



Rug Design Philosophy: The Cycle of Storytelling & Experience

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Intro

Crafting has always brought me joy ever since I was a kid, and I was always curious why. As I got older my crafting curiosity led me to the art of rug making. I took a deep dive into the long-rooted history of rug/carpet design as it relates to necessity, cultural significance, and contemporary eastern/western perspectives.

The investigation led me to two narratives, the first being Persian historical/social relationship with carpet making, as well as the stories woven into and created on top of eastern style rugs. And the second being Western appreciation and experience created because of the conservation and dissemination of Persian rug design and philosophy since the late 19th century. This being largely influenced by William Morris' contribution to the introduction of textile arts to the West.

By studying both these narratives I was able to conclude that storytelling, when it comes to rug and textile design, is an integral part of experience, inspiration, and creation that keeps the tradition of rug making alive today.



Historical Context of Persian Rugs

Narrative 1.

- For many centuries, Persian rugs have been the benchmark of craftsmanship when it comes to fiberarts. In Persia (Modern day Iran) carpet-making was an independent crafting activity that developed around the 13th to 15th century CE.
- The versatility of Persian rugs allowed for them to be adapted as utilitarian, decorative, and religious objects.
- The use of a carpet as a household element has been widely popular in Iran since the early 19th century.
- Iranian's believe handmade rug is a piece of cultural heritage that evokes socioeconomic, cultural, and political developments in Iran from the premodern to the modern era



Modern Significance in Persian Household

Narrative 1.

- Another one of the ways rug making, among other handicrafts, is so remarkable to them as a culture, is the way carpet symbolizes and structures the space of family life.
- Most middle class or working class homes don't accommodate a sofa but alternatively use rugs for collective family activities.
- Persian carpets have borders that serve as frames, drawing attention towards the center of the carpet, offering symmetry and a sense of balance to the room.
- In a similar fashion, family members sit around the border of the carpet and dedicate the center for family activities such as eating or dancing.



Modern Significance in Persian Household

Narrative 1.

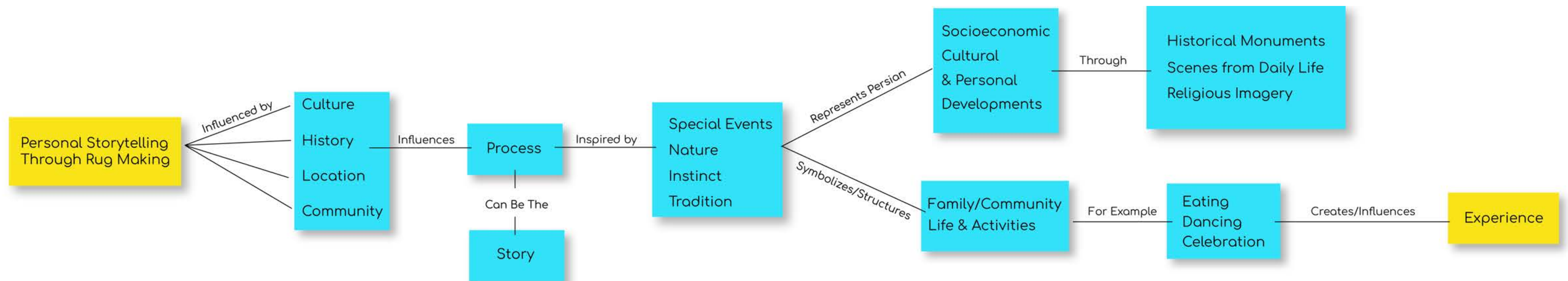


- Persian rugs have an intrinsic tie to storytelling. A single rug in a Persian household can have hundreds of stories attached to it. Whether those be the stories about the creation of the rug, or the times spent enjoying the rug.
- Azadah Tavousian stated, “that us Iranians were raised on these carpets, we have had our celebrations upon Iranian carpets. Whenever we see carpets it rekindles fond memories for us.”
- I believe this is part of the reasoning behind the Iranian belief that owning a rug improves the quality of life.

Persian Storytelling through Rugmaking

Narrative 1.

