

Stitches and Sparkles: Weaving Feminine Narratives through Traditional Sewing and Rhinestone Application

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Background

Research Question:

-What is the relationship between traditional sewing techniques and modern rhinestone application in shaping the narrative of femininity and lineage?

History:

-Using what is now called the Ghana Must Go bag, Ghanaians migrated from Nigeria between the years of 1969 and 1985. The bags became a cultural symbol of movement and migration, entering the art world and even reaching the controversial Louis Vuitton campaign, where they were sold as luxury items rather than necessities.

ENFOLD:

-Ghanaians used a specific kind of plaid bag to leave Nigeria, becoming a symbol of the historical event. Called Ghana Must Go bags, Amarachi Odimba explores migration, domestic space, and memory through the transformation of these symbolic bags in the ENFOLD project, connecting them to her own familial and life experiences.

Methodology

Research was completed for this project in three different ways:

- 1) Hands-on work with my research mentor, Amarachi Odimba, on the ENFOLD project: During my time on the ENFOLD project, I was tasked with the slow, delicate application of rhinestones to the Ghana Must Go bags. Here, I recognized the fragility and femininity of the medium, allowing me to form my own research idea and the ties of art to family and motherhood.
- 2) Finding sources that relate to the ENFOLD project and familial ties: With the help of my research mentor, I found various narratives and first-hand stories of art in families, especially Alice Walker's *Everyday Use*, which delves into the family troubles of hand-me-down artifacts such as quilts.
- 3) The creation of artworks that connect to my own family lineage: My family's main craft is quilting, and I have created a work that combines both these aspects with the aspects Odimba uses from her lineage for her works in the ENFOLD project. I have used quilt-specific stitching, Eastern Russian motifs, and rhinestones to loop back into my time with the ENFOLD project.



Fig. 1: Salley Mavor, *Ghana (Bedtime Stitches)*, 2019
Fabric, thread, beads, wire: sculptural embroidery, 16" x 20"



A Ghana Must Go Bag



Fig. 2: Mickalene Thomas, *Moment's Pleasure #2*, 2008
Rhinestones, acrylic, enamel: wood panel, 72" x 84"



Fig. 3: Amarachi Odimba, *Re/gaze*, 2025
GhanaMustGo bags, canvas, acrylic, sequins, 55" x 52"



Notes on Images

Fig. 1: Use of quilting for nostalgic, family lineage-based works.

Fig. 2: Researched artist used as inspiration for both the ENFOLD project and my own work here.

Fig. 3: One piece of many from the ENFOLD project.

Results

-This experience allowed me to reflect on my family's artistic endeavors in quilting, where sewing serves as a domestic, feminine practice of care, storytelling, and familial continuity. Quilting is incredibly similar to the application of rhinestones in the ENFOLD project, in that it relies on repetition, touch, and plenty of time.

-Results show just how many cultures and familial lines have roots in some form of art that reflects their femininity. A lot of the art I focused on has a trace back to the artist's ancestors. In *Everyday Use* by Alice Walker, Walker draws on her ancestral connections to African quilting as inspiration for her characters and plot. There is a connection back to Mom in this story, which I see in a lot of the art I focus on, as well as the ENFOLD project.

-Further research needs to discover other connections found in art to family, rather than just fragility and femininity. In addition, creating more artworks in this context could further develop a person's pride in their family lineage.

References & Acknowledgments



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