

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TEXTiles: The Woven Word

Curated by Deborah Goodman Davis

September 21 – October 29, 2021

Bookstein Projects is pleased to announce a group exhibition curated by Deborah Goodman Davis. The show will include textiles by the following artists:

Gina Adams
Ghada Amer
Stephen Antonakos
Hellen Ascoli
Alighiero Boetti
Zoë Buckman
Jeffrey Gibson
Baseera Khan
Jessica Rankin
Elaine Reichel
Erin Riley
Marie Watt

Textiles and language are integral to what it means to be human. This exhibition, curated by Deborah Goodman Davis, brings together the work of a dozen artists of different generations and diverse cultural backgrounds whose work combines language and textile art in thoughtful, unexpected, and exciting ways.

The artist Ann Hamilton, who often incorporates both text and textiles in her work, has noted, “Held by cloth’s hand. We are swaddled at birth, covered in sleep, and shrouded in death.”¹ Dating to at least 27,000 years ago, during the Paleolithic era, weaving is one of the most ancient forms of technology. Along with it, fiber-based arts encompass felt, spun fibers, nets, knits, lace, embroidery, tufting, braids, beading, and ropes. The many forms of textile art have long been associated with arts and crafts, the decorative arts, and women’s handiwork, and have by extension been assigned a lower status than other modes of art making, although their cultural significance has always been profound. A century ago, the Bauhaus school in Germany broke ground by blurring the line between craft and the fine arts as they considered the nature of art in the age of technology. Artists working in Bauhaus textile workshops experimented with unorthodox materials to create abstract weavings, the most important being Anni Albers, who is largely responsible for the elevation of textile art to the fine arts. (Despite the Bauhaus’s progressive thinking with regard to the arts and design, the weaving studios were overwhelmingly populated by women, since they were still discouraged from participating in other fine arts departments.) The handmade made a resurgence in the seventies, led by Miriam Schapiro’s *Femme* and the Pattern and Decoration movement. An appetite for craft and the handmade continues to grow today, possibly a reaction to the postmodern emphasis on fabricated art and the ephemerality of the digital age we now live in—lately heightened by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Although humans invented writing systems over five thousand years ago, before the invention of movable type in the fifteenth century, the creation of text was labor intensive, either by handwriting, engraving, carving, weaving, or stitching. For centuries, texts have been integrated into textile arts, the best-known European example of stitched text being the embroidered Latin commentary on the eleventh-century Bayeux Tapestry, which recounts events leading to the Norman Conquest of Britain in 1066. Though we tend to think of the use of typography in works of art as a twentieth-century

¹ Ann Hamilton, *habitus* (Philadelphia: The Fabric Workshop and Museum and New York: Delmonico Books/Prestel, 2017), p. 5.

phenomenon, the combination of language and image became widespread in Europe with medieval illuminated manuscripts. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, stitched lettering became widespread in needlework samplers made by young girls to hone their embroidery skills. In modernism, text and language proliferated appeared with Cubism and Dada as cuttings collaged from newspapers. Surrealist artists continued to combine text and images, typified by Magritte's seminal 1929 painting *The Treachery of Images*, which shows an image of a pipe, beneath which are the words "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," ("this is not a pipe"). Text itself has even become the primary medium for many postmodern and conceptual artists, such as Mel Bochner, Jenny Holzer, Robert Indiana, Joseph Kosuth, Barbara Kruger, Glenn Ligon, Bruce Nauman, Kay Rosen, Ed Ruscha, Lawrence Weiner, and Christopher Wool.

The exhibition, *TEXTiles: The Woven Word*, presents a sampling of contemporary works of art that marry fiber and textile with language and includes a few historical precedents by Alighero Boetti and Stephen Antonakos. Among the works in the exhibition are *Fairly Patient*, Erin Riley's tapestry of the interior of her teenage composition book demonstrating her early interest in Nan Goldin's iconic "Ballad of Sexual Dependency." The hand-cut calico letters of Gina Adams's quilt *Treaty of the Seneca 1802* show parts of the broken pact between the United States and Government and this Indigenous American people. *I AM A BODY*, from Baseera Khan's Psychedelic Prayer Rugs series references the "I AM A MAN" signs made famous by the civil rights protesters of the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers' strike. Ghada Amer's *Black board with Grid* embroidery states "I am tough, I am ambitious, and I know exactly what I want. If that makes me a bitch, okay."

An artist's decision to use textiles, often categorized as craft, is a statement in itself since it challenges the traditional hierarchy of the art forms formerly marginalized as female or primitive (outsider) work. The themes in this exhibition, as diverse as the work, convey ideas of poetry, literature, identity, gender, social inequity, politics and historical injustices and the art of weaving.

TEXTiles: The Woven Word will be on view from September 21 – October 29, 2021. Gallery hours are Monday through Friday, 11:00 am to 5:00 pm and by appointment. For additional information and/or visual materials, please contact the gallery at (212) 750-0949 or by email at info@booksteinprojects.com.