



TISHMAN CENTER · JUNE 7, 2019

"The act of making together, both the technical and the expressive" - report on Donna Maione's faculty grant

On April 27th, 2019 research participants and design facilitators gathered together at [Bailey's Cafe](#) for its eighth and final workshop series: *Redesigning Communities: Mending and Textile Waste*. Bailey's Café is a community space based in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn founded by Stefanie Siegel. Through community-based organizing and artistic expression, they build intergenerational connections and story sharing, exposing participants to new experiences, honoring the stories of those whose voices are seldom heard and helping to develop a sense of possibility, healing and renewal. The research team was lead by Donna Maione, sustainability design researcher and Parsons faculty member, with design facilitators and Parsons graduate students Natalie Tillen and Abhishek Nair, and Parsons alum Hong Yu. It was a celebratory day of welcoming in the larger community to engage with the theme of textile waste, to share the accomplishments of the workshop participants, and make visible our co-created results. The series of workshops, made possible by a faculty support grant from the Tishman Environment Design Center. Each of the workshops corresponded to the previous as a way to build skills. The day culminated in a mix of co-designed activities: hand-embroidery on a collective story-

cloth, completing sewing projects, and a clothing swap/give-away of reclaimed garments. Participants engaged in a variety of ways; both in group dynamics and on an individual level, exploring various methods and approaches to reducing the amount of textiles going to landfills by repurposing, mending and up-cycling. However, the work always related back to the personal connection to the cloth. The eight workshops created the conditions for learning and collective making together and incorporating technical skill-building, from how to sew a seam on a sewing machine to the expressive pattern design of mending. Each participant worked on small projects, some in collaboration; pillow covers, placemats, upcycled jeans into a skirt, material preparation for making a quilt top and so on.



Each participant had a 'need'

In speaking with the participants along the way, different needs were expressed. One participant conveyed needing to only have one project on-the-go at a time and the means to do it. She came into our first dedicated making workshop with a plan: (i) what she was going to do/make (pillow cases), (ii) how she was going to do it (came prepared with her fabrics from FabScrap and her personal sewing machine) and (iii) a sense of how long it would take her. Another participant was emotionally conscious of engaging with mending and making; her grandfather was a tailor, her mother made everything for their family, and she herself spent a big portion of her life making her own clothing. Her need was having

the freedom to choose her engagement level, from casual mending to dedicated making. There was another participant who was brand new to the entire sewing experience. Inviting her to have a look through the bags of reclaimed garments from Eileen Fisher, she began to pick out colors and fabrics she liked, which made her feel more comfortable in the space. Donna was able to facilitate a conversation about how she might repurpose a garment into something else. Once Donna got her on her way with pinning the fabric, she began to further familiarize her hands with the making process. Throughout the eight sessions, design facilitator Abhishek video documented the experience. [This short film](#) gives insight into the why this environmental awareness project is important at a community level and shares the experiences of some of the people and happenings that were experienced along the way.



Zero waste project

Tishman Center

02:32

As a collective, our need was skill-building together from our multifaceted levels of experience, talking out the processes and laughing a lot. The act of making together from both the technical and the expressive, created a rich shared learning environment. This project demonstrated that watching and listening to others experiment trying new things & picking up old things can bring people together in a way that is both healing and transformative in how we care for each other and our planet. *Written by Natalie Tillen, Parsons Graduate Student*



Comments (0)

Newest First

Preview POST COMMENT...