who use them; we are not responsible for them; our will has had no part in their production” (Morris 300). What I aim to foreground is that it is in distancing the individual from the making process that there is a distancing from the product, the life cycle, the understanding, and the touch. The removal of the handmade is a removal of the hand. The maker will be a part of the work that is transferable to the observer through observational touch, limiting the distance between made and consumed as well as between maker and consumer.

FUNCTION VS NON-FUNCTION

? I'm always surprised when the things I make look functional.

What feels relevant here is to make a connection to the role that function has in shaping craft production and aesthetics. There is still an inherent need for craft objects to serve/succeed and in this way, they not only have aesthetic lines to adhere to but also functional ones. I'm speaking about how the idea of use and wear is important in a handcrafted object while directly referencing textiles. I feel as though there is beauty in the wear and visible use of a textile. The worn-out velour of a favourite teddy bear/thinned elbows of an old cardigan/the busted-out butt of your favourite jeans. They're markers of wear and time and care or carelessness. The mending of holes brings a different value to an item, it marks it as loved. These actions speak to the intention and value being given to the object. Returning to the thread that I'm holding throughout - *soft felt logic* - its intersections with function feel a bit tricky. While the work I make is non-functional, you can't clothe yourself in it or have it served an acute use (apart from *butter*) within the home, the designs and thought-making process that is present within the creation/methodology of traditional craft remains. Having

¹³ William Morris, 1834-1896, was a prolific craft maker in the England. His work in surface design was revolutionary at the time and continues to hold prevalence today. He was a key figure in the Arts & Crafts Movement. His work was a direct reaction against the industrial revolution and the changes in production that were happening that the time. Morris was revered for his emphasis on hand made textiles and wallpapers reviving older ways of manufacturing and working to gain ‘collective joy in labour.’ Later, in his life Morris dove deeper into his writing and worked to establish a socialist party in the UK trying to dismantle and highlight the class struggles of the time (“About William Morris”).

trained as a craftsperson the questions of applicability/use/desired outcome underscore all of my making decisions. While the question “Which fabric will be the warmest?” might be replaced by “Which fabric will create the most interesting hand feel?” the sequence of using the methodology of craft making remains, how do all the choices made to create the item serve its eventual goal? In her text “Super-Objects: Craft as an Aesthetic Position” Louise Mazanti proposes a logic of her own, the Super-Object:

The term *super-object* serves as a framework to describe the role of craft as a position that draws on both visual art and design discourses while still acting as an independent practice with independent meaning. A super-object is an object that exists parallel to the object category of the design commodity, at the same time as it contains (super-)layers of meaning that relate to visual art....The super object stands as a metaphor for craft as an independent practice, for a body object that grows out of design because they have a form-typological relation to functional objects, even as the objects’ artistic (aesthetic or conceptual) content is central (62).

Mazanti is building a bridge of sorts between the craft and art dichotomy that remains. It’s the understanding that craft can exist apart from function and within it at once. The allowance for craft to be combined with experience aligns with my work. My *soft felt logic* is asking to be held and interacted with and can exist within the context of the super-object. The work is apart from a single category. Mazanti also differentiates between ‘Process’ and ‘Doing:’

If the term *material culture* covers all manmade objects, we could say that under this umbrella, art, design, and craft objects play different roles—roles that originate in historical, economical, political, and philosophical conditions, which are not fixed positions. And I would like to propose that the role of craft objects is the most blurred of the three. I therefore suggest we move from the “making” to the “being” of craft, from the “process” to the “doing”, to the role it performs in contemporary culture (61).

I differ from Mazanti in that I don’t feel a distinction between the making/being/process/doing of craft. I think they are all present and referenced when I think about my making, but I see the distinction in relation to *material culture*. My intention is to bring the process and the being into the making/doing and into the perceiving/perception of the work so that these experiences don’t exist for the maker alone.

