



CRAFTING DEMOCRACY

FIBER ARTS AND ACTIVISM

**EDITED BY
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Afterword: **Spinning Material Messages**

Enough! Organize. Resist. Break the glass ceiling, stab out stereotypes, and insert mythological adage of virtuous womanhood (here). These are a few of the many messages that march across the walls of *Crafting Democracy: Fiber Arts and Activism* like so many picket signs. Roughly three-quarters of the works on display contain writing of some kind, and many of these inscriptions are calls to action. Surrounding the visitor, they collectively create an atmosphere of protest, recalling the gatherings of Occupy Wall Street in 2011, the Black Lives Matter movement in 2014, and the Women's Marches of 2017, among other recent rallies. The viewer becomes a participant, compelled to take a stand on issues ranging from racism to feminism to marriage equality.

It is perhaps unsurprising that so many of the artists in *Crafting Democracy* have chosen to promote their causes through either the written word or recognizable imagery. Activists endeavor to change their world by raising awareness, and direct language ensures they are readily understood by the public. Language also creates continuity with other political modes of address. However, the reasons why artists find fiber such an appropriate medium for their messages are more complex. The authors of this volume have considered this question from diverse angles, including fiber's gendered associations, its DIY accessibility, and its role in preserving family history. Yet another answer circles back to the issue of language and its intimate relationship to fiber. The words *text* and *textile* share a common root in the Latin *textere*, to weave. Fiber arts, then, share the written word's capacity for communication.

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Functioning as a language in its own right, fiber expresses direct material messages that do not require translation. Every human being comes into contact with fabric daily in the form of clothing, bedding, or furnishings, and intuitively understands its connotations of warmth, labor, and heritage. Textiles therefore possess a unique ability to speak universally, while retaining the authentic dialect of their source (counter)-culture. In a political landscape that is increasingly demarcated by borders and walls, the cross-cultural language of thread becomes more essential than ever.

For the artists in *Crafting Democracy: Fiber Arts and Activism*, the medium of fiber reinforces the meaning behind written slogans or pictorial symbols. Each artwork essentially speaks twice—once through its content, and again through its material. The result is the visual equivalent of a shout. Each message is inseparable from fibers that form it, and traditional distinctions between figure and ground, image and caption dissolve into a single powerful statement. Answer the call of these stitched slogans, and don't mourn. Run for prez! In the fibers of this exhibition, love wins.

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