

# So Far and Yet So Near: The Artistic Residencies of Contextile Biennale Amidst a Pandemic

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# So Far and Yet So Near: The Artistic Residencies of *Contextile Biennale* Amidst a Pandemic

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Inês Jorge 

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Inês Jorge is a PhD student in History of Art at the University of Birmingham, with a doctoral scholarship from Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT). Her thesis analyses the exhibition of craft in the twenty-first century, and the ways in which different display contexts have shaped the definition of craft. Her publications in the field of exhibiting craft include an exhibition review of *Contextile: Contemporary Textile Art Biennial* and its artistic residencies as a strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic (*Journal of Curatorial Studies*, 2021).

### Abstract

Held in the Portuguese city of Guimarães since 2012, *Contextile: Contemporary Textile Art Biennial* was one of the first international events to adjust to the successive lockdowns of COVID-19. Its fifth edition in 2020 included an artist-in-residency program, with two of the eight participants working remotely from their studios. This essay examines the combination of on-site and distant approaches to making and curatorial practices as a response to the pandemic. It starts by briefly tracing the history of textile production in Guimarães, as well as the particular circumstances and display context of *Contextile's* artistic residencies. I then move on to analyze some of the projects conceived by the artists-in-residence in 2020. My aim is to illuminate the ways in which correspondence emerged as a tool to bridge artists, communities, the biennale staff, craftspeople, and place. In this context, the exhibition of the artistic residencies at the Convent of Saint Anthony of the Capuchins enabled the reification of

far-off encounters, along with the exploration of past and present experiences of industrial collapse and a developing health crisis.

**Keywords:** craft; exhibitions; artistic residencies; domesticity; COVID-19; biennale; site-specific art; embroidery

### Introduction

In 2020, COVID-19 brought about the closure of museums, galleries, and other exhibition spaces across the world. This article examines how curators and makers sought to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus on exhibition practices by merging on-site and distant methods of production and display. Its focus is *Contextile: Contemporary Textile Biennial*, held in the city of Guimarães, Portugal. Since its establishment in 2012, the biennale has encompassed a program of exhibitions and artists' residencies. *Contextile* is produced by Ideias Emergentes [Emerging Ideas]. Its fifth edition, between September 5 and October 25, 2020, was entitled *Places of Memory—Interdiscourses of a Textile Territory*, and aspired to encourage new perspectives about Guimarães and the history of its textile industry.

In 2020, the artists-in-residence program was curated by Cláudia Melo, who has also been the artistic director of *Contextile* since 2016. To contain the virus, the biennale team devised a blend of on-site and distant approaches to artistic and curatorial practice. While it may seem paradoxical to combine the idea of a residency with remote site-specificity, the organizers developed hybrid methodologies that combined internet technology and handmade practices. These strategies were deployed as a

means to connect artists working in different global locations with the Guimarães community.

The article is divided into five sections.

Drawing on secondary sources, the first section provides a historical overview of textile production in Guimarães, including the emergence of Guimarães Embroidery. The second section presents *Contextile's* artists-in-residence program and the distinctive traits of its fifth edition. The third section explores on-site practices materialized within the artist residencies, and the biennale staff as a vital intermediary between artists, place, and community. The fourth section focuses on how the artists-in-residence program applied hybrid approaches merging digital communication and craftsmanship, with the aim of bridging artists, makers, and the local community. Sections two to four are grounded in both theoretical and empirical research, which included site visits to the exhibitionary outcomes of the artist residencies; analyses of artist's testimonies shared through written statements or in the *Textile Talks*; interviews with curators, cultural agents, and makers who collaborate with the artists in the residence program; and the examination of installation photographs. Through this variety of sources I hope to show the roles played by different contributors, including those who are often absent in contemporary craft theory. The fifth section condenses the distinct tactics deployed within *Contextile's* program of artists' residencies in response to COVID-19. These include the use of drawing as a collaborative tool and the advocacy of craft as a heritage activity.

### The City's Fabric

The history of Guimarães is intertwined with that of textiles. In the Middle Ages, the city's

economy was mainly based on agriculture and its key crop was fine linen, both as yarn and fabric.<sup>1</sup> In the broader region of Vale do Ave, spinning and weaving were typically women's activities carried out alongside agricultural labor.<sup>2</sup> Flax was spun and woven at home and in small family workshops until the mid-1800s. In the nineteenth century, however, developments in the textile industry would contribute significantly to the transformation of the city.<sup>3</sup> In 1884, while the *Exposição Industrial de Guimarães* [Industrial Exhibition of Guimarães] highlighted a persisting tradition of flax in the region, the first efforts were being initiated to retrieve this practice through the foundation of local textile factories such as *Fábrica do Castanheiro* (1885–2013).

