



CURRENT STATEMENT AWARD

Holly Wong

she/her | San Francisco, California, US

I grew up in Miami, Florida and my first exposure to sewing was through my mother. We sat together at her Singer sewing machine as she created her own clothing patterns. My job was to cut out the shapes as she deftly assembled them. She was resourceful and could make anything in her imagination. A childhood friend's family owned a quilt fabric shop, and I would spend hours in the store fascinated by the patterns and the myriads of historic quilt block designs. Though I later spent many hours painting and drawing, these vivid first impressions sparked a love of fabric that always remained with me.

After completing high school, I moved to the West Coast to study studio art with a focus on interdisciplinary approaches. For the past twenty years, I have worked in a broad range of mediums, including traditional drawing and painting, collage, performance, video and photography. However, I have always returned to working with fiber. It grounds me and is a throughline through much of my practice. I live and work in San Francisco, where I create fiber-based installations that range in size from five feet high to room-size immersive environments, exploring grief, healing and resilience. As my practice has

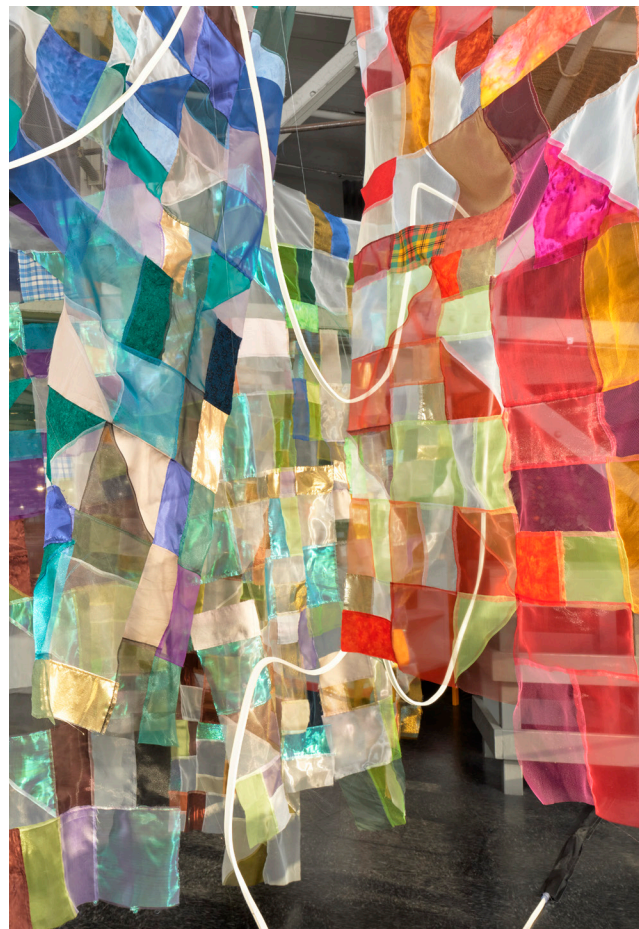
matured, I realized that the sewing line was another kind of drawing line and fiber became a fully integrated part of my work. I never feel like I must “pick a lane” in terms of medium as I feel that my fiber informs my painting and collage work and vice versa.

In terms of art history influences, my work is situated in the work of the Pattern and Decoration movement, second wave feminist artists, the California Light and Space movement, and the rich alternative history of quilt making and craft. From a cultural perspective, though I am Caucasian, I have an adopted culture as my husband is Chinese American. Learning the Buddhist tradition from him, as well as adopting the beautiful Chinese burial customs which include cloth burial blankets, my work has become layered with this additional cultural meaning, as these traditions shape the way that I think about grieving, death and the afterlife.



Holly Wong, *Deconstructed Quilt 1*, 2022. Silk, cotton and organza with LED lighting, 60 x 60 x 18 inches. Photo: Wes Magyar.

In my wall-based installations “Deconstructed Quilt 1” and “Deconstructed Quilt 2,” I use a flat felled seam technique inspired by Korean bojagi with transparent fabrics such as silk, organza and netting, sewn with invisible thread. I combine these ephemeral materials with LED strip lighting and photo diffusion film so that the LED light connected to the wall has a blurred or diffuse effect. My larger scale “Body of Light” installation suspends from the ceiling using aircraft cable and involves similar materials and approach. What is different about “Body of Light” is the fact that the piece was installed in front of windows facing the San Francisco Bay. It was a site-responsive work for the Fort Mason Festival pavilion as part of Art Market San Francisco 2023. My gallery SLATE Contemporary had suggested that I make a work that integrated the incredible light of the Bay Area as seen through the layers of the fabric itself. It was exciting to see visitors walk through the work and interact with it, at times relating to it as a kind of haven.



Left page: **Holly Wong**, *Body of Light*, 2023. Silk, organza, lame, cotton and netting with LED lighting, 180 x 132 x 84 inches. Above: detail. Photos: John Janca.



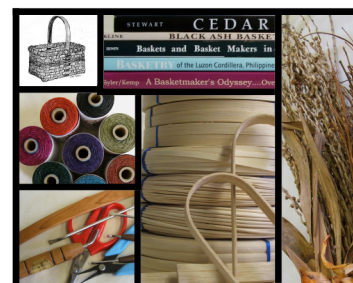
Holly Wong, *Deconstructed Quilt II*, 2022. Silk, cotton and organza with LED lighting, 60 x 60 x 18 inches. Photo: Wes Magyar.

From a personal perspective, I make my work in part to memorialize my mother whom I lost to alcoholism and domestic violence when I was 15 years old. Her love of sewing further imprinted the essential nature of fiber in my practice as my act of sewing became my homage to her. I am continuing her tradition but in my own contemporary approach. In creating my fiber installations, my goal is to provide a healing space for people who have faced trauma, whether it be through domestic violence or other forms of abuse such as racism, homophobia or political persecution. I sew as a journey towards wholeness, both for myself and for my larger community. My work seeks to reclaim the female body and bear witness to the spirit by emphasizing the vibrancy of pattern and flow, the softness of the fabric and the ever-present lightness of both natural and LED light. A major throughline in my work is the wound or scar and the power of taking back the night by healing the scar. Creating works of beauty in brokenness is my highest form of resistance.

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