I continue to come back to the loom for the quiet. Not for auditory quiet - she’s a loud clunker - but for the quiet in the brain. In all aspects of the task, there’s a beautiful mix of hyperfocus and muscle memory. I can warp without thinking about the motions, but I need to be counting. I can do the threading motion on autopilot but need to remember my pattern and check for errors. I can treadle without thinking about where my feet are, but I need to count weft picks to

keep the pattern. In this way weaving creates a quiet where the other thoughts can fall away because it fills my brain.

TASTE (BUT NOT THE SENSE)

It's funny to use a sense term but to not refer to its sensorial relation, here I'm not referring to taste as in the salty sweet potato chips on your tongue but rather the societal implications that denote what is worthy. Taste can be tied to the idea of 'good' and relates to a difference in understanding between arts and crafts. I'm framing taste as a tool to think about the areas of craft that fall outside the understandings of art. This hierarchy of taste is important when thinking and writing about art and craft and how it reinforces societal norms. Sandra Alfoldy explains this 'taste' relationship to scholarly work concerning craft, "Art historians are not obliged to qualify that their scholarly publications focus on professional art, yet studies in craft history are still required to delineate between amateur and professional activities" (3). *Why must I qualify every aspect of my choices?* This distinction furthers the perception that craft is separate from art and the only way craft could be considered art is by distancing itself from the realm of amateur hobby craft. Lippard describes this privileging of art in terms of 'taste' as follows:

The prevailing relationship between art and 'the masses' has been one of paternalistic noblesse oblige along the lines of 'we who are educated to know what's correct must pass our knowledge and good taste down to those who haven't the taste, the time, or the money to know what is 'Good' (Lippard 484).

I'm aiming to disrupt the idea of 'taste' through irregular choices in colour, material, and display. And I continue to be compelled by how notions of taste determine the value and success of craft.

VALUE

Value is a compelling word when tied to craft. Value is subjective. Is the value coming from the skillful prowess and execution of the maker? Or from the use and applicability of the object? Or is it coming from the experiential value of the work? In this section, I try to understand my relationship to value and delve into how the spaces that crafted objects exist within can affect their 'value'.

Within the Western convention of art gallery behaviour, both within the public and commercial fields, there is an expectation of decorum and propriety when occupying these spaces.

An onus is placed on not touching, remaining distanced from the work, presenting work behind glass, being quiet (Coombes 57-68). This convention lacks the depth of understanding that I crave when viewing work from the context of a textile practitioner, I deeply value touch as an essential part of knowledge forming and connection. The history of these conventions is well researched; there was a shifting of museums from private collections to public domain during the Enlightenment era — monitored, and rigid (Classen 1-8). Because of the ubiquity of textiles in everyday life, there is a lack of consideration for their nuances within the museum context described above. In craft-based spaces (trade shows/artists' studios/craft fairs/retail spaces) there is an understanding that touch is an aspect of perception and therefore allowed with respect and approval of the maker. At the One of a Kind show in Toronto for example, makers have clear signs and demarcations about how to engage with their work and many will say “Pick it up, use it, that’s what it’s for.” There is an understanding that touching the item is part of the purchasing sequence.

I want to contextualise the formation of museum and gallery systems as they relate to the larger conversation of this thesis. While this won't be comprehensive, I feel it is important to speak about museums and galleries because textile objects traverse their boundaries and occupy both spaces. Mazanti uses the ceramic work by Danish artist Anne Tophøj to discuss the idea of craft objects within the museum context:

Tophøj's conceptual point of departure was the fact that craft and design objects undergo an essential transformation when they are institutionalized and displayed as parts of an art museum collection. Locked into exhibition cases, the formerly functional wares are linked to a conception of autonomy for which they were not originally intended (77).

What Mazanti brings to light is the intentionality of a piece. In my work, I am creating with the intention of touch. Tophøj's work plays with the idea of function within craft and what it means to place objects inside museums. How the space that objects reside within can influence their perceived intention. By placing crafted objects in the gallery, their ‘use’ shifts and can be reinterpreted but what doesn't change is the need for the things to be touched and held by hands to be understood. Pushing the material past the confines of history resonates with me but I affirm and uphold the history of craft-making because I believe in its value and place. I hold the history while trying to find a place for newness within my work.