By contrast, the manufacture of cotton fabrics—often incorporating linen, silk, or wool—was introduced in the area of Vale do Ave by the early 1800s. Due to advances in industrial machinery, as well as their low cost and versatility, cotton textiles would become the primary national industry in the twentieth century. The relations between Portugal and its colonies would be shaped by this industry until the late 1900s. For instance, from 1930 onwards, Angola and Mozambique were forced to sell low-priced cotton to the metropolis, and then to buy the final products at a high price. As a result, the 1974 revolution in Portugal, and the subsequent dissolution of the nation's empire, had immediate economic effects.<sup>4</sup> The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the decline of textile and apparel industries, casting families into unemployment and many industrial buildings into ruin. As Melo explains: "Basically everyone who lives in Guimarães has or has had a relationship with textiles in one way or

another ... There is no way to escape this!"<sup>5</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, half of Guimarães' female population was employed in linen embroidery. These women responded to orders from local dealers, who then sold the items to the South of Portugal and Brazil. What is currently designated as Guimarães Embroidery [*Bordado de Guimarães*] results from a blend of "rich embroidery," comprising intricate stitches made with white cotton thread, and the more colorful tones of "popular embroidery," which was originally applied in the garments of farm workers and incorporated botanical motifs.<sup>6</sup> The formal teaching of this local technique dates back to 1958, when the Industrial and Commercial School of Guimarães (currently named Francisco de Holanda School) opened its Course in Female Skills. This assumption of embroidery as a feminine skill mirrors Rozsika Parker's account of the association between embroidery and femininity in post-medieval Europe.<sup>7</sup> In 1989 and 1996, the city council of Guimarães and *A Oficina—Centro de Artes e Mesteres Tradicionais de Guimarães* [The Workshop—Center of Traditional Arts and Crafts of Guimarães], respectively, organized two further training courses, both with the support of *Instituto de Emprego e Formação Profissional* [Institute of Employment and Professional Training].<sup>8</sup> Guimarães Embroidery currently encompasses no fewer than twenty-one stitches; a wide range of geometrical, floral, and plant ornaments; and six colors (red, white, blue, gray, beige, and black). Its design is typically symmetrical with easily identifiable motifs.

*Contextile* draws on this complex history of textiles in Guimarães. It forms part of a lineage of biennales distinguished by their specificity of medium and of place, which responds to the effects of deindustrialization

on their city's economy.<sup>9</sup> The next section introduces the particular context in which the artist residencies of *Contextile 2020* took place, and how such projects came into being in and through the exhibition framework.

### **The Artists-in-Residence Program of *Contextile 2020***

Since the inception of *Contextile* in Guimarães, artists have been invited "to inhabit the place, in order to then create something from it."<sup>10</sup> The artists-in-residence program of *Contextile 2020* was characterized, on the one hand, by an attempt to balance the desire for internationalization and the inclusion of national artists and, on the other, by the impact of the coronavirus.

In this fifth edition, the number of artists-in-residence was increased from three to eight, and Portuguese artists were included for the first time. All the artists-in-residence who participated identify as women, reflecting a continued identification between the textile medium and femininity. The artists were selected via three routes. Barbora Zentková (Slovakia), Julia Gryboś (Poland), and Paulina Almeida and Patrícia Geraldes (both from Portugal) were identified through a partnership with Magic Carpets, a Creative Europe platform; Mylène Boisvert and Michèle Lorrain (both from Canada) by means of a partnership with the *Biennale Internationale du lin de Portneuf* (International Linen Biennale of Portneuf); and Angelina Nogueira (Portugal) and Magdalena Kleszyńska (Poland) via an open call.