- These stories are influenced largely by the culture, history, location, and community of the person doing the rug making. All of these factors influence the process in which the rug is made and said process can itself be a story. This process can be inspired by many things like special events, nature, tradition, or even instinct. The process of rug making can help represent Persian socioeconomic, cultural, and personal developments through the depiction of historical monuments, religious imagery, and scenes from daily life.



William Morris Context and Contribution

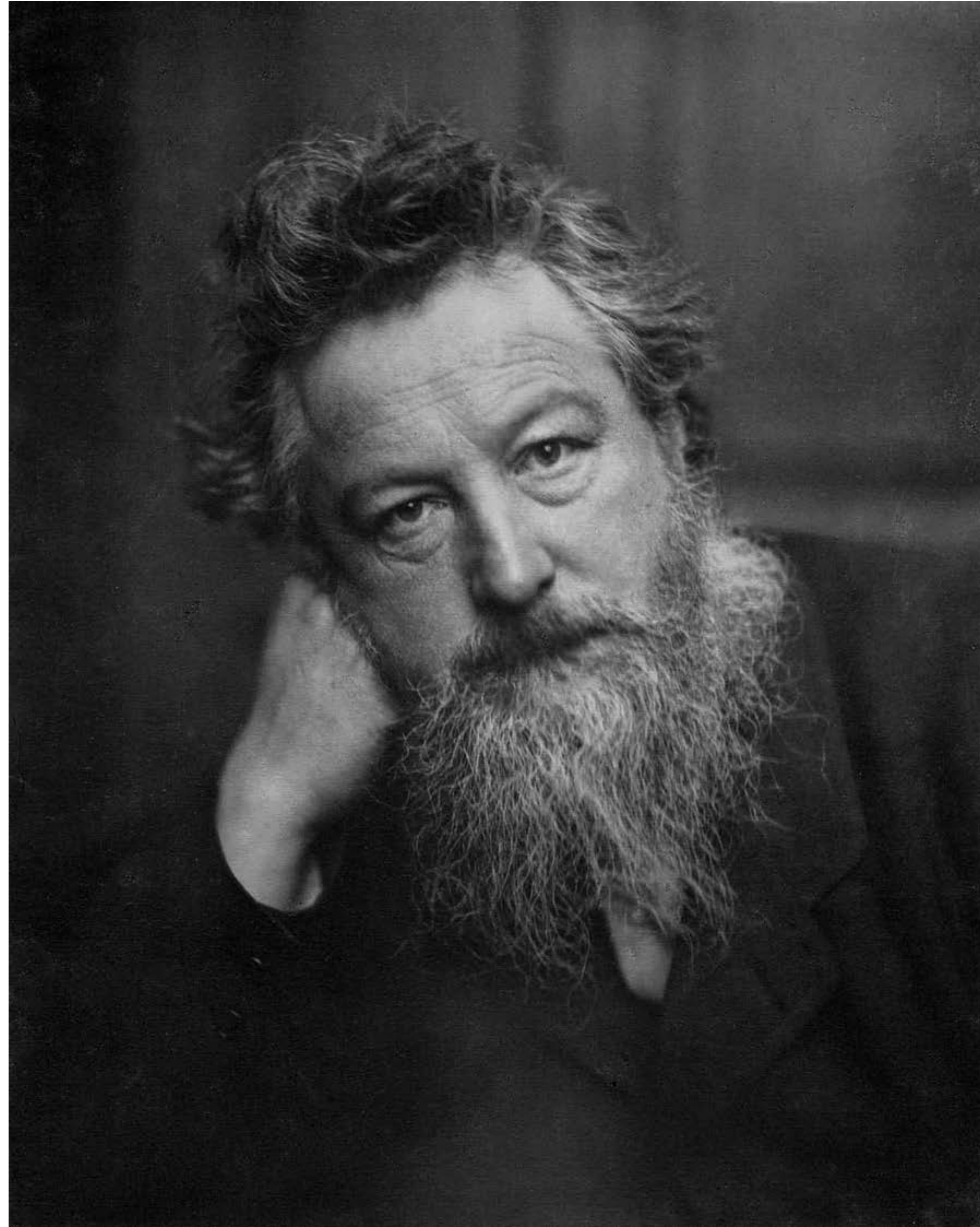
Narrative 2.

