

Collective Textile Histories in Lexie Abra Johnson's *The Rugmaker's Daughter*



Install shot of Lexie Abra Johnson's *The Rugmaker's Daughter* at PLUG Projects. Image courtesy of the gallery.

A snapshot of identity through recycled fabrics were presented in Lexie Abra Johnson's solo exhibition *The Rugmaker's Daughter* at PLUG Projects. Abra Johnson deconstructed and reworked old fabrics that can no longer be used in their intended fashion to explore personal family themes and anecdotes hidden in the materials that her work incorporated. By tying these memories to materials, she made me reconsider the state of rapid material culture through her presentation of textiles. This work ultimately reflected on memories that are intrinsically personal and aren't as straightforward and beautiful as the memories we choose to romanticize. Instead the work focused on the experiences we choose not to share due to complexity or the messiness of human existence.



AA Step 4 by Lexie Abra Johnson. Image courtesy of PLUG Projects.

Using scraps of denim in different washes, Abra Johnson reworked the material into abstractions that highlighted my own recollections. They sparked personal memories of all of the jeans that one might have owned throughout life, and fosters a sense of wonder where they ended up after the donation pile. The sewn denim collages presented in her *AA* series have a quaintness to them, while also appealing to a subconscious desire for organization. With the denim being worked into abstract shapes with contrasting patterns and washes, they took on a new aesthetic appeal, it showcases the versatility of the fabric and it's longevity as a fashion staple.

