

"Seersucker II"
akeylah wellington

SAUGATUCK CENTER FOR THE ARTS

plastic-plastic

Works by akeylah welllington
October 23, 2026 - May 14, 2027

aiwellington.com
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400 Culver St, Saugatuck, MI 49453
@saugatuck_arts | sc4a.org

about the exhibition

Drawing inspiration from the practice of making boondoggles, also known as lanyards or scoubidou, the show *plastic-plastic* is a meditation on the ubiquity of plastic. It features woven pony bead tapestries knotted into oversized versions of childhood crafts. As though put aside for more adult things, the brightly colored objects rest, slump, and lean against walls and the floor of the gallery. Made of pony beads, traditionally worn on the ends of braided styles, these objects were made to consider the relationship between Black girlhood and plastic's ubiquity. What does it mean to associate one's culture and upbringing with plastic?

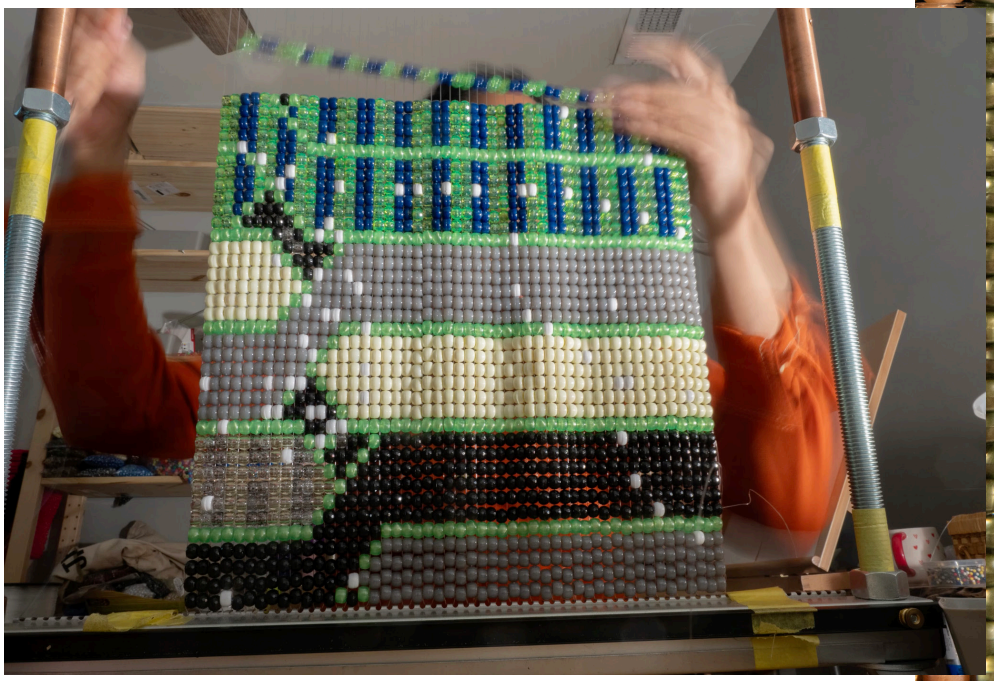
All objects in this exhibition are made of cheap petroleum derivatives: polystyrene, acrylic, nylon, and PVC. Nearly the whole show—warp, weft, and bead—is plastic. When natural materials like wood, shells, and paper pulp appear in the show, the artist invites audience members to compare and contrast their materiality. The title of the exhibition is an example of lexical cloning, in which a word is repeated twice to elucidate and emphasize. *The show is not just plastic. It's plastic-plastic!*



about the artist

akeylah wellington is a sculptor, tapestry weaver, and hard dough bread enthusiast. Her work reviews 2000s visual culture and ironies through the lens of craft. Her work is concerned with humor, as a noun, connoting comedy, and a verb, meaning to endure. Her attention to the aughts' technological and political developments is an attempt to make sense of her experience of loss, girlhood, generational inheritances, and time. Her work has been shown at Blah Blah Gallery (Philadelphia, PA), The Anderson (Richmond, VA), and Pond Gallery (Fayetteville, AR). She is a former artist-in-residence of Visible Records and Wassaic Project, a 2025 Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award recipient, and a museum educator.






“Artists are mirrors to the times that they are living in or through. “
— akeylah wellington



akeylah's favorite...

COLORS

akeylah loves the color of sandy soil like the stuff she grew up seeing in south Florida. She is a big fan of greens. It is her favorite color to wear, and akeylah's favorite crayon colors as a child were seafoam green and teal. She's been a green girl for a very long time.

FOODS

akeylah can eat hot escovitch snapper with her bare hands, bones and all. akeylah loves hard dough bread, which is a kind of Caribbean bread that retains its texture despite humid conditions. She also loves fresh fruit like mango, guinnep, plums, and cherries. She loves dried apricots, tamarind, and dates, too.

SEASONS

akeylah loves when summer rains provide relief from humidity. akeylah loves dandelion, mulberry, and serviceberry season in early, mid, and late spring.

