Spatial Entanglements from South to North

Abstract: Personalizing artistic expressions through textile design is an exciting way to explore innovative concepts and reflect individual or shared narratives. This study delves into the use of digital tools and natural materials to develop textile patterns and analyse their interactions with audiences. These materials take on a different appearance when viewed through or created with a digital lens. They provide a new way to experience these concepts and create an alternate reality. By using a qualitative arts-based research (ABR) approach, this research focuses on how self-created digital images on textiles can open up new possibilities and transport viewers beyond their physical realms. These collaborative textiles were exhibited in various settings to examine their adaptability and potential in relation to space. This practical creative approach delivered remarkable possibilities for reflection and collaborative analysis. Additionally, these textiles created a space-changing effect when displayed in different architectural settings, leading to new interpretations and experiences.

Keywords: Creative collaboration; textile installation; space-changing; shared narratives; arts-based research

1. Introduction and background

Entanglements South-North (2022–2023) exhibits the artistic and research collaborations of a group of four artist-researchers who engaged in digital bioart, co-creation, and shared authorship using arts-based research (ABR) approach (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Chilton & Leavy, 2014; Leavy, 2015). The study aims to offer different perspectives and approaches to understanding conflicts that may occur during the process of connection and creation. Using various natural materials with a personal artistic approach, the artist-researchers translated their visions into colours, images, and patterns, which were digitally printed onto eight large textiles (each 140cm x 700cm) that served as a basis for innovative collaborations and creative partnerships. Through these personalised, collaborative textiles, the artist-researchers anticipated fostering an environment of open communication, collaboration, experimentation, and new discoveries, bridging the gap between art and science. The arts provide a platform that enables people to forge significant connections, fostering relationships across communities and among individuals and taking on various forms, all of which promote unity and association (Chilton & Leavy, 2014). The work explored the connections between people, natural
environments, creativity, and identity expression. Consequently, the eight textiles entangled in a
dialogue that represented the role of the arts in social change, especially when margins are continually
shifting to create new possibilities.

As a result, this research poses questions such as, by exploring the concept of creative collaboration,
how can narratives shape and inform the opinions of audiences? How can space alter or transform
the appearance of an installation, creating a unique atmosphere and experience for the viewer? How
does textile installation in space influence the audience’s experiences and allow connections between
people from diverse backgrounds and cultures? Briefly, by exploring these questions, this research
seeks to understand how shared narratives, space, and installation shape audience perspectives.

The purpose of this article is to examine three exhibitions of collaborative textiles in various
architectural environments. We will observe how textile installations were transformed when placed
in various architectural spaces. Furthermore, the interplay between spaces and textiles will be
explored, detailing how each affects and influences the other. The fusion of textiles and space had a
significant impact on the exhibition’s visual appeal, allowing for collective creativity and group
engagement. By creating spatial relations between art and space, the textile installation highlighted
how different settings could change the meanings of the textiles.

2. Literature review

Architectural critics have recognised that the existence of a building goes beyond its planning and
building stages (Brawne, 2003). Rendell et al. (2000) claim that architecture is, to some extent, a form
of representation. It involves more than just physical buildings but also includes other forms of
creative output from architects, such as sketches, blueprints, written descriptions, and photographs
(p. 11). These elements are essential components of the larger architectural landscape. Advancing this
argument, they further claim that ‘architecture also appears indirectly in various forms of cultural
documentation, all of which contain representations of gender as well as class, sexuality and race’ (p.
11). By approaching architecture in this manner, it is possible to view the field as encompassing not
only physical structures and designs but also visual representations, written works, theories, histories,
and the points at which they intersect (p. 11).

Art installations can transform a space (Yavena, 2003), inspiring audiences to explore and interact in
ways that they may not have considered before. Through this interaction, individuals can develop a
deeper understanding of both the space and their own place within it. This understanding facilitates
meaningful social connections between audiences and the exhibited works of art, enabling them to
engage with the space in a significant and impactful way (Gonzales, 2019). According to Dernie,
‘exhibiting has become a significant form of creative expression’ (2006, p. 6). While exhibition-making
often involves collaboration between diverse teams of people, including curators, artists, designers,
writers, and technicians – it also reflects broader social and cultural trends, providing an opportunity
to comment on the world. Through art, design and technology, exhibitions can bring attention to
important issues in society, create meaningful conversations, and provide an opportunity for
audiences to engage with culture in unique and immersive ways (Ashton & Durling, 2000; Bal, 1992;
1996). Bal (2020) explains the curatorship as an act or performance. However, curator acts are also
proactive, often radical, with the aim of transforming the behaviours, perspectives and thinking of
audiences (Sutter, 2008). Moreover, exhibitions are displays of the actual performances of artworks, as explained by Bal (2020).

