

Compassion in Action/May You Know Peace

an exhibition by Sharon Kagan

PROPOSAL

Introduction

Kagan received the *WORD Artist Grant: The Bruce Geller Memorial Prize from the American Jewish University* in 2021 to produce “The Undoing: Forgiveness,” a community video project presenting intimate stories of wrongdoing contrasted by the benefits of forgiving. In the video, artist Sharon Kagan performs a ritual knitting practice accompanied by a loving-kindness meditation in response to private stories of wrongdoing and forgiveness recorded by a diverse group of artists and community members.



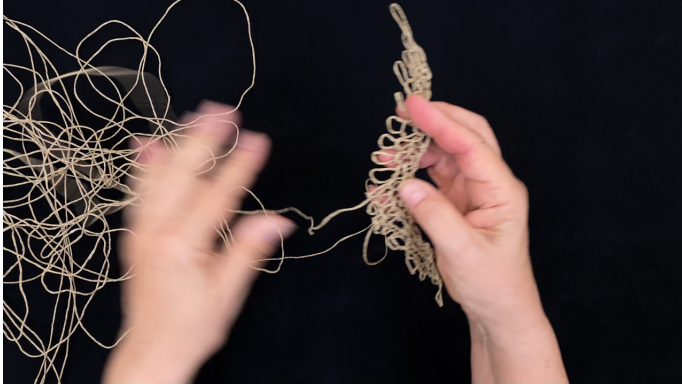
Artist Bio

Social justice and man’s inhumanity to man were central themes in Sharon Kagan’s childhood home. Her mother was responsible for saving the lives of hundreds of Jews as a partisan fighting the Nazis inspiring her to focus on socio-political issues that provide multiple entry points for the viewer to imagine a more just, diverse, and inclusive world.

Kagan’s recent video performance “The Undoing: Forgiveness” examines how we forgive. What is it to forgive? What is it to be forgiven? This work expands the feminist tenants of liberation, diversity and justice.

In 2021 Kagan received the *WORD Artist Grant: Bruce Geller Memorial Prize from the American Jewish University* to complete “The Undoing: Forgiveness.”

Recent solo exhibitions include *The Politics of Color*, Show Gallery, Hollywood, CA and *String Theory*, Herrett Center for Arts and Science, Jean B. King Gallery, and College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls, ID (2020-2021); Sharon Kagan, Hardin Center for Cultural Arts, Gadsden, AL and *String Theory*, Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings, MT (2019); and Sharon Kagan, Charles MacNider Art Museum, Mason City, IA and Sharon Kagan, Northern State University, Aberdeen, SD (2018).



Artist Statement

“Compassion in Action” is a journey of discovery and understanding. I believe that each of us can choose to initiate a profound healing process to alleviate the trauma and devastations experienced by the American Indigenous peoples and the American settlers that allowed genocide, Holocaust survivors and the Nazis who murdered millions, or the

descendants of Black slaves and White slave owners. It only takes one person to begin the process of freeing themselves from a painful legacy to begin the process of change for all generations.

My work has focused on becoming free of the generational trauma from anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. As the daughter of Holocaust survivors I have wrestled with the subject of forgiveness, often coming to the conclusion that I cannot forgive an act that was not committed against me. I now realize that although the acts were not done to me personally, I have lived with their consequences my entire life. So how do we forgive something so enormous? What is it to forgive? What is it to be forgiven?

In an effort to find an answer to these questions I have chosen to engage the Buddhist meditation practice of Metta – “May you know peace. May you be happy. May you be free of all pain and suffering. May you be free of the legacy of your inheritance. May you be free to love and be loved. May you know the gift of forgiveness. May you feel the joy of forgiveness. May your heart be open and free. May you be blessed with forgiveness.” In “Compassion in Action” I ask the viewer to join me in this practice.

Waxed hemp is the metaphor I’ve chosen to represent the wrongdoings. Waxed hemp twine sticks to everything and knitting it is like wrestling a demon into submission. Yet, hemp has other important properties. It is known to have environmental healing properties; it removes metals from the soil, is self-hydrating, and restores land that was made toxic or over planted into healthy usable soil.