ARTISTS

Victoria Duggar, Malcolm Peacock, sara jean ruiz
(her best friend!)

akeylah is currently...

READING

Drums and Shadows: survival studies among Georgia coastal Negroes; *The People Could Fly*, Virginia Hamilton; *Blackspace: On the Poetics of an Afrofuture*, Anais Duplan; *Fifteen Theses on the Cute*, Frances Richard; *Animacies*, Mel Y. Chin; *Scoubidou Mega Guide*

LISTENING TO

new avatar, Kelela; *LP!*, JPEGMAFIA; *Memoirs of an Imperfect Angel,* Mariah Carey; *Cherish The Light Years,* Cold Cave; *Box of Chocolates,* Kevin Aviance; *Live at Carnegie Hall*, Sweet Honey in the Rock

WATCHING

On Becoming a Guinea Fowl, Waiting to Exhale

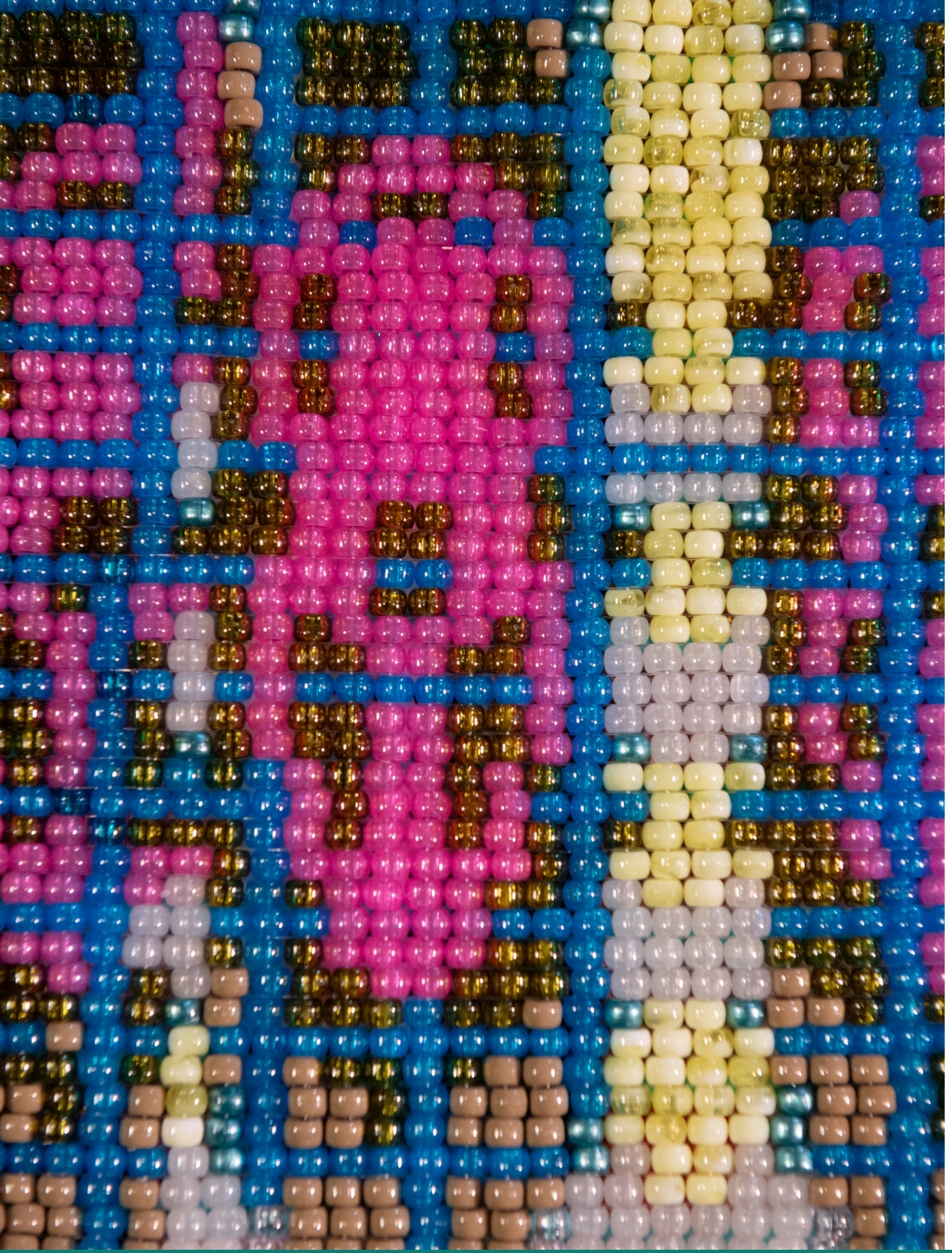
DAYDREAMING ABOUT

A world where everyone gets fed, can play, and is respected.

