

SHARON KAGAN



The Undoing: Forgiveness

Video Performance by Sharon Kagan

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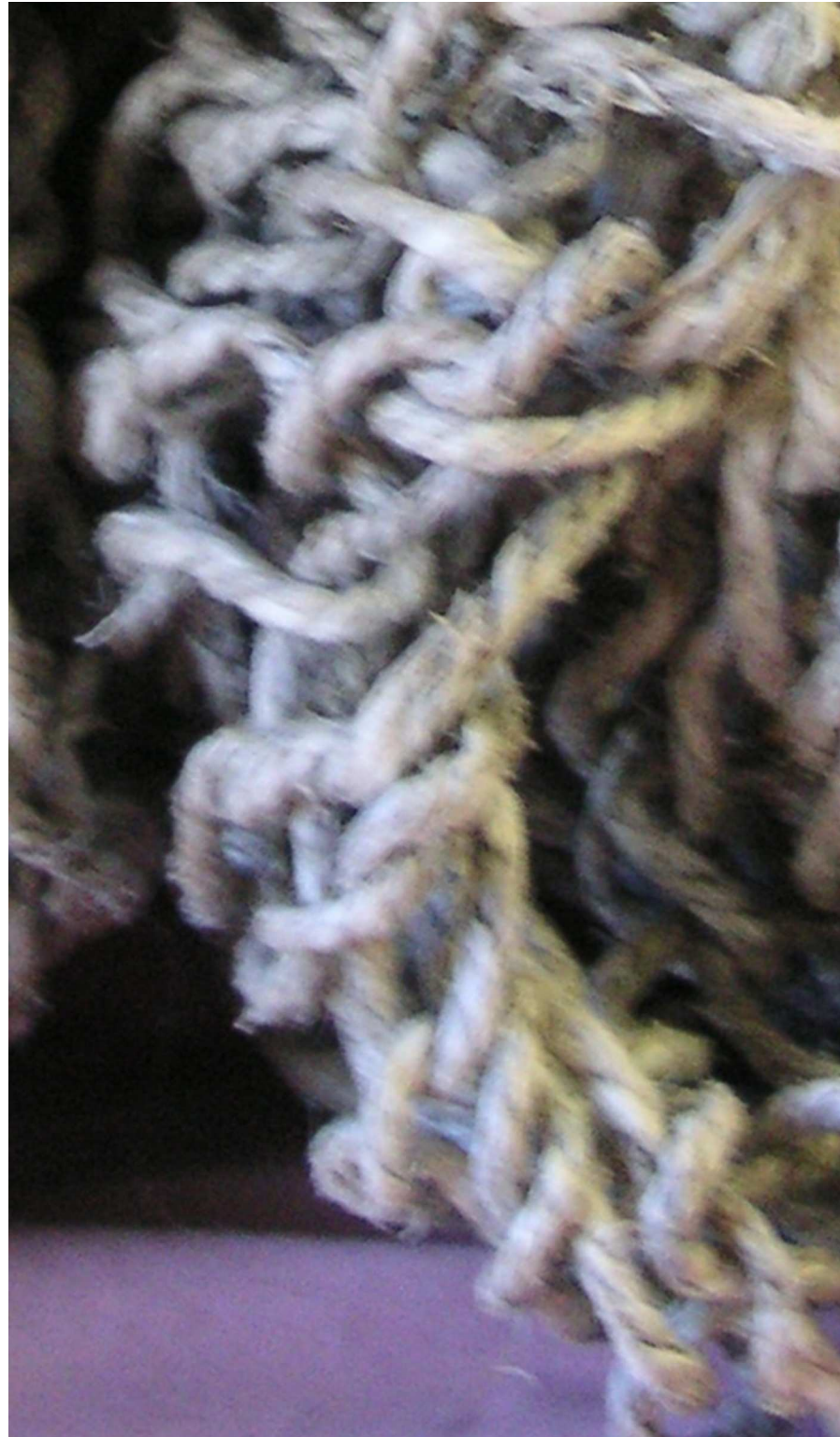
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Artist Bio

Resume

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The Undoing: Forgiveness



In 2021 I received the WORD Artist Grant: The Bruce Geller Memorial Prize from the American Jewish University to produce a community video project presenting intimate stories of wrongdoing contrasted by the benefits of forgiving. In the video I perform a ritual knitting practice accompanied by a loving-kindness meditation in response to private stories of wrongdoing and forgiveness recorded by a diverse group of artists and community members.



A Sticky Business

Knitting is generally a very relaxing experience, meditative. However, knitting waxed hemp twine is an entirely different experience. The wax stuck to my hands, the needles and the twine stuck to itself. I knew this going into the process; that's why I chose the material. Anger, the inability to forgive, and wanting to forgive are all sticky business.

In my imagination the visual elements of the video would be one continuous knitting and unraveling. You can actually see the tips of my fingers redden in the video. It was painful.

As is always the case with performance that is ceremonial, everything that happens is meant to be. There were moments when the twine got completely tangled. I had to put my needles down and reckon with it.