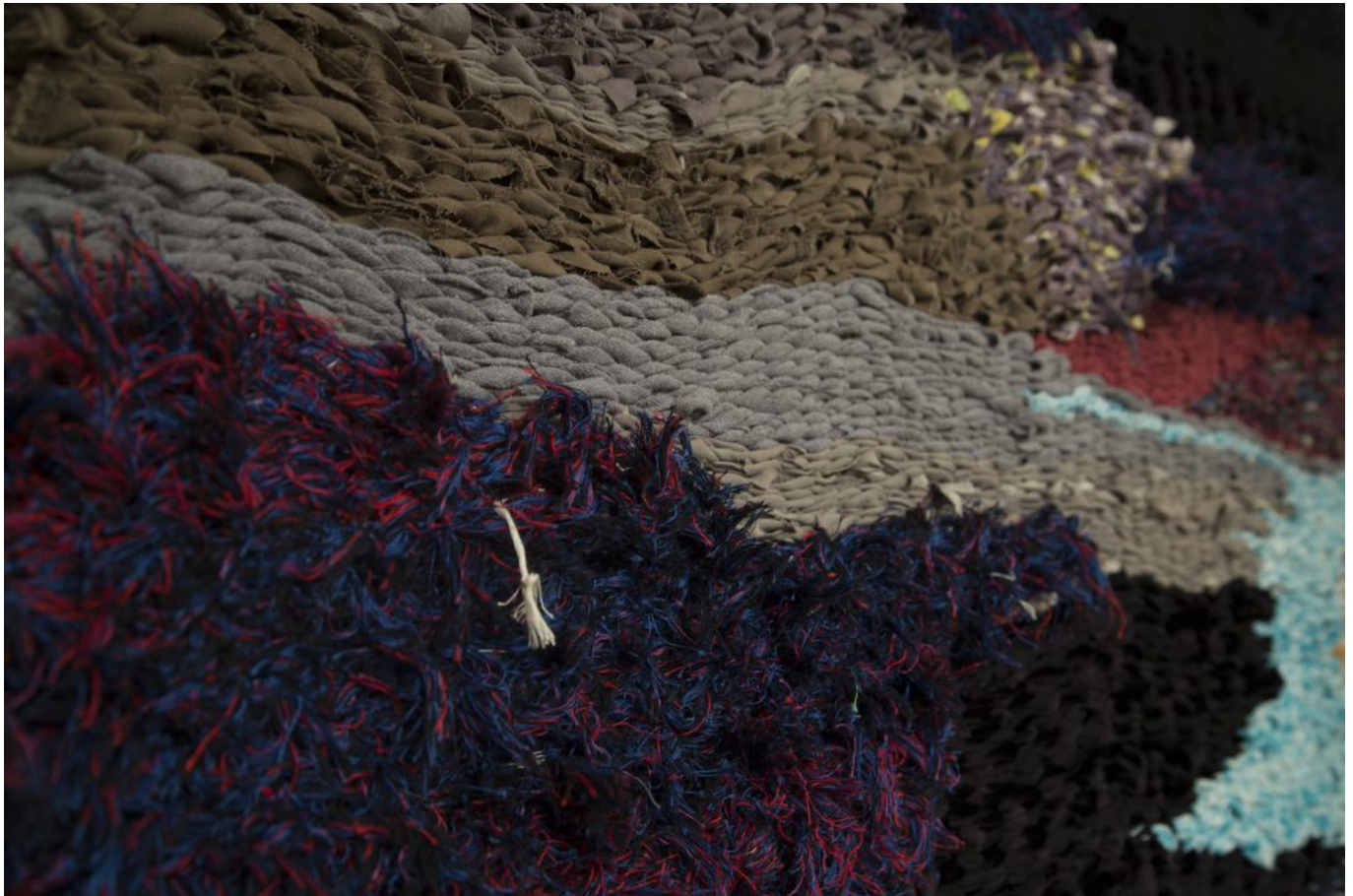


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One of the large scale weavings hung on the left side of the gallery, while the other was stationed on the floor in front of it. The weavings, titled *Reconstruction* and *Legacy of Destruction*, dealt with interpreting reality differently than the denim. The incorporation of velvet, shag, wool, and other materials into weaving pushed the idea of memories further. The varied fibers provided viewers with more of an experience rather than considering the pieces individually. To me, it appeared as a segment of one large pile of laundry; in it's messiness, there is something beautiful about all of the materials harmonizing as a singular pile. We all have a vivid memory of textiles like these in our psyches that we either chose to remember, or they affected our emotions so deeply that we can never forget it.

At the exhibition opening, I immediately noticed the experience the large scale weavings provided viewers. It's placement within the smaller space enacted a strong sensory occurrence beyond the

visual aspect. The works' soft and porous materials created a sound barrier between my left and right side. As my left side was close to it, sound could only be heard from my right, creating a small moment of reflection and pause contrasting the pandemonium of the show's opening. This directly contrasted with the current, rapidly progressing state of material culture and how because of that, our clothing is thought of as so disposable due to the fast-changing seasonal trends of fashion companies. I view the pieces as reflecting anxieties, only calmed in making a to-do list, I thought about the pieces as tasks I must complete. The complexity of the wall hangings were a haunting reflection of my thoughts during a panic attack, with each material making sense on it's own, but becoming overwhelming when viewing all the materials at once without time to process them.



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This work ultimately makes comments on the fashion industry, and how overwhelming it can be for consumers to keep up with the latest trends. The notion of fashion is a rapidly changing, with old trends becoming re-popularized and new ones showing up every season. From my time working in retail, Abra Johnson's installations reminds me of the seasonal rearrangements; the constant juxtapositioning of items for maximum consumer consumption. Her work brings an anxiety that comes from how disposable fashion is in contemporary culture, but also the value that society assigns it as an overall aesthetic. Whether it's denim, (something that never goes out of style, it seems) or another quirky material used, they both created a pause which made viewers think about why we value specific fabrics over others. The textiles take on a different meaning when wearing them, versus viewing them on a gallery wall. The dialogue they create between rapid material culture in the 21st century and the pause her simpler works provide highlight the current state of consumer culture in fashion.

The Rugmakers Daughter ran from July 21st through August 26th 2017 at PLUG Projects (1613 Genessee St. KC, MO 64102) for more info please visit <https://www.plugprojects.com>