Something you might be surprised to know about akeylah is...

akeylah is a big fan of the single-developer pixel art game Stardew Valley. She has several farms where she plays as though her avatar is a character from the show Adventure Time. Thus far, she has a farm for Bonnibel Bubblegum, Marceline the Vampire Queen, and Finn the Human. She wants to do Jake the Dog next, but is busy.





key concepts

- the early 2000s
- found media
- displacement
- girlhood & youth
- weaving & handicrafts
- plastic & the environment

vocabulary & terminology

scoubidou (et. al scoobies / lanyard): a French knotting practice where plastic lace is used to make different stitches. The craft fell out of popularity and reemerged as a popular activity during the 90s and 00s

boondoggle: a synonym for the first term; a useless object

plastic lace: thin strips of flexible plastic available in a range of colors

aughts: the first decade of the 2000s

plastic: a wide category of inorganic, synthetic materials derived from petroleum. Plastic, deriving from a Greek word meaning "moldable," is used in everything from food containers, paint, car parts, and beads

sublime: in art theory, this term refers to artwork which inspires a combination of awe and terror

beading: the process of making jewelry or textiles where beads are the primary or predominant material

weaving: the process of making cloth by interlacing fiber at right angles

pony beads: plastic beads with a barrel shape, used in friendship bracelets and as hair ornaments for Black braided styles

tri beads: plastic beads with a shape similar to boat propellers

polymer: plastic clay which can be baked in an oven

acrylic: referring to a powdered material used to extend the length of human nails; referring to a clear plastic which can be shaped with heat

lexical cloning: the repetition of a word in speech to emphasize the true meaning of that word