- William Morris was a British textile designer, poet, novelist, social activist and prominent leader of the Arts and Crafts Movement established in the 1880's. According to Helen Elleston, Curator of the William Morris Society, William Morris was interested in all kinds of textiles, but Persian carpets were one of his great loves.
- He was largely responsible for the popularization of rug trade in the late 19th century.
- As the 19th century advanced, technological innovations began to shift the emphasis in rug making away from individual craftsman, due to the invention of the power loom.



William Morris Context and Contribution

Narrative 2.



- In response to the threat of mass production in this and other crafts, William Morris organized a company in England dedicated to rejuvenating the handcraft tradition.
- Morris combined the tradition of individual craftsmanship with good design, a marriage critical to contemporary rug artists. His ideas formed the guiding tenets of the Arts and Crafts Movement and soon took root in the United States.
- By the end of the 19th century, Morris's ideas had spawned a number of workshops and guilds in America that produced and promoted handmade rugs.

“The best way to preserve your culture
is to share it with others.”

European Perspective on Rug Design

Narrative 2.

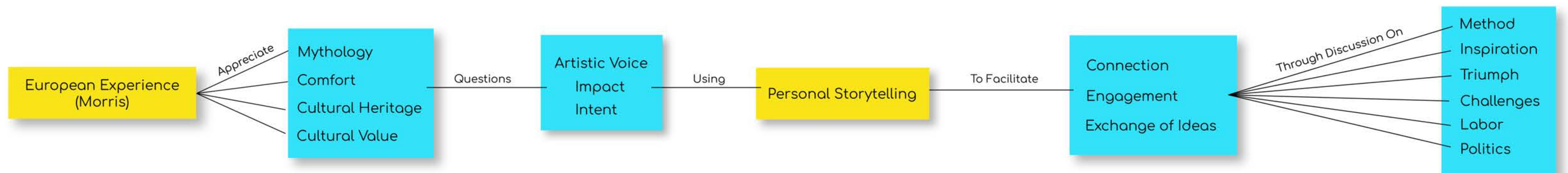
- European appreciation for the art of Persian rug design has been around for centuries largely due to their beauty and the quality of a handmade work of art.
- Therefore they have to engage and fall in love with a piece in order to create a connection to the design.
- A way in which Europeans engage with rugs is through the medium of storytelling.
- “There is something about Persian carpets that is sticky to stories – magnetic, and this is one of the reasons why the west loves them. It loves this mythology.” -Dorothy Armstrong, PhD Researcher for the Victoria and Albert Museum



European Experience (Morris)

Narrative 2.

- Europeans or western audiences in general have an appreciation for the mythology, cultural heritage/value, and even comfort when it comes to rugs and carpets. These things help promote questions about the rug-maker's artistic voice, intent, and the impact it has on us as viewers. They do this by using personal storytelling as a way to facilitate connection, engagement, and the exchange of ideas through discussion on topics like method, inspiration, triumphs, challenges, labor, and politics in relation to the carpet.



Modern Rug Design Practice

Contemporary Research

- Today, there is a new wave of interest in the handmade American rug.
- Many contemporary rugmakers do not limit their imagery or technique to a particular rug vernacular. They consciously draw on past and present rug and art traditions, utilizing elements from many genres to create individual statements.
- These are the rug artists who produce "contemporary" handcrafted rugs that are characterized by their stylistic diversity and quality construction.



Modern Rug Design Practice

Contemporary Research



- Despite the growing number of colleges and universities that offer textile courses, the overwhelming majority of rugmakers surveyed by The Textile Museum report that self-directed study in rug making techniques constitutes their most useful training.
- Rarely did the rugmakers in this group state that the techniques they use were learned from a close family member. Instead, the artists typically turned to rug making because of their interest in and love for rugs.
- The desire to make a beautiful and useful textile in a large size format was often cited by the artists as a reason for directing their energies to rug making.