EXHIBITION

2 dogs

5 drinks

Many hands

A few feet



Fig. 15. View of the gallery show *hands holding, holding held.* at the Ignite Gallery, photo by Laiken Breau.

Over the week that *hands holding, holding held.*¹⁴ was open I was able to watch the interactions/implications of the works come to life. I got to witness the transition from temporal idea or question into actual real time display. This section will touch on the curatorial choices made, walk you through the exhibition and give observations from the gallery floor. Figure 16 is the map didactic that was made for the exhibition and given to visitors, it can be used in this section to better understand the layout and interactions between pieces.

¹⁴ The tile *hands holding, holding held.* came from thinking with the works and what I hope happens to them, I hope they are held, that hands touch them, and that the touch doesn't end with the experience of the work but the tactile memory rests upon the hand that touches to be carried forth and held past the exhibition's run.

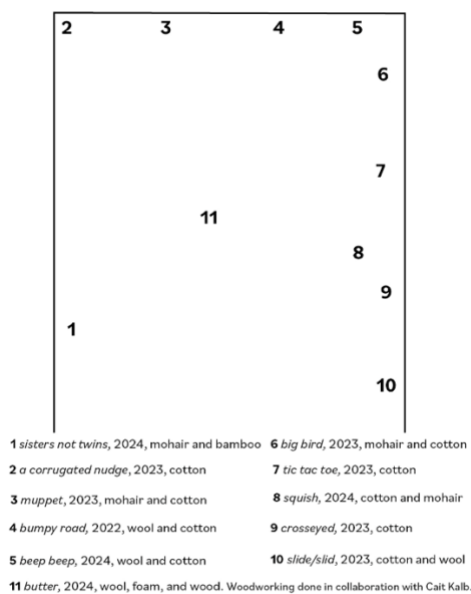


Fig.16. A map of the show made as a didactic for visitors to take and use in the space.

INSTALLATION

In the installation of *hands holding, holding held* I tried to bring the body into the space and have it considered by the work. *a corrugated nudge* is asking the perceiver to crane their neck and look up - up at the ceiling, up at the space above. *big bird* is small and innocent and asks to be approached, to bring the body close to the wall, eliminating space between you and the work and creating an opportunity to touch. By creating works that leak onto the floor (*squish* and *slide/slid*) I'm forming a path or navigational arrangement through the gallery and helping move bodies through the space. It's asking the body to bend over and approach the floor, hinge at the hips and bend at the knees and move within the space. Putting works high/middle/and low in the space is asking for the body to be active in the perceptive journey. In this configuration there is an observance of the space - floor, ceilings, walls.

The exhibition begins with the title text, which is flocked and fuzzy on the wall surface, adding a tactility from the very beginning. *sisters not twins* is the first encounter when moving from left to right in the space, the pieces are hung on the wall around eye level but still reachable with their long braids hanging off the corners breaking the frame. *a corrugated nudge* creeps over the wall into the corner, asymmetrically placed and deeply inset into the crevice, taut against the wall. *Muppet* - who is hung at a similar height as *sisters not twins* - is approachable/strokable/knowable. As you move along the wall you can walk against the bump in *bumpy road* brushing against the hip,

mirroring the body and the yellow lines move up to *beep beep* with speed and pace to find *big bird*. *big bird* sits with space and air around him, quivering under the vent above, feeling like the conductor of the yellow brigade. He transitions us to *tic tac toe* who is similarly mounted, hanging off the wall and has a long-twisted fringe that falls at hand height. *Squish* protrudes out onto the floor, asking for a consideration of the ground after being so focused on the walls. The patterns on *squish* are referential to *cross-eyed* (same colour palette, same technique), together they create a dialogue of the optical 2D and the animate 3D. Moving to *slide/slid* we come back to that low level, around hip height, and it spreads forward, reaching. It creates a border for the show and a path to follow that leads you to *butter*. *butter* is placed in the center of the room, length wise, and is a space for rest, reflection, and acknowledgment that moving bodies need places to stop, to be unmoving. The bench fabric is more muted compared to the rest of the show and is more familiar in terms of upholstery that someone may have encountered in the world. This is intentional to create an opportunity for the inadvertent touch – a passive touch. While I understand that the works in the show may not always end up being touched, I feel more confident in people’s willingness to sit on a bench placed in the gallery because it fits into the understood formatting of these spaces.



