

Current Artist Statement

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Born on the binational precipice between the United States and Mexico, Ali Dipp is interested in the evolution of America's self-representation. Her hometown of El Paso, the former jean capital of the world until NAFTA, sets the backdrop to thematic currents she probes by 'painting' on denim with thread. Employing the use of a manual sewing machine, the artist repurposes denim and thread to speak broadly about what the borderland vividly visualizes: the shape of the nation. The presented collection is a series of denim heirlooms created by manually stitching on repurposed Wrangler jeans from El Paso's Salvation Army store. Along with other denim heirlooms, the displayed collection of works will include three large stitch paintings from a developing, in-progress twelve-part series titled *Of Course*. This show spans both representation and abstract works concerning the evident themes within the process of aspiring towards a better life.

The denim heirlooms amass a collection of images across 300 years of nation-making painting. The works refer to a range of historical images, including landscape and history genre paintings. The series pulls from a long chronological trajectory of images, spanning from the Hudson River Valley School through twenty-first century depictions of the West. This set of historical pictures, when brought together, form an aesthetic argument about how American representations reflect a changing nation. The compositions, while pulled from discrete and often distant historical circumstances, articulate recurring paradigms—such as the directional pull of an image or the orchestration of light across the pictorial horizon. Evidence of these visual motifs resounds across these works of Emanuel Letuze, Edwin Church and Albert Bierstadt. Witnessing these images concurrently in a room allows the viewer to cut across hundreds of years to show the unchanging experience of representing America. Curated as a whole, these denim heirlooms ultimately emphasize how reiterating visual scenes enforce American aspiration. When amassed as a whole, the collection seeks to explicate how the aesthetics of nationhood render what Ed Ruscha calls “a particular kind of heaven.”

Along with recounting historical representational images, the collection fuses craft into modernism. The series ties together the quilting tradition into a modernist grid—referencing artists who employ modernism to investigate social questions such as Mark Bradford, Agnes Martin, Jennifer Bartlett, Thester Gates, and Sanford Biggers. Buffered by the structural edification of grids, lines, and trajectories, *American Craft* testifies that even images that present the process of moving into novel terrain is nothing new at all. Ambition, with all its novelty, returns to similar and time-trodden visual motifs. In bringing about manually-stitched and print-based renditions of still images about a changing nation, the works interrogate how ideas about *progress* themselves *progress*.

While the works on display are part of a developing series, aspiration as an American condition has long been trenchant to Dipp's work. While she originally started making denim stitch paintings to commemorate familial genealogy and its immigrant legacy, she has expanded her initial investigations in U.S.-Mexican relations to think about a broadened scope of trajectories across American history. She conceives her earlier work, with its primary conceptual emphasis on the Southwestern border, as influential to her current efforts.