Tim Eads

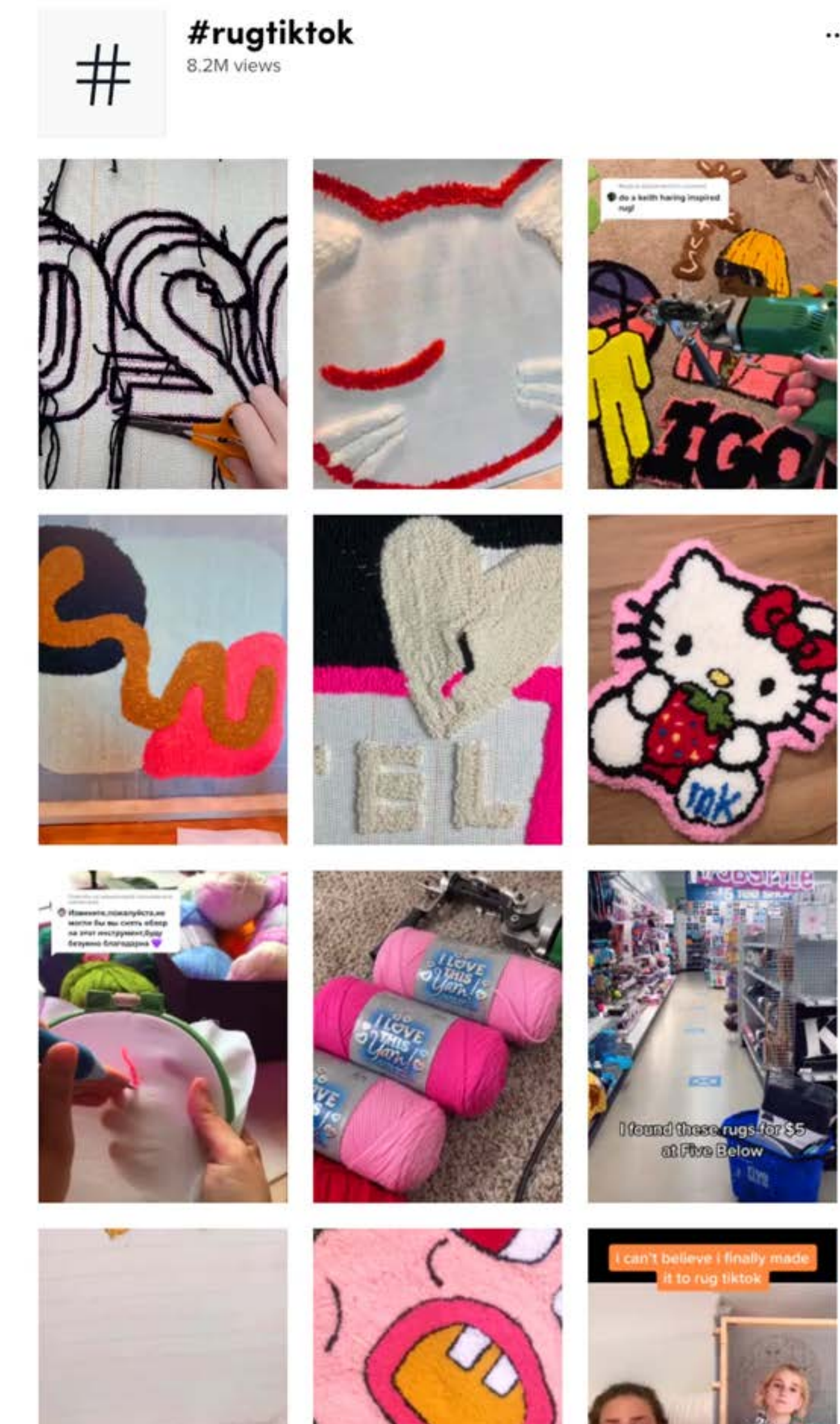
