



Teresa Margolles
Opening Paths to Social Justice, 2012-15.
 Embroidery on fabric previously imbued with blood from the body of a woman assassinated in Guatemala City, 78¾ x 78¾ in.

PURCHASE, NEW YORK

Teresa Margolles

Neuberger Museum of Art // July 12–October 11

SIX PIECES OF embroidered cloth—the smallest as big as a baby's blanket, the largest the size of a bedspread—lie on flat plinths, waist high, illuminated from underneath in the otherwise lightless room that houses Margolles's "We Have a Common Thread." The works aren't protected by glass, and it's easy to lean over to observe the stitching, getting close to the material. One barely notices the spotty discoloration in the first two one encounters, but by the third, the rusty stains become more pronounced—the mark that blood leaves on fabric.

Five of six tapestries bear these stains. Margolles acquired cloth for each from Panama, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Brazil, and Mexico, and each carries the DNA of a person (mostly female) who died a violent death in a crime that was subsequently mishandled, or even ignored. Margolles returned each marked fabric to the victim's community, where a group of artisans worked over it using decorative methods specific to that region. A sixth textile was

created in New York, but instead of blood, this one bears an imprint of the ground, with small scraps of detritus and scuffs from being pressed and dragged along the section of sidewalk in Staten Island where Eric Garner lost his life in July 2014 during a mishandled arrest by New York City police officers.

Videos lining a back wall of the exhibition space give insight—in varying degrees—into the lives of the other victims. Those who worked on the Guatemalan textile talk about how coming into contact with the trace of the anonymous woman on their material made them think about the women in their families and community who suffered domestic violence in silence, with great shame, while their government's answer to the rampant problems of abuse and murder of women in the indigenous communities was to say "they are used to being treated like this." In Brazil, the aunt of a prostitute and drug user recalls the bureaucratic nightmare of trying to bury her niece, who had been strangled with a telephone

cord in retribution for the theft of a cell phone. "A person nowadays can be killed for nothing, right?" she comments.

Both the truth and the fallacy in this statement strike a raw chord. Anyone can be killed, but the commonality shared here—the "thread"—is that the senseless murders of certain people will be treated differently because of racial, cultural, and sexual prejudice, as well as the corruption of the very authorities put in place to protect citizens.

Given the collective length of the videos, it's unlikely viewers will watch all of them in their entirety, but this isn't to the exhibition's detriment. In fact, it emphasizes that though these people were from vastly different places, their stories are achingly similar. There are not six memorials here, but one. Throughout, the political agenda is clear and profound, but not overly didactic. But then, Margolles need not spell out the urgent questions her work brings to the surface; they are there anyway, in the spaces between the details. —JH

FROM LEFT: WU TSANG AND CLIFTON BENEVENTO; TERESA MARGOLLES AND THE NEUBERGER MUSEUM OF ART

