

Andrew Edlin GALLERY

For immediate release

ANDREW EDLIN GALLERY TO REPRESENT INNOVATIVE SELF-TAUGHT ARTIST RAY MATERSON, MASTER EMBROIDERER OF ONE-OF-A-KIND MINIATURES

Andrew Edlin Gallery is excited to announce that it has become the exclusive representative of **Ray Materson** (b. 1954), the American self-taught artist whose unique, small-scale embroidered-fabric works are among the most technically inventive and stylistically distinctive creations to be found in the broad worlds of outsider or contemporary art.

The gallery will have a selection of Materson's art available for collectors to examine and in the near future will begin featuring the artist's works in group and solo exhibitions.

Materson, who was born in Connecticut and grew up in the Midwest, now lives and works in Michigan. As a young man, Materson was interested in and studied the dramatic arts and philosophy, but after falling into trouble with drugs and committing several robberies to support his habit, he was arrested and sent to prison in Connecticut to serve a 15-year sentence. (He was released early, on parole.)

Materson was 33 years old when he went to prison. Today, he recalls, "I had been incarcerated about one year when I began stitching my way to freedom. I knew how to sew a button onto a shirt and do minor mending." In jail, Materson, who, as a child, had enjoyed watching his grandmother spend hours at her needlework, managed to obtain a sewing needle of his own from a security guard. Using fabric swatches taken from bedsheets or plain, white boxer shorts, and laboriously extracting the colored threads from knit socks, Materson gathered the materials he needed to begin making embroidered portraits of baseball players — the iconic works for which he is best known — or scenes plucked from memory or inspired by pictures in magazines.

In prison, the security guards told Materson, "Matty, you're just one less knucklehead we have to worry about." They allowed him to pursue his art-making, for which, from other inmates, he earned the nickname "Betsy Ross." Materson's fellow prisoners paid him with coffee and cigarettes in exchange for his personalized, handmade artworks.

To date, the artist has produced several hundred remarkably colorful and detailed thread-and-fabric images, each of which tends to be about the size of a standard, small index card. In addition to pictures of baseball players, he has crafted individual or groups of related works inspired by the plays of Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Chekhov, not to mention portraits of such royal figures from the past as Queen Victoria, Catherine the Great, and members of the Russian Imperial Romanov family.

In his art, Materson has also addressed the subject of drug addiction. In 2003, that aspect of his work caught the attention of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which honored him with a grant in support of this artistic activity; that award also allowed him to develop an arts program for young people wrestling with drug and alcohol addiction. An autobiography, *Sins and Needles: A Story of Spiritual Mending*, was published by Algonquin Books in 2002.

Materson is the first to acknowledge that his chosen materials and art-making technique have traditionally been associated, often dismissively, as “women’s work” (a notion that feminist artists of the 1970s imaginatively subverted as they reclaimed the expressive power of needlework, weaving, quilt-making, and other so-called craft-based or handiwork genres and techniques).

Materson’s work may be appreciated in the broader context of numerous *art brut* creators who have used embroidery, fabric, or the embellishing of textiles or garments as the main materials and methods of their art. In Materson’s case, the skill and straightforwardness with which he portrays his subjects also invites the association of his painstakingly executed images with the efforts of American folk artists to document both their immediate surroundings and imaginary worlds.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York); the American Folk Art Museum (New York); the American Visionary Art Museum (Baltimore); Halle Saint Pierre (Paris); Compton Verney Art Gallery (United Kingdom); and other museums in the United States and overseas have featured Materson’s work in various thematic, group exhibitions. His embroideries have also been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions at American Primitive Gallery (New York), and have been included in various projects at Henry Boxer Gallery (London). His works are in the collections of the American Folk Art Museum, the American Visionary Art Museum, the Louis-Dreyfus Family Collection, and other notable institutional and private hands.

Commenting on his feelings about the unusual artworks he creates, the artist notes, “They say you never forget your first kiss. Each piece I create is like a first kiss.” Materson says that he is looking forward to new opportunities to share his “kisses” with the gallery’s international audience.