

The Fine Art of Denim Artist Statements

MICHÈLE FANDEL BONNER

Telling, Inseams, Flatfelled

The work seeks beauty and meaning in the castoffs of daily life, and addresses issues of identity, time, and consumerism. The process can be intuitive and often lets the material speak for itself in its raw form, requiring no further interpretation, but at other times the materials act as a link to a backstory, a feeling or an event. The final meaning may not be revealed until deep into the making process and can come in a sudden moment of realization. Much of the work is made in stages over periods of months and even years.

“Telling” was made in a rush of anger, listening to the #metoo revelations on the radio while working in my studio in 2017. Each tile represents an unsolicited comment from a man made to me or heard from others. They are as ubiquitous as the denim and clothing labels from which they are made.

Flatfelled and *Inseams* are made from the countless denim castoffs from a local thrift shop. These jeans are often in perfect condition and are only donated because the style is “dated.” Form over function...

HOWARD BRANDENBURG

Smoke Signals, Ingest

The substance of my work revolves around the central theme of humanity. Painting becomes a tool to investigate the collective past, present and future of our species by exploring ideas of our human influence and impact to society, the environment, ourselves, and our evolution. I am interested in examining perceptions and observations of our behavior, reaction to our ever-changing world, and our own conscience. Painting allows me the freedom to explore these range of ideas through the use of metaphors, design, human form, abstraction, and geometry.

The imagery I have been producing for over thirty years is mostly crafted in oil paints on canvas, wood panel, and my own worn out jeans stitched together. My designs are honed in sketch books. Each painting is different in model and composition; its own standalone concept. However, my works are all unified by my style of overlapping and repetitious pattern, movement, geometry, and energy.

These selected painting are from a current running series of paintings called ‘Dryland’. The materials used in these works are all recycled except the oil paint. Stretcher bars and frames are milled from reclaimed wood. Canvas are created from worn out jeans and scraps of canvas sewn together. I have used the pockets of the jeans a ‘pull tabs’ to expand the concepts of the painting adding an interactive component to each work.

KERSTIN BRUCHHAEUSER

Used Denim Wall Hanging #01, Used Denim Wall Hanging #02, Used Denim Wall Hanging #03

Working with used textiles is fundamental to my artistic practice. This triptych of wall hangings is made of used denim. Arranged in a symmetrical pattern different shades of blue form abstract shapes. The well-balanced structure and the color blue itself are meant to have a relaxing effect on the viewer's mind while the eyes wander from the relief-like surface to the details of the used denim material.

The used textile material is convincing by its tactility and suppleness. Bygone times have left their traces on it and the willingness to be transformed makes it the perfect medium for exploring how things change.

Taken out of its former everyday life context and transferred to the artistic context – it's here now, for you.

My artworks are meant to evoke a personal response by reflecting the past, to celebrate the traces people leave behind, the marks they make on the world, to treasure things that have been there before us, the details, the ordinary: whatever is made out of caring – and they are meant to capture the positivity of the ever-present change and becoming, as the characteristic feature of the world, to give inspiration and to move forward with hope and determination.

EMILY BUDD

Hot Pants, I, The Things We'll Carry

As a lesbian-identifying visual artist, my work challenges hegemonic interpretations of gender and desire, seeking queer alternatives to heteronormative structures and hierarchies. Having a background in bronze-casting and paleontology, I'm interested in time scale and imagining a queer archaeological record using ancient and transformative casting techniques. Through the lens of deep time, I seek strategies to visualize queerforward experiences and possibilities for escape from the straight world, capture moments of radical transformation, and document the volcanic movement of imminent forces towards change. Reformative monuments, memorials, and artifacts become an act of queer place-making, while mapping out a fluid dreamscape celebrates the latent destinies of genderhood on the brink of nonnormative inevitability. The Hot Pants series casts clothing as a future artifact of movement, noting queerness as a guide for survival through change, while various found objects act as cairns indicating a transition towards a queer future.

DON DONCEE COULTER

Three Forty Five Tea

My artwork has a unique look that is constantly revolving. Some have described it as having a three-dimensional / High Definition effect due to the incredible attention to detail. Texture plays a major role in the overall appeal of each piece. Leather & suede has been my fabric of

choice as their texture translates well in my pieces. My only apparatus is the xacto knife. It allows me to make precise cuts and gain control over rugged fabrics such as denim. As you view my work, you will get some sense of perspective through my eyes. I break down my subjects in different planes before considering color or texture. The dominance of warm colors reflects the over mood of my pieces. My goal is to give off a vibe of tranquility.