It was more than just knitting and unraveling, but a complex subject and the materiality of the waxed hemp reflected that fact. When I was finished my hands ached and burned and were covered in a waxy residue.





Metta is a Buddhist meditation practice that involves concentrating and reciting, either silently or out loud, phrases of good wishes toward yourself and others.

Metta is usually translated as “loving-kindness” or “good will.”

What this form of meditation is designed to do is to purify us of hatred and ill will.

Good will, or loving-kindness, is the antidote to ill will, anger, and animosity.

Metta reduces the conflict and hatred that emerge from fear and like a virus spread from person to person. This form of meditation cultivates non-hatred and non-fear in order to become stronger, more understanding, and more centered.

Then one can move forward in a positive fashion to battle oppression and work towards creating a better world.

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**

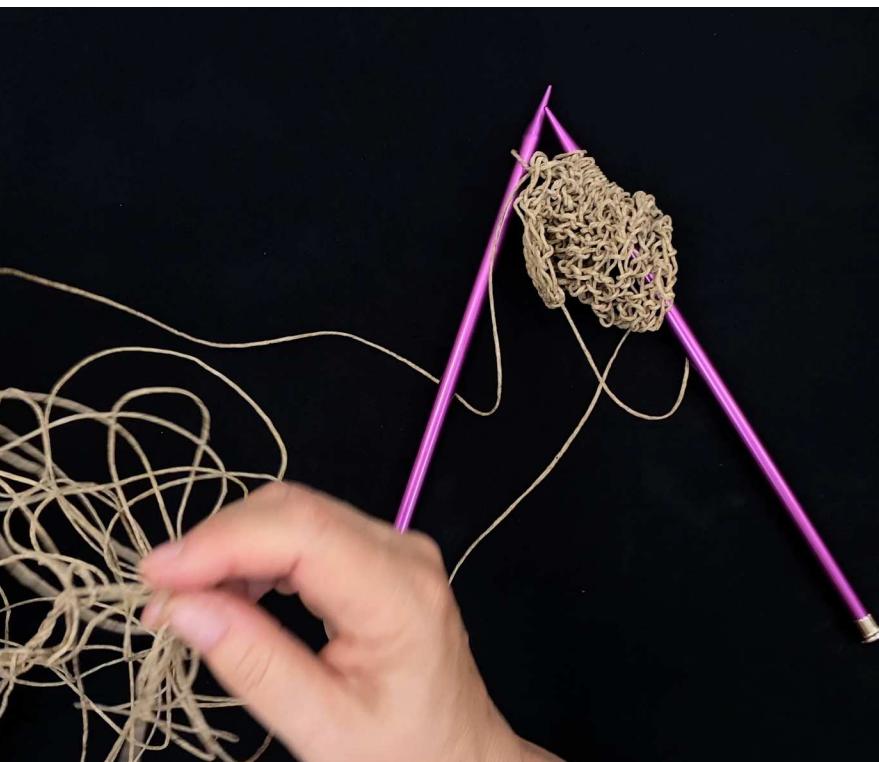
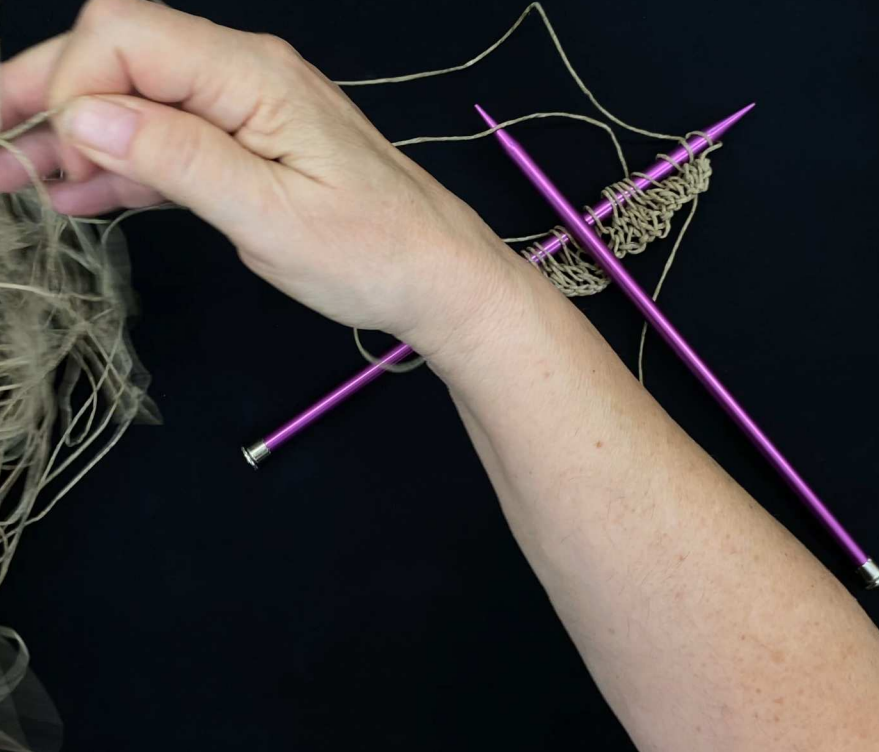
Shana Nys Dambrot , Los Angeles based writer and critic

