

# [TEXT]URE: WEAVING TOGETHER AN UNDERSTANDING OF NEW LITERACIES

by

RACHEL KAMINSKI SANDERS

(Under the Direction of Donna E. Alvermann)

## ABSTRACT

As a Language and Literacy Education student, this scholar felt a need to address the call from scholars within the field to further the “ethos” knowledge of new literacies, an understanding beyond typographic forms, by writing a dissertation in a format which practices new literacies skills rather than traditional ones. Her dissertation, written solely outside the written word in the form of a museum exhibition, opened to the public in the Education Center at the Georgia Museum of Art on April 5, 2018. More information can be accessed through the exhibition webpage at [www.rachelksanders.com/texture-exhibition/](http://www.rachelksanders.com/texture-exhibition/).

INDEX WORDS: New literacies, Cultural studies, Nontraditional dissertation, Written word, Fashion, Arts based research, Texture, Body, Women, Museum exhibition, Higher education

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B.S., FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY, 2006

M.A.T., CLEMSON UNIVERSITY, 2012

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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## Artist Biography

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**Rachel Kaminski Sanders** graduated from Florida State University in 2006 with a bachelor's degree in Apparel Design and Technology. Rachel spent her senior internship in the showroom of Donghia, a luxury interior design company, studying textile designs. After college, Rachel moved to New York City to start a career in the fashion industry. She had the wonderful opportunity to work with the fashion department at InStyle magazine, which landed her a job with Bottega Veneta's communication department. At Bottega, she was able to work with a number of national publications and travel to Milan several times for Fashion Week.

Rachel moved back to South Carolina in 2010 to attend graduate school at Clemson University, where she received a Master of Arts in Teaching both English and Social Studies for grades 5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>. Rachel landed her first teaching position at Southwood Academy of the Arts, a public magnet school in Anderson, SC. The school offered a great opportunity to blend Rachel's interest in art and her passion for

teaching. She taught seventh grade writing for three years before deciding to pursue a PhD. Rachel is currently working on her doctoral degree at The University of Georgia in the Language and Literacy Education Department under the advisement of Dr. Donna Alvermann. At The University of Georgia, she has been able to further explore her research interests, including: arts based research, popular culture, new literacies studies, as well as clothing and the various textiles that can be used to create them. Rachel hopes to use her background in apparel design to broaden the types of scholarly research compositions traditionally accepted within higher education, an area of particular interest that she feels is imperative to developing the skills required by new literacies scholars.



## Artist Statement

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As an educator, I have an untraditional background. My undergraduate degree is in Apparel Design and I began my professional career in NYC's fashion industry. Understandably, I have always taken a more creative path to my academic work, and for me, required an experience beyond the book. I started my teaching career in a writing classroom at a public arts magnet school. I found each year that when the middle school students initially heard the word 'writing', they cringed. Several years later, I received the same disgust for writing from my undergraduates. In fact, a pre-service teacher in my writing pedagogy course informed me they "hated reading and writing". This challenged me to think about my own practices as a teacher and a student.

Throughout my academic career, my teachers considered me a "terrible" writer because I was a terrible speller; my papers bled with their red ink. These experiences ultimately haunted my confidence years beyond the classroom. It was not until I attended a Summer Institute (SI) at a National Writing Project (NWP) site that I actually began to identify as a writer. The diversity of that writing community challenged me to look differently at the traditional classroom. The experience reminded me of my time as an undergraduate in the Florida State University Apparel Design program, where the writing process took several different forms. Instead of writing research papers, my knowledge was developed through the process of designing and creating fashion collections. I used forms and figures, colors and textures to represent meaning and communicate the ideas from my collection.

As a teacher, I have taken this revised understanding of writing with me, encouraging my students to express themselves through ways they felt the most comfortable. This meant moving beyond print-based forms to incorporate other forms, such as the arts. Students produced knowledge in a variety of representational forms, instead of just words on a page. Writing became three-dimensional, making room for a diversity of textures. Slowly, the hatred towards writing changed. I didn't understand exactly why, but I had a strong sense something was happening.

