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Tatters and Shine: Contemporary Art Textiles Inspired
by Global Traditions

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researching and writing about embellished ethnographic textiles and dress informs my studio-produced artwork. I combine techniques of the past (hand dyeing, resist techniques) with new materials (holographic glitters, laser foils, heat laminating) and processes of the present such as digital imaging and wide format digital printing. I am fascinated by historical textile surfaces richly embellished with beads, mirrors, gold, obsessive stitching and embroidery for inspiration in building my own multi-layered, dyed and embellished surfaces. My work is also greatly inspired by researching textile motifs and materials used by many people to convey concepts of regeneration, protection, fertility, ancestral blessings and well being. Such associations and societal values in textiles serve as a model for my own personal and collective narratives. For years I have been fascinated with the Japanese notion of boro, the poignancy of tattered cloth resulting from years of humble use. I also look to universal practices employing patches and applique', and reflect on the age-old question of what came first, the hole or the patch. Among Asian and Islamic people, rags and fragments can take on an almost sacred nature when offered as ritual markers for prayers and wish fulfillment. Textiles have been used in many cultures to repel evil spirits and perpetually emanate prayer. I recycle bits of discarded but once valuable global textile fragments and combine them with my own art to give antique fragments a new life and meaning. In this way, I explore the contrast of rawness and boro, or poignant beauty with contemporary textile materials. Through this art I attempt to pay tribute and restitution to once beautiful but discarded cloth fragments. I consider these works collaborations with unknown textile artists. For a recent solo show in

China, I created a series called "The Scholar's Path". The raw elements of these pieces were digitally printed on the Mimaki wide format ink jet printer. Since this show was at a University, I drew upon study and writing, activities professors and students share, regardless of where we live in the world. In teaching World Textiles History, I have found that allowing my students to use a small index card as a "cheat sheet" or "crib sheet" allows the learner to better grasp the major concepts. Any student who takes the time to create a "cheat sheet" is studying and learning, as the muscle memory and coordination of the hand and eye from writing reinforces the learning. These little "cheat sheet" cards, which I collect at the end of every exam, are frequently in themselves little works of art. By digitally scanning hundreds of my students' "Cheat sheets", rows of books and textile artifacts from my class study web sites, I use repetition, lines, rows, text and imagery to speak to note taking, studying, lecturing, perfecting pedagogy and building on the foundations of knowledge. I presented these digitally printed textiles in overlapping panels or rows to relate to sheets of paper and notebook pages. Some of the works suggest Chinese and Japanese scroll formats. It is also very common in Western culture to see fabrics and garments printed with Chinese and Japanese calligraphy. Here, the writing is viewed for its aesthetic dimensions rather than for its' meaning, because many of us have no idea what the content says. We cannot read the words but we like the designs, elegant lines and shapes. Likewise, I have seen people in Asia wearing slogans and phrases printed in English that hardly make sense to a primarily English speaker. I turned "cheat sheet" inspired texts into commentaries on scholarly pursuits that can also be enjoyed by many as interesting surface patterns devoid of meaning.

Through exhibiting and talking about my work nationally and internationally, I am able to convey stories about both historic textiles and personal to universal narratives. This is a small, personal step toward promoting greater awareness of global textiles past and present, in an attempt to humanize the impersonal face of globalization.