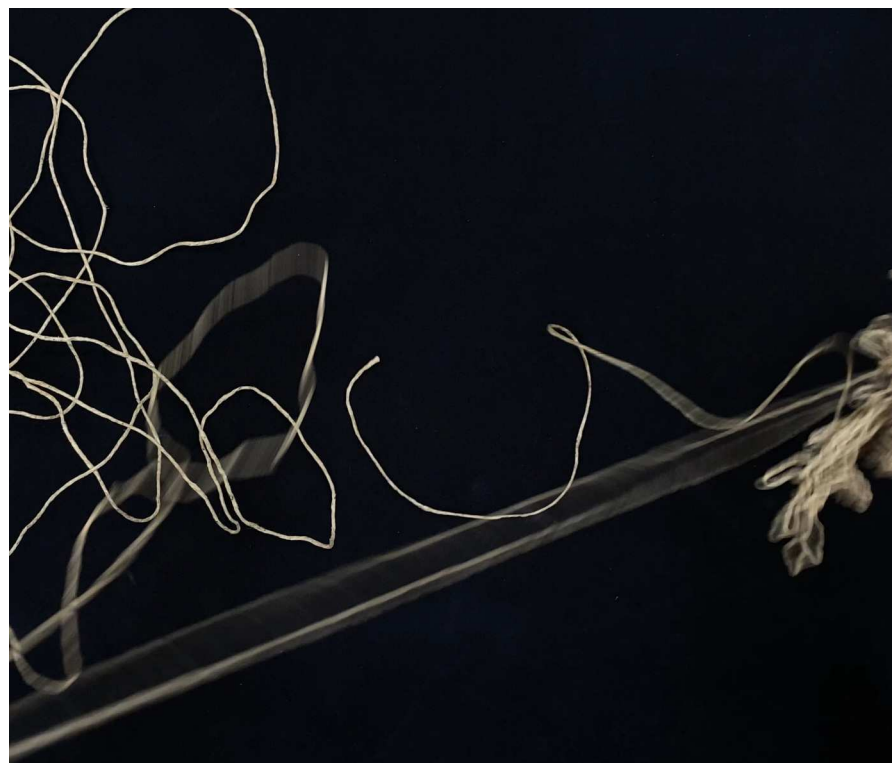
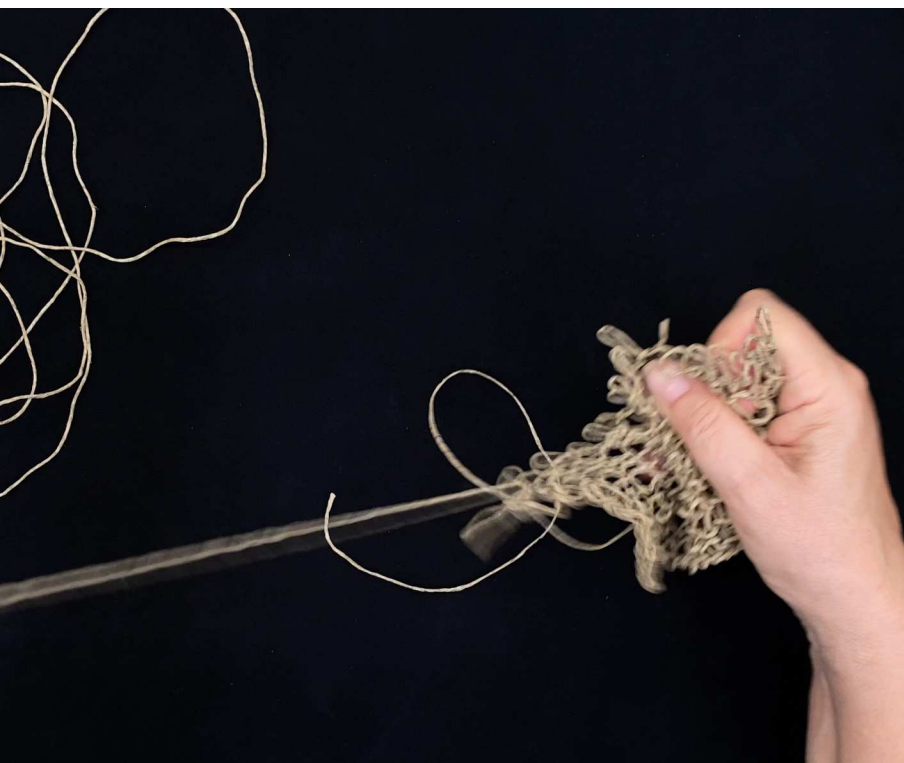
With a long career that has encompassed practices from performance art, to radical knitting, installation, photography, painting, and video, Sharon Kagan's meta motif is the pursuit of a kind of craft-based conceptualism, in which both experience and idea are given equal prominence in her vibrant, fractal aesthetic.