Encounters between artists, the biennale team, the city and local communities were hindered by successive lockdowns. Of the five overseas artists, only three could fly to Portugal. This called for the use of alternative

methodologies to facilitate the exchange of information, communication, and creative interaction. The duration of the projects was also adjusted from one to two months, a change necessitated by multiple quarantines and by the intensive nature of artist residencies.<sup>11</sup>

The outcomes of the artists' residencies were brought together in an exhibition at Santo António dos Capuchos [Saint Anthony of the Capuchins], a former convent and hospital converted into a heritage site in 1991. This space embodies the accumulation of uses and memories in Guimarães. Works by the eight artists occupied several areas on the two floors of the former convent and of what once was the city's main hospital, including areas as diverse as the cloister galleries, the confessionals, the inner courtyard, and emptied rooms. These distinct settings, in conjunction with the deployment of varied forms of natural and artificial illumination, emphasized ideas of being inside or outside, secrecy, decadence, seclusion, and traveling. The artists' installations reveal an exploration of textiles not merely as a medium, but as a concept—through media as diverse as print, drawing, ceramics, artist's books, metalwork, embroidery, paper, and knitting. Rather than being displayed in plinths or glass cases, objects were directly placed on the walls, the floor and in purposely designed props, or hung through different methods. Each artist produced one artwork, with the exception of Kleszyńska, who drew from the collections of various museological spaces in Guimarães.

All of the physical events in *Contextile 2020* were complemented by a virtual exhibition, which can be accessed through the biennale's website.<sup>12</sup> In the case of the artists' residencies, this online platform offers non-interactive three-dimensional views of the

displays as well as images of installation views and details of artworks.

The next section addresses the key role of the biennale team in the mediation between artists, place, and community, through an analysis of a few projects developed in situ during the artists-in-residence program of *Contextile 2020*.

### On-Site Practices

Of the artists who were able to develop their works on site, Angelina Nogueira particularly benefited from the intermediary skills of the biennale team. Her *De Fibra* (2020) is a collaborative performance and installation deriving from objects and stories that were shared by a group of local women.<sup>13</sup> As is common in community-based projects involving artists who are not from Guimarães, potential participants were identified and mobilized by the biennale's "field staff,"<sup>14</sup> which included Paula R. Nogueira, a researcher on the industrial history of textiles in the region. While the women disclosed stories and objects that somehow carried a "textile memory," the artist listened to them, posed questions and documented the conversations through photography and film.<sup>15</sup>

Nogueira's installation, *De Fibra* [Of Fiber], alludes not only to the material component of fabrics (which, in the Portuguese use of the term, can refer to "animal, vegetal and mineral substances"<sup>16</sup>), but also to the Portuguese idiom *de fibra* [of fiber], which is often applied to women and expresses the "[e]nergy or capacity to make difficult decisions or take on firm positions."<sup>17</sup> In the context of the historic hospital setting and of COVID-19, this connotation recalls the difficult decisions that had to be made by healthcare staff in hospitals and nursing homes across the globe. Within Nogueira's project, the expression *mulheres de fibra*

[women of fiber] equally discloses textiles as part of the identity of the Guimarães community. In a time of isolation and vulnerability, fragments of these women's stories were recorded in multiple fabric "scrolls," bringing to mind the role of textiles as primary storers of data before the inventions of writing and computing.<sup>18</sup>

In the exhibition, the women's testimonies were reinterpreted through an artist's book and an installation comprising suspended textiles (Figure 1). Originating from local factories, the shards of cloth were sewn together, painted and drawn on by the artist. These assemblages were then hung on pinewood structures. Some of the fabrics were placed over the room's windows, while others were illuminated from behind through lightbulbs, producing effects of light and shadow. Certain textiles featured written excerpts from the women's statements, such as "*o meu marido ainda não nasceu*" [my husband is not yet born], reflecting the personal content of the conversations between artist and participants. By transforming cloth waste from local industrial units, *De Fibra* evokes a fragmented history of textile production in Guimarães. This history is comprised not only by material elements such as industrial buildings, cast-off fabrics, and personal objects, but also by immaterial narratives. The arrangement of the hanging textiles in one of the hospital rooms generated an intimate space, emulating the artist's private exchanges with the local women. Yet Nogueira's intervention, which involved the distortion and disintegration of these stories, deliberately hinders us from knowing them fully. This suggests a refusal to construct a comprehensive account of the women's testimonies, affording their voices a degree of autonomy.

The next section outlines the use of hybrid approaches blending internet



**Fig 1** Angelina Nogueira, *De Fibra*, 2020. Installation view at the Convent of Saint Anthony of the Capuchins. Photo: Eduardo Vieira, courtesy of the artist.

technology and craft practices, as a means to connect artists, makers, and the local community.