Dernie (2006) states that creating an experience through narrative is central to exhibition design. By using the power of storytelling, exhibitions can inspire action and foster progress, allowing the audience to engage with the world in a meaningful way. In addition, installations in exhibitions are powerful tools to express an impact, spread awareness, develop empathy, and shape a better tomorrow. They provide a platform for creatives to showcase their work and engage with the community in a significant manner.

Collaborative works of art can uncover the stories of the unseen and unheard and can explore the power of collective storytelling. They provide an important space for stimulating dialogue on establishing a more equitable world. Using architecture as a means of “shaping space,” Jefferies and Conroy (2006) explore narratives and storytelling. Shaping space through art can be an influential instrument for collaboration and storytelling (Bal, 1992; 1996) and can be used to create meaningful dialogues about the world around us. When patterns are created based on collective stories, they enhance our comprehension of the intricacies and subtleties of shared experiences (Steffen, 1997). This, in turn, opens up opportunities for significant dialogue around social equality (Ishikawa, 2003). For instance, a textile pattern created through collective storytelling can be used to create a shared language that can help bridge gaps between communities and facilitate honest, open dialogues about difficult topics.

In this article, the artist-researchers refer to the display of collaboratively designed textiles in architectural spaces as “space-changing” (Jefferies & Conroy, 2006; Tapki et al., 2018). Textiles have been used for centuries to create beautiful and functional interior spaces. It is irrefutable that textile design, interior design and architecture are interrelated and can be viewed through an interdisciplinary perspective. Textiles can also serve as a means of conveying a distinct and innovative narrative. Quin (2015) claims that ‘the dynamic exchanges taking place between architecture and textiles are creating a new range of possibilities that take both disciplines in exciting new directions’ (p. 61); ‘textiles and architecture can truly become one in the built environment’ (p. 51). The combination of these two disciplines allows for a more holistic approach to design, one that considers both a space’s form and function. Nevertheless, the installation of artistic (narrative) textiles in nature can offer a different perspective, adding an element of artistic expression to the surrounding space. They create an atmosphere of comfort and inspiration within a space, as well as provide distinct visual storytelling within it. They can also be used to create a more dynamic and fluid environment, one that is constantly changing and evolving (Moor et al., 2014).

3. Methodology: Creative Collaboration and space-changing effects

‘Collaboration thrives on diversity of perspectives and on constructive dialogues between individuals negotiating their differences while creating their shared voice and vision’ (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 6). In this artistic inquiry, the process of creative collaboration was more than just transferring digital prints to textiles. Over several months, the artist-researchers were continuously entangled in iterative cycles
of questioning, making, reflection, and analysis. At the beginning of the creative process, the textiles were envisioned as layers of shared narratives combined on textiles, with an intentional open-ended installation. Initially, these images represented unique individual narratives, but as a result of digital transformation and the exhibition processes carried out in three distinct locations, they came to represent shared narratives. Practices of textile installation-making and reflection were part of this collaborative process; they were the layers and entanglements the artist-researchers had with their respective environments and personal experiments, which were documented and transferred as digital images.

The personal narratives were rewritten, elaborated on, enhanced and recreated through digital photo editing and drawing before it was transferred to high-quality thin Cotton Batiste fabric (75 gm weight) and printed with a digital reactive method. The colour is chemically bonded to the fibre in this printing technique, which enhances the depth and brightness of the hues while maintaining the fabric’s organic feel. The selection, combination and tonal variation of the colours during the photo editing process had to be exaggerated to achieve the vibrant colours represented in the textiles and to achieve the best printing effect. The individual narratives of the artists were presented as shared responses and as a collective dialogue through the group exhibitions. Fine and Corte claim, that ‘shared responses create a commitment to sociability’ (2017, p.76). This continued throughout the textile-making process and also during the dissemination phase.

Three exhibitions resulted from this creative collaboration. The exhibitions themselves enabled open experimentation of spatial dimensions (Basu & Macdonald, 2007; Sugden, 2005). The artist-researchers explored how the spaces were and how they had become (something else) through the distinctive display of the textiles. The exhibitions were a methodological approach for disseminating the entanglements with growing, making, digital imaging, printing, spatial design and displaying. Additionally, it created a space-changing effect that altered the venue’s atmosphere and appearance. After each exhibition, the artist-researchers reflected on the spatial dimensions for further dissemination. The research process was cyclical and documented through photographs and viewers’ reactions.

