

PRESS RELEASE

Artist Rachel Breen Explores Relationship Between Overconsumption of Clothing and Working Conditions of Garment Workers in New MAEP Exhibition at Mia



Rachel Breen, *Shroud*, Installation view, Perlman Museum, Carleton College, 2018. Photo credit: Renee Yamada

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MINNEAPOLIS, March 3, 2020—The Minnesota Artists Exhibition Program (MAEP) at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) presents “The Labor We Wear,” an exhibition by artist Rachel Breen. On view March 19 through June 28, 2020, the exhibition explores the relationship between the overconsumption of clothing and the dangerous working conditions of garment workers throughout history. Breen utilizes used clothing to create four large-scale installations that make these relationships visible in order to find ways to break the toxic chain.

The centerpiece of “The Labor We Wear” is Breen’s massive work *Shroud* (2018), an installation consisting of 1,281 white shirts that hang from the gallery ceiling. The work commemorates the lost lives of workers (predominately women) from two tragedies: the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in Manhattan, and the 2013 collapse of Rana Plaza factories in Savar, Bangladesh. The shirts have multiple references: the white shrouds used to wrap corpses in Bangladesh and of the Jewish faith, shirtwaists sewn and worn by New York garment workers at the turn of the century, and clothing currently sewn by Bangladesh’s garment workers.

The intersecting installations of three other monumental textile works, *The Bottom Line*, *Collared* and *Piece Work* connects the themes of *Shroud* with one’s relationship with people making clothes today. For this artwork, Breen deconstructs used shirts to make tangible the piecework of labor. Covering three walls, one from floor to ceiling, the installation of brightly colored shirt “segments” reflects what a typical garment worker in Bangladesh sews during one day’s work.

“Our lives are defined by consumer culture; yet, we are quick to forget the very real environmental and humanitarian impact of our actions,” said Nicole Soukup, Mia’s assistant curator of contemporary art. “Breen reminds us of the invisible labor we wear.”

Mia

About the artist

Rachel Breen holds an MFA from the University of Minnesota and an undergraduate degree from [The Evergreen State College](#). She has been a community organizer for social justice organizations throughout the country and is a cofounder of Jewish Community Action in Minnesota. Breen is the recipient of four Minnesota State Arts Board grants, the Walker Art Center's Open Field fellowship, and the 2019–2020 Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship.

Related Programming

- Wednesday, March 25, 10am – 4pm: A mending circle led by Rachel Breen will be held in Mia's U.S. Bank Gallery as an act of remembrance on the 109th anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, which was the deadliest industrial disaster in American history. The public is welcome to join for as long as they like. Thread, needles, and scissors will be provided, just bring something that needs to be mended. Artist Lauren Callis of [An Upcycled Closet](#) will be teaching basic sewing skills at 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.
- Thursday, April 2, 6:30–7:30pm: Rachel Breen will be in conversation with Dr. Sanchita Saxena, executive director, Institute for South Asia Studies, and director of the Subir and Malini Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies at University of California, Berkeley. The discussion will touch upon the cycle of garment production in Bangladesh and the consumption of fast fashion—from dangerous factory conditions to problems caused by textile waste.
- Thursday, May 21st, 7- 8 pm, Rachel will give a talk about her work, her process and the relationship between the overconsumption of clothing and working conditions of garment workers.

This exhibition is part of the [Minnesota Artists Exhibition Program](#), located in Mia's U.S. Bank Gallery.

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About The Minneapolis Institute Of Art

Home to more than 90,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest art collections in the country—from all corners of the globe, and from ancient to contemporary—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration. General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee. For more information, call 612.870.3000 or visit artsmia.org.

Museum Hours

Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday 10am–5pm

Thursday, Friday 10am–9pm

Sunday 11am–5pm

Monday Closed

For more information, call + 1 612 870 3000 or visit artsmia.org

