

The Mourning Project

Fact Sheet

What is The Mourning Project?

The Mourning Project is a memorial, a community art project, and a call to action. Makers across the country and the globe created 20,000+ pairs of handmade baby booties to honor every American infant who dies before their first birthday every year. We seek to honor the loss of these children, draw attention to the problem of infant mortality in the US, and begin a discussion on how to improve little lives.

Why is this important?

The US has the worst infant mortality rate in the developed world and loses more than 20,000 babies before their first birthday every year. We can learn from other countries and our own states how to address this heartbreaking issue in a cost-effective way.

What are the causes of infant mortality in the US?

We can break down the problem to three areas: the closing of rural hospitals and birth centers in rural areas, the high cost of health care in this country, and the systemic racism of the health care system. Fortunately, we know how to address these disparities to improve the lives of American babies.

Who started the project?

Mary Vaneecke is a textile artist who lives in Tucson, Arizona and developed the idea for the project.

Who made all the baby booties?

Many makers are loss parents, siblings, and grandparents. Others are knitters, crocheters, crafters, and stitchers who wanted to be a part of this project, whether they had a direct connection to the cause or not.

How many people made booties for the project?

It is difficult to know the exact number. Some contributed anonymously through a local group or shop. Several quilt and fiber art guilds members contributed hundreds of booties as a group. *About five makers stitched/contributed 1,000 pairs each.* The total number of makers is between 600-2,000 individual makers.

How long did it take to collect all those booties?

We started collecting booties in 2019 and finished the collection phase of the project in February 2023.

Where did the booties come from?

The Mourning Project started in Tucson, and hundreds of makers are local to southern Arizona. We received booties from as far away as Australia and Amsterdam. Makers from almost all 50 states contributed to the project.

How many booties total do you have?

As of August 1, 2023, we have collected about 22,000 pairs. 21,000 pairs make up the installation image of the heart with baby feet. Another 1,000 pairs are available for curators to enhance the installation according to the site's specifics.

How big is the installation?

The flat installation of the heart and baby feet is 38 feet by 38 feet. This does not include the altar or additional 'loose' booties that can accompany the larger installation.

What is next for the Project?

We have an online installation of the booties on our website and are working on bringing the booties to venues around the country. Watch our Events page on the website for more venues.