The space-changing effects were accomplished through improvisation. At first, the exhibition was planned in a way that the textiles were designed as panels that could be hung double-sided in space. This decision was a result of an online planning meeting in the Microsoft Teams platform with the curators of the exhibition. A video walk-through, digital images of the space and a floor plan assisted the artist-researchers in planning the display of the textiles accordingly. Panels were not sewn or cut with the aim of eliminating waste and preserving the textile’s organic textures. The layout of the panels enabled the sustainable reuse of the textiles in various settings. In each setting, the artist-researchers had to use the affordances of the environment to decide on the space-changing effect they wanted to achieve. Affordance is often linked to voluntary action in contrast to the limiting features of resources, such as technology (Bloomfield et al., 2010). Sarantou and Miettinen (2017) argued that improvisatory practices serve a connecting role in design processes between inventive, development and evaluative phases. In addition, improvisation serves a connecting role in the learning processes of using the available resources and creative agency or voluntary action in a given environment to create new experiences and learning (Sarantou, 2018). Improvisation fosters creativity, resulting in novel experiences (Qureshi et al., 2022). Therefore, the exhibition-making
enabled new space-changing experiences. As Pink et al. (2016) posit, perceptions of spaces, the shapes and colours contained within them, are simultaneously discrete experiences and objects that determine how people move through and create atmospheres of places. The textiles served various purposes, for example, they became backdrops, space dividers, and labyrinth-like. The artist-researchers had to draw on their intuition, past experiences of exhibition design and the current circumstances within the given environments to create the three exhibitions.

4. **Textiles in architectural spaces**

Different architectural spaces resulted in different experiences while exhibiting *Entanglements South–North*. In the period between November 2022 and April 2023, textiles were displayed at three different venues: Prague (2022, Corso Space of the National Gallery, Czech Republic), Windhoek (2022, Goethe Institut, Namibia) and Antwerp (2023, Lange Zaal, University of Antwerp, Belgium). It was the same installation that was displayed in multiple venues, just as the author-researchers built layers of narratives upon one another. Each venue featured a unique display, offering a distinct experience to the viewers. The displayed elements were rearranged and reinterpreted in each space, creating a unique aesthetic experience. The installation was not only a visual experience but also a journey of discovery and exploration of the different elements. The distinct displays allowed viewers to gain insight into the complexities of the entanglements between South and North shared narratives. Each artist involved contributed to two textile pieces, with a focus on incorporating their own personal choice of materials and artistic experiences as the primary theme. It is important to note that each artist relied on their own artistic reasoning when creating their respective works, as can be seen in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4.

![Figure 1. Cartographies of the Self, (140cm x 700cm), Satu Miettinen.](image1)

![Figure 2. Stitching with Roots, (140cm x 700cm), Melanie Sarantou.](image2)
4.1. Corso Space of the National Gallery, Prague – Czech Republic

These collaborative textiles began their journey as part of a symposium at Corso Space of Prague’s National Gallery (see Figure 5). Visitors were attracted to the exhibition by the two-sided, three-dimensional playfulness of the textile installation. The textiles were presented in a way that allowed visitors to interact and engage with them in a physical mode, creating a dynamic and immersive experience. This helped to create an atmosphere of discovery and exploration, which further enhanced the exhibition’s appeal.

During this initial exhibition, Miettinen, Qureshi and Sarantou, three artist-researchers present at the venue, curated the installation. Since it was about to be on display for the first time, it was planned ahead of time how to distribute the fabrics in such a large area. We were given temporary wall partitions; therefore, we chose to show how it appears more like a 3D installation from both sides. In addition, we also improvised at the site and hung two textiles across two ropes. This is visible in image Figure 5, far left corner. As curators, the three artist-researchers decided to give the installation the form of suspended textile sculpture. Not only did the interior of the huge hall provide the crucial backdrop for the textile sculpture, but its sheer size also allowed the audience to observe the piece from different angles, transforming the venue into an immersive art experience. The textiles connected the temporary wall to the floor as they were trailing onto the floor, reminding the viewer of standing at a steep foothill, thereby almost forcing the viewer to look up to see the top of the rising landscape, whereafter views could tumble down to land on the soft curve connecting the wall and the floor (Figure 5). The high ceilings and giant grid-like windows of the Corso Space well balanced the size and impact of the large textile installation that was visible from outside, warmly melting into the chilly and busy street in front of this central location in Prague, a city that welcomed its first snowfall of 2022.
The audience was immediately drawn to the intriguing patterns, which generated extensive discussion. The intricate details of these textile patterns generated from artistic experiences became more evident when illuminated by the light from the big windows of the hall. With their complexity, they posed many questions for the audience to ponder, such as how they came to be and the underlying thoughts of the artists. The patterns were seen as a metaphor for the interconnectivity among the authors from the two hemispheres, as well as a source of inspiration for the symposium’s attendees. The patterns were a reminder of the importance of collaboration and understanding between different ideologies. They inspired attendees to think more deeply about ways to bridge the gap that divides the world. One of the audiences exclaimed, that “It is a bold act of doing”. Thus, the patterns worked as a bridge, connecting the two sides and providing a platform for dialogue and understanding.