Through my studies at UGA, I discovered these other forms of representation provided the type of writing the 21st century classroom needs: the production of "new literacies". The term applies both to the new understanding of what it means to be literate in present day (beyond typographic forms), referred to as the "ethos stuff" by Lankshear and Knobel (2011), as well as the new hardware and software of communication, referred to as the "technical stuff" (p. 29). The students were getting at the "technos" of new literacies but, perhaps even more importantly, at the "ethos" of new literacies. The forms of these texts supported the inclusion of individual funds of knowledge to the exclusion of a standardized classroom.

Although this thinking is not new to higher education, it is rarely reflected in practice. Research reveals a gap between what academic scholars are saying and what they are doing. New literacies scholars have been calling for educators to broaden practices for several years, yet they continue to use the written form to argue for the intellectual legitimacy of these new literacies (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Dalton & Proctor, 2008; Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 2008; Gee, 2015; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, 2011; Street, 1984; The New London Group, 2000). These



scholars even bring attention to “the irony of a volume on new literacies research that appears within the pages of a 500-year-old technology” (Coiro et al., 2008, p. xii). This creates a contradiction: scholars in institutes of higher education are arguing for the intellectual validity of new literacy practices but not acknowledging the production of such practices as intellectual work.

For three years I asked my seventh-grade students to produce a variety of new literacies forms, but I myself had never written one. I want to practice what I believe as a teacher, that texts are no longer limited to the one-dimensionality of a printed book. Consequently, my dissertation will be written in a nontraditional literacy form, calling attention to stale traditions and offering a renewed perspective on literacy practices in higher education. I believe through my own experience of actively engaging in the production of knowledge in a format other than the written word, I will develop a better understanding of the new literacy skills expected of students in the 21st century while also addressing this contradiction from within my field. A potential implication of this work will be a better understanding of the “writing” process in new literacies. In alignment with the NWP, I believe in teachers teaching teachers (NWP & Nagin, 2003). Teachers need to be taught how to model these practices and they need to have time to explore these new literacies before entering their own classrooms. I need the experience of these practices to develop as a new literacies writer. Thus, a second potential implication will be the development of my craft within new literacies, or what Eisner (1976) argues is educational connoisseurship. This experience will better inform my instructional practices as a literacy scholar.

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## **[Text]ure: Weaving Together an Understanding of New Literacies**

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The exhibition title is a compilation of words including: text, texture, textiles, enclosure, and culture. The title asserts that a culture so focused on the written word disregards the variety of forms in which individuals can communicate with one another, and as a result loses the potential to bring the textures of diversity to a once one-dimensional discussion that is standardized in education. To encompass this idea, the word "text" has been bracketed, to signify "enclosure".

### **Exhibition Timeframe**

Length: 1 day

Date: Thursday, April 5, 2018

Location: Georgia Museum of Art

Room: Education Center, First Floor

Installation Hours: 8AM until 3PM

Event Time: 5PM until 8PM

### **Exhibition Elements**

2 mixed media installations

### **Exhibition Size**

Mixed Media Installation #1 Body of Text: 9F Length x 12F Width x 5F10 Height

Mixed Media Installation #2 Words Matter: 15F Length x 12F Width x 6F4 Height

### **Contact Information**

Website: <http://www.rachelksanders.com/>

Email: [texturewksh@gmail.com](mailto:texturewksh@gmail.com)

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/texturewksh/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/texturewksh>

Instagram: #texturewksh

Social Media User Handle: @texturewksh

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCuJZfmiOsRz0mCHbSMpAQyg>

### **Exhibition Narrative**

Technology continues to expand our world and the ways in which we communicate. The traditional meaning of the term literacy has broadened beyond just the written word to now include media such as graphic novels, videos, dress, and more. These "new literacies" – the modern understanding of ways in which individuals communicate with each other – are attempting to gain validity in an academic world still narrowly focused on traditional reading and writing. While the existence of these literacies is recognized and discussed, their production has not yet gained acceptance as being a valid means of intellectual discourse.

The dissertation is the seminal piece of a PhD research program, yet few students have produced one in a format solely outside the written word. This creates a contradiction between scholars who acknowledge the importance of new literacy practices, yet do not accept their production as true intellectual work. As a student in a language and literacy department, I felt a need to address the call from scholars within



the field to further the “ethos” knowledge of new literacies, an understanding beyond typographic forms, by writing a dissertation in a format which practices new literacies skills rather than traditional ones. This exhibition brings attention to taken-for-granted traditions in education that continue to marginalize individuals through the privileging of the written word, while helping to address the contradiction within my field.