appropriation: in art, this refers to the practice of recontextualizing images

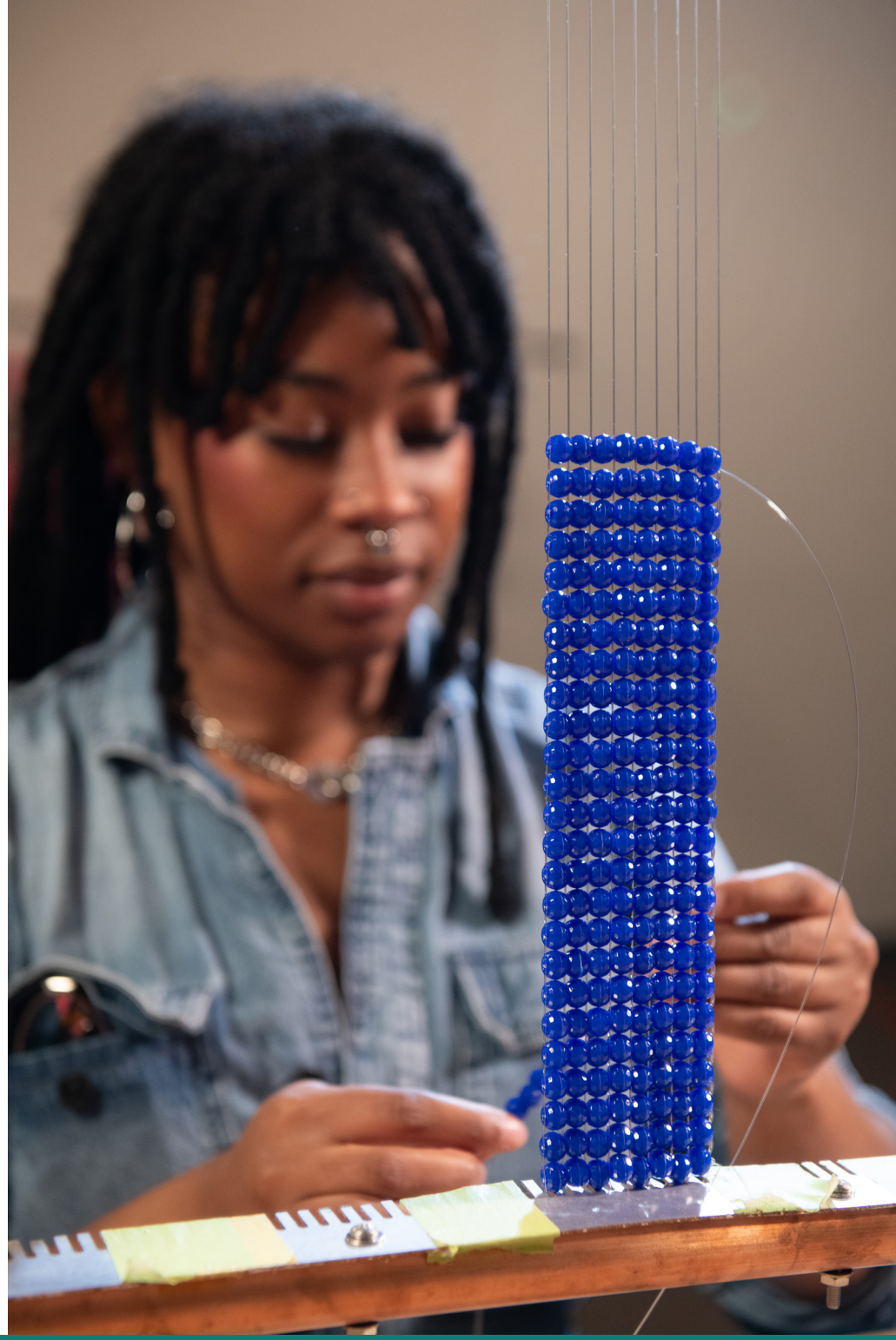


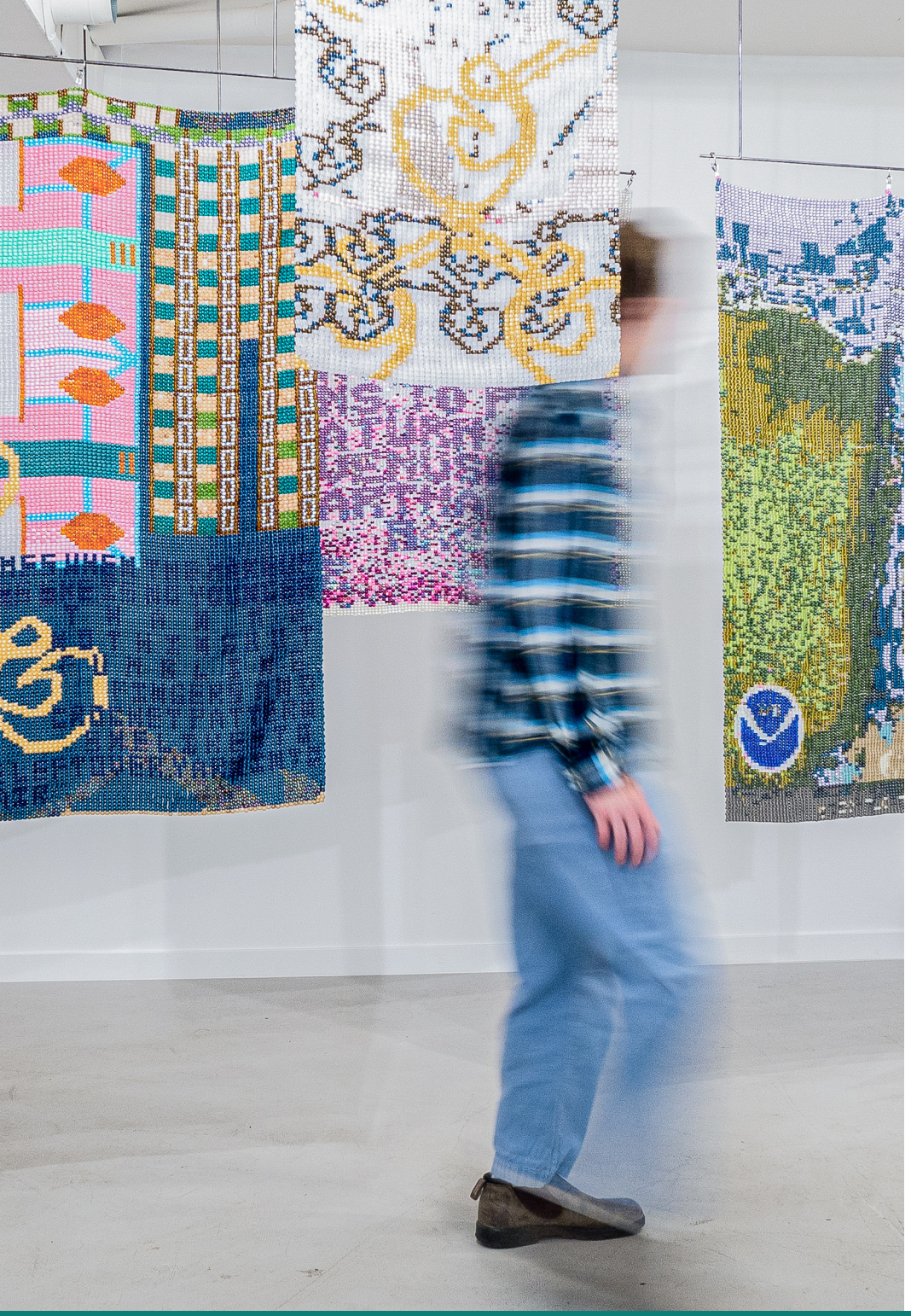
before viewing

The work in *plastic-plastic* is rooted in the artist's childhood memories and makes reference to the period of time known as the aughts, otherwise known as the early 2000s. Inspired by plastic lace craft, the exhibition explores the significance of childhood handicrafts as a mode for marking time and storytelling. wellington invites viewers to consider the ubiquity of plastic in our environment and everyday lives, but also to stumble on the joy that can come from creating large scale works and forms using simple, youthful materials like plastic pony beads.

Plastic lace craft refers to a type of woven handicraft often practiced by children at summer camps, on the playground, and in their social circles. Often referred to as scoubidous, boondoggles, or lanyards—these woven creations are made of intricately knotted and woven plastic lace and are often created to be keychains, zipper pulls, or bracelets. While plastic lace craft may be a recognizable contemporary craft form to many, the origins of the scoubidou can be traced back to France in the 1950s, where weaving in this form with flat ropes became a popular playground fad. Scoubidous experienced a resurgence in popularity in the 1980s and the 2000s, where plastic lace became the material of choice.

