

## What can one person do?

A lot. Individual actions matter!

- Download an app that will help you buy more ethically: Check out Good Guide, Ethical Barcode, Good on You, and Not My Style!
- Contribute to an organization that works with garment workers: Labor Behind the Label, Clean Clothes Campaign, and International Labor Rights Forum are a few good ones!
- Organize a swap meet
- Buy used
- Get educated
- Work on labor rights locally
- Buy well made clothes so you don't have to replace often
- Mend
- Re-purpose, embellish, re-make
- Create your own style, not what is marketed to you!
- Wear it out
- Buy one thing Fair Trade this year
- Buy less
- Recycle what you can
- Embellish an unloved item of clothing with new trim, a brooch or a patch.
- Wash your clothes less often
- Dry your clothes on a clothes line instead of the dryer
- Support unions and workers forming unions
- Students: join "United Students Against Sweatshops" USAS
- Buy something better: choose something from a brand with a positive social or environmental impact

## Resources

[fashionrevolution.org](http://fashionrevolution.org)  
[cleanclothes.org](http://cleanclothes.org)  
[labourbehindthelabel.org](http://labourbehindthelabel.org)  
[laborrights.org](http://laborrights.org)

**View finished works at  
[rachelbreenart.com](http://rachelbreenart.com)**

 @rbbreen  
 @thegarmentsolidarityproject  
# garmentsolidarity



Rachel Breen is a fiscal year recipient of the 2017 Artist Initiative Grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board. This activity is made possible by a grant provided by the Minnesota State Arts Board through an appropriation by the Minnesota State Legislature General Fund and the arts and cultural heritage fund, and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.



RACHEL BREEN 2017

## **What is The Garment Solidarity Project?**

The Garment Solidarity Project expresses solidarity and empathy with garment workers in Bangladesh and around the world through the metaphoric act of sewing clothes for the women who sew our clothes.

I am a visual artist whose main tool is a sewing machine. I feel a kinship to women who are sewing today and have used sewing in the past to create, to mend, to express, and to survive. The women who sew our clothes are the unseen humanity in a globalized industrial world. I am inspired to make work about these women to bring to light our connections to these workers and to open a critical dialogue about the globalization of the garment industry.

Sewing is common across cultures, connecting materials for protection, decoration and comfort. It can reconnect that which has been broken or torn—it's an act of repair, of making something whole again. I use a sewing machine to disrupt and subvert these purposes, exploring social concerns and the fragility of daily life.

## **Why this project now?**

On April 24, 2013, the Rana Plaza factory collapsed in Dhaka, Bangladesh, killing 1,134 poor, mostly female garment workers. When I learned about it I immediately thought of the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire of 1911 that killed 146 garment workers, most of whom were poor, mostly female Jewish Immigrants in New York City.

The two incidents are separated by over 100 years, but they are not two separate stories. They are each a part of one long story that continues to this day—a story that all of us who buy and wear clothes are inextricably involved in. By connecting the two factory tragedies I hope to prompt public thinking about the current conditions under which our clothes are made.

## **Why sew in public?**

Many cultural, economic, and political questions are embedded in the process of how our garments move from cotton field, to factory, to mall. By creating an interactive performance, I hope to make these largely invisible questions visible to audiences that may not be in the habit of seeing them.