### Hybrid Practices

Due to the need to restrict physical contact during the pandemic, artists Barbora Zentková and Julia Gryboś were allowed to visit an industrial building in Guimarães, but not to spend time with its employees. Their installation, titled *The Light that Finds the Spreading Wounds* (2020) (Figure 2), incorporates textiles discarded by the factory. Akin to Nogueira, the artist duo transformed the cloth—in this case by dyeing it in tones of gray, blue, purple, orange, and white—but kept its flaws and breaks visible. More translucent and brightly colored than Nogueira's almost opaque and

pale ones, these fabrics were often pierced by natural sunlight. The textiles were hung from the ceiling, (re-)creating divisions within the space such as areas where walls had previously existed. Within the old hospital setting, these fabrics recalled the historic use of tapestries to warm and decorate the interiors of castles and palaces<sup>19</sup>, along with the curtains of a hospital bed, a sight all too familiar during the worst phases of coronavirus. More broadly, the redundant cloth and its place of origin evoked the collapse of the textile industry as well as its physical and psychological damages. This traumatic past occurred at multiple scales, from the class-based suffering of families affected by unemployment to the ongoing effects of colonial violence implicated in the history of textile production.





**Fig 2** Barbora Zentková and Julia Gryboś, *The Light That Finds the Spreading Wounds*, 2020. Abandoned place, former hospital, medical gauze, hand-dyed fabrics, linoleum cut, human cells and bacteria drawings. Installation view at the Convent of Saint Anthony of the Capuchins. Photo: Barbora Zentková and Julia Gryboś, courtesy of the artists.

By displacing the rejected cloth to the Convent of Saint Anthony of the Capuchins, Zentková and Gryboś arguably suggested a new function for textiles within a postindustrial context. In *The Light that Finds the Spreading Wounds*, fabrics represent the notion of “intangible cultural heritage” as outlined in UNESCO’s “Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.” This concept encompasses

the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith—that

communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.<sup>20</sup>

In this sense, Zentková and Gryboś’s dyed cloths not only complement the emptied areas of the historic building with material artefacts, but also articulate the practices, representations, knowledge, and skills involved in textile production. Craft—and textile making in particular—therefore resurfaces as a recuperative activity.

In contrast to Nogueira’s *De Fibra*, Zentková and Gryboś’s collaborative intent was only partially fulfilled. The artists had planned to lead a workshop that invited local



**Fig 3** Barbora Zentková and Julia Gryboś, *The Light That Finds the Spreading Wounds* (detail), 2020. Abandoned place, former hospital, medical gauze, hand-dyed fabrics, linoleum cut, human cells and bacteria drawings. Photo: Barbora Zentková and Julia Gryboś, courtesy of the artists.

people to etch their remembrances of the hospital on the linoleum floor of the building. As the event had to be cancelled due to the pandemic, following Zentková and Gryboś's departure, members of the community were asked to complete the drawings that the artists had started on the Capuchins flooring.<sup>21</sup> The impossibility of a physical meeting consequently gave rise to a sort of faraway *cadavre exquis*. The gouged imprints consist of uncanny and biomorphic shapes (Figure 3), which bear a resemblance to the collective and automatic drawings and texts introduced by the Surrealists in the early twentieth century. Yet while the Surrealist exquisite corpses were usually sketched on paper, in an informal exchange between artists, in *The Light that Finds the Spreading Wounds* these were imprinted by both artists and

participants on the floor of the abandoned hospital. This installation thus encompasses a collaboration between artists, members of the community, and the institution on whose ground the etchings were engraved. The multiplication of the incised organisms throughout the floor seems to echo the spread of the virus and the formation of its variants. As the initial aim of the workshop was to explore personal memories of the site, intuitive drawing was a useful tool to access the subconscious of contributors.

Other artists-in-residence engaged with correspondence as a mode of craft practice motivated by the pandemic conditionings. Despite working from different locations, Kleszyńska, Lorrain, and Boisvert instigated faraway conversations and meetings with fellow artists and local artisans through their

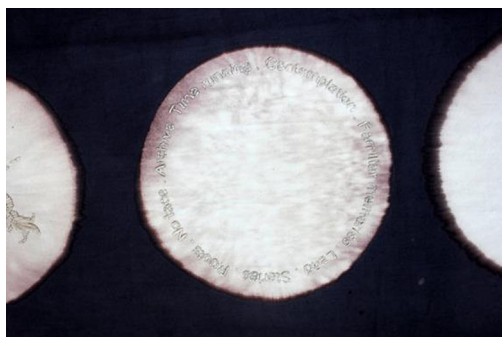


**Fig 4** Magdalena Kleszyńska, *Together at the Table*, 2020. Dyed and bleached cotton, embroidery on cotton, hand-made and dyed fringes. Installation view at the Convent of Saint Anthony of the Capuchins. Photo: Magdalena Kleszyńska, courtesy of the artist.