Rather than merely recognizing oppression, research in the field of cultural studies calls for the extension of practices to empowerment. The educational practices of this nation progressed from religious practices that originated in Western Europe. I am interested in how these traditional practices and beliefs marginalized individuals based on gender. Christianity’s culturally perceived weakness, or perhaps even wickedness, of women has been articulated from an early time period and has been rearticulated during various historical events. I looked to encompass elements of those historical themes in the design of this collection as a means of empowerment, to pushback against the received view. As an artist, fashion designer, and female educator, I hope to bring art and fashion, femininity and the body, from the academic margins where they lie in order to challenge higher education’s privileging of the written word through the language of dress.



## Images Representing the Work

Image 1: Exhibition popup event flyer.

The flyer features a dark, textured background with a blue and black abstract pattern. The title '[texture]' is in a large, white, sans-serif font. Below it, the subtitle 'WEAVING TOGETHER AN UNDERSTANDING OF NEW LITERACIES' is in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. At the bottom, the event details are listed in white text: 'APRIL 5, 2018 | 5PM UNTIL 8PM', 'GEORGIA MUSEUM OF ART | EDUCATION CENTER', and 'WWW.RACHELKSANDERS.COM'. On the right side, there is a black box with white text for 'PRESENTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA', 'POPUPEVENT DETAILS', 'EXHIBITION DESCRIPTION', and 'FREE ADMISSION'.

**PRESENTED BY**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

**POPUPEVENT DETAILS**  
APRIL 5, 2018 | 5PM UNTIL 8PM  
GEORGIA MUSEUM OF ART | EDUCATION CENTER

**EXHIBITION DESCRIPTION**  
Technology continues to expand our world and the ways in which we communicate. The traditional meaning of the term literacy has broadened beyond just the written word to now include media such as graphic novels, videos, dress, and more. These "new literacies" – the modern understanding of ways in which individuals communicate with each other – are attempting to gain validity in an academic world still narrowly focused on traditional reading and writing. While the existence of these literacies is recognized and discussed, their production has not yet gained acceptance as being a valid means of intellectual discourse.

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**FREE ADMISSION**  
All are welcome to attend the event, to share refreshments and conversation, as individuals from all communities immerse themselves in weaving together an understanding of new literacies. Virtual participation will be available through the exhibition webpage at [rachelksanders.com](http://rachelksanders.com).

THE EXHIBITION IS PART OF AN ONGOING RESEARCH PROJECT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA IN THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION'S LANGUAGE AND LITERACY EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.

Image 2: Exhibition save the date.

The save the date flyer features a dark, textured background with a blue and black abstract pattern. The title '[texture]' is in a large, white, sans-serif font. Below it, the subtitle 'WEAVING TOGETHER AN UNDERSTANDING OF NEW LITERACIES' is in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. At the bottom, the event details are listed in white text: 'GEORGIA MUSEUM OF ART | EDUCATION CENTER' and 'www.rachelksanders.com'. In the center, there is a white box with a black border containing the text '5PM UNTIL 8PM', 'APRIL', and '05' in a large, bold, sans-serif font.