Figure 5. Entanglements South – North (2022), Corso Space of the National Gallery, Prague - Czech Republic.
Photo credits: Amna Qureshi.

4.2. Goethe Institut, Windhoek – Namibia

For the second exhibition, the Entanglements South-North collaborative textiles were displayed at the Goethe Institut in Windhoek, Namibia (see Figure 6). This time the curator of the exhibition was Chakirra Claasen, a lecturer in the visual art division of the University of Namibia. The exhibition area was small, yet distinctive with its white rectangular shape that featured walls of varying lengths. Despite its size, it proved to be an effective space for hosting the exhibition. In this context, the white rectangle refers to a neutral space where the outside world was separated from the context of works of art and textiles as objects. With an emphasis on colour and natural light, textiles were shimmering both against white walls and in a space, which minimized distraction, creating sensory illusions and story layers for the viewers (see Schittich 2009, 62; O’Doherty 1999). The viewer’s relationship with the textiles became closer, and colour became a tangible experience.
The exhibition was well attended and received positive feedback from the public. It allowed people to interact with the artwork, providing an immersive experience. Textiles (images), surfaces (tactile quality) and white space formed an unbroken whole and displayed creative practices to the audience. The viewer was lured into a world of arctic materials and their colours (hue, brightness, and saturation), and the boundaries of the human and in-human became blurred (Figure 4). The structures and materials of the textiles were able to convey messages, such as cotton for softness and satin for coldness and smoothness. For example, at first, the surface of textiles conveyed the idea of ice-dying patterns, which, with the use of ice or snow, create vibrant and crackling surface patterns (Fig 3).

The textiles were installed as a wall-to-wall and floor-to-ceiling backdrop for the exhibition. However, this powerful display did not overshadow the exhibition content. Rather, the backdrop appeared to have shortened the longer wall, thereby pulling in the sides of the white rectangle closer and creating an illusion of a cosy space with a different dimension than that of a rectangle.

![Figure 6. Entanglements South–North (2022), Goethe Institut, Windhoek - Namibia. Photo credits: Heidi Pietarinen.](image)

### 4.3. Lange Zaal, Antwerp – Belgium

The *Entanglements South–North* collaborative textiles were presented for the third time in *Cumulus 2023, Connectivity and Creativity in Times of Conflict*, hosted by the Faculty of Design Sciences of the University of Antwerp in Belgium (see Figure 7). Cumulus is the leading global association of Art and Design Education and Research, and it hosts regular conferences on art-related issues as well as in connection with exhibitions. Every year, the focus is on a particular theme, and the exhibition was curated by Vivi Touloumidis from the Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts. The textile collection was exhibited in the Method/ART track, which addressed different states and processes of conflict in the contexts, strategies, and creativity in diverse artistic disciplines (Method/ART 2023).
The gallery for the exhibition was originally a monastery called Lange Zaal (long hall). As the name suggests, the size of the hall was impressive (about 15 × 6 meters), and the overall appearance of the space was airy because there was access to the space from both ends of the grand hall. The textiles were suspended from the ceiling and moved freely in the airflow as the viewers walked or passed through the space, as if they were in a forest, forming a space within a space both visually and mentally (see Figure 7). When experiencing the exhibition, the illusion of sidestepping the trees in the woods was created, but another way to imagine passing through was as if the audience found themselves inside a labyrinth. Rhythm and order were blurred, and textile surfaces and images created many personal horizons to look at or a shared horizon with others, as we discussed with the audience.

