



made aware

By Brooks Harris Stevens

## ***Mending Gold: Longitude and Latitude***

**The meditative and ritualistic aspects of my studio practice are expressed through the common act of mending.** The basic form of repair achieved by hand connects my thoughts and ideas to the life of the textile and its role in our daily lives. This connects to the use, understanding, and appreciation of how these objects and materials serve significant roles in our lives. The understanding and love of cloth is one that continually drives my artistic interpretation, as my thoughts evolve from mending not only textiles but also to mending land and the built environment.

Taking non-traditional routes in my creative process allows me to discover new ways of making and pushing the boundaries in textiles. Stitching by hand connects me to the rich history of textiles and an understanding of what a needle and thread can achieve. These simple materials lead me to find answers and to determine new questions and ways of interpreting our lives in a rapidly changing world. ***Mending Gold*** is a series of work that addresses the life of worn cloth by expanding into worn paths in the landscape and built environment, as well as the economic and political realm. Mending is paralleled to the value and wealth associated with the use of gold in textiles and crosses all borders.

After three summers learning about the history, traditions, and material culture in the

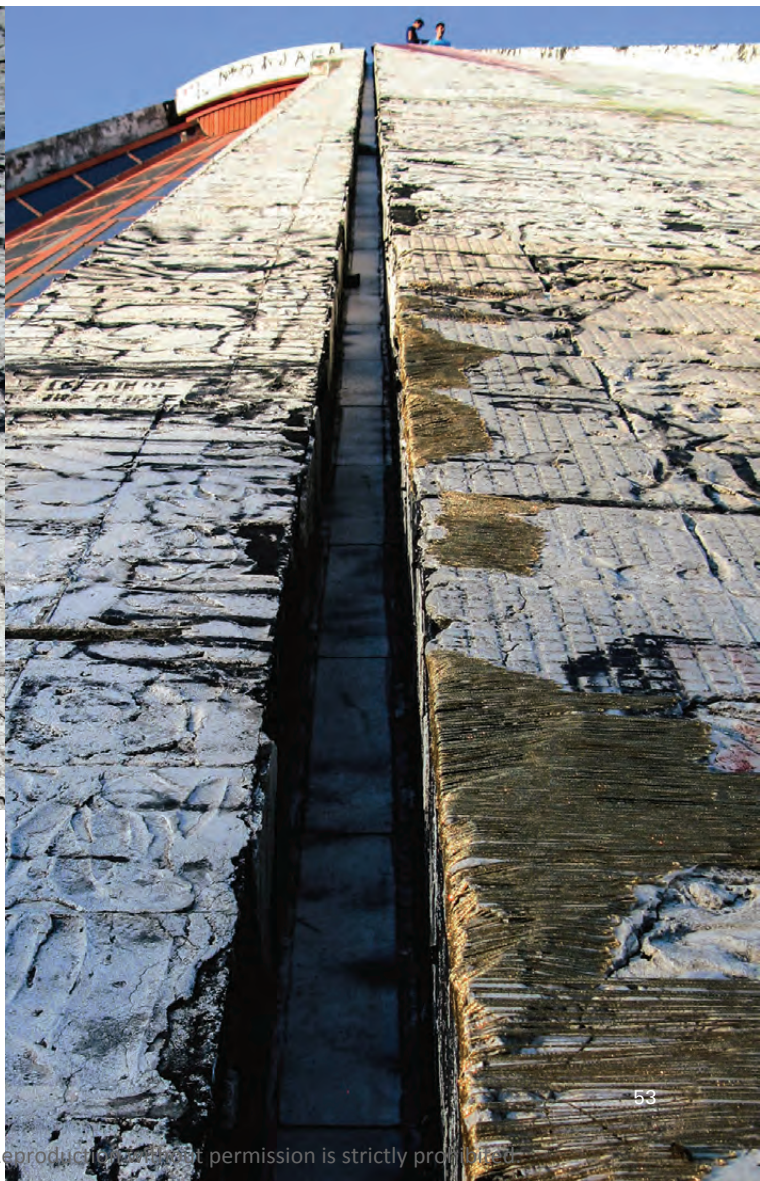




Balkans, I had the opportunity to mend a deteriorating building in **Tirana, Albania**. The Enver Hoxha Pyramid is one of the last communist monuments built in the region. Dedicated to dictator Enver Hoxha, citizens were uncertain whether to keep the building as a reminder of the past or to abandon the structure to build something new. As an admirer of Albania and its citizens, I was inspired to mend a part of the building. Better known as “the Pyramid,” it was originally covered in pristine marble. It currently stands stripped to the cement base, graffitied and condemned. Despite its steep incline, locals and tourists climb it daily to view the city. In ***Mending Gold: Enver Hoxha Pyramid, Tirana, Albania*** (2015), I was inspired by gold embroideries on Balkan textiles and applied gold yarn to crumbled areas of the

surface. The worn areas that were patched with gold yarn highlight the history of the building, skilled craftsmen, and citizens, adding value and support through the act of mending.

In May 2016, I had the privilege of mending a military bunker along a mountain ridge just outside of Tirana. Various sized concrete bunkers, built during the 44-year reign of the xenophobic communist government ruled by Enver Hoxha, are a ubiquitous sight throughout the landscape. At the fall of communism in 1990, there were 700,000 bunkers—enough to shelter about four Albanian citizens each if the country were attacked. Four ambitious and spirited Art and Design students from **Polis University** in Tirana and I hiked two days to mend a bunker. Each student had personal and unique experiences with the bunkers in their



**LEFT: BROOKS HARRIS STEVENS** *Mending Gold: Enver Hoxha Pyramid* 2015  
Exterior view of the Enver Hoxha Pyramid in the city center of Tirana, Albania.