projects. During her artist's residency in Guimarães, Kleszyńska devised *Together at the Table* (2020) (Figure 4) as a fictional gathering between all artists-in-residence. She described this encounter as follows: "It had to appear as a group project ... But because we couldn't meet together, I thought that we could meet at the table by other means—correspondence."<sup>22</sup> Before coming to Portugal, Kleszyńska organized a meeting with the other artists via Zoom, in which she described the topic of her project and told them how she imagined it would materialize. She also used a "mood board" to display her

ideas and theoretical background. Kleszyńska then asked her colleagues to participate by sharing one element of their own projects through drawings, sketches, texts, photos, or other media. These could be sent as digital files. She received one of Boisvert's square drawings, a poem from Lorrain, and an old photograph of Nogueira's mother. When Kleszyńska arrived in Guimarães, Zentková and Gryboś let her use one of the patterns that they had made on the floor.

Kleszyńska then hand-crafted and dyed a cotton tablecloth, on which she bleached eight circles, suggesting the position of dinner



**Fig 5** Magdalena Kleszyńska, *Together at the Table* (detail), 2020. Dyed and bleached cotton, embroidery on cotton, hand-made and dyed fringes. Photo: Magdalena Kleszyńska, courtesy of the artist.

plates. She translated the artists' replies via embroidery in these bleached circles (Figure 5). (As Geraldine and Almeida did not want to join the project, their spaces were left empty.) The methods of coloring and decoloring arguably mimic processes of remembering and forgetting. *Together at the Table* is equally reminiscent of previous artistic recreations of banquet scenes, notably Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974–9) and Lubaina Himid's *Swallow Hard: The Lancaster Dinner Service* (2007), both of which include craft-related media such as ceramics and needlework. These two artworks seek to make visible the histories and identities of the marginalized, notably women and people of color.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, Kleszyńska's installation documents a rendezvous that could only take place virtually.

In the exhibition, *Together at the Table* comprised a dining table covered with the handmade textile. The absent chairs evoke a time of deprived human contact and loss caused by the coronavirus. The dim illumination, provided by three bulbs hanging above

the table, generated an atmosphere at once intimate and funereal. It calls to mind the ways in which hospitals became the forced dwellings of patients, particularly when family visits were restricted; and how the commitment, risk, and humanity of healthcare and related staff was highlighted during the pandemic. *Together at the Table* therefore retrieves the domestic and cooperative dimensions of craft as a response to COVID-19.

Unlike Kleszyńska, Michèle Lorrain was not able to travel to Guimarães. Her isolated residency from her studio in Sainte-Louise, Québec, brought about an imaginary meeting point between Canada and Portugal.<sup>24</sup> Her *Places of Memory—Peregrinations* (2020) occupied two spaces within the exhibition. One of the vacated rooms encompassed a found cotton tent, where Lorrain had knitted a forest evoking her birthplace; a traveling bag stuffed with *tricotins* (a French knitting toy) made by artists-in-residence working on both sides of the Atlantic; and a tarpaulin where the artist had embroidered the walking paths of a friend and of other artists-in-residence around Guimarães (Figure 6). Looking out of the window, visitors could see an additional series of tarpaulins hanging on the walls of the inner courtyard (Figure 7). *Peregrinations* accordingly established a connection between the closed and open areas of the building. The objects, materials, and settings conjured in this installation alluded to journeys across space and time: from indoors to outdoors; around and between Québec and Guimarães; from infancy to adulthood. By incorporating the *tricotin* and the tarpaulin, *Peregrinations* equally highlighted the textile medium as a crossroads of tradition and innovation. Furthermore, the arrangement of the piece in the courtyard of the building



**Fig 6** Michèle Lorrain, *Places of Memory—Peregrinations*, 2020. Installation view at the Convent of Saint Anthony of the Capuchins. Photo: António Cruz, courtesy of the artist. With the collaboration of the Biennale Internationale du Lin de Portneuf—BILP.

brings to mind people's extensive use of windows, balconies, and terraces to communicate with each other during the pandemic.

