

Patricia Miranda's lace and fabric works at Jane St. Art Center

by **Lynn Woods** April 21, 2022 in **Art & Music**



Artist Patricia Miranda. (Photos by Dion Ogust)

In March 2020, just as the lockdown was going into effect, Patricia Miranda posted an image on Instagram of some lace she had inherited from her grandmothers and dyed. Miranda, an artist, curator and educator, had been using natural dyes in her art and educational programs for 25 years, but to her surprise, it was the lace that caught a visitor's attention. The woman sent an enormous box full of lace to Miranda, the first of many such donations. "I touched a heart string," Miranda recalled. She began to document the lace donations, which currently number in the thousands and have been collected in what she calls The Lace Archive; each piece is photographed, identified by its owner or maker, a written story attached (if there was one, and often there is), and cataloged.

But the New York City-based artist also was inspired to incorporate the lace fragments into works of art, which she thought would be a compelling way to make visible a meticulous labor of care by women formerly confined to the home. The results are on display in "A Repairing Mend," a solo exhibition of Miranda's lace and fabric works that runs until May 8 at the Jane St. Art Center, 11 Jane St Suite A, Saugerties.

The centerpiece of the show is *Lamentation for a Reasoned History*, a monumental wall piece measuring approximately 10 feet high by 35 feet long that takes lace out of the closet, so to speak — out of the musty boxes crammed full of hand-sewn fragments many of us inherited from our grandmothers and great-grandmothers (and don't

know what to do with). Its scarlet color is derived from a dye made from the cochineal insect, which is indigenous to Mexico and Central America and was used by native cultures thousands of years before the Spaniards arrived (Miranda sources the dye from Peru). Lace enjoys a second life, transformed from the eye-straining needlework that evolved painstakingly from women's fingers into large, Modernist-inspired artworks whose formal placement in the two adjoining galleries suggest the precincts of a sacred space.



Work by artist Patricia Miranda at the Jane Street Art Center in Saugerties.

This sense is heightened by the dramatic but limited palette of the pieces — either deep red, the color of passion, in the case of the lace

pieces, or white, in the case of pieces made from aprons, shirts, and other items of clothing, a color that signifies purity (and in Chinese culture, death). In the rear gallery, a mysterious sculpture comprised of white fabric pieces resembling a hut or enormous skirt is framed on either side by red lace works hung from the ceiling, resembling chuppahs (the canopy suspended over the bride in traditional Jewish weddings), a symmetrical arrangement fit for a temple. (Miranda said she devised the pieces as a way to utilize the wires already hanging from the ceiling.) There is a sense of ceremony, of sanctuary. The transparency of the lace — lacking a substrate, the lattice-like structure of thread is referred to as *punto in aria*, or line in air, which gives it a tensile strength — and the whiteness of the aprons and other textiles convey a sense of dematerialization. We've entered a spiritual realm, whose narratives and expressions are signified by the merest wisp of a thread.



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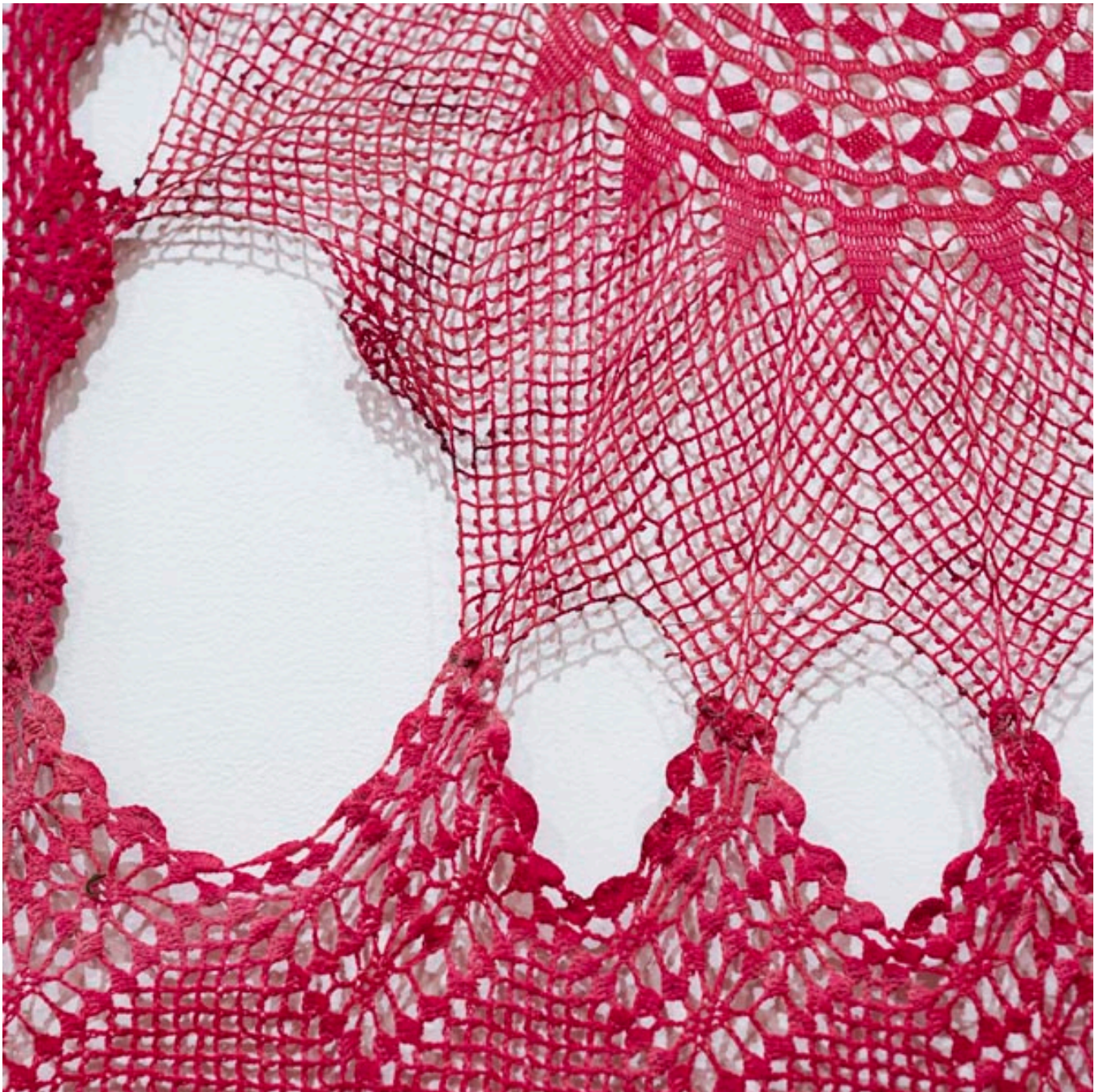
Indeed, one of the appeals of the medium of found lace and textiles is the slender environmental footprint, Miranda noted. She only uses natural dyes, which include not only cochineal insects but also oak gall wasp nests and mineral clay — materials with a rich history rooted in ancient indigenous cultures. The malleability of her materials enables her to fashion the pieces to the space (and their portability means she doesn't have to rent a warehouse for storage.) While she recently had a similar show of lace and fabric pieces at the Garrison Art Center, she made adjustments to *Lamentation* so that it would better fit into the Jane St. Art Center gallery (for example, she increased the height of *Lamentation* to accommodate Jane St.'s higher ceiling).

