

Ray Materson: Embroideries, 1990–2023

February 4 – March 18, 2023

Andrew Edlin Gallery is excited to announce a solo exhibition for **Ray Materson** (b.1954), his first in New York since 1996. The exhibition will feature approximately thirty-five artworks that date from the nineties up until today.

Materson makes elaborate miniature embroideries from the loose threads of disassembled garments, most typically socks. His art speaks eloquently and directly to the myriad ways in which sheer need—creative, personal, and economic—can foster uncanny ingenuity.

Incarcerated from 1987-1995 for crimes he committed while in the thrall of addiction, he began to embroider as part of his effort to express a personal style within the constraints of uniformity imposed by prison garb. His first piece was a logo for a sports team he followed, and he soon made other logos on commission for fellow inmates who wanted signs of affiliation—national flags, hearts and flowers—to send to loved ones. As he became more accomplished and found inspiration in a book on Impressionist art, Materson had an epiphany: his work did not need to be mimicry, but could be more serious; he could create his own designs and tell his own stories.

In contrast to the degradations of prison life, the humanism of Materson's art is palpable. He brings the real, the recovered, and the imagined in intricate pocket-sized parables of debasement and redemption. What we see from the outset is the persistence of memory, the unfolding of family history, and the characters from his childhood that were important to him, such as the professional athletes he followed. The dichotomy between hope and despair, a light and darkness, is like a psychological chiaroscuro, with heroes like *Paul Robeson*, *Mahalia Jackson* and *Joe DiMaggio*, and the reminiscences of *The House on York Road to Once a Young Man* and *Dad in Central Park, circa 1940*, versus the detention dramas of *Morals Charge*, *Waiting for the Man* and *Almost Free... At Last*. Some of his recent works have hard-hitting socio-political implications, like *Theater of Abomination* (2022), a scathing response to the Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision.

A Materson exhibition of this scale would not have been possible without the generosity of The William Louis-Dreyfus Foundation. Louis-Dreyfus (1932-2016), a businessman, philanthropist, and major collector of outsider and contemporary art, was a great patron of Materson's and amassed a significant collection of his work. Proceeds from the sales of pieces from the Foundation will benefit the Harlem Children's Zone, which is dedicated to breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty in New York City.

Ray Materson's art is held in numerous prominent private collections as well the permanent holdings of the American Folk Art Museum, New York, the American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore, and the Bennington Museum, Bennington, Vermont. Previous solo exhibitions include those at American Primitive Gallery, New York (1994), University of California, Davis (2007), and the Mini-Time Machine Museum of Miniatures, Tucson, AZ (2015-16). In 2002, the artist published a memoir, *Sins and Needles: A Story of Spiritual Mending* (Algonquin Books, 2002).

Finally, the artist and gallery are indebted to Aarne Anton, whose early and steadfast championing of Materson at his American Primitive Gallery, effectively brought his works to the attention of the art world and beyond.