Unseen Labor

Ann Kardos

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An international library community-organizing embroidery project and exhibit about metadata, our stories and our service

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On display at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in the Science and Engineering Library, January 21, 2022 through May 6, 2022

Conceived, curated and edited by
Ann Kardos

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Aboutness

About the project

Unseen Labor is an international library community-organizing embroidery project created by Ann Kardos, a metadata librarian at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Metadata work is not typically seen as creative work, but work that is guided by national standards, best practices, policies and guidelines in order to produce and maintain standard records for library resources that can be shared between institutions and vendors. Metadata librarians and catalogers create and maintain millions of library resources for our patrons, with whom we may rarely (if ever) interact, and we provide valuable backend support for our front-facing colleagues.

Ann conceived of the project to ask library cataloging and metadata professionals to examine their stories and experiences centering unseen labor, both physical and emotional. It was posted on three metadata and cataloging listservs in the fall of 2021 and received a great response. There are approximately 60 metadata creators following the project, from all over the United States (including Alaska and Hawaii), Canada and the United Kingdom. The group represents a wide variety of libraries and services, including academic, public and museum libraries, archives and non-profit library groups. Contributors were asked to create a cross stitch or embroidery piece that would share a story about unseen labor, experiences in our libraries, our work, projects we're proud of and more. The project has

since grown into an active online community. The group keeps in contact through an email list and Instagram, and several members have also created a Zoom stitching group that is now affectionately known as The Library Guild. The stitched pieces submitted for this project will be on display in the Science and Engineering Library at UMass Amherst during the Spring 2022 semester.

About the instigator & curator

"Self-Portrait #2"
Adapted and embroidered by Ann Kardos / Original portrait in ink by Lee Morrissette

Ann Kardos is a metadata librarian at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Ann's first love is film, and she

studied video production and screenwriting at Syracuse University. After her undergraduate degree, she went on to complete a professional culinary certification in Denver, Colorado. For several years, she worked for small documentary film makers during the day and in kitchens by night! She later moved to Boston and received her Masters in Library Science in 2008. In her spare time, she has studied oil painting and photography, but these days, she works in cross stitch and embroidery.

Ann began cross stitching as a child, but her mom always told her how many stitches to make on each row. She stopped stitching because the kid-friendly patterns, like snowmen or teddy bears, were not her style. A friend suggested she start cross stitching again during the COVID-19 pandemic as a way to prevent chaos and panic from taking over her mind. Finding contemporary patterns more enjoyable than those she stitched as a child, she began to stitch a lot to pass the time. She then taught herself to embroider by watching YouTube videos. Ann enjoys stitching a variety of patterns, from swear words to modern floral wreaths and more. She also designs some of her own patterns and is expanding her knowledge of stitching techniques. From November 2021 through February 2022, Ann had one of her original embroidery pieces on display at the National Liberty Museum in Philadelphia, as part of the Badass Herstory exhibit curated by artist and activist Shannon Downey, who goes by the name Badass Cross Stitch.

Throughout her career, Ann has worked in a variety of libraries and archives. She came to UMass in 2017, where she works as part of a small team of dedicated individuals, supporting access to approximately 10 million records in

the Five College Catalog. She creates, maintains, enhances, edits, reviews and uploads thousands of records each month. You have probably never seen her.

The Stitching

There are a lot of jokes and stereotypes when you choose to work in library technical services. We are often seen as quiet and introverted. Some people think we lack great social skills and that we are mostly nerdy folks who are good with computers, data input and a lot of rules. Other things I've heard over the course of my career are that we're not seen as very out-going, we don't need to think on our feet and our work isn't very creative.

