

A R T S

M A G A Z I N E

Maureen Sherlock, "Home Economics." *Arts Magazine*, February 1992

Natalie Bookchin's embroideries of dialogue from the nightly news recirculate the TV newscast as folklore for the modern world. These are transitional pieces marking a shift from classic '80s media analysis toward far more fragile constructions. Playing on the tradition of women's needlework samplers, she re-presents the "fall of International Communism" through Dan Rather's commentary on the destruction of the Berlin Wall. Hearty Dan braves the outside—a cold, cruel world, while a more domestic Connie Chung hangs on his every word back in New York where she keeps the home fires burning. Dan enlightens her, reassuring her safety in the now expanded "free world." In hindsight we now understand how the Cold War was supplanted by the victorious drug war, and the plowshares of the peace dividend have been turned into desert stands. It is a decoding of the banality of a text describing a truly profound event; what makes it provocative is the absurdity of its presentation.



Natalie Bookchin, *American Sampler*, 1990, Fabric, embroidery thread, 3' x 3¼".

Bookchin's sampler abjures its potential status in *Country Home*, by craft and by content; but it does refer to another history of needlework whereby women marked both their misery and joy, where they recorded not alphabets but personal history. Some of the more recent work in her one-person show at Franklin Furnace, *Playing House*, shifts from '80s issues of media critique to the returning referent of that media: historical events. Taking images from the *New York Times*, she bargellos them to scale and embroiders the explanatory texts. *Laykama Taylor, 12 years old, is the largest child killed by gunfire in New York City* (1990), works from a photograph of a young African-American child in cap and gown from the back pages of the newspapers (the front page is usually reserved for whites). The stitching recalls the work of Victorian women who memorialized their children lost to diphtheria epidemics, but presently act to slow us down in the fast-paced plethora of saturated images that we see but do not think about. Eschewing any pretense of professional craft traditions, Bookchin self-consciously takes up domestic role-playing to slow down the usual rapid-fire context of these images from New York to Soweto. Before discarding the paper she creates a true personal "souvenir" to mark and hold on to events in the everyday world.