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## Future Heirlooms – Unbound

by [Joetta Maue](#)

# FUTURE HEIRLOOMS

So when I saw the feature Mr. X Stitch recently did on [Tamar Stone](#) I thought we must have threads attaching our brain waves as this week's Future Heirlooms features the very same, very talented, very amazing Tamar Stone.



I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting Tamar yet but hope to soon since we both live in the fair city of New York. The first time that I saw the work of Tamar I was totally blown away by the entire package- the technique, the hand, the concept. AMAZING. Someday I hope to see it in person sometime very soon.

Tamar shares so much about her process and her connection to the corset it is fascinating!

So enough of me talking lets get to the interview with Tamar- here goes:

### **Where do you live? Does this affect your work?**

I live in NYC, and I also have a house in NE PA. Being in NYC is great in that I have access to the NY public library where I do a lot of my research. However I don't have a lot of space in NYC, like so many people, which is where the house in PA has been helpful, it gives me a chance to spread out. Since we have to do all of our own housework, yard work etc...I've learned that mowing our small lawn with a vintage manual push mower can be very helpful with clearing my head...and then I'm able to concentrate on the creative work – I never expected that so much manual labor could be helpful to my art work, but it actually is.

I also tend to make more of my living in NYC – I work as a freelancer production assistant for companies that produce business meetings and corporate training. Many of those companies in the U.S. are based in NYC. Basically – the day job pays for the art work, and I need



### How did you begin to work with embroidery as an artist?

The only embroidery I've ever done was when I was in 7th grade, and it was sort of all the rage back in the 1970's to embroider your jean jacket and denim skirts. At that time I was doing a lot of french knot and chain stitch work. For my art work, I believe in hiring the best technical people I can find. I figured since my sewing is not good at all, that if I expect someone to pay for my work, they should get the best work possible when it comes to craftsmanship and I prefer to go to someone who has much more experience and technical ability (another reason I need to keep working at the day job).



### How does the practice of embroidery affect the conceptual aspect of your work?

My work started out on paper – talking about issues of self esteem and women’s’ body issues. I was discussing the history of women being confined, and defined by the clothing they wore – whether for medical necessity or societal reason (I wore a metal and leather back brace ([Milwaukee Brace](#)) for 6 years in the 70’s to correct my [scoliosis](#) / spinal curvature). I came to the point where I wanted the textile – the corset – to actually “speak” the stories of women who have been bound by their clothing and society’s conventions, and I didn’t think the printed word on paper was enough. By using embroidered threads interwoven with antique textiles, I feel that the textile has more of a “voice.”





Later on when I began to work with the beds, I knew that the stories on the bed coverings would also have to be embroidered, for it wasn't enough for me to tell the story of a woman and her experience with her bed on paper, but I felt that the bed coverings needed to speak to – and with the stitched words, I believe they do.

**How does the use of the text from early 19th century manuals affect and contribute to the concept of the work? What commentary and you making by using these texts?**

I build the stories in my work around the text that I research. I could never write as well as some of the turn of the century advertisers did, and by using their slogans as a jumping off points for my themes I can create a much more interesting narrative than if I try to make something up. I also find, at least for me, that working from non-fiction is much more interesting – the ideas found through out history to me are fascinating.

One of the biggest challenges is when do you stop researching and get down to creating a new piece...I find that at times I could just read and read and read, but there is always the point where I realize I am hiding behind the reading, and it's time for me to start digging through my research to put together the next project.



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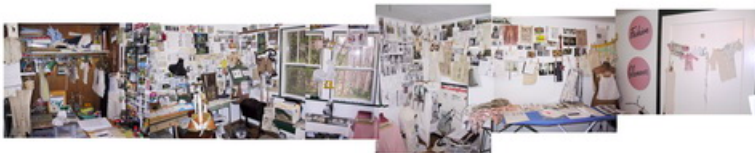


### Can you talk a little about the technique of building the corset books and where you find the corsets?

I find the corsets from all different sources, auctions, yard sales etc... Usually I build a project around a specific piece – currently I have a corset vest piece that I am working on that was built around the fact that the corset was made up of old stripped flannel – it's more of a child's vest made in this unusual fabric (I've actually had similar child vests that I have used in projects made out of cotton fabric). The pages inside this piece are now being created on various old pieces of flannel that I have been collecting..the images are being embroidered on the flannel pieces and assembled into a book. If I hadn't found that flannel vest, then I probably wouldn't be using the flannel pieces that I collected so long ago.

Some of the corset I have are salesman samples – which are great because they fit in the palm of your hand mostly, and it creates a very intimate experience opening up something that small. Sometimes instead of starting with a corset, I'll start with a piece of ephemera that I have, like it the "[Society's Corset](#)" piece. I found a small Binner Corset pamphlet, and when I saw the photos inside the pamphlet (why is that woman posing with a loaf of bread?) I knew I had to build a piece around the text. The salesman sample girdle happened to be very close to the girdles in the pamphlet, and the pages are created out of materials that are usually associated with female intimate clothing like satins and silks.