I've worked in cataloging and metadata since 2009, and I've just never found these stereotypes to be true. While many of us are "quiet" at work, it's because our tasks and workflows are often extremely detail-oriented. If I'm working on a batch edit for something, I can mess up a few thousand records if I lose my train of thought. I can fix it, but I don't like to do my work twice if I can avoid it. When you stop by my desk, it's not that I don't want to talk to you. It's that I need to take a moment to shift my extreme laser focus away from the bytes of data or my rabbit hole of research to see you and speak coherently. I've met a ton of extroverts working in this area of the library. I'm not one of them, but don't worry. We have plenty, just like in all other areas of the the profession.

As for the bit about rules or creativity… My philosophy is that rules are made to be broken. We do have a lot of rules, standards and guidelines that govern the work we do. That's so we can share our data with libraries all over the globe. But we break, conflate and interpret rules.

ALL…THE…TIME. We have to. Sometimes, the rules for a field element don't adequately explain the format of something we have in our hand. Or we have to move field data around because we find out our users are searching for something in a specific and unintended way. We might find out our discovery system (what we call the catalog) doesn't work with our old legacy data in one field–and it will affect how we use that field or others in a record. We are pivoting, interpreting, and creatively assessing the data in the library catalog every day. So many of our codified rules and policies have phrases like, "if appropriate" or "supply when." In the biz, we call this **cataloger's judgement**. No one ever sees it happening! It looks like we're just quietly staring at a computer screen or looking at a cart full of books and following our rules.

All of this made me think of stitching. Stitch by stitch, I work on tiny little details. I count, interpret and make mistakes as I work through my pattern. I might see the name for a stitch that I need to learn and maybe adapt before I proceed. I think of my pattern as just a guideline, another rule meant to be broken. I can tweak or change the pattern as I go. I can choose to embellish a border differently, or use entirely different colors of floss. I can add swear words to an otherwise innocuous and traditional pattern. I'm using my judgement, as I make each individual stitch (think of these as individual bytes of data) to create something whole and large and beautiful (like the library catalog). While I'm only making one little stitch at a time, they will all eventually make a full picture.

Like cataloging and metadata, stitching is unseen labor. People see the finished product and not all the hours of labor that went into the piece of work. I had this AHA

moment one day while I was stitching and feeling down about my work. It struck me, “Might other cataloging and metadata creators feel unseen? Or feel their work is unseen or misunderstood? Do they want to express the work that they do everyday in a creative and artistic way? Do any of them stitch?”

Yes they do! All of the above! Some of us feel unseen or misunderstood. Some of us feel like we want to show you something cool we’ve been working on. Some of us want to tell you a story about someone or something important. We all want you to think about the labor that we put into each resource you check out of the library, physical and digital alike. We want you to remember the people behind the scenes who make the discovery of resources possible. But we also want you to think about library metadata and resources a bit more colorfully and creatively, like we do.

Take a peek.

Misty Alvaro (Ohio)

Ritual for Visibility

Watercolor, graphite and cotton thread on canvas
Designed, painted and stitched by Misty Alvaro / Tweet by Fobazi Ettarh @fobattarh

"Comprised of three sigils constructed by the artist, a queer, pagan library professional, this piece is a coded message about hidden identity, labor, and invisibility. Sigils are unique symbols constructed from words expressing

desires or emotions; they are used in many pagan traditions to focus intention and bring about change. Sigils may be created in any medium: chalk, paint, stitched onto clothing, or even marker on the soles of shoes. For some practitioners, the exact phrase or meaning hidden in the symbol is intended to be forgotten. For others, the spell gains potency as the sigil wears away."

The top left sigil comes from the phrase, "When we do this right, nobody sees us."

The middle sigil says, "Don't assume I'm cishet."

At the bottom right, the sigil is from a tweet by Fobazi Ettarh (@fobattarh) and says, "Vocational awe is fucking toxic."

*****

Misty Alvaro is a processing and cataloging manager at Columbus Metropolitan Library in Columbus, Ohio.

The piece features a watercolor background on canvas, painted in shades of gray and yellow. Three sigils are diagonally stitched onto the canvas, going from upper left to bottom right.

