

# ISSUES AND ACTIONS

March, 2006

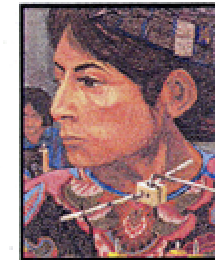
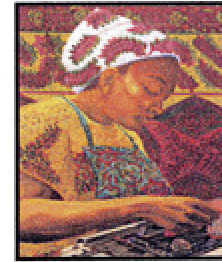
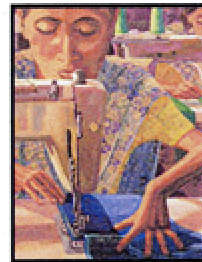


## WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

### SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

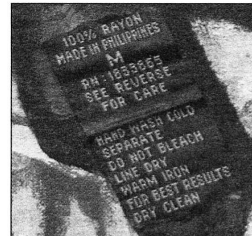
*Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.* Earth Charter Principle III # 9.

Presente: She is Here With Us



When the people of White Salmon, Washington, stepped into their community library during the month of September, they probably didn't think they'd be leaving without the labels on their clothing. That is unless they knew they were going to encounter Janet Essley's interactive painting exhibit entitled *Presente: She is Here With Us*.

Essley, a visual artist who lives in the rural, northwest town, displayed her portraits of women garment workers from around the world along with "doll" forms, a map of the world, scissors, and safety pins. As part of the exhibit, the public was invited to cut the labels off their own clothing and pin them to the doll forms. Over the course of the month, several of the dolls evolved into a visceral "graph" of where the clothing in most American closets is made — 20 percent U.S., 20 percent Mexico and Central America, 20 percent Southeast Asia, 20 percent India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, a smattering from Europe, South Africa, Pacific Islands, Arabian Peninsula, and the rest from China.



As we remember her hands on each piece of clothing that we wear, may we envision a new world that globalizes compassion. May we insist upon a living condition for others that we enjoy for ourselves.

### Honoring the Women Around the World Who Make our Clothing

When asked to describe the meaning of the exhibit's title, Essley replied, "In this context I was thinking more of how clothing is made, how it was, until recently, an intimate act where a mother makes clothing for her family. I wanted to make the point that the hands of all the women who make our clothes, touch us as we dress — that we are connected to them through our clothing. This leads quite simply to the concept that we are all one, that none of us are free, or whole, or at peace, until all of us are."

The paintings are rendered in vibrant, acrylic colors and applied to clothing fabric. more information about this exhibit or to arrange to bring it to an event or venue near you, contact Janet Essley at [essmoy@gorge.net](mailto:essmoy@gorge.net).

These women are valued because they adapt easily to industrial discipline, are quiet, patient, and dexterous. Each is willing to work 40, 60, 80 hours a week, often as the sole support of her family, at subsistence wages in even the poorest of countries. She works in sweatshops, exhausted and often hungry. She is locked in buildings that collapse or burn down. She is threatened by factory managers if she complains and beaten by police if she protests. She works hard, and fast, in fear of the injury-causing machines. Sometimes her only other option for employment is prostitution. She has no choice but to sell her hands or body to feed herself and her family. She does this because corporate globalization has crushed the traditional world into which she was born.



The paintings ask the viewer to acknowledge the intimate connection we have to women in other parts of the world and to explore through this the impacts of corporate globalization on all our lives. The current realignment of the garment industry due to the end of previous trade agreements threatens the employment of tens of thousands of women workers who are the sole support of their families in countries around the world, including the U.S. The paintings encourage a globalization of empathy and the human right for work with dignity.— *Janet Essley*

*Special thanks to Interfaith Worker Justice for allowing us to use this article from their January publication “Faith Works.”  
And a special thank you to Janet Essley for providing us with color copies of her paintings.*

## The Sweat - Free Movement

A movement has swept the U.S., carried by students, union members, faith communities and textile workers all over the world. Today, about 200 U.S. colleges have policies requiring their athletic wear to be produced sweat free, and 78 government entities have adopted sweat-free procurement policies.

Working condition improvements are becoming evident as these policies go into effect.

The weekly base salary at the Codevi Free Trade Zone in Haiti for example, increased more than 100 percent (by about US \$22.00), after a no-sweat agreement was reached in 2005, reports the Clean Clothes Campaign.

And the cost to consumers?

The price of a \$25 sweatshirt would increase just \$0.50 to \$1, if wages were doubled to guarantee a living wage, according to an article in

**The Nation.** Further information: [www.cleanclothes.org](http://www.cleanclothes.org), or [www.sweatfree.org](http://www.sweatfree.org)