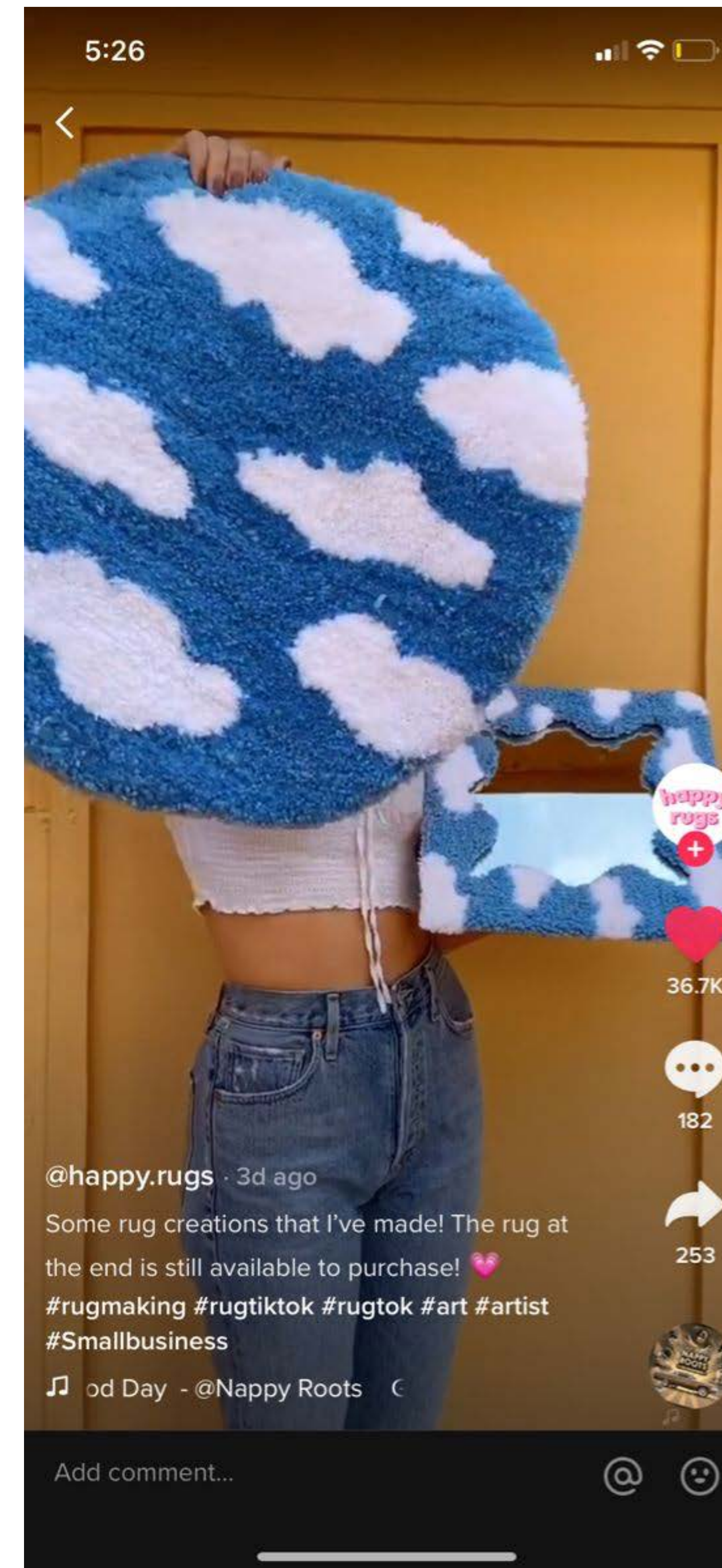
Contemporary Research