Fig. 17. closeup of indentation and touch on *butter*, photo by Laiken Breau.

OBSERVATIONS

While being at the space I witnessed all kinds of interactions with the works. People stroked/touched/pulled and played. With my active choice of not having dictating didactics there were opportunities for questioning and the unknown to emerge. I would let people occupy the space without being explicitly told that they were allowed to engage for a time. Some people wouldn't dare stoke without direct permission, some would do a sneaky little one thinking they wouldn't be seen, some would read the text and decode the meaning, finding validation in their tactile desires. *muppet* was a work that led to the easiest touch interactions because of the more explicit indication through the inclusion of the hairbrush. There was also the visual cue of activation present with the direction of the hair changing over time, people caught on to the changing fur landscape. And a lot of the touches seemed motivated by others, what were other people doing in the space? How were they interacting. This led to interesting questioning of how the exhibition could change drastically depending on who you were with and what else was happening around you.

A question that formed while observing the interactions was what kind of touches are allowed or expected when we say, "yes go ahead and feel"? If you say yes to one form of contact, do you inherently say yes to all? This question came from seeing people place their coffee cups/dirty bags/lemonade/wet raincoats on *butter*. Or witnessing owners allowing their dogs to walk over *slide/slid*. As the maker there's a part of me that screams at these interactions and doesn't want them to happen but also a tether to the thought of whether I have the right to dictate the way touch comes to pass. The line, for me, comes back to the initial formation of *a soft felt logic* which included the thought of touching with love and intention. Placing cups upon *butter* doesn't seem to hold love/intention and therefore I found comfort in a subtle comment of "could you place that on the ground?" While these thoughts are still forming and changing, they were unknown questions, they only came through the experience and activation of the space by the unknown, the perceiver.

Another way the space was unexpectedly activated was through *big bird* not just the movement but the fact that people began taking him off the wall to look at the French cleat mount and the back of the work (see fig. 8). This type of interaction again raises this question of what kind of touch is acceptable? This desire for interaction with *big bird* may relate to a beautiful reading of the piece in my defense, where it was described as small and innocent, asking to be held, and fitting perfectly in the palm. Perhaps this feeling was what motivated the removal of him from the wall and a holding in the hand.

hands holding, holding held.



Fig.18. *big bird*, 2023, mohair and cotton, 3.5" x 3.5", photo by Laiken Breau.

While gallery sitting and watching the interactions between work and people, I found a deeper connection to some of my more motivating questions. The idea of yearning kept returning with a louder clunk in my head. I was able to witness this yearning to some extent, the verbal communication coming from perceivers suggested that they were drawn to the colours or textures or forms. I saw the yearning in the faces that lit up when they were granted permission to touch after spending some time in the space. I felt like I saw the desire in all the different forms of touch that I witnessed. Being able to see the smiles/joy/delight/play present in the gallery space felt validating in holding the questions around yearning that I included in the introduction. I felt desire present in the space.



Fig. 19. *muppet*, 2023, mohair, cotton, plastic, 10" x 10", showing the touch interaction with the brush, photo by Laiken Breau.



Fig. 20. *slide/slid*, 2023, cotton, wool, 8" x 70", closeup of the hand interacting with the fabric, photo by Laiken Breau.