Mylène Boisvert also had to work remotely from her studio in Montréal. As the artist explained in her presentation at the *Textile Talks*, her *Tracing Places* (2020) forges a link between Portugal and Canada not only through its subject matter, but also through a "correspondence"<sup>25</sup> with the biennale staff and local craftspeople. Boisvert's installation was inspired by two visual ingredients. The first was Guimarães Embroidery, whose botanical designs derive from the observation of nature whilst cultivating the fields (Figure 8). The second was the fern garden of a house in Canada that the artist had shared with a Portuguese emigrant couple in the 1990s and early 2000s. After the couple and

Boisvert left, the place was completely transformed by the new occupiers. As she only had a photo of the front of the house, "the topology [of the garden] ... was drawn from memory"<sup>26</sup> in response to the overall theme of *Contextile 2020—Places of Memory*.

Whilst in *De Fibra* the *Contextile* team mediated the artist's interactions with the local community, in *Tracing Places* the team became the artist's "eyes and hands in Guimarães,"<sup>27</sup> the key intercessors between artist, Guimarães Embroidery, local craftspeople, and the city. This was achieved through the digital exchange of sources for artistic research and records of creative processes; and two virtual meetings with the three remaining professional practitioners of this local technique, Adélia Faria, Isabel Oliveira and Maria da Conceição Ferreira. Because



**Fig 7** Michèle Lorrain, *Places of Memory—Peregrinations*, 2020. Installation view at the Convent of Saint Anthony of the Capuchins. Photo: António Cruz, courtesy of the artist. With the collaboration of the Biennale Internationale du Lin de Portneuf—BILP.

Boisvert could only access samples of Guimarães Embroidery through a book and reproductions on her computer screen, she spent the summer of 2020 looking for the exact shade of red used in this making practice. The colors and shapes of Guimarães Embroidery, along with the fern garden, inspired Boisvert to produce drawings with red ink on small squares of flax paper (Figure 9). This process also reflects the artist's personal technique, in which "flax fiber in the form of fabric is turned into paper and then transformed into thread."<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, Boisvert asked artisans Faria, Oliveira, and Ferreira to interpret her fern sketches into needlework; to write about their relationship with embroidery; and to

draw a plant from their own garden, which she then transposed to the textile medium. Akin to the artist's illustrations, the embroidered squares predominantly disclose asymmetrical designs, departing from the conventional composition of Guimarães Embroidery. The technique is itself a merging of popular and elite models, of craft and art, and Boisvert adds a layer of complexity to this "high"/"low" dichotomy, intersecting makers, approaches, and media ascribed to both domains. As a result, *Tracing Places* exposes the historic linkages between "superior" and "inferior" spheres of creation.

The separate components of *Tracing Places* were brought together in the floor of the exhibition space, where the piece was



**Fig 8** Maria da Conceição Miranda Ferreira (A Oficina), coaster, 2005. Inventory number: MAS T 884. Photo: Miguel Sousa. © Museu de Alberto Sampaio, Guimarães.

assembled by the production team (Figure 10). The shape of the installation replicates the topology of the Portuguese–Canadian fern garden. *Tracing Places* therefore results from the juxtaposition of different hands, media, and spaces that have been successively altered over time such as the garden, the convent, and the hospital. Boisvert’s collaborative method also mirrors the ways in which industrial progress imposes a continuous rehabilitation of jobs, practices, and sites.

This section has examined the intersection of digital and craft tools in both on-site and remote projects developed within the artist residencies of *Contextile 2020*. These approaches were deployed with the aim of bridging artists, craftspeople, and local communities. The works of Zentková and Gryboś, Kleszyńska, and Lorrain investigated the physical marks of presence through the etchings on the floor of the hospital, the bleached “plates” on the dining table, and

the walking routes stitched on tarpaulin. On the other hand, some of the artists used correspondence as a means to involve distant participants in their practices. While Kleszyńska and Lorrain interacted with fellow artists-in-residence, Boisvert’s exchanges were directed toward the biennale staff and the Guimarães embroiderers. Her remote residency equally made possible an encounter with her own multicultural community, enabling her to draw inspiration from the garden where she lived in Canada.<sup>29</sup>

### Final Considerations

In the fifth edition of *Contextile*, the program of artist residencies encompassed projects developed in situ and at a distance from the artists’ studios. In both cases, works were produced in correspondence with members of the local community, other artists-in-residence, and artisans from Guimarães. The exchange of ideas—an essential component of any creative process, and particularly of artist residencies—thus occurred not *along-side*, but *through* making.