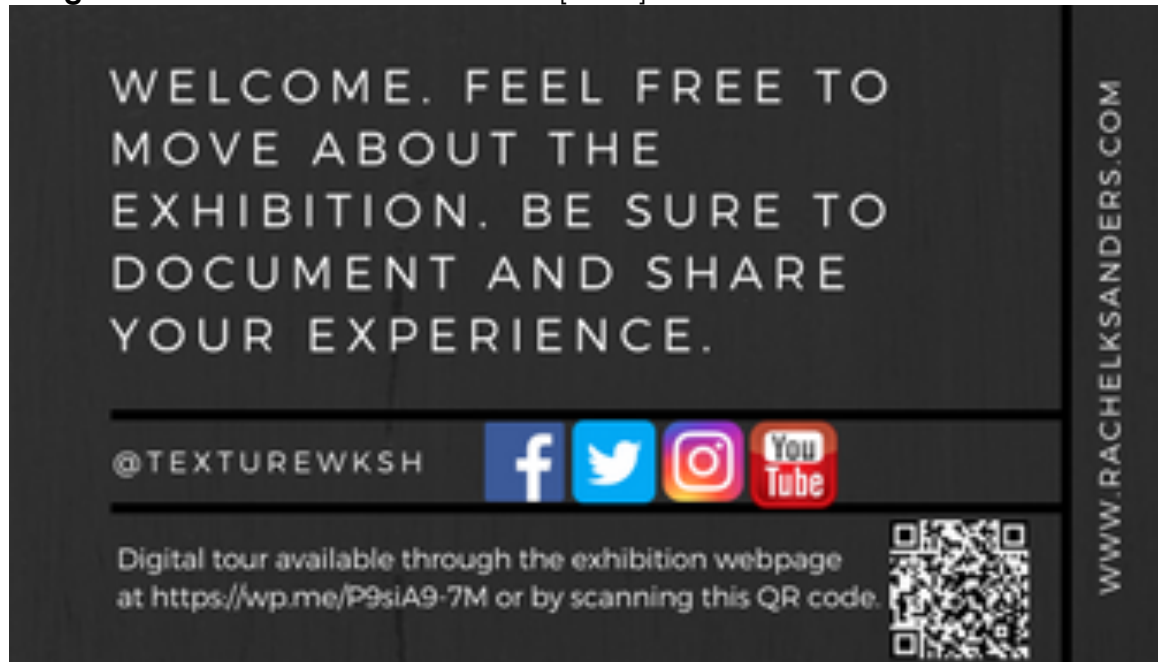
**Image 3:** Exhibition Museum Poster



**Image 4:** Exhibition Social Media Card [Front]



**Image 5:** Exhibition Social Media Card [Back]



**Image 6:** Mixed Media Installation #1 Body of Text [Front]

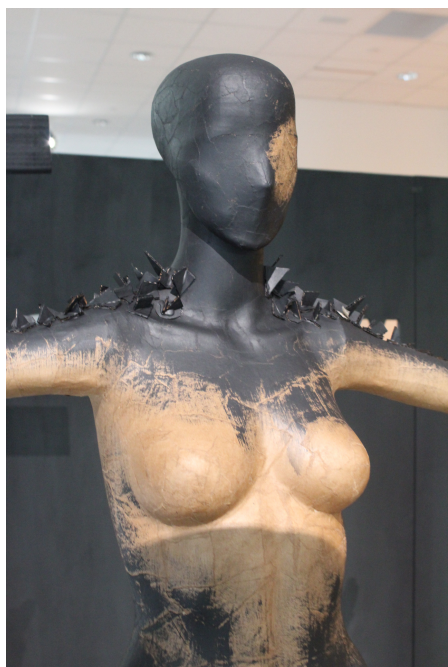




**Image 7:** Mixed Media Installation #1 Body of Text [Side]



**Image 8:** Mixed Media Installation #1 Body of Text [Mannequin Body Letter "T"]





**Image 9:** Mixed Media Installation #1 Body of Text [Mannequin Body Letter "T"]



**Image 10:** Mixed Media Installation #1 Body of Text [Mannequin Body Letter "E"]





**Image 11:** Mixed Media Installation #1 Body of Text [Mannequin Body Letter "E"]



**Image 12:** Mixed Media Installation #1 Body of Text [Mannequin Body Letter "X"]

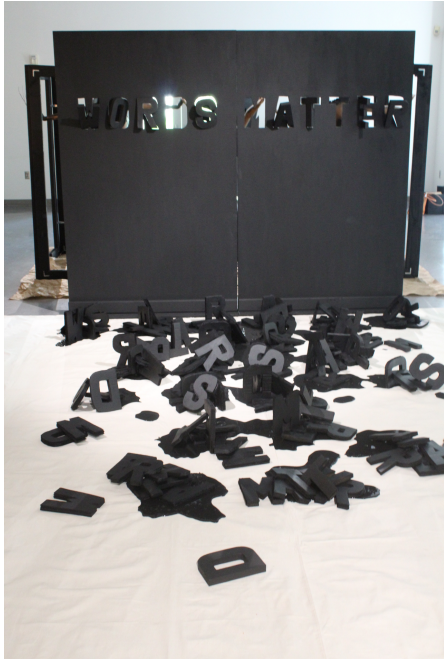




**Image 13:** Mixed Media Installation #1 Body of Text [Mannequin Body Letter "T"]



**Image 14:** Mixed Media Installation #2 Words Matter





**Image 15:** Mixed Media Installation #2 Words Matter ["Words Matter" Wall]



**Image 16:** Mixed Media Installation #2 Words Matter [Ink Spill]





**Image 17:** Mixed Media Installation #2 Words Matter [Phoenix Rising]





## Artifact Inventory List

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### Mixed Media Installation #1 Body of Text