When you think of the composition of a piece of art, you may expect it to be made with paint or out of clay. You do not expect it to be comprised of outdoor grill covers or scraps of denim. However, that is exactly what you would see when viewing a piece from Columbus based artist Don 'DonCee' Coulter. The brilliance behind the work is that Coulter creates his paintings by using everyday items not traditionally associated with 'painting.' Using objects such as denim jeans, leather jackets, and aluminum pans, Don 'DonCee' Coulter manipulates common materials to create lush landscapes and to capture the environment of the Jazz movement. DonCee's environmentally friendly pieces illustrate creative reuse of materials while also touching on past cultural movements. The artist carefully manipulates each material to reflect the nature of its subject matter.

ALLISON DENT
2020 R.I.P.

Embracing the challenge of The Fine Art of Denim gives me a platform to express my love of an old pair of jeans, fabric, and to transform them into a new entity. My sculpture takes wire, my well-played hockey shoulder pads, a mountain of denim and more stuck fingers [stitches], than I've have ever had, to honor the strength and sacrifice of 2020. My sculpture has been thru a war and is still fighting. The strength of the shoulder pads, the wings of tattered denim strips and dragging tails/legs of denim acknowledges the 2020 year of sickness, death and survival. The orange insignia symbolizes new beginnings, energy and the sunrise we all hope to continue to see each day.

DEBRA DISMAN
Reading Color I, Reading Color VI

I currently work in the form of the book, in forms evoked by the book, and in new sculptural media of my own devising; both as a solo practitioner and in the public sphere of community engagement. As a maker and teaching artist I create work and projects which push the boundaries of the book into new forms and materials, inviting altered ways of viewing the world and how we inhabit it. Although the work remains tethered to loose definitions of the book as structure, it is moving progressively into other sculptural and conceptual realms where devotion to material labor and a passion for the haptic become powerful motivators and themes.

When working, I try to sidestep my conscious, critical mind and allow flow state to take over, remaining aware and receptive to the visceral, conceptual and concrete directions the work is taking. Achieving and remaining in this sense of flow where potential is infinite is mission

critical to my working process. It is this state of openness and unlimited possibility that allows new levels of connection and meaning to emerge, and purpose, knowledge and direction to be clarified.

Having worked in the realm of the built environment for many years, I am fascinated by the parallels between books and buildings in terms of architecture, meaning and utility. Each constructs public and private spaces where stories are "read" on many levels, often revealing more than their authors and makers ever intended. Related to the body and the corporeal space it creates and inhabits, my work seeks to offer places of contemplation, solace and bafflement, while instigating exploration, investigation and examination of what we think we know, and are.

HEIDI DRAHOTA

Used look 1-4

I live in Nuremberg Germany. After my studies in history, mathematics, biology and art, I taught in secondary school with students from lower levels of education for almost 30 years.

Artistic activities have always accompanied my life. I draw, take photos and paint, for a long time watercolor. But one day the moths ate my brushes. It was the end of painting on paper - besides making sketches.

Textile materials aroused my interest again. In 2002 I started to learn felting on a self-taught basis. In 2008 I started my career as an artist using textile materials and techniques. I exhibit worldwide. Felting has been an essential part of my overall work. Wool enables me to work on a large scale, although it is a very arduous process and requires a lot of strength to control the wool in dimensions over 2 m. I use the felting of yarns and threads onto the fibers as a design element. Structures are another element to implement appropriately the image content. An important role in my PhotoFeltCollages. I use my own photos and interpret them in terms of color, shape and structure with wool fibers and fabrics.

Beyond felting I patch, sew, quilt, embroider, dye, print, knit, crochet and make ecoprints. All these techniques I nowadays combine in my work. I very often incorporate social and political issues into my work. My four-part contribution deals with one of a political topic and, as so often, I combine all of these techniques in it.

The International Human Rights Award 2015 given to the trade unionist of the Bangladeshi textile industry, Amirul H. Amin, was the occasion for an international exhibition called Stuff for Thought which I implemented in Nuremberg. My piece Used Look was part of the exhibition that I showed in Nuremberg and some European countries from 2016 to 2018.