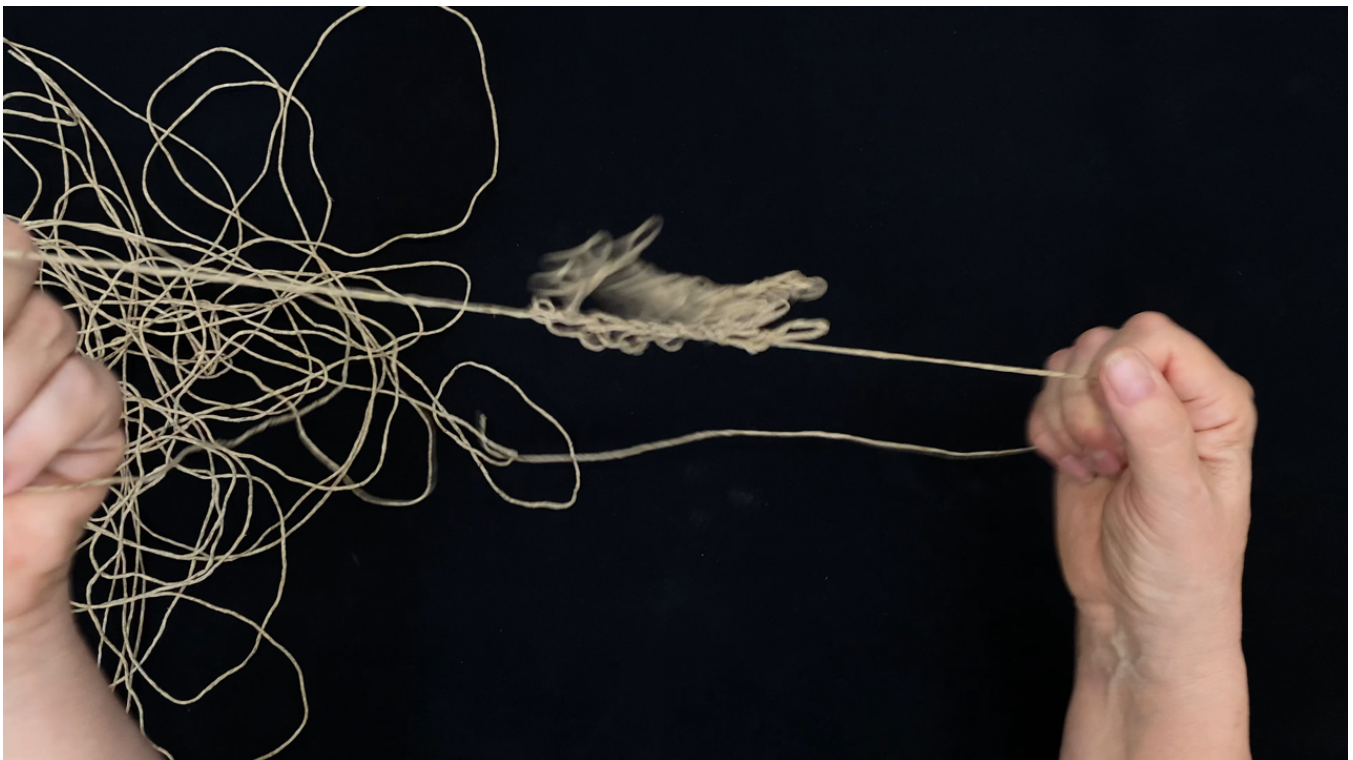
Waxed hemp is exhausting to knit with. My hands become red from the effort of getting a needle through a stitch, twisting the yarn and pulling it through. My hands burn and the action requires tremendous strength.

Unraveling the hemp became a nest of knotted confusion. The hemp would not freely unravel the way yarn does, each circle around the spool had to be pulled free individually. I thought that unraveling it would cause fewer struggles. Forgiveness can falsely appear to be an easy process, it is often sticky, unruly, and knotted with emotions and painful memories. We may often lose our way in finding the end of the thread and finding a path to forgiveness.

The audio storytellers share many stories including forgiving America for the myth of the “American Dream,” a young girl who was not only dropped by a dear friend, but how the mean girl betrayed her by making sure the whole school alienated her. The endings to these wrenching and heartfelt stories of wrongdoing are a revelation.

In the piece “Release Me” I build a knitted container around myself to represent the confinement and hindrances imposed by trauma and held by resentment and the inability to forgive.

The images and stories that comprise “Compassion in Action” will hopefully give the viewer an opportunity to accept their own personal trauma, to become witnesses to the suffering of others, to experience compassion and understanding, and to become a part of a solution for themselves and others.



Installation Components

The entire installation is made up of seven components including a durational performance piece and outdoor sculpture installation, three video performances, an audience engaged installation, still photography, and wall text installation. All seven components or a selection of components may be combined for the final installation.

1. Durational Performance: *Release Me*

An outdoor durational performance of the artist knitting a metaphorical prison of hemp and then breaking free from her imprisonment. The artifact of this performance will then hang on a rickety tower with spindly legs reminiscent of a prison guard tower created by artist Terry Holzgreen. Due to the scale of this piece it would either need a large indoor space or an outdoor space.

Maquette available on request.

2. Video Performance: *The Undoing: Forgiveness* (31:01) to be displayed on a 72" television screen with headsets for viewing and listening.