Much like an antique patchwork quilt, *Lamentation* transforms the collective handiwork of unknown artisans (though a few of the pieces she's collected are machine-made synthetics, most are of linen, cotton or silk and sewn by hand) into a Modernist vocabulary that unifies the fragments, which vary in scale and design, into a mural-sized rectangle imbued with syncopated rhythms. To highlight the intimate relationship of textiles to the body (which is wrapped in fabric from birth to death) as well as the elegiac quality of lace as a cultural artifact once integral to women's lives, Miranda has attached clay and plaster ex-votos of various body parts to the lace.

The massing of such intimate domestic items as aprons, handkerchiefs, napkins, doilies, and antimacassars into several large

circular wall pieces entitled *Enwrapped in Arms Unfolding* powerfully signifies absence, of those hands that knitted, sewed and embroidered, of those bodies that wore the hand-embroidered aprons. There's a sense of mourning, enhanced by the draping and droop of the fabric, commemorating unsung labors and anonymous lives. The association is heightened by the sculptural installation of the hut-like structure covered in shirts, skirts, and other linen and cotton items in the rear gallery. It might depict an enormous skirt, which "is a powerful association," said Miranda, noting that the interior is hung with more linens, comprising its own installation. "There's the image of the Virgin Mary in which she has the whole of the church under her skirts." Just as with the lace, many of the aprons were donated. At first, she wasn't sure what to do with them. "I was looking at them one day and saw these ties and thought of forlorn arms," she recalled. "Some of these aprons are so carefully and beautifully adorned. Some were embroidered by children, as a way for them to learn how to embroider."

Rounding out the show are Miranda's drawings of lace patterns on gilded glass panels (she draws by removing the gilt with a wooden styles). A second series utilizes graphite and rabbit skin glue on gold leaf. These ghostly images distill a material that's already only half there, interpreting lace as a mere imprint in the sand, an intricate atmosphere composed of snowflakes.



Work by artist Patricia Miranda at the Jane Street Art Center in Saugerties.

Miranda, who teaches at Montclair State University and New Jersey City University, is a founder of the artist-run organization The Crit Lab and MAPSpace, has advised several MFA programs, taught curatorial studies, and been awarded numerous grants and residencies. Two events will enable her to share her expertise with the public. On April

23 from 4 p.m.-6 p.m. the gallery is sponsoring a family workshop in which kids and adults can learn about natural dyes; they'll get a chance to dye their own piece of linen. On May 7, also from 4p.m.-6 p.m., Miranda will be joined by Elena Kanagy-Loux, co-founder of the Brooklyn Lace Guild, for a Lace Study Day. (Kanagy-Loux, a descendant of the Amish who grew up in the U.S. and Japan, spent four grant-funded months studying lacemaking in Europe and is the collections specialist at the Antonio Ratti Textile Center at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.) The two women will present a "lace study box" and examine various samples of different kinds of lace to discuss in depth this unique craft. Visitors are also welcome to donate lace during the course of the exhibition.

"Patricia Miranda: A Repairing Mend," is at the Jane St. Art Center, 11 Jane St., Saugerties, open Thurs. noon-5 p.m., Fri. and Sat. noon-6 p.m., and Sun. noon-5 p.m. Through May 8.

Call (508) 241-0273 or see <https://www.janestreetartcenter.com> for more information.



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