The aim was to encourage the audience to view the art and explore the installation in search of a personal interpretation, or perhaps to get lost in the sheer dimensions and placement of the textiles in the labyrinth, or to perhaps find themselves immersed in the soft sheerness of the textiles, surrounded by large patterns of bold colours and familiar and unfamiliar motifs. The textiles challenged the audience to explore their surroundings, wandering, staring and creating their own unique experiences. The audience was taken through a journey of discovering how to piece together the installation, and each person’s experience was unique.

![Figure 7. Entanglements South – North (2023), Lange Zaal, University of Antwerp - Belgium. Photo credits: Satu Miettinen.](image)

The three locations each had a unique atmosphere that was created by changing the space. The exhibitions generated interest among visitors who were captivated by the various settings. It was evident that the atmosphere could be manipulated by using space effectively. The different architectural spaces created a distinct ambience and brought out diverse meanings from the textiles. The dynamic environment created by the space changes allowed audience members to experience the artwork in different ways, showcasing the power of space in influencing how art is interpreted and experienced.
5. Conclusion and discussion

In this study, the authors share their experiences from different hemispheres about spatial entanglement, which gives a new perspective on the term. Therefore, spatial entanglement can be seen as a reflection of intimate connections between artists from opposite poles despite vast distances. Moreover, changes in space affect and reshape, creating a complex network of interconnections. This study provides a deeper understanding of this phenomenon and its implications for global relationships. This knowledge can be used to strengthen connections between distant parts of the world and to foster collaboration and understanding.

The knowledge can also be used to build bridges between ideas and to promote a sense of shared voice and purpose. By gaining a better understanding of how space interrelates and intersects with different cultures, we can develop more effective strategies for creating global harmony and peace. We can use this knowledge to bridge divides and foster more meaningful dialogue. This can lead to improved understanding, greater collaboration, and a more unified global community. By recognizing how our narratives are shaped and influenced by the spaces we inhabit, we can gain a greater appreciation for the diverse backgrounds and perspectives that exist across the world. In conclusion, this can help us to develop a better understanding of our similarities and differences and to recognize the interconnectedness of shared narratives.

The focus of the *Entanglements South–North* collaborative textiles was not only on narratives in today’s technology, such as digital photography or digital printing but on how artist-researchers instigate new research on phenomena in making. Advanced design techniques make you consider whether the abilities of the textile designer, the intermediate stages of design, or the traces of creation are being lost as a result of digital design technology. Then, following this query, further inquiries emerge. How will materiality or the relationship between material and colour be understood in digital design? What kind of information is left out of artistic research work? Colours on a computer screen are formed from light, so the materiality of digitally printed fabric is not conveyed in the same way as through concrete material. ‘When saved as image files, viewed on a computer screen, or printed, patterns are also two-dimensional, even though they refer to a three-dimensional world’ (Pietarinen & Timonen 2021, p. 198-216). Understanding the development of the textile collection as installations also brings to mind a poetic exploration of materiality at the edge of the boundaries of perception—*eyes touching and fingers seeing*. A powerful pattern design, image magnification and story layers influenced exhibition spaces, creating entrancing experiences for the viewer (see Bello 2022a; Bello 2022b).

The textile collection was influenced by the venues, and the final execution was shaped every time by space. Textiles were not products; in contrast, the goal was to encourage viewers to contemplate textiles in a space, assisting them in enjoying them on their own terms. The artworks aroused discussions, processes, collaborative making, shared interpretations and collective intuitions. Space, images, tactility, and stories were interwoven to create a whole. Exhibition spaces and their atmospheres, sacredness, and the power of natural light, were like wandering in a forest, a tranquil exhibition space. Following the exhibition in three different places gave artist-researchers the opportunity to view the works of art in the context of time and space. They allow themselves to work slowly, letting the colours, materials, patterns, and surfaces speak for themselves. The artist-
researchers also held conversations with visitors, sharing and exchanging thoughts and ideas. Through this experience, they gained insight and understanding into the nature of art and how it connects to its viewers. They were able to create an experience that transcended the boundaries of art and the physical space in which it was created.

References


About the Authors:

Amna Qureshi is a PhD candidate at the University of Lapland, Finland. Her research interests are artistic and art & and design education experiments. Her Ph.D. study primarily focuses on visual design and design thinking processes. She emphasizes the importance of art-based research (ABR), which provides youth with a platform to explore their creativity and develop new ideas. Additionally, she is interested in bioart trends that offer opportunities for inspiration, curation, raw materials, shared experiences, collaborative practices, and shared authorship.

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