Within these practices, drawing emerged as a key medium. In the context of contemporary craft scholarship, drawing is often discussed as pertaining to fine art vis-à-vis craft, or as a means of asserting design control over artisans. In *Zeros + Ones: Digital Women + the New Technoculture*, Sadie Plant describes how the images produced elsewhere in the visual arts are distinct from those of weaving: “Images are no longer carried in the weave, but imprinted on its surface by ... pens and brushes ... patterns become as individuated and unique as their artists and authors.”<sup>30</sup> The deployment of drawing in *De Fibra*, *The Light that Finds the Spreading Wounds*, *Together at the Table*, and



**Fig 9** Mylène Boisvert, drawings with red ink on small squares of flax paper, 2020. Image of artistic process. Photo: Mylène Boisvert, courtesy of the artist.

*Tracing Places* could be seen as an attempt to retrieve self-expression for the textile medium.

Zentková and Gryboś and Boisvert specifically used drawing as a collaborative tool to engage external participants. Within parameters defined by artists, skilled and unskilled contributors were granted some degree of creative freedom. This partly reflects what Glenn Adamson designates as the postdisciplinary condition, in which contemporary practitioners tend to oversee rather than execute their creations.<sup>31</sup> As an illustration of this shift, Adamson discusses Alexander McQueen's collaboration with woodcarver Paul Ferguson, explaining how

Ferguson drew a pattern to be approved by the designer, "conforming to the long-established authorial hierarchy."<sup>32</sup> While this case study discloses drawing as a skill reserved for the subordinate artisan, in *Contextile's* artistic residencies drawing was either retained or distributed by the artist amongst the craftspeople or the public. Adamson's example also demonstrates the concealment of craft skills within luxury production. Although a certain imbalance between artists and contributors was sustained in the artistic residencies, the traces of craftsmanship were not so much hidden but rather assimilated in these projects. This is distinct to what takes place in Guimarães





**Fig 10** Mylène Boisvert, *Tracing Places*, 2020. Installation view at the Convent of Saint Anthony of the Capuchins. Photo: Inês Jorge. With the collaboration of the Biennale Internationale du Lin de Portneuf—BILP.

Embroidery, where artisans do not usually sign their works. *Tracing Places* was exceptional in that it credited the embroiderers by including their names in the exhibition label.

Akin to the biennale as a whole, the artist residencies of *Contextile 2020* exposed craft as a heritage activity. This is based on a twofold strategy. First, the program promoted Guimarães Embroidery amongst the international creative community. As mentioned above, this stems from a broader effort to increase training in this technique since the 1950s, and more recently “to raise the profile of Guimarães Embroidery among existing consumers and to attract potential

new markets.”<sup>33</sup> Such undertakings have brought about the official certification of this making practice in 2010, with the aim of safeguarding its history, legacy, and particular features whilst ensuring its authenticity. Faria, Ferreira, and Oliveira are all certified artisans who convey Guimarães Embroidery to contemporary artists, who in turn ensure its reinvention and continuation. Yet, as stated in a product specification file originally published in 2009, innovative practices are restricted to the alteration of a single element—whether it is color, line, or motif—in order to preserve the technique’s identity.<sup>34</sup>

Second, craft becomes a heritage activity when it is used as a tool to engage with other material and immaterial legacies. These include the fabrics and stories shared by the community in *De Fibra*, the discarded textiles from local factories in *The Light that Finds the Spreading Wounds*, the French *tricotin* in *Peregrinations*, the Portuguese–Canadian garden in *Tracing Places*, and the historic convent and hospital. In this context, the deployment of Saint Anthony of the Capuchins as a display setting offered significant connections not only with the COVID-19 pandemic, but also with further past and present, individual and collective narratives around ideas of decay and rejuvenation, confinement and encounter, domesticity and traveling. It was equally through the exhibition apparatus that many of the distant conversations amongst artists as well as between artists and the Guimarães community were made manifest. Both of these approaches to craft as a heritage activity embody potential responses to different periods and kinds of crisis and trauma.