Throughout the exhibition, you will notice oversized forms of scoubidous or lanyards. Instead of being made with plastic lace, they are made from woven strips of plastic pony beads. By incorporating the use of pony beads, the artist is able to magnify not only the size of the forms, but also the significance. Traditionally used at the end of braids in Black hairstyles, pony beads, like plastic lace, call back to the artist's memories and experiences of girlhood.





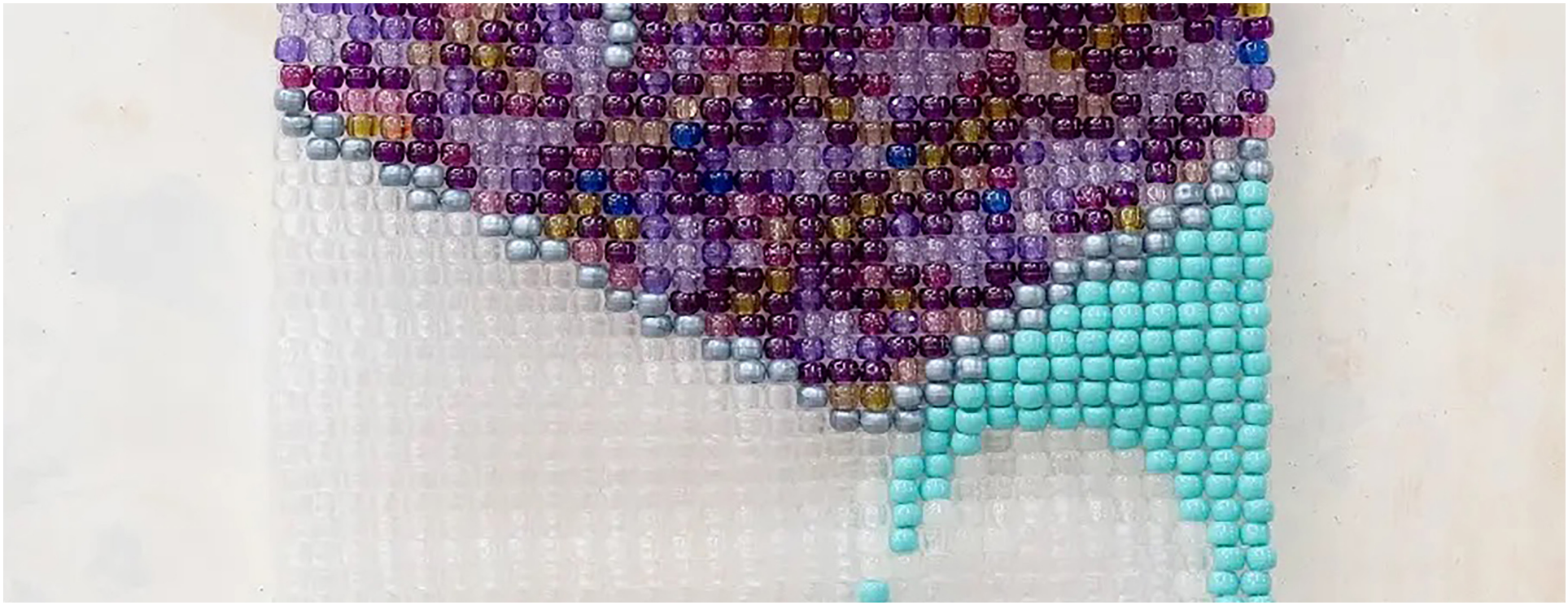
while viewing

While you explore the gallery, consider not only the objects and what they represent, but also the arrangement. As though put aside for more adult things, the brightly colored woven objects rest, slump, and lean against walls and the floor of the gallery. Do you feel a sense of loss, playfulness or maybe both?

When we consider the ubiquity of plastics in our environment and our reliance on them in life, we are often met with two realities. Plastic is everpresent and everlasting—it is durable and therefore utilitarian, it allows for play and creativity, and yet—there is so much of it in our environment we are confronted with grim realities of pollution, microplastics, and waste. As you view the works, consider what the use of plastic is communicating. In both contexts, there is a sense of permanence to plastic; an emphasis on what remains.

The materiality of plastic also embodies a sense of preservation. Throughout the course of history, we've changed packaging to plastic to better protect and preserve the goods within it. We laminate important documents with plastic sheets, wrap fragile items in bubble wrap, and place precious items inside acrylic cases, to name a few. There is a sense that plastic will allow us to keep things of value protected and close to us. Consider what the artist is preserving—a moment in time; treasured traditions of weaving, crafts, and cultural knowledge; and the value of making things by hand.

look for: the seersucker/blast gold series



These small tapestries are compositions of skies, patterns, and marbles coming from screenshots of the Flash Game, Marble Blast Gold. An emergent theme in akeylah's practice are fantastical, hypothetical, or seemingly impossible skies from idyllic or imagined days. A few tapestries from this series are in *plastic-plastic*.