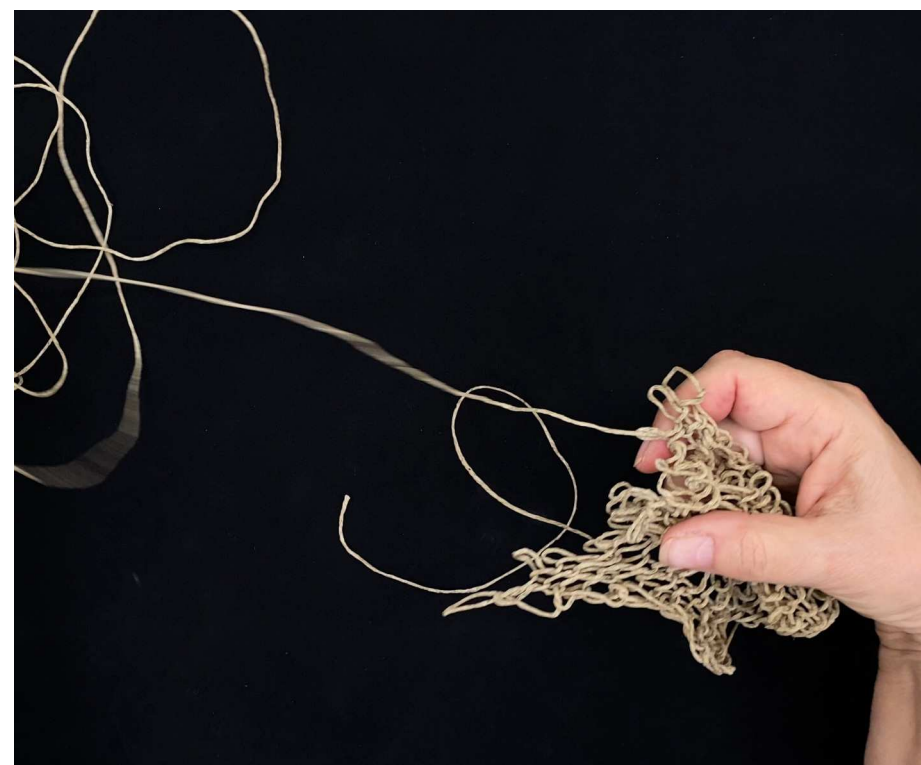
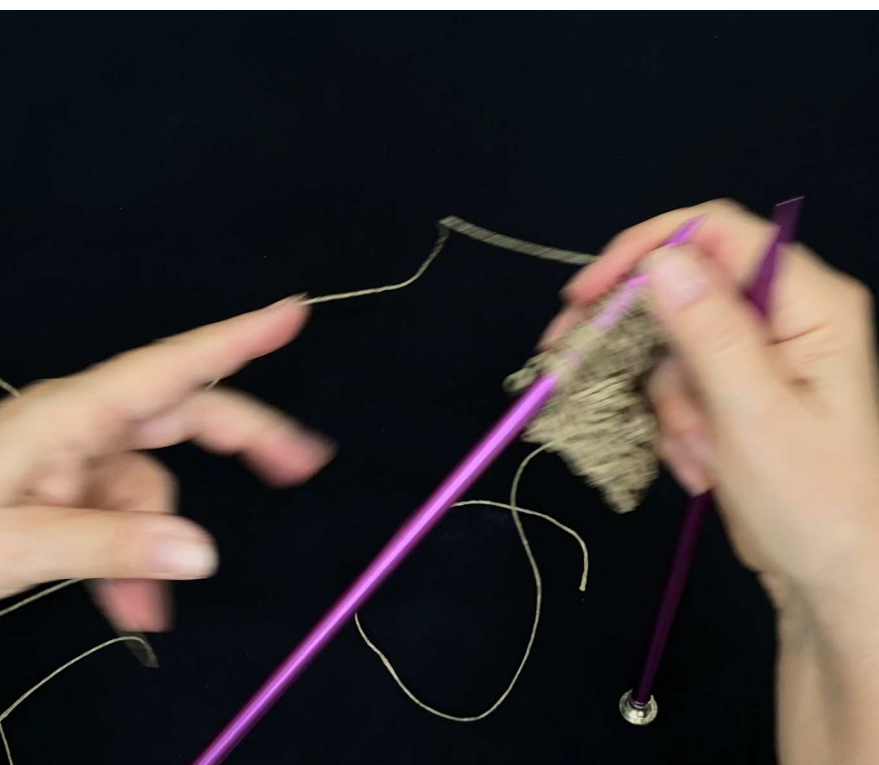
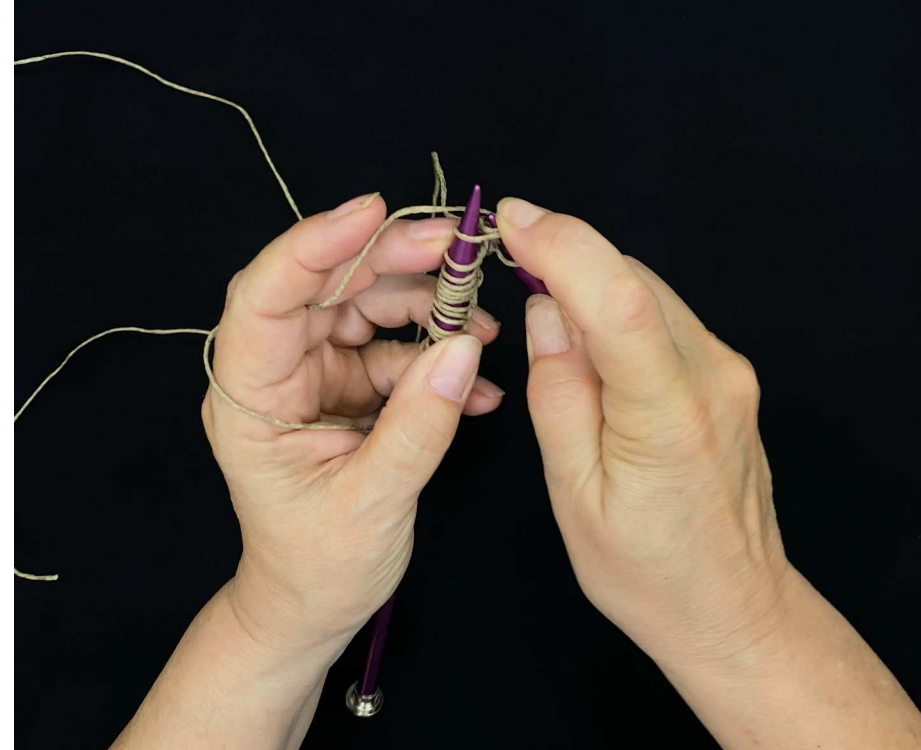
