

Guide to Embroidering Latin American Experiences

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*“My project is based on *The Motorcycle Diaries* and *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*. My embroidery is on a vinyl record and juxtaposes Che Guevara’s understanding of systemic issues in Latin America (the map of all major roads) with the personal experiences of friends he meets along his journey (the portrait of a communist man).” IDST 190 07 student, Fall 2019*

Goals of this Guide

- The goal of this guide is to introduce students to embroidery, a practice that will support your learning of the different dimensions of life in Latin America.
- Using this guide, you will use the Makerspace to design and create an embroidered map that communicates your understanding of Latin American experiences to a broader audience, drawing on the readings and films introduced and discussed in class. Embroidery (along with sewing and stitching) develops your concentration, visualization, and creative thinking. Embroidery is performative art; it requires body and mind working together to create, identify, and make connections between patterns, abstract concepts, and material form.

Recommendations

Make this “your” work. Make it for yourself. Take some risks with it. Try something new. You’ve got this!!

These are the “best practices” that I recommend you follow as you design and embroider your map.

- Read the project description and rubric carefully [<here a hyperlink to the project instructions>](#). In the project description you will find information on BeAM locations, orientation, and available workshops

(e.g., sewing). Read through the description of graded items and grading rationale; make sure that you understand the instructions (e.g., which assignments are due and when they are due). My contact information is at the very top of the Instructions document. I am happy to address any questions that you might have about this assignment!

- Start early and check with me regularly about the content and form of your idea for this project. This semester-long project is specifically left open-ended to allow room for your creativity. On the one hand, this openness is great; you can choose what to focus on and which materials to use. On the other hand, it can be quite daunting to design and create a project from scratch –especially if you have never embroidered before. Please check with me if you are having difficulties with this part of the creative process. We will dedicate time in class to guide you on project design, visualization, and storytelling. These approaches should help you narrow down your project idea.
- The assignment asks you to use class content and translate it into an object of art: an embroidered map. Think about how meaning is communicated in your map/artwork's content, context, and process. What will your map address? What is the intent and what is your point of view?
 - Meaning can be communicated in different ways. For example, in the **materials** you use in your art work. Your choice of materials (e.g., copper wire, hair, wool yarn, alpaca yarn, silk) matters: is it “strong,” soft, colorful, etc.? Does it relate to the economy and production of a specific place?
 - Meaning can also be communicated through **representation** of concepts. What will you embroider? Which film or reading will you focus on? Which ideas, events, or places will you represent? (e.g., Chuquicamata Mine or Internal Colonialism?).
 - Meaning can be conveyed with **technique and positionality**, too. What embroidery techniques will you incorporate in your work? Whose *point of view* does your technique represent? (e.g., Otomi, Arpilleras, or Kipus)

Things to Avoid

- One of the most challenging points of this assignment is how to work with the openness of the prompt. Each student is given the space to engage with a topic of their choice and to decide on the materials to represent and communicate their ideas. Each student determines the intent of the map and has to be clear about their positionality and point of view. This is challenging because the responsibility of creativity is on the student: students have to identify their point of view and have to narrow down the scope of their ideas.
- For example, students start with broad ideas and ambitious projects to represent lots of information. Then they find out that while the ideas are impressive and thoughtful, the actual practice of getting these on a map makes them aware of how long it takes to implement their idea. They have limited time, resources, and technical expertise. They are learning as they embroider. Embroidering requires being present, thinking about audience, and reflecting on positionality. This requires a slowing down. The project *requires* this slowing down.
- To minimize frustration in the learning process, I recommend introducing BeAM early on and to start practicing embroidery IN CLASS early on. One of the things we did was story-boarding of readings and films early on in the semester. This helped identify key features, using drawing and sketching as alternative modes of communication, and then presenting the sketched to peers.
- I recommend dividing up the project into smaller chunks of assignments, e.g., proposal, sketches, drafts, reflections (even taking pictures of themselves in the places they choose to embroider), and draft presentations to a broader audience.

- I also recommend using class time to practice embroidery, starting with simple tasks that are meaningful to students (e.g., asking them to use the techniques taught to embroider their names).

Modifications

- This project works well for a small class. For a larger class, it is useful to create smaller groups where students collaborate and teach each other. Students have diverse levels of skills and learning styles. For some, embroidery comes easy. Others find embroidery more difficult. Sometimes it is because of social norms and expectations (e.g., a male student told that this is an activity for women, not men), other times the difficulty stems from motor skills, other times from impatience.
- For the larger classroom setting I recommend, forming peer support groups early on and making space for these groups to meet regularly during class time, to maximize their ability to work together. Confidence unfolds from familiarity and regularity.

Other Resources

- We created a website for the course for students to use as a gallery exhibit of example projects created by students who previously took this course. The website includes sketches, work in progress, and final products, along with a short paragraph reflection by each student.
- We created short videos of ourselves embroidering to show in class.