- Only recently could consumers get a hold of a common carpet-industry tool: the handheld electric tufting machine (otherwise known as the tufting gun). For that, you can thank the Philadelphia-based artist and educator Tim Eads, founder of TuftingGun.com and the Tuft the World online community.
- Eads name is important because he was one of the first to bridge the gap between manufacturing and consumer.
- In 2018, he found a supplier for the machine and soon opened up his own store, which is now a leading supplier of tufting tools and materials.



Covid-19 & Tiktok Influence

- Tiktok and Covid-19 played a large role in the newfound popularity of tufted rug design. Due to the lack of ability to go anywhere, and the boredom that coincides, many people took to TikTok.
- Rug tufting videos gained a huge popularity as the process is satisfying to watch and the results are beautiful, brightly colored pieces.
- The inspiration from Tiktok combined with extra free time, and access to materials allowed for many people to commit to trying this hobby out on their own



Covid-19 & Tiktok Influence

Contemporary Research



- While rug tufting has reemerged in what we're seeing called the 2019 Rug Renaissance, the inspirations for what tufters create is much less based on anything significant.
- Many people tuft rugs that are vector images of cartoons, video games, objects, etc. Usually things that signify interests so that when people enter your home they know more about you. It also allows for the beginning of conversation if someone recognizes what your rug design is based off of.
- Seeing as rug making in this way isn't tied to culture or tradition in the way Persian rugs are made (weaving, knotting, etc.), people don't have any reason to attach symbolism or necessarily story to the rug design.

Self-Driven Material Research

Contemporary Research

- I began by creating 3 rug samples in the shape of a square, a circle, and a heart, just to get a feel for how the machine runs. The samples turned out great and it gave me an opportunity to practice shaving the rug down, and backing it.