CONCLUSION

The thread that I have woven throughout this thesis is the *soft felt logic* asking to be held. It, at the root, is a simple call to hold and touch with intention and love. An ask to know objects fully and to be interested in the intricacies and secrets they hold between the fabric folds. I endeavour to try and put words/language/reasoning to the embedded and embodied act of touch. I hope to be able to add to the sensorial memory bank of the perceivers that walk through my exhibition, that something within the work sparks an interest/intrigue and they're able to feel something new or known.

I began this paper with the *soft felt logic* as a methodology that I found through making and writing and which I have used to try and understand/communicate what feels innate and known to me as a maker. To try and communicate the ephemera. Desire was guiding when developing this method because the urge to touch feels deeply connected to desire, the reaching towards something and having it meet you. In investigating the hierarchy of the senses, I created a space for understanding the intersectionality of sensorial experiences, how the visual language and world we live in can be interrupted/disrupted and what the possibility for engaged sensorial experiences could look like. The *soft felt logic* asks for the hierarchy to step aside and understands that the senses need to uplift/uphold one another side by side instead of on top of one another.

Within the creation of the handwoven works my body moved/laboured/rested/resisted, my body ached. My body is part of the work. Throughout I was thinking/thinking/thinking because the blessing and the curse of craft is how many options exist for any one idea, a never-ending stream, a well of contrasting possibilities. Through those waters I trudged to find my reasonings, the anchors to hold this project. The grid that lets me rest between its known walls and push it into new shapes. The colours of a crazed child that make me feel free and alive. The materials that are soft and caring for the work, work which I can be so hard on, so critical of. The repetition/repetition/repetition on repeat mirrors the thought patterns of my brain. While the *soft felt logic* is employed to think about how these things all interact on the textile, it is also employed in how I think about my making/being/crafting/acting/resisting.

In this paper I've expanded on the spaces that crafts occupy. Where do textiles exist in our surrounding world? How do they exist in different spaces like the gallery/museum/exhibition space? The *soft felt logic* asks for textiles to be considered in all these spaces, to be viewed as having reasons and purposes that may go outside the function of the space. And function alone should not be able to dictate value. For myself, the value of objects through the lens of the *soft felt*

logic is in the questioning of the perceiver to deduce the intention of the object and listen to the textile. The historical place and framing of touch in this section is used to understand the role that tactility has played in craft production and to ground my exploration as a maker in craft history and thought. I feel grateful to have found a field like craft which is so rich in its shared knowledge and deep love of material. The process of researching and thinking along with other makers/thinkers made it feel like these topics are infinite, that one of the many beauties of craft is its ability to be expansive. I feel lucky to share and contribute to the ongoing conversation.

Being able to experience the fulfillment of desire/yearning/touch through the mounting of the show *hands holding, holding held* allowed for a confidence in my creations. Watching them live and thrive apart from me in the gallery space and in many ways successfully answer the questions posed while also provoking new ones, feels like a great conclusion.

I want to return to some of the guiding questions put forth in this thesis. I asked how the use of material creates visual and physical textures that stimulate a yearning for touch. What is this yearning? How do colours, tones, and hues create dialogue and interactions that incentivise the experience of touch? What spaces do craft objects occupy? Through the broadening and reduction of my questions having this one float to the top felt inviting. It's clear and concise and answerable and unanswerable all at once. I wager that the *soft felt logic* is concrete and flexible enough to walk off after these pages have been written. It is held within the bodies and minds of makers and can be learnt or understood through practice and consideration. It is asking to reframe our interactivity and our reliance on visual language to open ourselves to joy that can be found in immersive/expansive/expressive tactile experiences. The *soft felt logic* asks the perceiver to contend with all of themselves, all of those who have come before, all of the maker, not just parts. Thinking through this logic has allowed me to feel grounded in my making, and in the knowledge held between my shoulder blades, running down my back and reaching out down to the creases and crinkles of fingertips and toes. My dream/hope/want is for you, the perceiver/reader/viewer/toucher/lover to walk into the world with the sense that we can be soft, we can feel, that there is power in the skin and there are stories in the cloth.

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