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### Notes

- 1 Catarina Pereira, "Guimarães Embroidery: A Legacy for the Future," *Datatêxtil* 24 (2011): 46–57.
- 2 Jorge Fernandes Alves, "A Indústria Têxtil Do Vale Do Ave," in *Património E Indústria No Vale Do Ave*, ed. José Amado Mendes and Isabel Fernandes (Vila Nova de Famalicão: Adrave, 2002), 372–89.
- 3 Pereira, "Guimarães Embroidery: A Legacy."
- 4 Alves, "A Indústria Têxtil," 372–89.
- 5 "Basicamente, toda a gente que vive em Guimarães tem ou teve uma relação com o têxtil, de uma forma ou de outra. ... Não há como fugir!" Cláudia Melo, interview by Inês Jorge via Zoom (September 14, 2020). All translations author's own.
- 6 Pereira, "Guimarães Embroidery: A Legacy," 52.
- 7 Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, rev. ed. (London: Women's Press, 1996).
- 8 Pereira, "Guimarães Embroidery: A Legacy."
- 9 Examples of these include the International Tapestry Biennial (1962–95, Switzerland); the Faenza Ceramic Art Competition (founded 1938; comprises a biennial since 1989); the Korean International Ceramic Biennale (2001–present); the British Glass Biennale (2004–present; and the British Ceramics Biennial (2009–present).
- 10 "Convidar os artistas a habitar o território para, a partir dele, criar é, desde o início, uma das propostas da CONTEXTILE." Wall panel, Artists' Residences, Convent of Saint Anthony of the Capuchins (September 5–October 25, 2020).
- 11 Melo, interview.
- 12 Contextile, "Contextile virtual," <https://contextilevirtual.pt/> (accessed May 5, 2022).
- 13 Cláudia Melo and Samuel Silva, eds., *Contextile 2020: Contemporary Textile Art Biennial* (Porto: Ideias Emergentes, 2020), 124.
- 14 "Equipa de terreno." Melo, interview.

- 15** “Memória têxtil.” Ibid.
- 16** “Substâncias animais, vegetais ou minerais.” *Dicionário Priberam da Língua Portuguesa*, “Fibra” (accessed May 4, 2022).
- 17** “Energia ou capacidade para tomar decisões difíceis ou assumir posições firmes.” Ibid. Similar idioms can be found in the English language such as “moral fiber” and “with every fiber of (one’s) being.”
- 18** Sadie Plant, *Zeros + Ones: Digital Women + The New Technoculture* (London: Fourth Estate, 1998), 65.
- 19** See for instance Mary M. Brooks, “‘Mouldering Chairs and Faded Tapestry ... Unworthy of the Observation of a Common Person’: Considering Textiles in Historic Interiors,” *Textile History* 47, no. 1 (2016): 60–81.
- 20** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, “Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,” <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention> (accessed May 4, 2022).
- 21** Melo, interview.
- 22** Magdalena Kleszyńska, “Artist residencies: Contextile 2020: Guimarães, Portugal” (unpublished text, Magdalena Kleszyńska, 2020), 2.
- 23** Celeste-Marie Bernier et al., “Intervention, Mapping and Excavation: White Caricatures versus Black Dehumanisation in Swallow Hard: The Lancaster Dinner Service (2007),” in *Inside the Invisible: Memorialising Slavery and Freedom in the Life and Works of Lubaina Himid*, ed. Celeste-Marie Bernier et al. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 217–36.
- Amelia Jones, “The ‘Sexual Politics’ of The Dinner Party: A Critical Context,” in *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*, ed. Amelia Jones (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 107. See this for a discussion about the polemics surrounding the “cooperative” process of The Dinner Party, which involved no less than 400 participants.
- 24** Melo and Silva, *Contextile 2020: Contemporary Textile*, 130.
- 25** Mylène Boisvert, “Presentations by the artists in residence” (Talk, Auditório Centro Cultural Vila Flor, Guimarães, September 7, 2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXI\\_ZjPHTNQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXI_ZjPHTNQ) (accessed May 4, 2022). Boisvert’s presentation can be found at 5 h 41 m 25 s and 5 h 57 m 17 s.
- 26** Ibid.
- 27** Ibid.
- 28** Mylène Boisvert, “About,” Mylène Boisvert, <https://www.myleneboisvert.com/en/about> (accessed May 4, 2022).
- 29** Boisvert, “Presentations by the artists.”
- 30** Plant, *Zeros + Ones: Digital Women*, 67.
- 31** Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft*, repr. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013; London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2018). Citations are to the Bloomsbury Visual Arts edition. See particularly “Part One: Manipulation.”
- 32** Ibid., 35.
- 33** Pereira, “Guimarães Embroidery: A Legacy,” 56.
- 34** Oficina, *Bordado de Guimarães: Caderno de Especificações*, 3rd ed. (Guimarães: Oficina, 2011).