

# sculpture

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# reviews

WASHINGTON, DC

Nicole Salimbene

Flashpoint Gallery

Mending comes alive in Nicole Salimbene's breathtaking work, awakening complex sensations of loss, empathy, and healing. An obsolete or forgotten activity for some, for others, it endures as a cultural norm born of economic necessity. In Salimbene's vision, participatory installations incorporating thread, needles, and seating invite viewers to experience mending as a hands-on, multivalent

art medium, rich in metaphor and ritual. Like many artists currently exploring tangible solutions to building community, Salimbene is concerned with our overwrought lifestyle and troubled environment. Rather than directing group activities, however, she opts for a silent, more solitary interaction to generate something new from the collective voice of anonymous partners.

With no damaged textile in sight, Salimbene concentrated instead on the stitching process with Zen-like

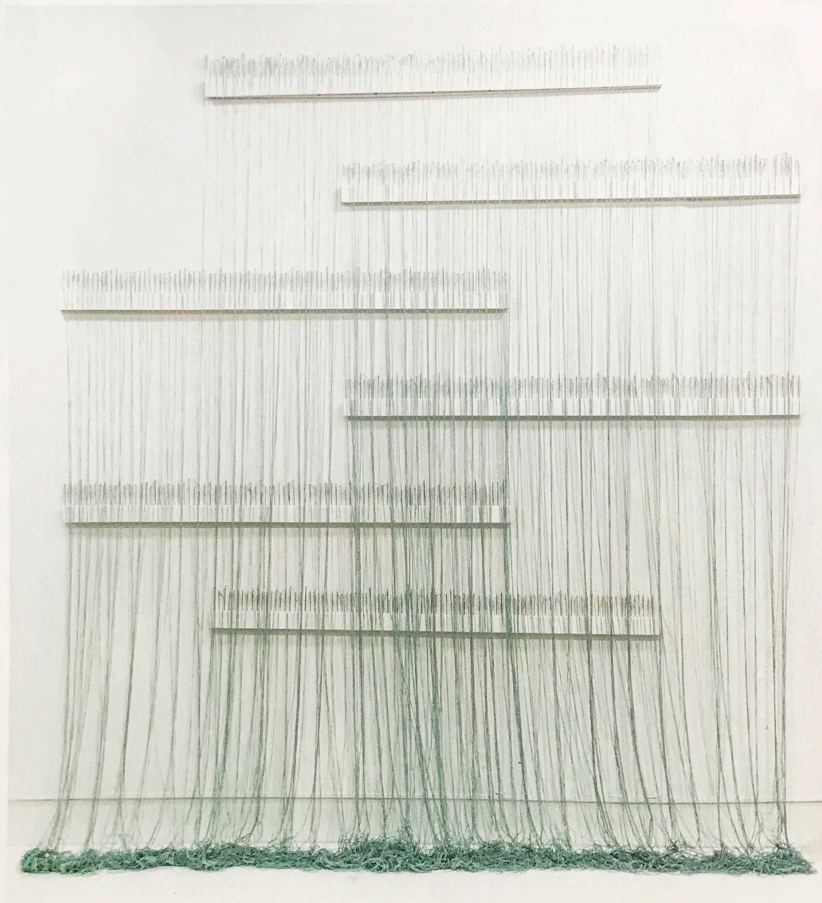
purpose. Who or what needed repair was left to the imagination. Simple furnishings and a minimal palette of white, cream, brown, and black lent a contemplative mood to the gallery and set off the works on view. *Mending Waters* beckoned from the far wall. A cascade of blue threads evoking the cleansing energy of rain pooled onto the floor, alongside a stool, box of needles, spool of blue thread, and threaded needles. In the center of the gallery, the globally inflected *Mending Table* featured

thousands of needles threaded into a low table, their black strands gracefully spilling onto a mat made of pages from an old world atlas. Yoga cushions on either side brought to mind the humble elegance and inner spirituality of a tea ceremony.