With all the corset projects I need to "see" the final project laid out before me before any of the sewing starts. I usually put the corset on a copy machine and make the whole thing out of paper! Then I lay out the text on the computer and cut and tape it onto the 3-d paper corset that I made so I can see how the text can wrap around etc. Of course making a few paper dummies I have realized that what you can produce on the computer is not always the way the embroidery can be sewn on to the actual corset – sometimes the corset boning gets in the way of the needle, or the font won't fit etc – so there is always adjusting going on from how I originally laid out the project, to what actually becomes the final piece. I've learned that I need to be constantly flexible and not so "married" to a specific idea, because sometimes those things just won't work, and in order to move forward with the project, and not get bogged down by being "stuck" – i just need to re-adjust my expectations and think of other ways to solve those technical problems that sometimes dictate how the project will go.



### Describe your studio and studio practice.

In my apartment I have a grey 1950's boomerang patterned formica table top that I pulled out of a dumpster in NYC in the 1980's, which is mounted on small filing cabinets and milk crates. I always thought that someday I would "grow up" and work on a more "adult like" table surface, but over the years my eyes have become adjusted to the table top, and it is somehow now a neutral surface that I can work off of, so I just continue using it. I also have large pieces of homasote nailed to the wall and painted white – which I use as a bulletin board which contains all kinds of visual influences from antique corset ads, my polaroids of various folk art things from road trips, traditional rug hooking images (I also do traditional rug hooking) among other things.



In my house my work space is a small room with all the walls covered with homasote covered with images in addition to a clothesline strung across the room to also hang things off of. I also tend to use my ironing board as a desk in addition to the assortment of desks that are jerry rigged together from various things – mostly consisting of old typing tables on wheels with plywood tops and assorted plastic filing cabinet things with wheels with desk tops on top of those. I try to create as much surface area as I can because I tend to need to spread things out in order to visually “see them” in a way I can organize them in my head. At times, I have found myself spread out on the floor with a sleeping bag to sit on when I’ve run out of desk space (which seems to be often since I don’t put things away – I just tend to add more layers to what is out – if I put something away, I may tend to forget about it.)...and yes, it does seem like I need to spend a lot of time dusting things since everything is out all the time....

*This sounds like an incredible space to see and create... and I to always seem to end up using my ironing board as a desk- it just works so well.*

Lately I’ve spread into the hallway of our small house – where we built a dormer to create more space and now that hallway is filled with a double row of doll beds that are all ready to be worked on for future projects. Since I didn’t want to put homasote up on the pine walls I used an old screen window to hang above the work table in the hall – to hang things off of as bulletin board of sorts.

### **How has your work evolved since you first began working with embroidery?**

(hmmm, I’m going to have to think about this one for a while...)

*Cannot wait to eventually find out or just watch as her work continues to grow...*



**What is the next direction or step for your work?**

There are corset projects that I want to work on to continue the exploration of the corset in the story of women’s history i.e. the history of women in education.

Also, I have a few projects where I would like to use other materials, like metal with antique textiles. I’ve also begun making shadow boxes.

**What else do you spend your time doing? Do any of these inform your work?**

Besides my artwork, I do traditional [rug hooking](#) (which is taking wool strips and hooking them through burlap like material). I find that when I am not able to think about the art work, keeping busy with my hands on the rug hooking is a great alternative (when I sit in front of the TV set hooking a rug, I feel that if my hands are busy at least I feel less like a “sloth”).

*me too, I am always working while watching bad t.v, good to know that I am not alone.*

I think like a lot of artists, I tend to feel that I am not creating enough, or fast enough...or basically, just not doing enough all the times. However, on the flip side, at times I just need refuel – whether it’s doing my volunteer work (for some balance in life) or other creative work like the rug hooking, and sometimes just need to sit and read, or do other types of manual labor such as taking care of personal things – like cleaning the apartment etc.



**Do you ever wear corsets? Just a fun question!**

The only time I have ever worn a corset type of thing is when I herniated my disc, and I had to wear a 1/2 corset, 1/2 brace thing for a few months. But it didn’t really solve the problem, so I ended up having my last disc removed (too bad this happened right before laser surgery, because now I have a very large scar on my back...just one of the many reasons I don’t wear a bikini when swimming). After all the years of wearing my scoliosis brace, I tend to stay away from form fitting clothing of any type – no pleats, darts or anything like that and I tend to buy my pants I realize, always a little on the larger/looser side then more form fitting.

Funny, I never think of the words “corset” and “fun” as something that goes together...I’ve actually gone to presentations of corset wearing/fetish groups just to hear what they have to say about wearing corsets etc...but I’ll admit, I still don’t get that idea of being pulled into a specific shape...it just brings back too many not good memories of having bruise marks on my body from wearing that brace for so many years (and the humiliation of having to wear an undershirt between me and the brace to try to cut back on the bruising).

*To read more details about Tamar’s [bed work](#) check out her websites explanation.*



Where can we see your work? links, websites, galleries, shops, etc.

My website is: [web.mac.com/picturetown](http://web.mac.com/picturetown)

On the CV page are links to various blogs and articles that talk about my work.

*All of the images are from [Tamar's website](#) which also gives detailed shots of how each book opens from page to page. It is a wonder to see so please stop by and see her work [there](#).*

*You can also read a feature that I did awhile back [here](#).*



[Joetta Maue](#) is a full time artist primarily using photography and fibers. Her most recent work is a series of embroideries and images exploring intimacy. Joetta exhibits her work throughout the United States and internationally, and authors the art and craft blog [Little Yellowbird](#) as well as regularly contributing to the online journal [Hello Craft](#). Joetta lives in Brooklyn, NY, with her husband, baby son, two cats, a goldfish.

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What stunning work. I'm so impressed. and glad I accidentally stumbled over to your blog. following links that started on Flickr.





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