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## Equal Recognition for Artistic Labor: Needle Arts Are Fine Arts

*Margie Alsbrook\**



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\* Margie Alsbrook is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Mercer University School of Law. Her needle arts have appeared in the National Quilt Museum, the National Liberty Museum, and in *Stitching Stolen Lives: The Social Justice Sewing Academy's Remembrance Project* (2021).

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**NOTE ON EQUAL RECOGNITION FOR ARTISTIC LABOR: NEEDLE  
ARTS ARE FINE ARTS**

This piece underscores the disparity of respect between the creations of men versus the creations of women in the art world. “Needle Arts Are Fine Arts” reflects the reality that acquiring the knowledge and skill needed to create high-quality works of needle art often takes decades to develop. However the gendered perception of needle arts often means that these beautiful art pieces are designated as mere “crafts.” This historical bias has led to the devaluation of needle art pieces: even those displayed in museums worldwide often remain unattributed, with their female creators relegated to anonymity because their work was not properly recognized during their lifetimes.

In this work the artist designed the alphabetic font and spacing in the style of protest posters, drawing inspiration from rebellious artists such as the Guerilla Girls. The stitching technique is a deceptively simple-looking style of needle art called “chicken scratch embroidery.” Popular with women in rural areas during the twentieth century, this style intricately embroiders each square with a star-patterned arrangement of six stitches. The fabric is a vintage flour sack and reflects the resourcefulness of women who reinforce the resilience of their rural communities through creative recycling.

The patience and practice needed to transform fabric into stitched treasures are finally starting to receive the recognition they deserve in artistic communities worldwide. The artist hopes this trend continues to grow in the years to come.