



SUBSCRIBE

Search...

MAGAZINE	ZOOM	CALENDAR	ABOUT	PARTNERS	AMERICAN CRAFT COUNCIL
----------	------	----------	-------	----------	------------------------

Pricked: Extreme Embroidery

STORY BY ANDREA DINOTO

Once upon a time, there was a princess who—cursed by a wicked witch—pricked her finger on a spinning wheel and fell asleep for a hundred years. Sleeping Beauty, as she was called, awoke when kissed by a handsome prince, and off she went with him to the Museum of Arts & Design to see amazing embroideries the good fairies had been working on all along. What the princess saw was something like, but really nothing like, the simple samplers she'd sewn as a child. "While you were sleeping," the prince explained, "Conceptual Art was invented. A handkerchief is not just a handkerchief anymore." Fascinated, Sleeping Beauty read in the catalog that the embroideries on view explored themes of language, politics, memory, pop culture, the body and the subconscious. "I get it," she exclaimed, "this is not just about sewing, it's about pricking memory and conscience, of pricking the heart, of piercing the body (my finger still hurts), of violation and embellishment." The prince nodded. "You've got that right."



This Article is from the **February/March 2008 Issue.** [More from this issue](#)



[1/6] Paddy Hartley, *Spreckley 1*, 2007

[◀ Previous Image](#)

[Next Image ▶](#)

The couple agreed that some of the most engaging works were to be found in the language section, where stitched texts appropriated from history, literature, diaries and signage delighted them. Maira Kalman's quirky graphic style, rendered on three illustrated panels with a line from Goethe's *Faust* ("I feel a sense of dread. Tear after tear is falling...") sent a shiver through Sleeping Beauty's heart. While the prince was chuckling at Andrea Deszö's embroidered squares, with their superstitious messages from her Transylvanian mother (e.g., "My mother claimed that our nanny had six puppy dogs sent into her stomach by her previous employer"), Sleeping Beauty contemplated Tamar Stone's doll's bed, *A Case of Confinement*, actually a book, in which each layer of sheeting was a machine-embroidered page of text on the harsh realities of birthing.

But, she wondered, who are all these faces populating both the political and pop-culture sections of "Pricked"? (The prince explained that "pop culture" was all about common folks and their foolishness.) Sleeping Beauty asked why Sonya Clark had taken a five-dollar bill and embroidered an Afro hairdo

See Also

Museum of Arts and Design

[More](#)

FEATURE

Lenore Tawney:
Spiritual
Revolutionary

Lenore Tawney united the disciplines of weaving and sculpture in daring works that helped create the fiber art medium. Whether monumental or the size of a postcard, her

on Abraham Lincoln's head—*Afro_Abe II*. “Purportedly a celebration of Lincoln's connection to the African-American community,” intoned the prince, “but this piece is rife with ironic overtones.” The princess puzzled over Xiang Yang's provocative multimedia sculpture linking photos of men named George Bush and Saddam Hussein with silk embroidery thread; and then there were the six needlepoint mug shots of famous somebodies—Robert Downey Jr., Paris Hilton, Mel Gibson and who-the-heck?—by Maria E. Piñeres. What a bunch of losers, thought Sleeping Beauty, but the artist has certainly lent them gravitas through sheer, painstaking handwork. Just thinking about it made her weary, but she was not allowed to rest on Mattia Bonetti's full-size, patchwork sofa hand-embroidered in China with banal images torn from French and Chinese magazines. Thank God, thought the princess, for a glimpse of true beauty, as she turned to Elaine Reichek's *A Lexicon of Clouds*—machine-embroidered details from landscapes by eight major artists, including El Greco and J.M.W. Turner; and for Nava Lubelski's wondrous wine-stained tablecloth—a minor disaster elevated to art simply by embroidering the edge of the stain with red floss; and for Shizuko Kimura's thread sketches of nudes done with all the fluidity of ink; and for Kate Kretz's hair embroidery of closed eyes on pillows, that incorporate the artist's own eyelashes. (Sleeping Beauty especially liked this one.)

It was time to go, but the couple were drawn to the deep pathos of Carol Shinn's machine-embroidered paintings of empty chairs, and also, strangely, to the decadence of Angelo Filomeno's *Death of Blinded Philosopher*, a gruesome memento mori depicting a skeleton with feathers, flies and cockroaches bursting from its skull, all done in red thread on silk shantung—replete with Swarovski crystals.

“A thread runs through all of this,” said the princess, “of love, loss and the endurance of craft.” The prince took her arm. “Before we go,” he said, “let's stop at Emily Hermant's *Lies, lies, lies...* installation, where you type a lie into a computer, then the next person edits—or embroiders—it.” “I can't think of any lies,” lied Sleeping Beauty, “you go ahead.” So the prince went into the booth and wrote: “I'll respect you in the morning,” then, humming to himself, he rushed the princess out the door.

The 108-page paperback catalog is \$26.95 from MAD. The traveling exhibition is part 2 of the museum's Process + Materials exhibitions, following “Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting.”

Gimme More!

<http://www.madmuseum.org>

art has always communicated at the deepest level with each new generation.

[More](#) 