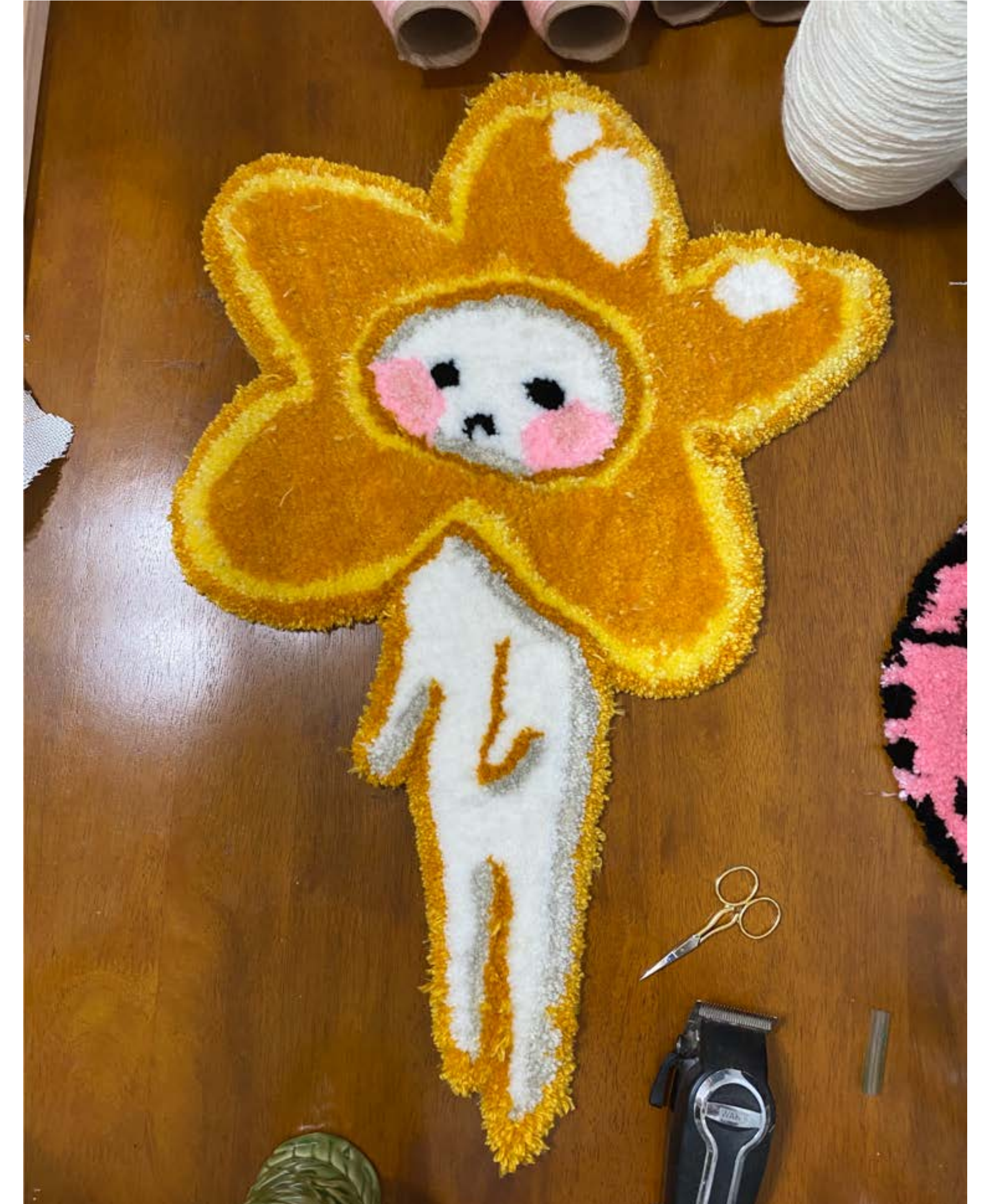
Self-Driven Material Research

Contemporary Research

- I then moved on to tufting actual pieces for the people in my life as a way to practice.

I took a sketch my roommate made and designed a rug for his room and then tufted another rug for him based on another one of his illustrations. And additionally I tufted a small rug for my classmate Amelia.

I really enjoyed the process and it really helped me learn the trade and how I could better improve my skills, as well as inspired new ways to expand on the techniques I learned.



Self-Driven Material Research

Contemporary Research



Claim

Synthesis of this research led to the investigation of how the intrinsic storytelling nature of rug and textile design creates intrigue, inspiration, and in turn more creation.

As a result of my research, I have come to some conclusions on what I want to convey as well as what I want to get out of it myself. I'm interested in using the concepts of storytelling and experience to convey a message to an audience that may not have any information on textile design. The design experience will investigate the importance of storytelling, and the cyclical nature of creation, experience, and inspiration, that leads to the continuation of the popularity of rug/carpet design. I would love to achieve this by combining the process and materiality of modern rug making with the concepts posed to create an impactful piece.

My hope is that the narrative that I create through this project creates conversation, inspiration, and appreciation for the art of rug design. As well as to reintroduce the importance of storytelling to modern rug makers.



Proposal 1.

- The first proposal would have to do with the way rugs gather stories over time as they are used and appreciated. The idea would be to create a large rug that would be used in a communal living space, and video document the experiences created on said rug. I would create either a time lapse video, or video composition that would accompany the rug as the final product. The idea would be that the design would show the audience that the stories created on a rug, and the wear and tear over time actually increase the value of a rug in a home, like is customary to Persian belief. And in that way the rug improves the quality of life. The reason behind creating a video as a companion to the main piece would be to show how modern rug making techniques like tufting are taught through media resources like Youtube/Tiktok videos rather than through word of mouth.



Proposal 2.

- The second proposal would be influenced by William Morris' approach to preserving and sharing culture. The idea would be to create a large multi-media installation depicting my own family story. Seeing as rug design isn't connected to my ancestry in any way, similar to Morris, I would be using rug design as a way to preserve my own family culture in the same way Persian rugs do. I'd like to open up this project to have more than one material process if need be, if it relates to how I intend to tell my own narrative.



Proposal 3.

- The final proposal was intended to be a way to create community within the arts using rug design as a way to facilitate the process. The idea would involve interviewing local artists or artisans in a particular community over the course of a day. We would work together to create a rug that is a combination of our own vision, or something that represents our shared experience. I would then leave the rug with them for an extended period of time to later retrieve. On the day of retrieval I would conduct a follow up interview on the stories and experiences tied to the rug since our first interaction. As well as how the rug and experience we made together inspired them artistically moving forward. After doing this with many artists in a community, I would attach the pieces together to create a larger piece that emphasizes the importance of story, the connections they make, and the inspiration that in turn facilitates creation. I could also include a digital or print companion piece documenting all the stories I gathered from the artists I interviewed. This would allow for people to see how this one artist is one piece of a larger community, also as a way to identify what piece of the master rug belonged to what artist.