The award and also the conception of this exhibition focused on labor rights and working conditions in Bangladesh, consumer awareness of responsible consumption, knowledge of production conditions in the textile industry and the knowledge that global and fair trade can only be achieved if the social Standards of human needs are met.

My contribution is the interpretation of this thematic triad. Our buying behavior has a decisive influence on what happens in production in the textile industry and around the world. Worn jeans are recycled into collages, separated into threads to be felted in as a design element or shredded into pulp for handmade paper. as a message for sustainability and as a call to significantly improve working and living conditions through changed consumer behavior. Supported by a call from Lord Mayor Uli Maly from Nuremberg Germany, the town of the Human Rights, written on my handmade paper.

SHELLEY GARDNER

38 Special

I love working with used denim jeans because of the history contained in each pair. Recycled denim retains the shape of the wearer in much the same way a pair of gloves or boots shows the creases and lines of previous use. I try to use every part of the disassembled jeans, waistbands, inseams pockets, to create a new form.

GEORGE GIANAKOPOULOS

Reflex, Evil eye, Hips 2 B Square

Being creative is extremely important to me. It's my passion, my life's work and how I contribute to my community. I like to make art that inspires others without having a specific or direct message. The images, subject matters and narratives in my art (family, music, pottery, agriculture and love) are based on my tastes and my experiences. They reflect my point of view of the world as a stay at home father of two and a part-time farmer. I have also struggled with the written language and academics due to dyslexia (a learning disability). My hope is that my work makes people feel something that inspires them to create their own point of view.

For many years I made cubist, geometric paintings with oil and acrylic on stretched canvas. I have recently begun to focus on creating art quilts out of used clothing. I have begun to combine painting and quilting by experimenting with needle felting wool into raw canvas and sewing and quilting raw canvas before applying paint. I have also been collaborating with blacksmiths in my community to design decorative iron rods to hang my quilts and paintings. I also play music on a regular basis. I play the string bass and perform traditional American music and original music composed by other singer songwriters with whom I play. I participate in up to 50 performances a year with dozens of different groups and feel lucky to have forged strong relationships with many Alaskan musicians.

SABINE HEINLEIN

Denim Leopard, Whale Capsizing Boat

My quilts explore the powerful sense of wonder that animals elicit, even as they remind us of the dangers both animals and humans face due to their abuse and extinction. My work can be lighthearted and humorous, but it also revels in dark thoughts. What if things were turned

around? What if animals won the battle and were free to play and multiply at the expense of humanity?

My artwork features creatures and scenes from the natural world that may not exist in the future. Animals everywhere are feeling the squeeze of human overpopulation, of agriculture encroaching on their habitat. Leopards, whales and tigers are continued to be hunted for their skin and their meat. Coral reefs and their colorful inhabitants are threatened by warming waters, ocean acidification, overfishing and pollution. Pangolins and bats are slaughtered because of their supposed medicinal properties. The list continues endlessly.

Traditionally, quilts are seen as an idle woman's pastime. They appeal to powerful human emotions: our need for friendship, family and intimacy. Quilts were made for loved ones to provide warmth and handed down to future generations to build historic continuity--a continuity that climate change and environmental destruction is jeopardizing. Because of the time, effort and solitude traditional hand-stitching demands, quilts deviate from the impersonal manufacturing process and the focus on spectacle that currently rule so much contemporary art. At a time when consumerism, narcissism and environmental destruction are reaching catastrophic proportions, we have to ask ourselves how we as artists and curators are complicit.

Made from recycled textiles--particularly environmentally harmful materials like denim--quilts challenge antiquated power structures, species inequality and our obsession with fast fashion. My series of blue jeans quilts in particular confronts a consumerist culture that drives excessive energy and water consumption and diseases caused by toxins released in the manufacturing process. By cutting and reconfiguring textiles, I experiment with modern and traditional concepts of art-making while saving material from the landfill. Reclaiming textiles for long-lasting, useful (and educational) articles allows me to lead by example while protesting the disastrous cycle of waste, the destruction of land and the poisoning of our water.

My work has a free-spirited air, bringing to mind maybe Panamanian Mola, Tibetan tiger rugs or Ghanaian Asafo flags. Fully improvised, my quilts are hand-stitched, mostly with an extra-long running stitch reminiscent of traditional Japanese Sashiko. Sometimes I use a more elaborate chain link stitch bringing to mind ancestral embroidery. While my artwork's underlying concept is dark in nature, its execution and the final result often take on an amusing tone. My approach is modern and conceptual, but my work's traditional form, which is evocative of folk art, has the power to draw in a vast and diverse audience. It is my goal to evoke empathy in the viewer and inspire environmentally conscious thinking and acting even in those who are not habitually interested in art or environmentalism.

MALKA KUTNICK

Stretch, Wingspan, Woman

My soft sculptures are constructed using repurposed materials, primarily denim and other fabrics that have been discarded by family and friends. My creative process begins with cutting material and sewing pleats to imbue the fabric with structure. I work with the material's innate

qualities, honoring its distinct characteristics. The fabric asks to be cut, sewn, gathered, pleated and unraveled. I use the same Singer industrial sewing machine my father acquired in New York as a new immigrant decades ago. This body of work investigates ideas of traditional women's labor, the interplay between craft and fine arts, and circular economies aimed at eliminating waste and the continual extraction of resources.

TANYA LUCADAMO

Ego Head

The way we connect with our peers, environment, and ourselves can greatly influence our life's energy flow. Using the timeless medium of denim, I further explored this concept through the deconstruction and reconfiguration process.

BOB MOSER

Welder's Landscape 2, Welder's Landscape 3

I never thought about turning 65, and all that would entail. As years of welding, grinding, the heavy lifting of 100's of pounds' steel sculpture started requiring shoulder surgery, it gradually caught up with me; I began to think of other materials, materials that would extend my art-making another 25-30 years. Long ago I was a kite maker, I made them using traditional quilt patterns, sewing them out of rip-stop nylon; flying, and exhibiting them all over the world. As I had already spent an inordinate amount of time on a sewing machine, fabric seemed a logical material to return to.

The work is still tedious and requires hours of time in the studio, yet it is Zen-like in its simplicity. Time can suspend itself and hours pass with the rhythmic stitch, stitch, stitch of the sewing machine needle pulling thread endlessly through the fabric. When not listening to podcasts, I can allow the rhythmic sewing to totally occupying the left brain, the right side can then meander freely making usual and unusual connections. I have solved some of my biggest quandaries while in this meditative state.

So, at 65 and the toll of two shoulder surgeries forced a decision on me, so I began the transformation from welding steel sculptures to fabric artist. I still had a sewing machine from my Kite building days (I used traditional quilt patterns and ripstop nylon in those days) and as I had lots of old faded, burned, and permanently stained blue jeans that I chose to see the irony and began cutting them and using them as the material in this new direction.

JOHANNA NORRY

Water Never Goes Out of Style

Johanna Norry is an artist and fiber sculptor living in Atlanta. She received her MFA from the Lamar Dodd School of Art, University of Georgia in 2018. Her work has been featured in many juried exhibitions and invitational group shows in British Columbia, Georgia, New Mexico and New York. *Water Never Goes Out of Style* is made from 100 pairs of damaged Levi's. Evoking

images of the dye-laden water that pours into rivers in the developing countries where the majority of jeans are made, 2000 denim water drops (representing the 2000 gallons of water used to make a single pair of jeans), sewn onto deconstructed side seams from the same jeans, pour out of a denim covered sewer pipe.

JANICE PATRIGNANI

Air Borne

Janice Patrignani has been saving her worn out jeans since high school. Over the years, She's moved many times always with her bags of inspiration, mixing media with metaphor, to reincarnate and repurpose these precious remnants. Most recently she's been concentrating on her "Inspired Resilience Series" a synthesis of texture and shadow fashioned in denim coordinated with World War II parcel post parachutes as a jumping off point. She incorporates Shibori, the ancient Japanese fiber art of bound resist dyeing, in conjunction with Natural Indigo, (the oldest known dye to mankind considered a rare and precious commodity) and rust dying. She loves the unlimited possibility of the myriad of indigo shades of worn denim blue united with the mysterious qualities of newly indigo dyed Shibori. Assembled from her cherished deconstructed, re-birthed and enshrined denim/parachute artifacts this series also incorporates her newest obsession, encaustic wax. Creating is cathartic for her and a lifelong coping strategy that has served her well to help her chronicle personal challenges and triumphs.

As a design professional and art educator Janice holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Cincinnati's School of Design, Architecture, and Art. Since 1995 Janice has been customizing programs to fit with school curriculum needs in many areas of media expertise which include: watercolor, acrylic, and silk painting; fiber arts; bookmaking; paper transformations, and ceramic sculpture. Her goal as an arts educator is to encourage self-esteem in her students by giving them a means of expression for their unique way of seeing the world. Trained in Dr. Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence's Theory her workshops provide an environment that celebrates each child's individual strengths, a place where children are inspired to explore, discover, and learn.

JpsculptDesigns, her wearable art line showcases a kaleidoscope of colors, shapes and textures by combining many Shibori techniques onto transparent, translucent, and opaque silk with denim and needle-felted wool detailing. She loves layering luminous color upon color, dyeing and discharging with natural fiber reactive and acid dyes.

LEAH POLLER

Morning Joe: Part 2 "Spread generously - You're Toast"

Morning Joe: Part 1 "Ma Belle... Corona Hotline"

For years a sack of denim has sat in my studio, begging to be integrated into a work of art. What more telling moment when the whole of the world is hamstrung by Covid19. Sequestered in my studio in NYC, the epicenter of the US pandemic, it found expression in an unorthodox way for me (bronze is my normal medium). First, the Bluebook of Love: pages bound by heavy metal

strapping, each one hand painted and inscribed, calling out for love in the languages of personal history... with iconic adornments to punctuate the terms of endearment that echo from a time gone, perhaps forever.

MARY SCHWARZENBERGER

Going in Circles and Spiraling out of Control!, Tattered Heart!

Mary grew up in a home of makers, where her mother and grandmother engaged in sewing, knitting, and crocheting. Her grandmother would sit at her Singer Featherweight and give Mary scraps of fabric and teach her words like 'bias' and 'shirring'. Playing with fabric and color began at an early age for her. After a career as an educator, retirement meant pursuing a dream job of creating art full time. Mary's artistic endeavors include sewing, fabric dyeing, wearable art, and mixed media. Her unique work is clearly recognizable and has been described as funky, colorful, and joyful. Mary finds using texture and color to evoke a mood, addicting and therapeutic. The ocean is a recurring theme in her work. She finds that it impacts every sense, while instilling feelings of tranquility and exhilaration simultaneously.

Mary's wearable art jackets have won awards in national competitions and they have toured the country. She hopes to have a runway fashion show of her jackets at the Pennsylvania Quilt Extravaganza in Oaks, PA in September of this year.

ASHLEY THOMAS

My Painting Jeans

Always be true to what you're creating.

My inspirations are Rod Serling, Jasper Johns, Leonardo da Vinci, Vincent Van Gogh, and Horace Pippin.

ANN VOLLUM

The Pants They Wore – 525

Born in Africa, schooled in England, travelled widely, I have lived in America for most of my adult life. This international background has informed my artistic vision. As a mostly self-schooled artist with a background in architecture and graphic design I am drawn to structure, pattern and detail. Along my artistic journey I have painted, drawn, made "artist" books, cut fantastical lace like designs from Tyvek and cloth, finally finding my preferred medium in hand stitched artworks and sculptures. Currently I am working on two contrasting bodies of work, one of tactile, soft, knotted and embellished sculptural pieces, the other a series of stitched portraits.

Mired in the mind fog of our times I took to knotting strips of old jeans and embellishing them with wool stitching, buttons, beads and washers to create talisman sculptures. I became interested in keeping the integrity of the original denim jeans, so began ripping the legs but keeping the pant form. The shreds reflect the state of my mind not to mention the state of our

society. The embellishments and knots are a reflection of the hopes and struggles that bind us together and help us overcome adversity. The pants communicate a secret history of human experience and are representative of the American dream — a desire to make our lives and the lives of those we love better. From utilitarian to high fashion denim jeans are a metaphor for life!

SHIRLEY WAGNER

Infrastructure

The physical act of folding, wrapping and tethering well-worn cloth brings fresh insight to my urban inspired wall sculptures. Textile itself refers to an ancient practice and I bring it to new conversations about form with wrapped and manipulated elements. The dialogue moves from textile art to contemporary sculpture.