## **Many products are manufactured overseas. Why focus on sewing clothing and the Shalwar Kameez specifically?**

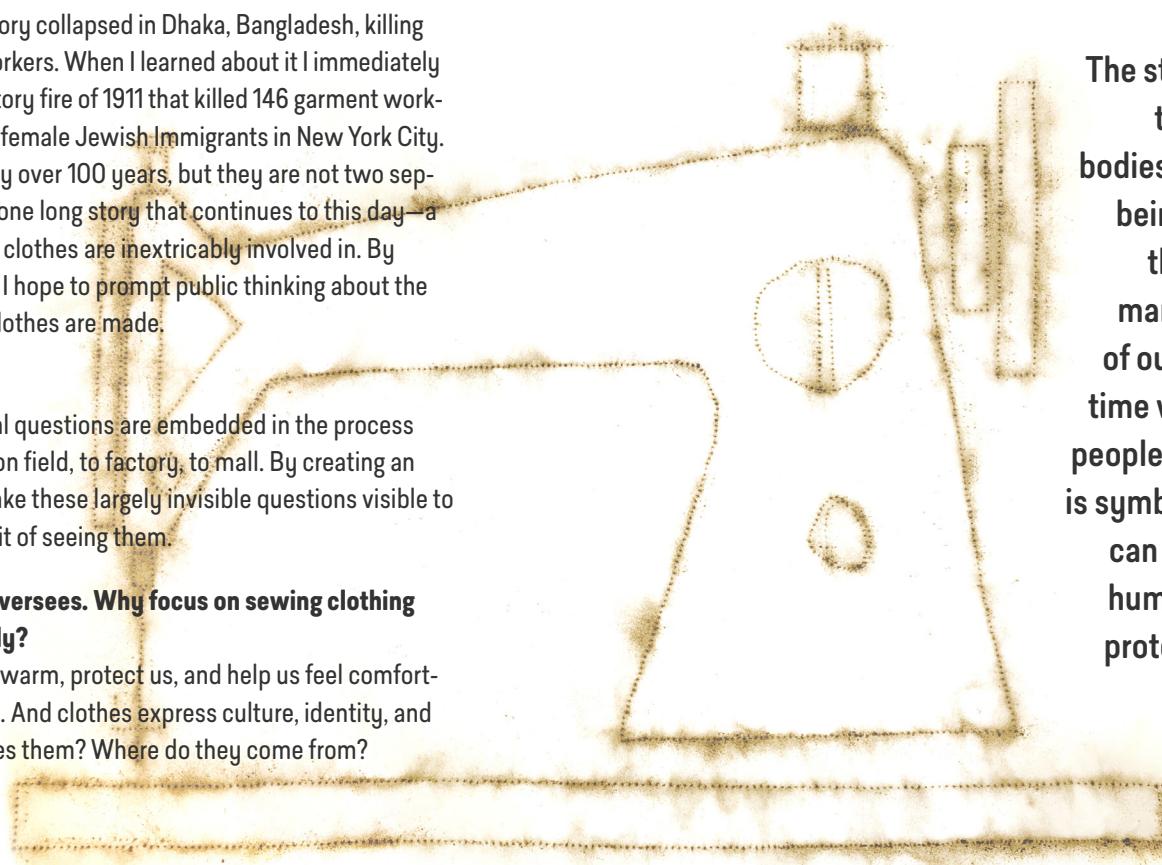
We all wear clothes. Clothes keep us warm, protect us, and help us feel comfortable. Clothes are a basic human need. And clothes express culture, identity, and style. But we so rarely ask, who makes them? Where do they come from?

In 1960, 95% of the clothes worn in the US were made in the US. In 2017, only 2% are made here. Most of our clothing is made in China, Vietnam, Mexico, Bangladesh, India, and other poorer nations.

Most women in Bangladesh wear the traditional *shalwar kameez*, a long tunic over loose fitting leggings. Bangladeshi garment workers sew clothing for us, so I sew a version of *their* traditional garment as an act of solidarity.

## **What is solidarity and why does it matter?**

My liberation depends on the liberation of all people. None of us can be free until all of us are free. Through this project, I create an expression of support for the struggles of oppressed and exploited peoples. A recognition that, despite different starting points, backgrounds, identities and contexts, the exploitation that others experience, still impacts me and my community, even if I do not directly experience it. Solidarity means to empathize and respect each other's struggles.



**The stitch is an intimate mark  
that literally touches the  
bodies of almost every human  
being on the planet through  
the clothes we wear. The  
mark of a stitch is a symbol  
of our interdependence. At a  
time when divisions between  
peoples are growing, the stitch  
is symbolic of my hope that we  
can recognize one another's  
humanity and take action to  
protect each other and work  
towards justice for all.**

*Rachel Breen*