

## HEARTWORKS STITCHING CLUB CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

When South Africa faced the depth of the corona virus in 2020, women in the Heartworks Stitching Club documented their experiences through original embroideries that depicted their lives and means of survival. These artists live in communities that face the greatest risks of infection. The tapestry collection archives the depth of this moment in human history, in forms that honor women's arts, the use of color in South African design, and the diversity of embroidery forms.



The Heartworks Stitching Club formed in 2000, through the vision of artist Margaret Woermann, to support local women artists, provide original pieces to a market of collectors, and build a sustainable women's cooperative. In 2007, Jennifer Fish, a Professor of Sociology and International Development, partnered with Heartworks to teach about the history of women's labor and the role of art collectives in South Africa's landscape, as she led university study immersion courses in Cape Town.



Embroidery artist Lynette

Embroidery holds a distinct and symbolic space for women across societies—as expressions of tradition, function, and culture. In South Africa, cloth, tapestry, and wall hangings provided means of transporting aesthetic culture during periods of migration. In the South African arts archives, embroideries and beading are central emblems of the diverse human landscape of this country, with 11 national languages, the history of apartheid, and the revolutionary transition to a human-rights centered democracy in 1994.

In 2020, when South Africa faced the highest rates of COVID-19 in the world, Woermann asked the 25 women in the Heartworks Stitching Club to “depict their lives” as a social documentation of what would become a defining global moment. As she hoped, each cloth conveys distinct episodes in women's lives, with repeated themes around survival, food security, school closing, loss of jobs, police surveillance, and the fear of illness. Part of this special collection became available in the USA to support the artists who were facing a complete loss of income. As the pandemic progressed, the tapestries became more hopeful, to reflect the impact of vaccines, the return to daily life, and a larger sense of hope for the world.

This collection features the original archive of tapestries, as an expansive social narrative on the pandemic and the pervasive spirit of survival captured by women in this original cooperative.

Each piece is available for acquisition.  
See the information cards accompanying this exhibition.