Bobby Bothmann (Minnesota)

651 $a Minnesota

Embroidery
Designed and stitched by Bobby Bothmann / Images adapted from SuperColoring.com

"In my work I provide detailed cataloging for resources on Minnesota, the name from the Dakota for Clear Blue Waters. I chose to create a map with the forests and prairies and include the major lakes and rivers. Major cities are

represented by red French knots. Around the state, I adapted images of the Norway pine, common loon, and lady-slipper, the state's tree, bird, and flower respectively (adapted from SuperColoring.com CC-BY images). Across the top, I have the MARC subject Minnesota in sky blue, with creator tags for the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples, and an audience tag for Minnesotans along the bottom in a variegated color to represent the true diversity in the state."

*****

Bobby Bothmann is the catalog and metadata librarian at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Bobby stitched an image of the state of Minnesota in the middle of the design, with images of the Norway pine, loon and lady slipper flower around it. The terms for Dakota, Ojibwe and Minnesotans are stitched around the edges of the state, with their appropriate MARC field tags and subfields. 651 $a Minnesota as the title of the piece references the MARC field and subfield for a geographic subject heading.

Bobby Bothmann (Minnesota) #2

I Werk $2 homoit Up!

Embroidery and beadwork
Designed and stitched by Bobby Bothmann

"This piece uses the logo for Homosaurus, an LGBTQI vocabulary that provides better access for queer topics than the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). In MARC metadata, the $2 defines the source of a vocabulary and uses a code, and here I use **homoit**, so this play on words reflects my cataloging work for this marginalized community. I chose the Gilbert font because it is

specifically LGBT-created with the intent of being used for headlines and protest signs.”

*****

Bobby Bothmann is the catalog and metadata librarian at Minnesota State University, Mankato. This piece was his first ever embroidery project!

The embroidery depicts the logo for the Homosaurus linked data vocabulary. The words “I werk $2 homoit up!” are above the Homosaurus. Subfield 2 on MARC subject fields denotes the source thesaurus used for a term. Metadata professionals using terms from the Homosaurus would apply a MARC field 650 in this way:

650 _0 $a Subject term. $2 homoit

Nicola C. (London, United Kingdom)

Bad Character

Cross stitch
Stitched by Nicola C. / Pattern and font chart designed by Kate J. Blandford, Bristol, UK

"'This error means that there is a character in your data that the system is choking on.' – OCLC"

*****

Nicola C. is the librarian at the Wellcome Collection in London.

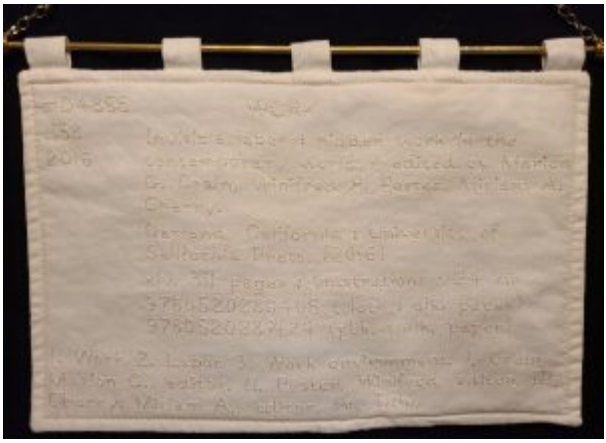
Nicola's cross stitch features the text "Bad Character" and a number one (1) in parentheses underneath. The text has a bottom border of peach, green and blue flowers, with black dagger characters (‡) in the centre of the flowers, the symbol used to display subfields in OCLC's Connexion. The quote in the description comes from the troubleshooting page that OCLC has supplied for issues with validating records:

Symptom: The user gets a "bad character" error in Connexion when trying to save or validate a record.

Resolution: This error means that there is a character in your data that the system is choking on. Look for any unusual characters in your content, especially characters that were copied in from another source and try typing over them with the correct character. 520 tags are especially common culprits. If the error message mentions a "0x1F" character, that is an invisible delimiter character. In that case, either restart the record, typing your data in directly or send a message to bibchange@oclc.org with the number of the record in your Online Save file. Sometimes they can identify the bad characters and clear them out for you.

Rachel Ivy Clarke (New York)

See What I Did There



Embroidery
Designed and stitched by Rachel Ivy Clarke

“When people talk about the value of libraries, they tend to think of books and other materials. But those resources don’t magically appear and organize themselves. It takes a huge amount of work to collect, describe and organize those resources so they can be available for use–immensely valuable labor that often goes unseen, unrecognized, and unappreciated.”

Rachel would like to thank: Lou Cabeen for the inspiration,

Margo Burns for the Dana Library Hand font, and David Talley for construction assistance and support.

*****

Rachel Ivy Clarke is an assistant professor at the Syracuse University School of Information Studies in Syracuse, New York.

The piece is white thread on white fabric, purposefully making it difficult to make out the information. The embroidery is of a library catalog card for a title called *Invisible labor: hidden work in the contemporary world*. The catalog card includes the call number, publication information, description, ISBNs, subject headings and the names of the editors of the title. This is a real book, published in 2016.

Elena Colón-Marrero (Michigan)

Drowning at Sea

Embroidery with cotton floss on cotton shirting and quilting cotton
Designed and stitched by Elena Colón-Marrero

"This piece represents my time spent learning how to describe software materials while working at a computing museum. No matter what I did, suggested, or wrote guidelines for there was always another person around to

tell me to consider other schemas, taxonomies, and guidelines. Despite cataloging over 10,000 records during my short time as a museum worker I felt that I was drowning in a sea of recommendations without tangible help for my work.”

*****

Elena Colón-Marrero is the archivist for digital curation at the Bentley Historical Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

The piece shows a skeletal hand coming out of a blue sea. The sea is full of words about metadata, including names of schemas and taxonomies: TOTEM, Dublin Core, BibTeX, Wikidata, Force11, metadata, MODS, MARC. There are three open mouths floating in the air above the hand, with words coming out of the mouths. The mouths are saying more metadata words: CodeMeta, Premis, RDA.

Ruth Elder (Alabama) & Ann Kardos (Massachusetts)

Less is Not More

Cross stitch diptych
Stitched by Ruth Elder / Collaboratively designed by Ann Kardos & Ruth Elder

Ruth: “This diptych serves as a reminder that when people and/or resources are taken away, production and services will decrease.”

Ann: “This statement seems obvious, but technical services budgets and staffing are often cut while we are expected to offer the same level or even more services.”

*****

Ruth Elder is a cataloger at Troy University in Troy, Alabama.

This cross stitch features two related pieces. One piece says "We cannot do MORE with LESS." The second piece says "We can only do LESS with LESS." The words are stitched in blue, green and red. There is a yellow and green border on each piece.

Ruth contacted Ann with an interest in the Unseen Labor project but was unable to design a piece within the timeframe. Ruth offered to help in other ways or to stitch other people's patterns. Ann told Ruth that she had a number of simple ideas, but no way to stitch everything herself. Ann scanned and emailed out some rudimentary patterns, and Ruth turned those patterns into something beautiful.

Ruth Elder (Alabama) & Ann Kardos (Massachusetts) #2

What's in Your Catalog?

Cross stitch
Stitched by Ruth Elder / Collaboratively designed by Ann Kardos & Ruth Elder

Ruth: "This piece shows why it is critical that the people 'behind the scenes' input accurate information in the catalog."

Ann: “When bad information, records or data go into the catalog, it essentially means that the catalog is full of garbage. The resources inside are lost and patrons can’t find them!”

*****

Ruth Elder is a cataloger at Troy University in Troy, Alabama. This cross stitch is of a silver trash can with the words “Put Garbage In the Catalog? Get Garbage Out!!!” stitched in purple. There are three black dead fish skeletons as a divider. Below are the words “0 SEARCH RESULTS” stitched in green.

Ruth contacted Ann with an interest in the Unseen Labor project but was unable to design a piece within the timeframe. Ruth offered to help in other ways or to stitch other people’s patterns. Ann told Ruth that she had a number of simple ideas, but no way to stitch everything herself. Ann scanned and emailed out some rudimentary patterns, and Ruth turned those patterns into something beautiful.

Michele T. Fenton (Indiana)

A Rockstar Cataloger

Embroidery
Designed and stitched by Michele T. Fenton

"An homage to Dr. Doris Hargrett Clack (1928-1995). Dr. Clack was an African American librarian who helped create AACR2, wrote books on cataloging and authority work, and founded the African American Studies Section of ACRL."

*****

Michele T. Fenton is a catalog librarian at the Indiana State Library in Indianapolis, Indiana.

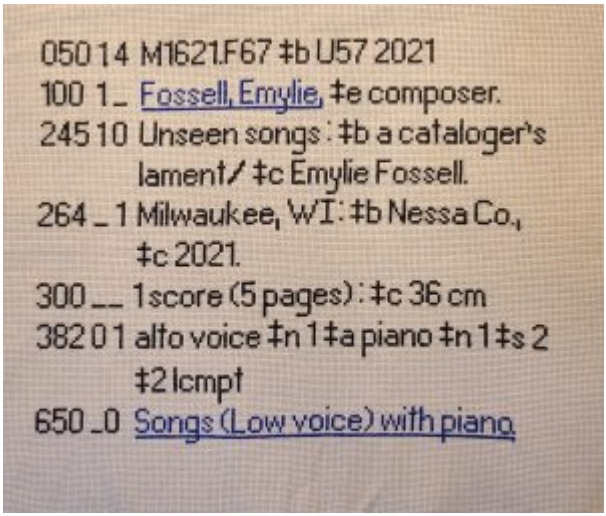
This embroidery is about Doris Hargrett Clack, who was an expert in cataloging and classification. It says "A ROCKSTAR CATALOGER" at the top, with a stitched portrait and "Dr. Doris Hargrett Clack 1928-1995" at the bottom. Also included is the stitched logo for the National Conference of African American Librarians. The piece celebrates Clack's legacy and is filled with stars and terms to describe her and her achievements:

- 650_0 Catalogs (MARC field and subject term)
- LIS (Library and Information Science)
- African American Librarian
- Z693 (classification for *Libraries — Library science. Information science — The collections. The books — Cataloging*)
- LCSH (Library of Congress Subject Headings)
- AACR2 (second edition of the Anglo-American Cataloging Rules)
- BCALA (Black Caucus American Library Association)
- ACRL (Association of College & Research Libraries)
- Cataloger Extraordinaire
- Z682.4.A37 (classification for *Libraries — Library science. Information science — Personnel — Special groups — African Americans)*

- Z682.4.C38 *(classification for Libraries — Library science. Information science — Personnel — Special groups — Catalogers).*

Emylie Fossell (Wisconsin)

A Cataloger's Lament



Cross stitch
Designed and stitched by Emylie Fossell

"In a previous position, I did a lot of music cataloging. I felt that this work was undervalued by administration and created this piece as an expression of not being seen or heard. The piece is made up of some basic fields for a music MARC record. While it is simple looking, it took many hours of work to complete. Even if something looks very basic, it shouldn't be taken for granted."

*****

Emylie Fossell is a librarian in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

This piece is a stitched MARC record, with a call number classification created by the stitcher. The call number classifies the work under *Music — Vocal music — Secular music — One solo voice — Accompaniment of keyboard instrument, keyboard and one other instrument, or unaccompanied — Separate works — Keyboard instrument accompaniment*. F67 is the Cutter number for the author of the work (Fossell) and U57 is the Cutter number for the title of the work (Unseen songs). This call number reflects the subject of the piece, Songs (Low voice) with piano. Researchers and patrons are often not aware of how much information metadata professionals are conveying through MARC records.

Lynn E. Gates (Colorado)

From Chaos to Order

Embroidery and beadwork
Designed and stitched by Lynn E. Gates

"Metadata librarians take disparate pieces of information from a variety of places and in a variety of formats and bring them together into a whole that can be read and understood by all. In doing this we provide the foundation that our libraries are built on. This foundation allows books

and other materials placed on a shelf (physical or virtual) to be found, it allows a user to check an item out and take it home, it allows other library staff to help users, etc. *From Chaos to Order* uses a variety of embroidery techniques to create a unified whole to show the path from individual pieces of metadata through a metadata librarian's computer to the library and its users."

Techniques used: bargello, bead embroidery, blackwork, bobbin lace, hardanger, goldwork and petit point.

Materials used: beads, canvas, cotton thread, felted wool, linen, silk gauze and silver bullion.

*****

Lynn E. Gates is the director of cataloging and metadata services and assistant professor at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs.

Lynn's intricate work comprises of many threads of beads coming together on a piece of fabric. The many threads are being funneled through a stitched image of a computer on a wavy blue background. Above the computer are three images of a home scene (pink), a help or reference desk (orange) and library shelving (greenish-yellow), representing how all the disordered data gets ordered, managed and created by metadata professionals to serve a specific use.

Stacy Gordon (Alaska)

Cat-a-log

Embroidery
Designed and stitched by Stacy Gordon

"Our Russian Blue, Dewey, contemplates cataloging."

*****

Stacy Gordon is a technical services supervisor at the Anchorage Public Library in Anchorage, Alaska. Her piece

shows a blue-gray cat with green eyes. The cat is standing on a log next to the letter “a” stitched in red. Read together, the cat plus the letter “a” and the log create the title of the piece, *Cat-a-log*!

Natasha Hollenbach (Indiana)

It's Complicated!

Cross stitch
Designed and stitched by Natasha Hollenbach

"My work is in Digital Projects. Whenever I talk about metadata, I always end up saying 'It's complicated' or 'It depends'. This piece highlights the nuance (and sometimes frustration) of metadata by giving each letter its own theme.

- **M:** The Five Types of Metadata (with the words Administrative, Descriptive, Technical, Structural, Preservation stitched inside)
- **E:** Searching (Boolean, Facets, Sorting, Keywords, And Or, Filters, Exact Phrase)
- **T:** Metadata Standards (BIBFRAME, Dublin Core, MARC, RDA, METS, EAD, MODS)
- **A:** User Interactions (Usable, Interface, Find,

Online, Discoverable, Accessible)

- **D:** Current Trends (Crowdsourcing, Linked Data, Tags, CAD, OCR, HTR, Digital Humanities, API)
- **A:** Maintenance (Legacy Data, Updates, Clean-up, Migration, Fix, New Term)
- **T:** Controlled Vocabularies (TGM, TGN, LCNAF, MeSH, LCSH, NALT, CONA, AAT)
- **A:** Flexible/Consistent and Aggregate/Local (Flexible, Consistent, Focus, Details, Aggregate, Local) are the two big balances acts that we all perform with our metadata."

*****

Natasha Hollenbach is the digital projects manager at the Indianapolis Public Library in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The word METADATA is stitched in large letters across the middle of the piece. Each letter has words backstitched inside of it, according to the theme described above. Below METADATA is the phrase, "It's Complicated!" stitched in shades of green.

Tricia Jauquet (Indiana)

(Librarians) NOT (Google)

Cross stitch and embroidery
Stitched by Tricia Jauquet / Designed by Pretty Witty Patterns

"There's a common saying amongst librarians: 'Do not confuse your Google search with my Master's degree.' Neil Gaiman has always been a wonderful supporter of libraries and librarians and his quote is very appropriate. Technical services librarians will never forget the importance of Boolean logic."

*****

Tricia Jauquet is a technical services librarian at Purdue University Northwest in Northwest Indiana.

