

# WHAT LIES BENEATH

WOMEN — POLITICS — TEXTILES

CALL FOR PAPERS

## Weaving Cultural and Personal Memory

Academic Symposium, 28 April 2022, 4–7pm  
Murray Edwards College, Cambridge  
(in-person)

THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN cultural and personal memory underpins textile art produced by women. Conventionally associated with the domestic, and therefore traditionally excluded from the realm of fine art, textile art is invested with an individual resonance while also carrying a wider cultural and social significance.

In Stella Mae Pettway's *Big Wheel* (1986), the quilt design is both abstract and representational, made up of brightly coloured concentric squares and circles. The artist is a member of the Gee's Bend Quiltmakers, a group of women living in a remote African American community in Alabama, where quilting techniques have been passed down through generations of women. Uninhibited by the conventions of fine or folk art, the Gee's Bend quilts constitute a crucial chapter in global art history. The interplay between symbols and asymmetry refers to histories of African American textiles while also evoking the formal qualities of European Modernist painting. The Gee's Bend Quiltmakers possess a shared visual vocabulary, while also expressing their own personalities and individuality.



Stella Mae Pettway, *Big Wheel* (1986),  
Courtesy the Artist and Alison Jacques, London  
© Stella Mae Pettway / Artists Rights Society (ARS),  
New York and DACS, London

As in Gee's Bend, textile-based works often serve a dual purpose, having a practical function while also recording the historical narrative of a specific community. Situating these questions within the disciplines of art history, art practice and visual culture, the academic symposium 'Weaving Cultural and Personal Memory' invites participants to examine the collective and individual histories inscribed in textile art. This is an opportunity to think critically about how conventionally domestic practices fit into broader social and political contexts and why the medium of textiles specifically lends itself to this type of art-making.

We invite contributors to propose papers across a range of cultures and periods, addressing topics that may include but are not limited to: personal and collective storytelling through textiles, textile art as political protest, the therapeutic potential of textiles and textile art as a means of memorialisation. We welcome abstracts of no more than 250 words by 5pm on 11 March 2022. Presentations should not exceed 15 minutes. The symposium is open to academics and graduate students in any discipline, as well as artists, critics, and curators. Please submit abstracts and a short bio to Antoinette Roberts at [adr49@cam.ac.uk](mailto:adr49@cam.ac.uk).

Organised to coincide with the exhibition *What Lies Beneath: Women, Politics, Textiles* (17 February – 28 August) at the New Hall Art Collection, Murray Edwards College, Cambridge.