This video performance records the artists hands knitting and unraveling sticky waxed hemp twine accompanied by audio stories revealing a wrong experienced and the desire to forgive the wrongs committed. While listening she recites the Buddhist Metta meditation, "May you be happy, may you be well, may you be safe and free of all suffering, may you be peaceful and at ease."

3. Video Performance: *The Undoing: Being Forgiven* (22:25) to be displayed on a 72" television screen with headsets for viewing and listening.

This video uses still images from the portion of *The Undoing: Forgiveness* where the artist unravels the waxed hemp twine. These images are then slowed down with added pauses and paired with audio stories of individuals who have been forgiven or those who have asked for forgiveness and been denied and a description of what it means to be forgiven.

4. Video Performance : *May You Know Peace* (21:00) to be displayed on a 72" television screen with headsets for viewing and listening.

Close up images of faces and their reactions – child of Holocaust survivors, a Black person, an Asian person, a LatinX person, a White person as they watch a 3 minute video of racial, environmental, and humanitarian injustices. The people being recorded are silently completing a Metta practice. The last three minutes of the video will disclose the images of these injustices to the viewer.

5. Audience Engaged Installation: *The Love Chapel—To Witness, To Release*

Two chairs sit inside of a loosely knitted cylinder of waxed hemp twine that hangs from the ceiling. The bottom 6 feet of the cylinder contains a door. Visitors are invited to enter and sit together in the enclosing. One will serve as The Speaker and the other as The Silent Listener. The Speaker is able to say anything, think aloud, or share a secret without censorship. The Silent Listener does not reply in response to what they hear; they are a compassionate witness free of judgment. The Listener is asked to silently repeat the Buddhist Metta practice, "May you know peace, may you be happy, may you be free from all pain and suffering."

6. Visual Art Installation: A selection of framed still photographs taken from video performances

7. Wall Text Installation: Taken from video performances and metta practice handwritten or collaged on walls

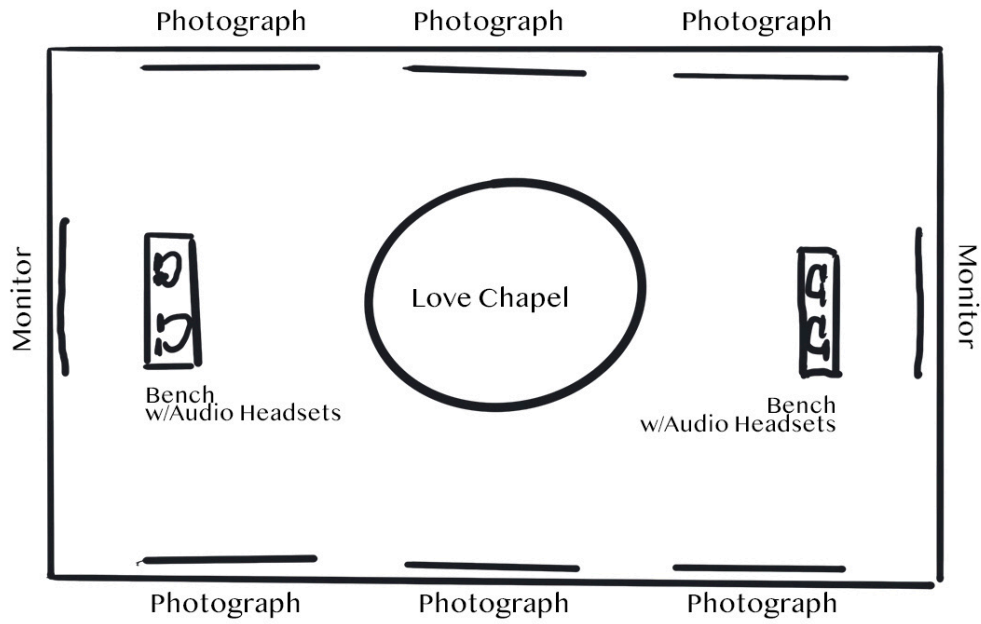
Budget Items

- Artist Travel and Per diem
- Artist Honorarium for Panels and Discussions
- Social Media Assistant
- 5,000 Color Trifold Brochure (approximate \$1,000)
- Trifold Graphic Designer (approximate \$750)
- Trifold Essayist
- 1,000 4 x 6" Postcards (\$60 for 1,000 / \$1250 for 30,000)
- Television Rental
- Audio Headsets for Television (\$350 each)
- Packing Supplies (approximate \$250)
- Delivery / Shipping (framed works and sculpture only)
- Framing (\$400 each / 36x48")
- Installation / De-Installation
- Essayist for Wall Text
- Signage

Compassion in Action

Floor Plan Example 1

2 Monitors



Compassion in Action

Floor Plan Example 2

3 Monitors