Look closely at the tapestries, then step back. How do they change? When you're looking closely at the material versus the imagery they create, how does the meaning change?

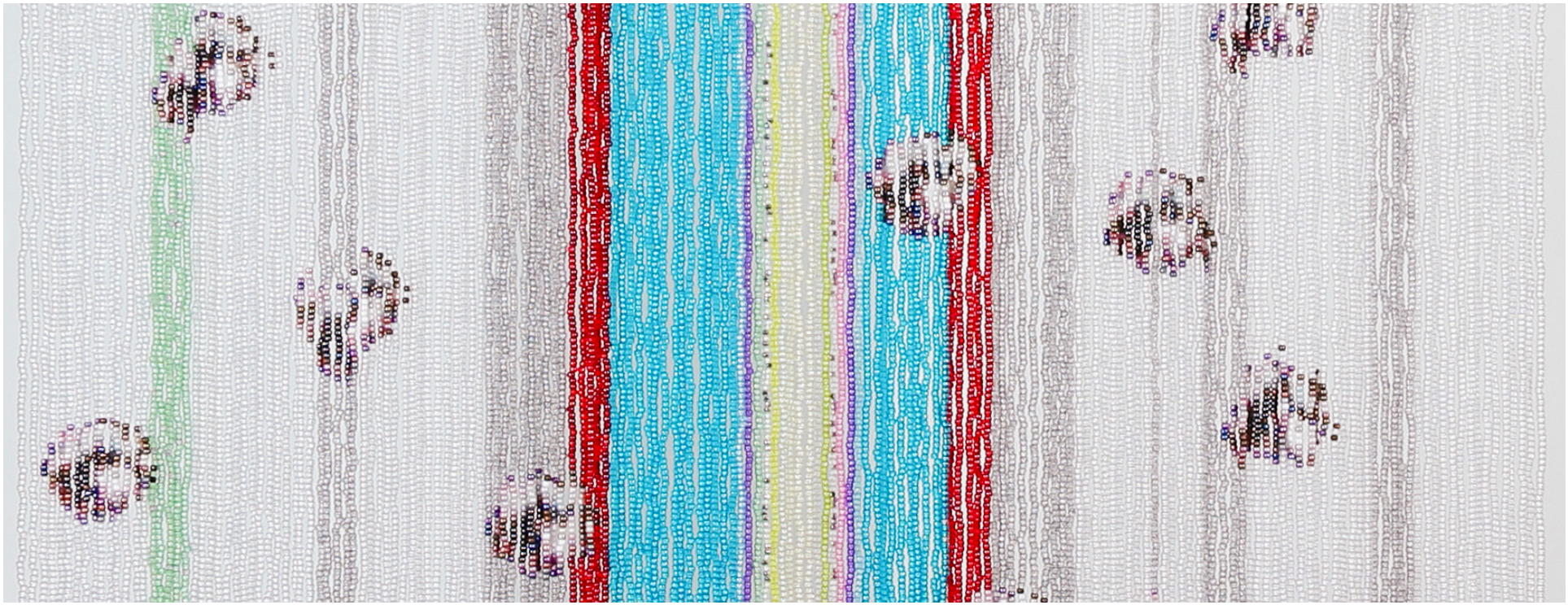
look for: starter *square stitch*, *magenta* and black



This sculpture is made of magenta pony beads arranged in long, thin strips. This weaving is inspired by the square stitch as described in the knotting manual *Scoubidou Mega Guide* and the hobby forum *Les Fous de Scoubidou*. Though plastic lace crafts are normally no larger than two or three inches long, these works are made with yards of plastic material. Works in this new series of artworks are named according to the stitch and bead color.

What does it mean to associate one's culture and upbringing with plastic? What plastic crafts or objects from your childhood hold meaning for you?

look for: pinball (curtain)



Pinball (curtain): This beaded curtain appropriates the pinball from 3D Pinball: Space Cadet, a minigame that was pre-installed on Windows operating systems released in the 90s and 00s.

When you look at this curtain, do you get a sense of movement? Try running your hands lightly across the curtain. What do you see? What do you hear?

after viewing

Interested in learning more? Below are some ways you can continue to explore akeylah's work and learn more about handicrafts featured in *plastic-plastic*.