Attention shifted to the earth in *Innocence and Experience*. Here, Salimbene placed soil from Santuario de Chimayo, New Mexico, revered for its healing power, into a rectangular basin, an act that inserted the outside into the gallery and demarcated sacred space. A park bench and bowl with green threads completed the tableau. The focus turned inward again with *When Pressed*, in which a line of threads studded into a found ironing board (which strangely resembled the hull of a sea vessel) gathered into ganglionic tangles and perfectly captured the anxiety of stress overload. Back at the entrance, *There is a Bridge Between You and Me* delivered its message through two mending stations and golden thread. Perhaps the most hopeful installation, it offered the first and last chance for partner interaction.

A procession of wall-hung paintings and mixed-media works expanded on the central theme. Channeling the psychic charge of Barnett Newman's *Stations of the Cross*, *Mending Fire: First-Fourteenth* made visceral the before- and after-effects of a wound. Against a plain canvas background, fiery plums emerged on either side of vertical tears. Held together by suture-like threads, the rips became painful reminders of scarification and battlefields. The ethereal *Mending Words: I-IV*, in

Nicole Salimbene, *Mending Waters*, 2016. Needles, thread, and wood, 60 x 108 x .5 in.







Left: Nicole Salimbene, *Mending Table*, 2016. Needles, thread, wooden table, world atlas pages, and cushions, 48 x 120 x 16 in. Below left: Nicole Salimbene, *When Pressed*, 2016. Needles, thread, ironing board, cushion, Zen meditation bench, cement bowl, thread spool, and scissors, 24 x 40 x 20 in. Below: Jackie Brookner, *Of Earth and Cotton*, 1994–98. Earth on shipping skids, 34 portraits.



contrast, deftly suggested a redress to the abusive power of words meant to deceive or cause misunderstanding. Linear pathways, threaded into dictionary pages mounted on handmade paper, created new and unexpected connections.

Interweaving Eastern and Western spiritual traditions, these works took an ancient practice that transcends time and place and brought it to bear on circumstances. Stitch by stitch, the viewer—either as witness or partner—engaged with Salimbene to assess the meaning and value of this activity across a broad range of possibilities. Highlighting transformative parallels between mindfulness and mending, these unassuming works prompted a nuanced meditation on the need for reparation, in both our internal lives and external worlds.

—Sarah Tanguy

**BRONX, NEW YORK**  
**Jackie Brookner**

Wave Hill Glyndor Gallery

First trained as an art historian at Wellesley College and Harvard, Jackie Brookner moved to downtown New York in 1976, where she studied art at the New York Studio School. Her paintings and sculptures reflect a thorough knowledge of and kinship with the legacy of the New York School, but she is primarily known for her social practice. In 2000, she began developing unusual public projects (Brookner died in 2015), which used water—rivers, streams, storm run-offs—and water-related issues as the centerpiece of an effort to merge art, ecological awareness, and practical intervention in troubled outdoor landscapes.

"Of Nature," a mini-retrospective organized by Wave Hill's senior curator Jennifer McGregor and independent curator Amy Lipton, gave long

overdue appreciation to this highly active and independent artist. The show could only hint at the scope of Brookner's public projects, which were detailed on video screens, in books, and in photographs. Yet her political awareness was made evi-

dent through her remarkable body of paintings and sculptures. Perhaps the most notable sculpture on display was the installation *Of Earth and Cotton* (1994–98), consisting of multiple pairs of feet placed on a small pallet. As McGregor explains in her catalogue essay, Brookner "followed the westward migration of the cotton belt," interviewing people who had gathered cotton in the 1930s and '40s. She then modeled their feet from local soil. The piece functions marvelously as a memorial, and the feet themselves are quite beautifully rendered. Brookner in many ways was a quintessential New York artist of her time, but her social interests and commitment to nature brought her into contact with areas and cultures outside the city, both nationally and internationally, which gave her a breadth not always associated with New York artists.



TOP: GALEB BAUMANN / CENTER; JORDANN WINE / BOTTOM; STEFAN HAGEN, © ESTATE OF JACKIE BROOKNER