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MENDING THE PUBLIC SPACE THROUGH COLLECTIVE WEAVING AND EMBROIDERY

Where might one begin the story of a seminal experience gestated in the realm of the everyday? And how might one measure the political dimensions of intimate space? It's hard to know what everyday thing, act, or phenomenon will morph into a memorable milestone, marking a point of no return, the foundation of something new. Perhaps something unexpected emerges when the seeds scattered and planted by those before us spontaneously sprout.

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Photos courtesy of House of Time Cultural Center, at the Autonomous Metropolitan University.

Universities harbor this great potential; given their public natures and their function as spaces for criticism and thought transformation, they gather multiple people, who, across time, nurture the soil with their actions and deliberations so that projects that might not have flourished in other contexts may thrive.

Sensitive to the exchange of knowledge, this parcel of fertile land at the House of Time Cultural Center of the Autonomous Metropolitan University was home to Patchwork Healing Blanket/*La manta de curación*, a community arts project envisioned by Marietta Bernstorff in 2019. The project employed the patchwork textile technique as an axis for the collective desire to end violence against women, children, and Mother Earth. Drawing from a tradition being resignified across women's circles around the world, weaving and embroidering can catalyze collective cultural action to heal and cure the normalized presence of violence.

This space for the construction of meaning, fostered by the project and by the House of Time, would host the "artist" embroidery workshop led by Ivonne Ortiz Saavedra, which was designed to accompany the open call for pieces for Patchwork Healing Blanket/*La manta de curación*. As the months went by, workshop participants came together to form a group they called The Women Embroiderers of Time, meeting on a weekly basis to review and assemble the textile material gathered in the bright rooms of the House of Time.

The collective aspect of their work is worth mentioning, and the group's openness to anyone who wished to participate greatly contributed to the project. Women from the neighborhood joined, attracted to the group's dynamics, along with

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artists bringing their own pieces, community workshop participants, feminist academics, and artist embroiderers, all of whom shared the open call among their communities. In the end, they all joined this great team to craft the blanket.

Women Embroiderers of Time became a “*colectiva*” of collectives (the Spanish *colectivo* is subversively gendered with an “a” to signify a women’s collective). Their enthusiasm for cultural community action paved the way for the project Patchwork Healing Blanket/*La manta de curación*, presented publicly at the Zócalo, Mexico City’s main public square, on January 26, 2020.

We must recognize the support that myriad areas of the university community lent to this project: first, we should thank the General Dissemination Coordinating Office, which recognized the relevance of housing a cultural project of this kind on its premises; academically, at the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM), we received support from the Master’s Program in Women’s Studies and the Doctoral Program in Feminist Studies, both at the Xochimilco campus, which shared the open call, proposed areas to accompany the blanket’s public presentation, and installed tents providing psychological and legal aid to those at the event; likewise, we received ample support from UAM Feminist Collective, with students from several UAM areas guiding the conversation spaces and helping with the logistics in general.



Given the collaboration with the university's academic bodies, the blanket project created ties with other groups with inclinations for the arts and textile activism. For instance, the community of Chilean women in Mexico, whose social movement is heavily articulated around embroidery, spread the open call across their networks in support of the project. Likewise, the Art, Creativity, and Feminism Colloquium, focused on activist embroidery and organized by Eli Bartra, PhD, at Casa del Tiempo in late October of 2019, spread the open call and the project among its specialized public, leading to the active participation of Frederique Drillhon, Rosa Borrás, and Liliana Elvira Moctezuma, who had presented at the colloquium and became stalwart in their commitment to the Patchwork Healing Blanket/*La manta de curación* from then on.

Regarding the project's meaningfully collaborative aspect, I would also like to mention the cultural groups and collectives at the House of Time: the Women's Urban Narrators' Collective, a group of neighboring women liaised by Mária Cervantes, Aurora Escoto, and Carlos Alfaro; the group of embroidering women at Factory of Arts and Crafts (Tláhuac Lighthouse), with Erika Karina Jiménez, Mabel Arellano Luna, and Alejandro Rincón, and the volunteer group yz Proyectos, coordinated by Rosa Morales and her team. At House of Time, we benefitted from the

invaluable support of Francisco Arellano and María Guadalupe Montiel Salinas. The First Printing House of America, our sister facility that gave us support and refuge on the weekend of the event, was also key.

To conclude, I would like to recognize the Embroiderers of Time, who came to know each other throughout the process and contributed to our commitment, work, life philosophy, and empathic listening. My sincere gratitude goes out to Ivonne Ortíz Saavedra, who started and directed the embroidery workshop and gave the group structure, as well as to Guadalupe Arreola, Lourdes Almeida, Frédérique Drilhon, Magali Pérez, Samantha Medina, Jimena Cancino, Cecilia Alvarado, Tessa Brissac, Osmayra Córdoba, Guadalupe Montiel, Dora Napolitano, Karen Schmeisser, Guadalupe Huacuz, Liliana Elvira Moctezuma, and Virginia Lara.

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Ludmila Díaz LR