

## PURLS OF WISDOM

Ann Morton uses the soft the medium of textile art to speak loudly

**Elizabeth Montgomery**

Arizona Republic USA TODAY NETWORK

**A& E**

## SUNDAY

Two days each week Ann Morton sits in a chair knitting between three American flags that hang in the lower level of Phoenix Art Museum.

A trace of daylight streams through a single window in the room with only the sound of footsteps echoing off the concrete gallery floor.

For months she's sat there, armed with two knitting needles and pieces of red and blue thread, creating her latest social statement. Thousands of handmade red and blue squares hang behind her blending together as one.

Morton, who was 35 years into her previous career before she focused on art full-time, likes to create projects that bring people together and make a larger statement. Her latest project, "The Violet Protest" opened at Phoenix Art Museum earlier this year.

The collaborative art project features



**Artist Ann Morton at the Violet Protest exhibit at the Phoenix Art Museum on May 20.**



**Artist Ann Morton knits a blanket for an American flag at the Violet Protest exhibit at the Phoenix Art Museum on May 20. Thousands of knitted squares from textile makers and artists throughout the United States and Canada are part of Morton's exhibit.**

PHOTOS BY DAVID WALLACE/THE REPUBLIC

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the work of textile artists and makers from across the country who have stitched, sewn and knitted pieces of art to send to Congress.

"Violet is between red and blue on the color wheel and the word violet is one letter away from violent. As soft as it is, it's still an act of resistance against the political divisiveness that we see every day," Morton said.

"We're going to bundle them up and mail them to each and every member of Congress. Everyone will get between 25 and 30 squares."

## How a trip to South Africa changed Morton's life

a good memory and that this is a positive way of saying, 'Hey we're out here, we support you, but we're also watching and we hear what's going on. We're not invisible.'" *Elizabeth Montgomery is Arts and Culture Reporter for The Arizona Republic, [azcentral.com](http://azcentral.com). Reach her at [emontgomery@azcentral.com](mailto:emontgomery@azcentral.com) or 602444-8764. Follow her on Twitter @emontnews.*

It's not the first social movement the Phoenix native has created with fiber art, and she said it won't be her last. But she wasn't always on this path.

Morton was working as a graphic designer when a trip to South Africa led her to shift her focus. She went from running a design firm to focusing on socially engaged art full-time.

"Just seeing how other people live in the world it was hard to just come back and keep doing what I was doing," Morton said.

"So I made a big decision. I thought about it for a long time and was kind of uneasy about how I was spending my creative capital, so I ended up going back to school to try and use art as a tool for advocacy.

She completed her master's in fine arts (with an emphasis on fibers) at Arizona State University in 2012 and set out to find her voice through art.

### **Morton likes to get others involved in her projects**

Through the years Morton has created very public, and often political, fiber art projects.

Her first was "Ground Cover," a 2013 city of Phoenix and National Endowment for the Arts-funded public project she organized where 300 artists made blankets by hand. The blankets designed to be pixels of a larger image. Once they were put together, they made up a single blanket that was more than 100 feet long and made a giant image of desert flowers.

The individual blankets were then given to people experiencing homelessness.

"There's always an end goal. It's doesn't just get made and that's it," Morton said.

Morton also led an art project where community members transformed recyclable trash into a display of flowers at the Arizona Science Center.

In 2019, Morton was named the Arlene and Morton Scult Artist Award recipient by the Phoenix Art Museum. Her "Violet Protest" being a featured exhibition at the museum is part of that award.

Earlier this month Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego proclaimed April 13 2021, as "The Violet Protest" day in the city.



**Joan Langham of Pittsburgh, Pa., from left, Sandra Braem of Phoenix and Joyce Miketic of Pittsburgh, look at Ann Morton's Violet Protest exhibit May 20.**



**People look at the knitted squares of artist Ann Morton's the Violet Protest exhibit at the Phoenix Art Museum on May 20.**

PHOTOS BY DAVID WALLACE/THE REPUBLIC



**Gary Morris and Ellen Whitney, both of Scottsdale, look at the knitted squares of Ann Morton's the Violet Protest exhibit at the Phoenix Art Museum on May 20.**

## **Morton hopes projects like ‘The Violet Protest’ have a greater impact**

Morton has become an influential part of the Phoenix arts community and plans to continue creating things for years to come. Though she has been known for bringing people together for collaborative projects, she still enjoys working on the smaller parts that she creates herself.

“I still make and I consider myself a maker and I still use textile techniques when I do make but there’s a certain kind of satisfaction I get from organizing these large projects that just bring makers together to make something larger,” Morton said.

Morton said the fiber art used in her projects not only sends a message, but it also connects the makers to the receivers.

“I think that all of us have a deep connection to textiles. We’ve had blankets, clothing, coats or sweaters that we’ve loved or been close with and I don’t think we know that until we see it and until we’re faced with the textiles again,” Morton said.

“(Members of Congress) will see the red and the blue and I just hope that it moves them, it sparks



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**Thousands of knitted squares from textile makers and artists are part of artist Ann Morton's exhibit, Violet Protest at the Phoenix Art Museum as seen on May 20.**

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