RESOURCES ON SCOUBIDOUS

Scoubidou Mega Guide

Le Fous de Scoubidous Forum

ARTICLES ABOUT THE ARTIST

akeylah wellington Interview, Crush Fanzine

akeylah wellington: The Architecture of the Gap, Burnaway.org

ECO-FRIENDLY BEADING RESOURCES

Eco Plastique





educational programming

GROUP FIELD TRIPS

Grades K-12 / Adult | Single Visit to SCA | 45 - 90 minutes
Includes tour & hands-on activity

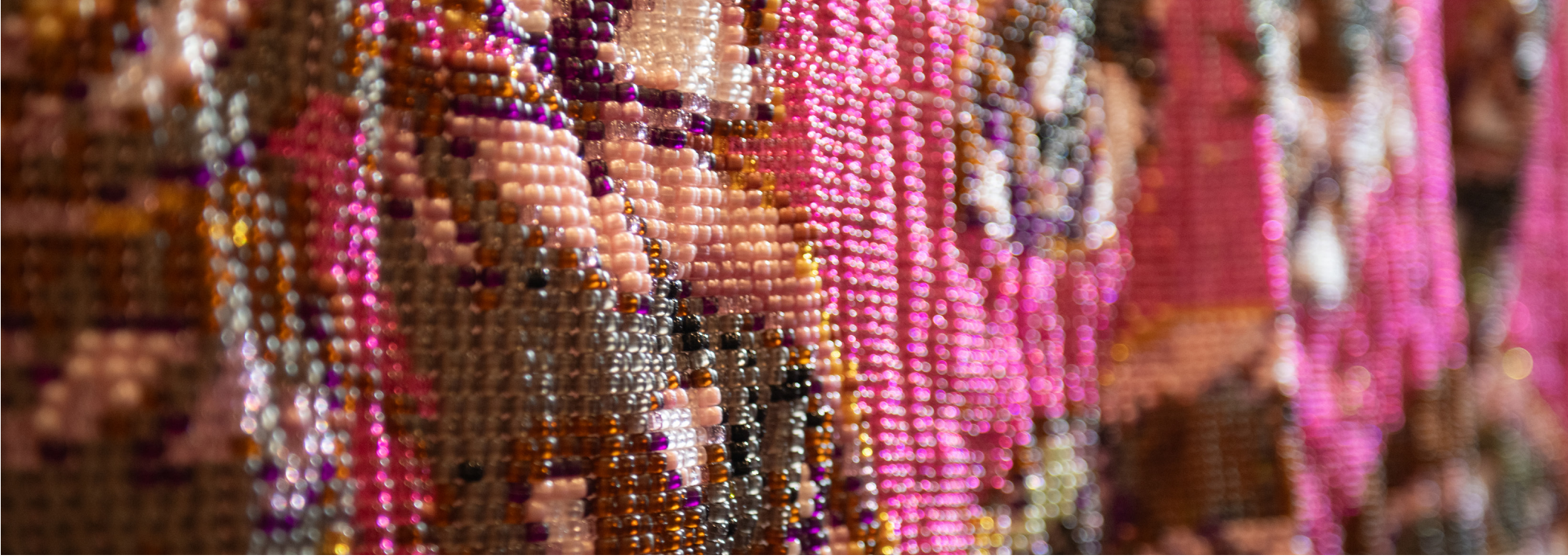
Key Concepts & Ideas: the early 2000s (the aughts), found media, displacement, girlhood & youth, weaving & handicrafts, plastic & its impact on the environment

Complete our Field Trip Inquiry Form

SCHOOL PROGRAMMING

High School Programming,
9th - 12th grade students
October 12 - November 6, 2026
3 classroom visits and 1 field trip to SCA
In-person visit with akeylah wellington

High school students will explore how visual culture shapes our modes of communication, our identities and our collective experiences. How can we use design and craft to practice presence, mindfulness while expressing meaningful ideas? Using pony beads, plastic lace and other familiar craft materials, students will design and create beaded tapestries that communicate ideas about identity and culture. Focusing on creative problem solving, critical thinking, design, and self-expression, students will work independently to design and follow detailed patterns inspired by the artists' work and style that communicate meaningful ideas.



Elementary Programming
3rd - 5th grade students
February 15 - March 5, 2027
2 classroom visits and 1 field trip to SCA
*virtual visit with akeylah wellington

Elementary students will create with familiar arts and craft materials like plastic lace and pony beads, while exploring the connection of artmaking to mindfulness, meaning-making and memory building. How can creativity shape how we remember childhood? What moments from now will we carry with us forever? How can we express our feelings about our world through art making? Inspired by the work of akeylah wellington, kids will reflect on the stories her work seeks to tell while reflecting and building connections to early 2000s history. Kids will engage with screen-free activities that inspire human connection, creative problem solving, and critical thinking.

Middle School Programming
6th - 8th grade students
April 12 - May 7, 2027
3 classroom visits and 1 field trip to SCA
In-person visit with akeylah wellington

Middle school students will explore how visual culture shapes our ways of communication, identity and our collective experiences. How can we use craft and repetition to practice presence, mindfulness while expressing ourselves creatively? Using pony beads, plastic lace and other familiar craft materials, students will design and create small handmade beaded tapestries that symbolize and represent meaningful ideas about identity and culture. Focusing on creative problem solving, design-thinking, and self-expression, students will work both independently and collaboratively to design and follow detailed patterns inspired by the artists' work and style.



related programming

CENTER (ON) | FEATURING AKEYLAH WELLINGTON

October, 23 2026 | 10:00 - 11:00 am
All Ages | Free for Members, $10 public

Join exhibiting artist akeylah wellington for a special Center (On) conversation exploring *plastic-plastic*, her newest exhibition. Through vibrant, oversized sculptures made from woven plastic pony beads, akeylah transforms familiar childhood craft materials into playful works that invite curiosity and reflection.

