



In 2015, Clark moved to other fine filaments to explore American histories of race and politics through textiles, using the individual threads of the Confederate Battle flag made popular by the KKK. This most contested object – whose 13 stars symbolise the Southern rebel states who seceded from the United States in 1860 and 1861 to form a confederacy to protect their slave-owning interests – endures as a violently invested white supremacist object. On 9 April 1865, the last Confederate army surrendered, bringing the American Civil War to a close. Precisely 150 years later, Clark began slowly and painstakingly to unpick the flag, literally and metaphorically dismantling a tightly woven national structure of race-based discrimination. As a participatory performance in gallery spaces, thread by thread, inch by inch and hour by hour, Clark and her collaborators collectively reduced the woven flag to its raw material for a work titled *Unraveling*. *Unraveled* sits on a shelf as a minimalist sculpture comprising three skeins of red, white and blue cotton, resulting from unravelling the flag, and a complete dismantling of white supremacy symbolized by that flag.

Now a Professor of Art and Humanities at Amherst College in Massachusetts, Clark's most recent project continues to engage with Civil War flags, but in a less-recognised form. In place of the red,

white, and blue hate symbol, the flag that Clark has reconstructed for *Confederate Surrender* (2022) is a domestic dishcloth handmade in cream waffle weave, bordered with three madder stripes and attached to a wooden pole. Clark's utilitarian cloth recreates the improvised white flag waved by a lone horseman to mark the truce that ended the war. Over the last several years, the artist has produced multiple variations. Each work asks why the divisive Confederate flag should be so widely reproduced while the humble flag that was the symbol of peace and reconciliation has been largely forgotten. Clark scaled up the truce textile in *Monumental*, so her 4 x 9 metre version takes up 100 times the space of the original. *Many* is assembled from 100 replicas, produced as part of a collective handloom project informed by historical construction methods: the outcomes exhibited as part of *Monumental Cloth*, *The Flag We Should Know* (2019,) her residency at The Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia, where it occupied a low plinth. Clark adds performance to the mix with *Reversals*. Here the artist dons a reproduction of the dress worn by Ella Watson in Gordon Parks' iconic photograph *American Gothic* from 1942. She scrubs the floor on her hands and knees with a bucket and a rag made from a Confederate flag, washing away dust she has collected from memorials to America's founding fathers in a political act of textile and racial reparation. \*\*\* **Annebella Pollen**

Image above: Detail of *Many*, 2019, woven linen, madder dye and tea stain.

Image right top: *Many*, 2019, 100 hand woven linen cloths and madder dye, 2019, 47x91 cm each.

Image right bottom: *Reversals*, 30 March 2019, a performance by Sonya Clark at The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia.