

Darya Bernard

Labor of Love

Artist Statement

Labor of Love is a handmade artist book combining crochet, film photography, cyanotype prints, and handwritten text to argue for the radical significance of craft in an age of industrial, and increasingly algorithmic, mass production. Contained in a crocheted tote bag, fourteen prints with text on the reverse sides are bound within eight crochet pouches. The book documents the making of itself, yarn unraveling and winding, my hands at work, and my thoughts on its process of creation. It is a meditation on slow craft and the value we associate it with.

While machines have not yet been developed to recreate the crochet skill, knitting machines have evolved to create knitted fabrics in many styles, including ones mimicking the look of crochet stitches. Hours of handworking with yarn can now translate to seconds of running a machine. Industrial convenience has softened us to want products made both quickly and cheaply. *Labor of Love* takes on additional urgency in the modern digital age now that generative AI is able to produce images, text, and design at an exponentially more efficient scale and speed than human ability. The discourse supporting AI-generated “art” frames human craft as an obstacle to be automated away. *Labor of Love*, instead, insists that the value of handmade work is in the process, the time, the attention, the embodied knowledge accumulated stitch by stitch. To hold this book is to hold evidence of that process. It cannot be generated, only made.

Labor of Love's binding in the form of a bag rather than a traditional book format is influenced by the gendered framing of the book and textile industries in western culture. Traditional books are structured explicitly; a rigid rectangular shape, a hard cover protecting pages inside, a most efficient and permanent packaging of words, masculine in nature. A bag or purse is more malleable; a softer body protecting its contents, it can be lightly packed to overstuffed, objects organized in pockets or floating freely. It is a signifier of personal ownership, and a staple in the world of women's accessories. The bag in *Labor of Love* is a vibrant take on the purse I carry daily, and embodies the idea of a woman's purse representing a microcosm of her life.

The aforementioned binary delineation is what influenced my choice to crochet specifically. Textile arts like crochet have been associated with women's domestic labor and categorized as “crafty” or “kitchy.” Meanwhile, woodworking, welding, and other masculine framed making practices are granted the dignity of “skill.” Feminist art historians like Rozsika Parker have

traced this deliberate separation as a mechanism of exclusion.¹ *Labor of Love* positions itself in direct dialogue with this history, insisting on the legitimacy and complexity of textile work as both art and political act. The textile industry inherently pairs with the domestic labor of women, an idyllic mother who provides warmth for her family. Its feminine association allowed for patriarchal devaluation of labor; clothing society is the woman's responsibility, not her craft.

Each material choice for *Labor of Love* is deliberate. The yarn used is sourced from thrifted Goodwill sweaters, \$5.49 each. I found it symbolically fitting to deconstruct the labor of a machine and overwrite it with my own handiwork, giving these industrially knit fabrics new life. Photographs on film document the process of making: my hands in motion, the fiber and the tools I've used, pieces in progress. Film does not allow for immediate review or in-the-moment reshooting, forcing a slow and intentional process. The handwritten text on the reverse of each print adds another layer of labor, ensuring that every surface of the book bears the mark of time spent and human touch. To prepare the film negatives for cyanotype printing, I used a scanner and Photoshop. This film to digital to cyanotype life cycle is a hybrid process that demonstrates unity in historical analog and modern digital technologies. *Labor of Love* is not anti-technology, it recognizes the digital process as a tool and enhancement to human creation, not a replacement.

Labor of Love is an aid to redefining human creation in the context of our rapidly evolving society. The book is designed to be seen, handled, changed, physically experienced. The hope is to make the labor of creation legible, and by extension, to restore visibility to the workers, makers, and artists whose contributions have been systematically undervalued. The viewing experience of *Labor of Love* is also a communal one. The method of binding prints separately allows the book to be experienced non-linearly by multiple people at once. I believe community is the backbone of artistry and human connection motivates creativity, so I want to encourage people to converse and consider learning or continuing to develop a hands-on skill or craft.

Labor of Love is a document of care. A chance to appreciate the value in material, process, and the long tradition of makers who worked slowly and were rarely credited for it. In combining photography, printmaking, fiber arts, and text within a single handmade book, the project refuses the divisions that have kept these practices from being considered together. It argues that making something by hand, in a time that has little patience for it, is an act of resistance.

Notes

1. Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Women's Press, 1984).