

Sharon Kagan: Dropped Stitches

Forgiveness has a quality of paradox. We're told it's a moral and spiritual journey; wellness psychology says it's about your own wellbeing and peace. The wounded human heart often has other ideas. Letting go can feel like letting them get away with it. You may feel that your tormentor or perpetrator of injury or injustice is not deserving of this grace, or that it is not your place or in your power to forgive their trespasses. The daughter of Holocaust survivors, Sharon Kagan has contemplated this paradox since forever, and much of her practice as an artist has sought to resolve it.

"The Undoing: Forgiveness" is both a work of performance and of video, accessing Kagan's practice of interdisciplinary narrative metaphor. With her own background in performance art and its documentation, and through a triple lens of feminism, Jewishness, and community, Kagan has been working in a liminal space between private and public soul-searching. In the video she enacts a ritualized knitting practice — creating then unraveling a pattern using sticky waxed hemp, all of it a metaphor for the challenges of the act of forgiveness and interconnectedness.

In its emotional complexity and straightforward aesthetic the work has echoes of the Shoah Project videos and ceremonial readings of religious texts. Its quiet power recalls the profound directness of the movement and video artists in the 1980's who explored the contours of an emerging medium as well as cultural trauma centered on their own bodies — in this case, Kagan's own hands. The mesmerizing rhythm of her movements are augmented by audio segments in which anonymous speakers testify as to episodes of harm done to them and their path toward forgiving their aggressors (friends, parents, civic institutions).

As Kagan repeats a Buddhist meditation on peace, freedom, love and joy in response to each canto, the idea dawns that unraveling is a good thing, actually. The labor of knitting was generating a knotty, sticky trap; dismantling it is freedom.

—Shana Nys Dambrot

Arts Editor, LA Weekly
Flaunt, Art & Cake, Artillery