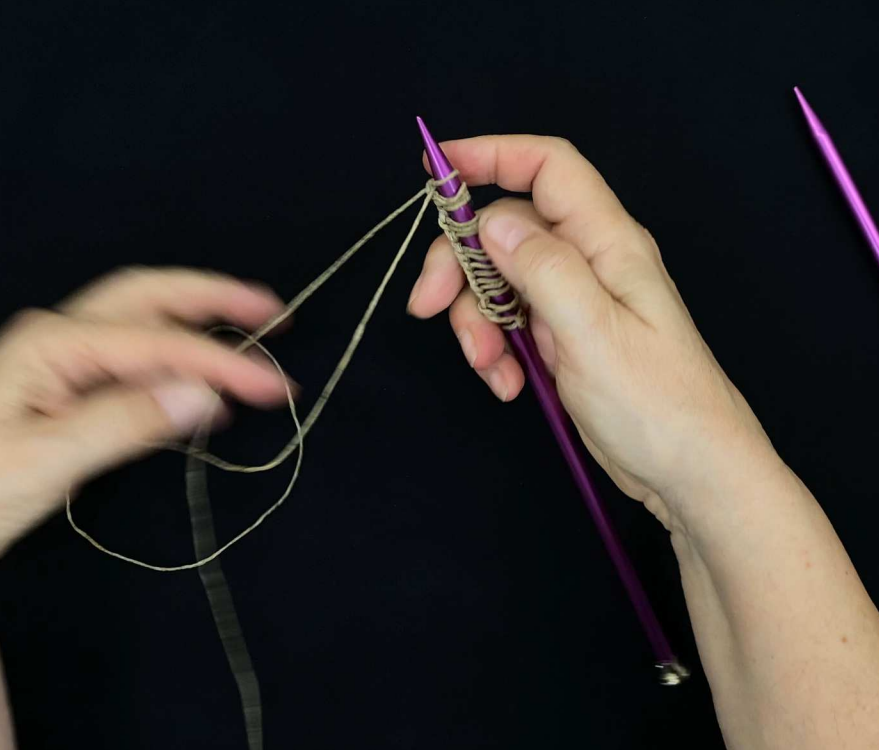
Richard Vine, Senior Editor, *Art in America*