**ABOVE:** The artist performing a mending with gold thread on the Hoxha Pyramid in Tirana, Albania.

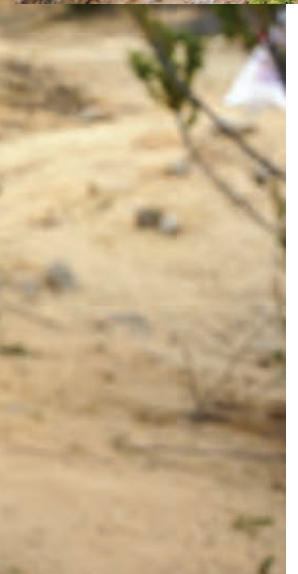
**RIGHT:** Detail of gold thread architectural mending.  
Photos by Brooks Harris Stevens unless otherwise noted.



hometowns. It was crucial to work with these young people, many of whom were born after the communist era, to help them mend the past and remember what history has taught us. Their sense of ownership and pride after completing the mending was humbling.

During a one-week trip to **Bucharest, Romania**, I met artists and entrepreneurs developing businesses in and around the Industria Bumbacului building located in the industrial sector. The revitalization of this former cotton-spinning mill is key to the development of new industry and younger forward-thinking generations. Inspired by the history of the building and the enthusiasm for renewal, I highlighted and mended missing areas of the rooftop by responding to the varying typography of painted brick. My understanding and appreciation of both the good and bad implications of the textile industry were shaped by growing up in the southern US. Selecting each rooftop area, I remembered what it means to lose the knowledge, skill, and dedication of each worker that was employed by the Industria Bumbacului, and how that loss affected the families and region. ***Mending Gold: Industria Bumbacului, Bucharest, Romania*** (2015) was mended to recognize vacancies that the textile industry left behind in Bucharest, and all of the abandoned mills in cities around the world.

This summer, I had an artist residency in **Leh, Ladakh**, in the northern high altitude desert region of India. Located in a disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir, Leh







**ABOVE: BROOKS HARRIS STEVENS**  
**Mending Gold: Bunker, Mount Dajti, Albania** 2016  
 An abandoned deteriorating military bunker in Dajti, Albania, after mending by the artist with gold thread.  
**LEFT** and **LEFT TOP**: Details of bunker mending.

**RIGHT: BROOKS HARRIS STEVENS Mending Gold:**  
**Industria Bumbacului, Bucharest, Romania** 2015  
 The artist mending the rooftop brickwork of the Industria Bumbacului building (former cotton-spinning mill) in Bucharest, Romania, with gold thread (and sunscreen). Photo: Jim Stevens.







ABOVE: BROOKS HARRIS STEVENS *Mending Gold: Leh Palace, Leh, Ladakh, India* 2016. The artist mending a wall with gold thread below Leh Palace overlooking Oldtown in Leh, Ladakh, India. Detail BELOW and TOP. Photos: Jim Stevens.



is precariously positioned next to the bordering countries of Tibet, Xinjiang, China, and Pakistan—all added to the complexity of the once preserved Ladakhian culture. Leh is filled with a dynamic landscape, from snow-covered mountaintops to sun-drenched stone-filled alleyways with homes, businesses, Buddhist monasteries, and mosques harmoniously blending into the terrain. The architecture that preserved so much of the culture is threatened due to climate change over the past 50 years. Once preserved and sheltered from the monsoon by the high altitude of the Himalaya Mountains, this desert region has become threatened by increased rainfall. I worked with a group of American, Canadian, and French architects researching and documenting aspects of the traditional stone and mortar construction of local buildings, which cannot withstand the deterioration from changing climate conditions.

Inspired by the landscape, textiles, and community, I thought about what it would mean to mend one of the thousands of walls in need of repair. For *Mending Gold: Leh Palace, Leh, Ladakh, India* (2016), I mended a portion of a stone wall just below the nine-story Leh Palace. I intuitively stitched the crumbling lines of mortar between stones with gold thread, admiring the drastic contrasts within the landscape. Just as the architects seek to find a solution to preserve the distinct architectural style of Ladakh, I also seek to mend and help preserve a culture at risk from outside forces.

As an avid traveler, the *Mending Gold* series has developed into a way to conceptually connect, not only with cloth, but also with people and cultures worldwide. I hope to connect viewers to see the commonalities, admire differences, and seek positive change by applying a universal and simple act of mending to specific locations. These new discoveries help to understand the complexities of history, politics, industry, body, and protection, as I move forward in my studio practice and life.

Brooks Harris Stevens' work is included in:

*World of Threads Festival 2016* at Queen Elizabeth Park Community and Cultural Centre, Oakville, Ontario, Canada (through November 27, 2016). [www.worldofthreadsfestival.com](http://www.worldofthreadsfestival.com)

*Material Connections* at Kent State University Art Gallery, Kent, Ohio (through December 3, 2016). [www.kent.edu/galleries](http://www.kent.edu/galleries)

*Textile Art of Today* at Moravian Museum, Uherské Hradiště, Czech Republic (November 2016–January 2017). [www.textileartoftoday.com](http://www.textileartoftoday.com)

—Brooks Harris Stevens is an artist and Associate Professor at Eastern Michigan University, where she has been the Fibers program coordinator in the School of Art & Design since 2007. Additional mendings are planned in the Balkan region during her upcoming 2017 sabbatical. [www.brooksfiberart.com](http://www.brooksfiberart.com)