



Natalie Bookchin, *Untitled*, 1990, fabric, embroidery thread, 27 x 36".

NATALIE BOOKCHIN FRANKLIN FURNACE

Inspired by a nostalgia for domesticity, Natalie Bookchin's exhibition, entitled "Playing House," evokes children's games as well as traditional handcrafted artifacts, such as embroidered samplers, to relay disquieting messages about violent street crime, drug use, political corruption, and personal deception.

In *False Positive (Daisy)* a work that incorporates petals from a flower used in a "he-loves-me-he-loves-me-not" game, 23 brilliant-red rectangles, alternately labeled positive and negative, each frame a petal. Stretched along the wall in a uniform, horizontal row, the arrangement constitutes a skeptical meditation on an old game of chance. The petals are isolated, altered specimens—the ensem-

ble a cold, calculated depiction of the gamble love has become in this health crisis.

Another grouping, of 26 small, black fabric samplers, shows two figures outlined in white thread variously entangled in combat. Each frame is identified by an expression suggesting aggression such as "zap," "yank," "nail," "cream," and "thrust."

Bookchin's most disturbing work is a series of thickly embroidered images taken from the news media. Presented like common newspaper photographs, the predominantly black and white images are coupled with expository captions. One image concerns a 12-year-old New Yorker named Laykama Taylor who was killed by random gunfire. Above the unevenly stitched caption is an embroidered reproduction of Taylor on the day of his graduation from elementary school with his brown face framed by the angular black and white forms of mortarboard and academic gown.

Hung high above the viewers' heads was a text in red thread on white muslin. Rather than the usual tender proverb, such as "Home sweet home," this sampler featured a visually distorted version of the United States' Pledge of Allegiance. Strung together and broken irregularly at the end of each line, the familiar passage is barely decipherable. The sampler challenges the unthinking, rote repetition of this patriotic pledge, disturbing its authority and challenging the loyalty it commands.

This installation's power lies in Bookchin's ironic combination of timeless tradition and direct confrontation. She remains faithful to the scale of domestic crafts, and it is daunting to imagine the long hours required to sew these pieces. Bookchin's unsettling interventions consist in her thoughtful juxtaposition of the deliberate, intimate quality of craft and the constant onslaught of outside political events brought into the

home by mass media. In this artist's hands, the nostalgic distinctions of private and public lives—of the idea of home as the antithesis of the violent uncertainties of the world—is called into question. These small samplers are devotional exercises that dispute the false security of home.

—Patricia C. Phillips