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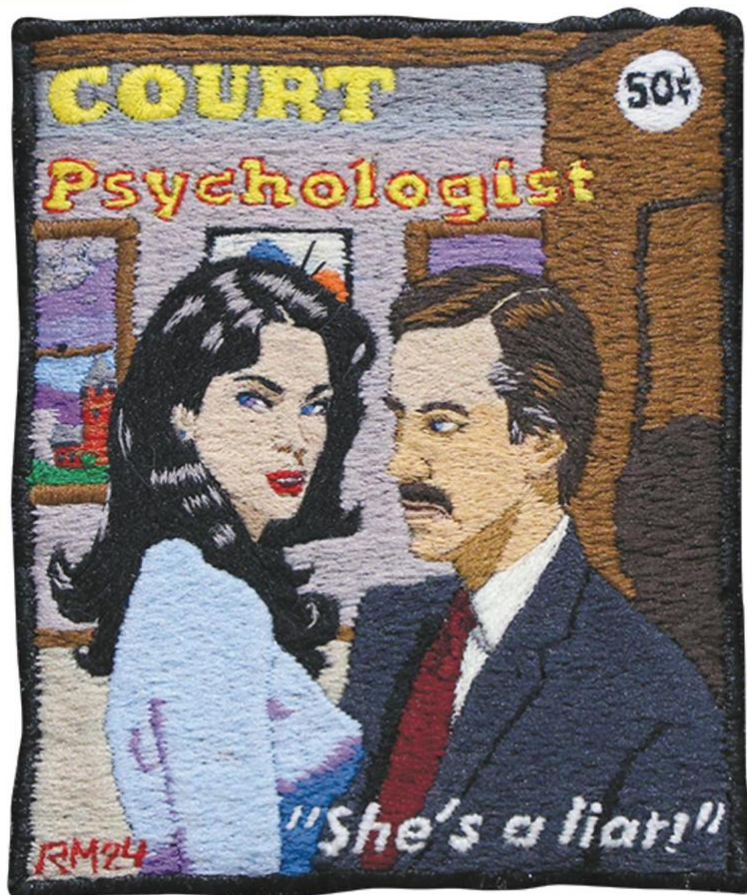
Art Basel Miami Beach 2024 // News

Cellblock embroidery set artist free to sew new scenes—now on view in Miami

Ray Materson continues to stitch the miniature images he once made for himself and other inmates, currently for sale by Andrew Edlin Gallery as part of Art Basel Miami Beach

Rachel Corbett

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Knocking our socks off: Ray Materson began stitching with thread from unravelled socks in his prison cell

Ray Materson, sitting in a cell in a Connecticut state prison, had his artistic awakening when he saw a pair of socks belonging to another inmate. His grandmother used to embroider when he was a boy, and it occurred to him that perhaps he could unravel thread from the socks and use it to sew images of things he missed from his life on the outside—including University of Michigan football, Impressionist paintings and his family.

Materson served seven years in prison starting in the late 1980s for robbery and drug offenses. Materson, then in his 30s, asked a guard for a needle, acquired some socks and began stitching miniature scenes for himself and for other inmates, who often requested symbols related to their identities, such as the flags of their home countries.

Now retired and living in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Materson is still embroidering his tiny, eye-catching scenes, several of which are on offer for \$12,000 apiece from Andrew Edlin Gallery's stand at Art Basel Miami Beach.

“A lot on display draws on his own experience from his time in prison and the experience he had divorcing his wife,” who had initially helped him sell the work he made in prison at galleries on the outside, says Rhys O'Connor, an artist liaison and communications associate for the gallery.

On view is a courtroom scene done in the style of a pulp-fiction cover, an image of his father reading a book by Plato with a clown painting he owned in the background and a nude woman in the woods. The sizes range from just 2.75in by 2.25in up to nearly 5in by 5in, all still done in sock thread, O'Connor says. “That was what was available to him in prison and that's what he's used to.”