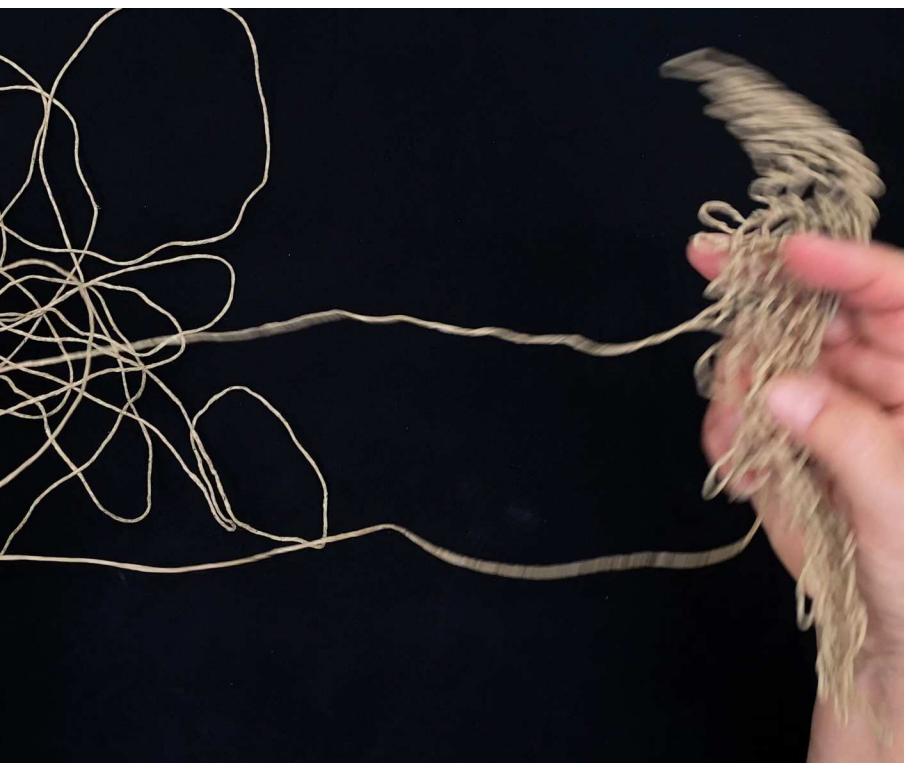
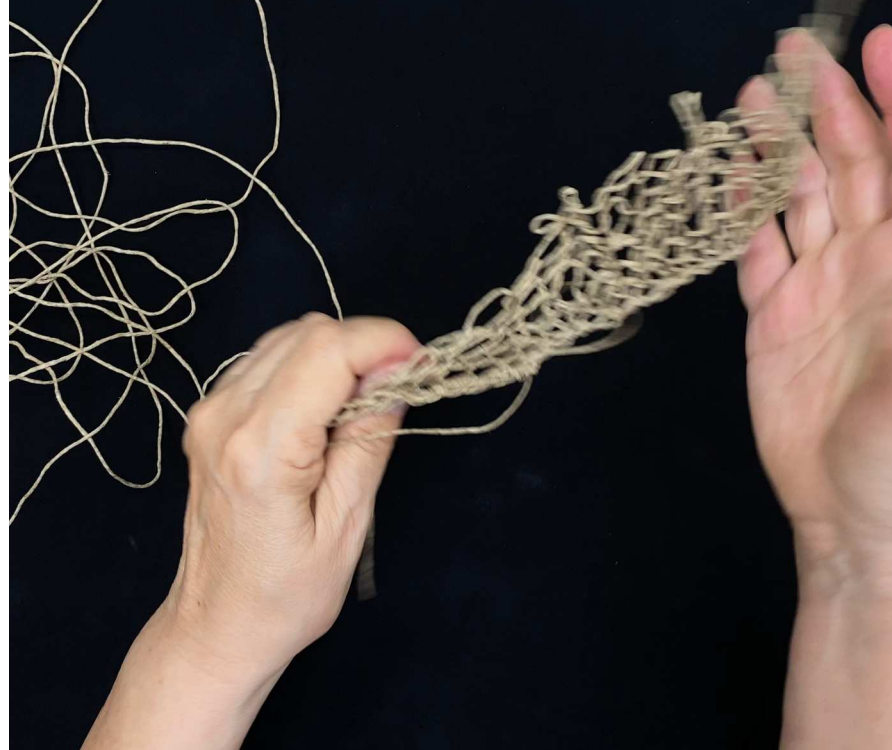
When Kagan's mother died in 2003, the artist took up the older woman's interest in knitting, both as a way of soothing her grief and as a physical expression of human continuity and connectedness. Knitting and nets became the basis for numerous sculptures that preceded her current work.