Hear directly from the artist about the ideas, memories, and cultural influences behind the exhibition, including the role of traditional Black hair adornment, nostalgia, humor, and material experimentation in her practice. Following the conversation, akeylah will lead a guided behind the scenes tour of the exhibition, offering additional insight into the work on view.

PLASTIC-PLASTIC, PARTY PARTY

Saturday, October 24 | 7:00 - 10:00 pm
All Ages | FREE

Join us for the opening party of *plastic-plastic*, an exhibition by artist akeylah wellington. The exhibition is a celebration of plastic lace craft and iconography from the aughts. Meet the artist, create throwback lace crafts with pony beads, and kick off a Y2K dance party beginning at 8 pm! Enjoy bites and beverages with Grand Rapids' favorite Hot Glue Creux, while browsing the gallery and mingle with more resident artists from the SCA.

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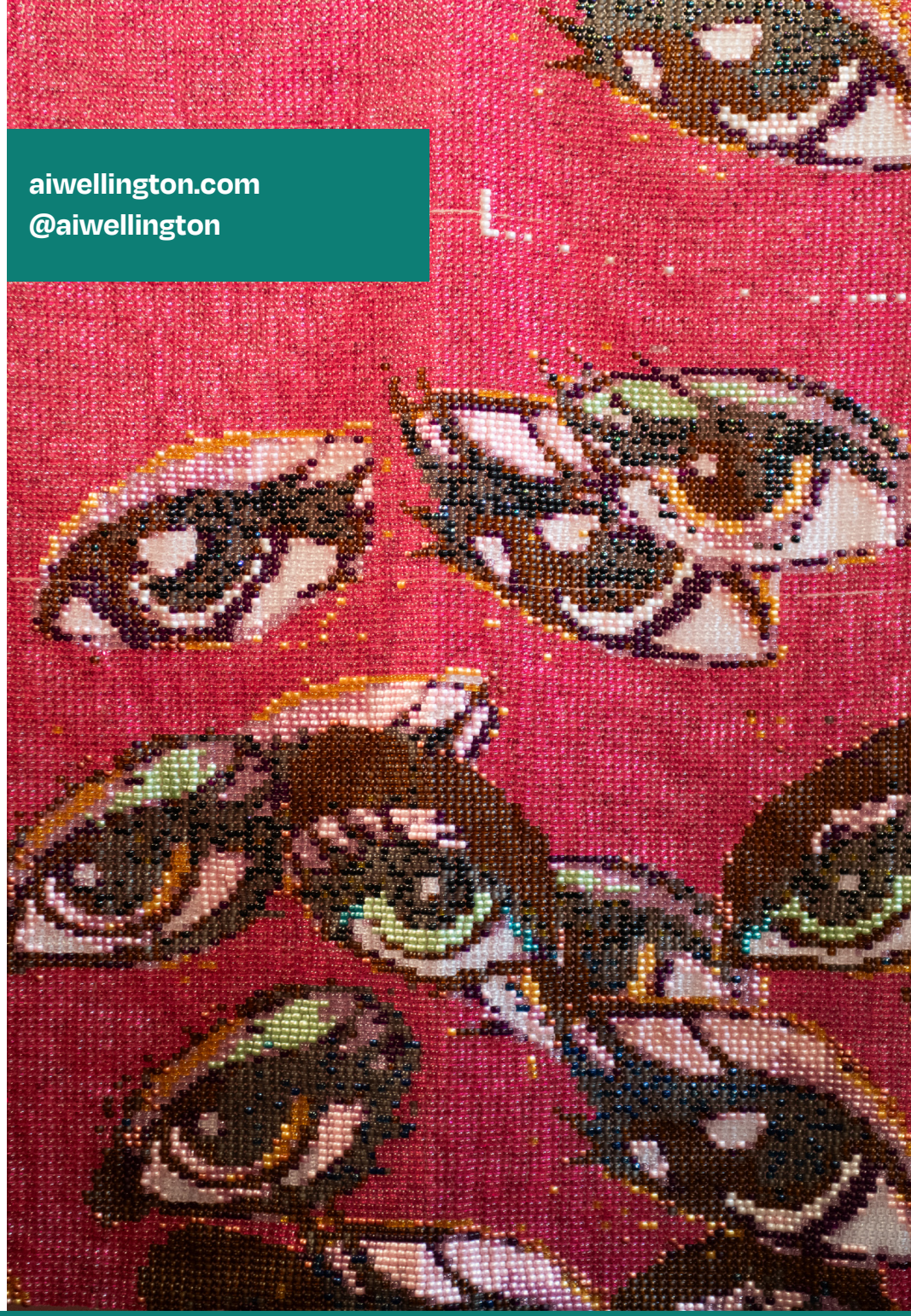
John Cannarsa & Tim Straker

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