- a. **Name of Object:** Mannequin Body Letter "T"  
**Quantity:** 1  
**Dimensions:** Height 5F8, Width of arm span 4F8  
**Artifact Reference #:** RS.2018.01  
**Medium:** plastic mannequin, grocery store paper bags, white school glue, acrylic black paint, hot glue.
- b. **Name of Object:** Mannequin Body Letter "E"  
**Quantity:** 1  
**Dimensions:** Height 2F9, Width of leg span 3F7  
**Artifact Reference #:** RS.2018.02  
**Medium:** plastic mannequin, grocery store paper bags, white school glue, acrylic black paint, cardboard, hot glue.
- c. **Name of Object:** Mannequin Body Letter "X"  
**Quantity:** 1  
**Dimensions:** Height 5F3, Width of arm span 2F4  
**Artifact Reference #:** RS.2018.03  
**Medium:** plastic mannequin, grocery store paper bags, white school glue, acrylic black paint, hot glue, cardboard rolls from paper towels and toilet paper.
- d. **Name of Object:** Mannequin Body Letter "T"  
**Quantity:** 1  
**Dimensions:** Height 5F8, Width of arm span 4F8  
**Artifact Reference #:** RS.2018.04  
**Medium:** plastic mannequin, grocery store paper bags, white school glue, acrylic black paint, black yarn, picture hanging wire, black cotton gauze fabric, headband.
- e. **Name of Object:** Brackets for Text Box  
**Quantity:** 4  
**Dimensions:** Height 5F10, Width 1F5  
**Artifact Reference #:** RS.2018.05  
**Medium:** plywood, black acrylic paint, sterling silver brackets, sterling silver hinges.
- f. **Name of Object:** Ink Blot  
**Quantity:** 4  
**Dimensions:** Dimensions fit to the base of the body and mannequin stand.



**Artifact Reference #:** RS.2018.06

**Medium:** black foam board

**g. Name of Object:** Paper

**Quantity:** 1

**Dimensions:** Length 9F, Width 12F

**Artifact Reference #:** RS.2018.07

**Medium:** Dropcloth from recycled materials

### **Mixed Media Installation #2 Words Matter**

**h. Name of Object:** "Words" Wall

**Quantity:** 1

**Dimensions:** Height 6F4, Width 4F

**Artifact Reference #:** RS.2018.08

**Medium:** birch plywood, black acrylic paint, paper Mache letters, hot glue, sterling silver bracket.

**i. Name of Object:** "Matter" Wall

**Quantity:** 1

**Dimensions:** Height 6F4, Width 4F

**Artifact Reference #:** RS.2018.09

**Medium:** birch plywood, black acrylic paint, paper Mache letters, hot glue, sterling silver bracket.

**j. Name of Object:** 3-D Letter Sculpture "Words"

**Quantity:** 12

**Dimensions:** Ranging from 10i Height and 24i Width

**Artifact Reference #:** RS.2018.10

**Medium:** cardboard, white school glue, black acrylic paint, hot glue.

**k. Name of Object:** 3-D Letter Sculpture "Matter"

**Quantity:** 12

**Dimensions:** Ranging from 10i Height and 24i Width

**Artifact Reference #:** RS.2018.11

**Medium:** cardboard, white school glue, black acrylic paint, hot glue.

**l. Name of Object:** Liquid Ink

**Quantity:** 27 cups

**Dimensions:** Forms to the shape of the container.

**Artifact Reference #:** RS.2018.12

**Medium:** white school glue, borax, water, India black ink.



**m. Name of Object:** Blank Sheet of Paper

**Quantity:** 1

**Dimensions:** Length 15F, Width 12F

**Artifact Reference #:** RS.2018.13

**Medium:** Cotton canvas dropcloth

**n. Name of Object:** Phoenix Garment

**Quantity:** 1

**Dimensions:** Bust 34i, Waist 24i, Hips 35i, Length 6F

**Artifact Reference #:** RS.2018.14

**Medium:** red mesh fabric, graduation gowns, red netting, India black ink, red velvet ribbon.