*May you know peace,
may you be happy,
may you be free of all pain
and suffering,
may you know joy.*

THE UNDOING: FORGIVENESS

***An invitation to participate in a new community-sourced performance/video project
by Sharon Kagan 2021***

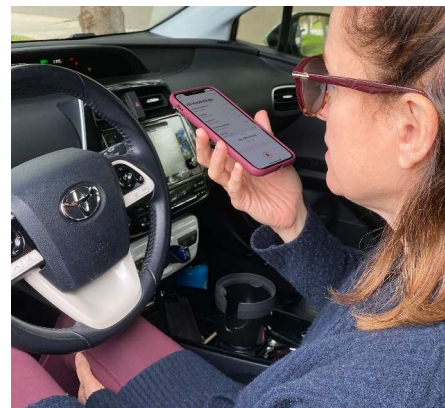
If you are interested in a serious inquiry into forgiveness, I am looking for your story. Please share a short 3 minute audio story of a wrong that you have experienced followed by how you would benefit from forgiving and releasing the pain of this situation. Possible subjects include personal story, historical story, political story, or a story of self-wrongdoing as examples.

These powerful stories will be included in a video/performance of my hands knitting and unraveling waxed hemp while reciting a Buddhist Metta loving-kindness meditation. “May you be happy, may you know peace, may you be free from all harm and suffering.”

This invitation is extended to a diverse community. Participants will be anonymous, and all recordings submitted may be used in production and promotion of the video performance. If you have a story, please consider helping others on a path of healing.

Please share your short 3-minute audio story and what impact it had on you.

Use your phone to record your story - Record the memory several times, choosing the one you feel is best, and email your recording to me personally.





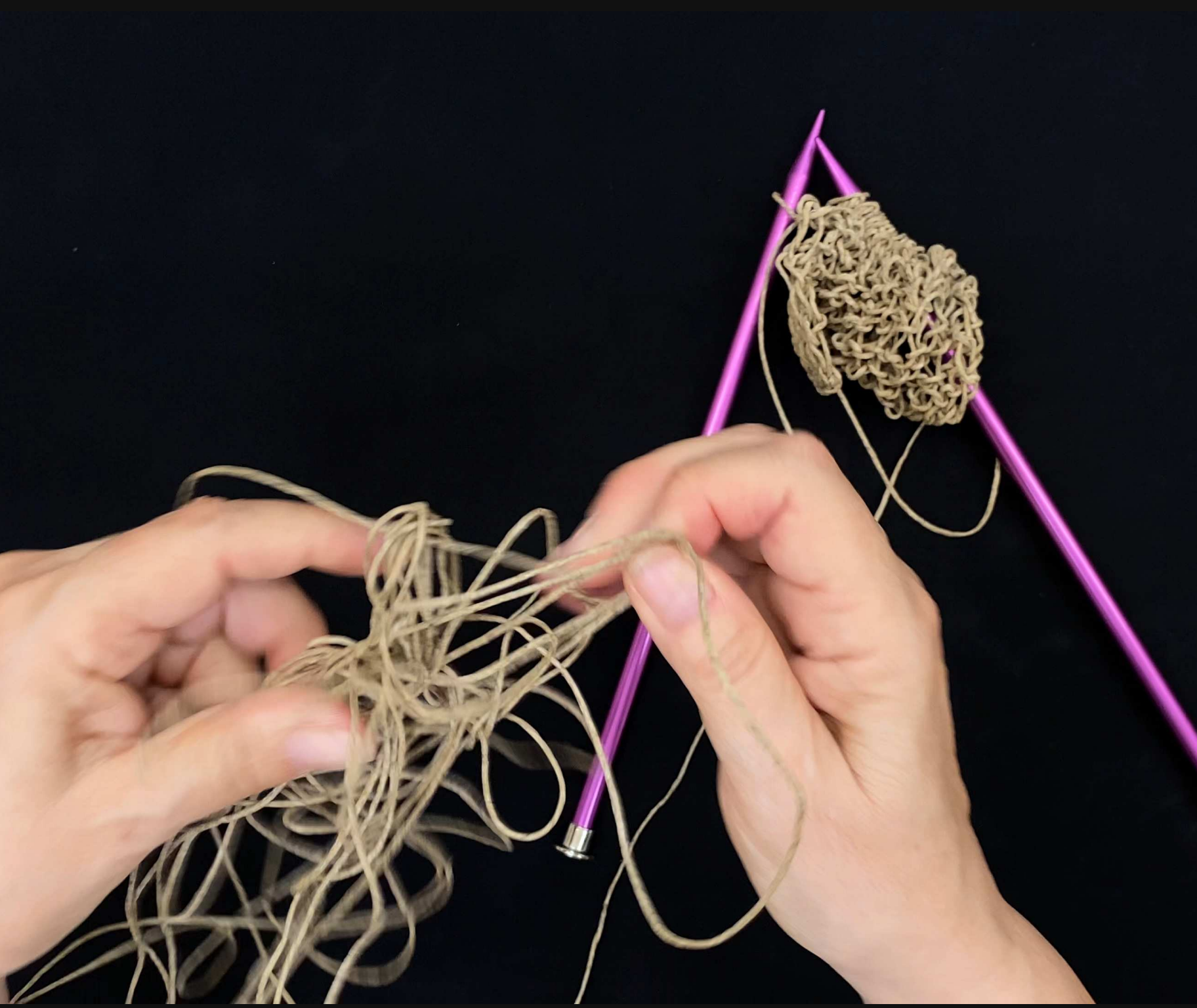
D. Dominic Lombardi, New York based artist, curator and critic

In Kagan's approach to art and science it is all about the journey, the inspiration and the faith that one-day you will find something concrete to build upon, discover and understand. Kagan will always be searching and finding because it is in her nature. Each step has an unpredictable end in some sense, and a very predictable end in other ways and it is that odd balance, that controlled chaos that at various points defies belief and defines processes in art and science.

John Mendelson, New York based artist and critic

We live in a time when artistic boundaries have begun to blur. Categories of art based on their medium, like painting or sculpture, have morphed until the hybrid is as familiar as the pure-bred specimen. Sharon Kagan is an artist who has worked in a range of modes including interactive installations, expressive performances, and inventive drawings. She brings to her work an awareness that art can emerge from deep levels of physicality and feeling, and show us the continuity between personal experience and the wider world.

By revealing what was once invisible, Kagan's work embodies a life transmogrified into art, starting with her early installations and performances. Kagan began knitting to mourn the loss of her mother, an unbroken link evoked in yarn. She has cited perceiving the world around her as vibratory energy as a formative artistic experience. The drawings and paintings she creates suggest the image of the net, a fabric made of knots and emptiness, endlessly capable of growth, movement, and connection.



BIO

Sharon Kagan's multimedia work focuses on socio-political issues providing multiple entry points for the viewer to imagine a more just, diverse, and inclusive world.

Compassion in Action is meant to expand the feminist tenant surrounding liberation and environmentalism into an intersectional, multidimensional conversation about diversity and justice. She states, "When there is ambiguity, there is the possibility for multiple interpretations inviting meaningful dialogue, exchange, and change."

Kagan received the *WORD Artist Grant: The Bruce Geller Memorial Prize* from the American Jewish University in 2021. Recent solo exhibitions include *The Politics of Color*, Show Gallery, Hollywood, CA and *String Theory*, Herrett Center for Arts and Science, Jean B. King Gallery, College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls, ID (2020-2021); *Sharon Kagan*, Hardin Center for Cultural Arts, Gadsden, AL and *String Theory*, Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings, MT (2019); and *Sharon Kagan*, Charles MacNider Art Museum, Mason City, IA and *Sharon Kagan*, Northern State University, Aberdeen, SD (2018).



SHARON KAGAN

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Education

M.F.A. 1979 Sculpture/Performance, Otis Art Institute

B.A. 1976 Fine Art (cum laude), UCLA

Grants/Fellowships/Awards

2021 - WORD Artist Grant: The Bruce Geller Memorial Prize, AJU

2019 - CCI Quick Grant Awardee

1989-1990 - National State County Partnership II Matching

Grant we declined due to fiscal problems with our non-profit partner

1985 -1986 - Brody Arts Fund Fellowship Award, Individual fellowship in performance art

1985 - California Arts Council, Artist in Residence sponsored by Artsreach

Professional and Volunteer Affiliations

2020-2019 Kipaipai Fellow, artist professional development program

2017 Pico Union Project, Artist in Residence

2005-2007 PiNK (into Pins, Needles & Knives) Collaborative Artist Group

1999 Barbara T. Smith archive, registrar

1986 Performance Director, Suzanne Lacy's *The Dark Madonna*, UCLA Sculpture Garden

1977- 79 Judy Chicago, Dinner Party, apprentice

Selected Exhibitions

2022

"The Undoing: Forgiveness" screening at J Street National Conference in Washington DC

2020-2021

The Politics of Color (solo exhibition), Show Gallery, Hollywood, CA

The Street & The Shop, Neue House, The Bradbury Building. Curated by Michael Slenske

String Theory (solo exhibition), Herrett Center for Arts and Science, Jean B. King Gallery, College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls, ID

Maiden LA, SOS.Siren, Los Angeles, CA

2019

Sharon Kagan, Hardin Center for Cultural Arts (solo exhibition) Gadsden, AL
String Theory (solo exhibition), Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings, MT

2018

Ping Pong Miami, Miami, FL

Sharon Kagan, Charles MacNider Art Museum (solo exhibition), Mason City, IA

Ping Pong Basel, Basel, Switzerland

Sharon Kagan, Northern State University (solo exhibition), Aberdeen, SD

2017

Free Form Five, Elga Wimmer, NY, NY

Selected Performances

2000

An Intimate Conversation, a performance/installation. Upstairs at the Market Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

1999

Bone Kaddish, Santa Monica Airport, Santa Monica, CA

A Husband/A Wife collaboration with Terry Holzgreen, Santa Monica Airport, Santa Monica, CA

1989

As I Recall, HIGHWAYS Opening Benefit, Santa Monica, CA

Selected Bibliography

“Meet an Artist Monday”; LAWeekly.com, Shana Nys Dambrot, November 16, 2020

“5 New Exhibitions to Check Out”, *Angeleno Magazine*, Claire Harper, October 2020

“Free, Form, Five”, *CultureCatch.com*, Mary Hrbacek, October 16, 2017

“FREEFORM 5, *ArtQuips*, 5, David Gibson, October 17, 2017

“Free Form Five”, *Huffington Post*, D. Dominick Lombardi, September 29, 2017

“Sharon Kagan: Microcosmic”, *Huffington Post*, Shana Nys Dambrot, March 16, 2017



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