This piece features a quote by Neil Gaiman, “Google can bring you back 100,000 answers. A librarian can bring you back the right one.”

Tricia Jauquet (Indiana) #2

U.M.M...‡?

Cross stitch
Stitched and lettered by Tricia Jauquet / Cauldron pattern designed by Charlotte Alexander

“I’ve always joked that the work Technical Services Librarians do is what people figure magic elves do for the library. Even our own co-workers don’t really understand what we do. ‘Do your magic and fix the problem’.”

*****

Tricia Jauquet is a technical services librarian at Purdue University Northwest in Northwest Indiana.

This cross stitch is of a witch's cauldron. Above the cauldron is the word "U.M.M…‡?" stitched in orange with a scripted font. The double dagger has a double meaning here, to demonstrate some confusion on behalf of the asker, but also some insider knowledge among cataloging and metadata professionals. The double dagger is used in the OCLC Connexion client (cataloging software) to designate subfields in MARC fields. Below the cauldron, the phrase "Union Of Metadata Magicians" is stitched in the same orange script that is used above.

Erin Jerome (Massachusetts)

Mysteries of Discoverability

Embroidery
Stitched and lettered by Erin Jerome / Mystic Sky (PAT0724S) pattern available from DMC

"As an institutional repository manager, I'm not technically a cataloger, but I'm definitely metadata adjacent. When asked by potential submitters how users will find their work in the repository, I find myself repeating the same

things over and over again–the more metadata you give me, the more findable it will be. If they don't give me keywords or other descriptive metadata, I will fill in all the gaps myself. And when folks get their monthly readership reports, they're thrilled! At the end of the day, it really does make me feel like a bit of a magician."

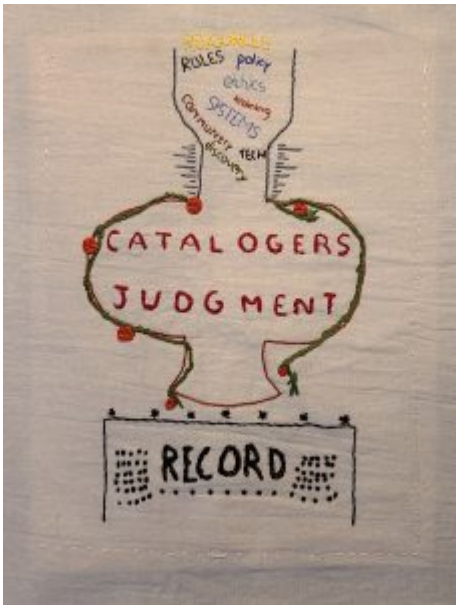
*****

Erin Jerome is the open access and institutional repository librarian at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Erin's piece shows an open hand with stars, moons, a sun and lightning bolt arching above in blue and yellow floss. There is a white and blue cloud below the hand. The text below the cloud reads "Keywords are magic and I'm the magician."

Margaret Joyce (Hawaii)

Cataloger's Judgment: The Hidden Human Process



Embroidery
Designed and stitched by Margaret Joyce

"Many think of cataloging as simply following a series of baroque rules. I wanted to highlight all the considerations that a cataloger has when making a record, and the human element that influences all the resulting work."

*****

Margaret Joyce is the Hawaiian materials cataloging and metadata librarian at the University of Hawai‘i in Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

This embroidery is of a funnel. At the top of the funnel are all of the considerations a metadata professional might have when creating a record, including resources (such as time and money), rules, policy, ethics, training, systems, community, tech and discovery. All of that (and so much more!) goes into a large middle section called Catalogers Judgment, where a cataloger applies and thinks about all of these external rules and ideas to create the RECORD a user sees in the library’s online catalog, which allows them to find the item on the shelf.

Jeanette Kalchik (California)

2021 Highs

Cross stitch
Stitched by Jeanette Kalchik / Adapted from pattern by KristisCornerNeedle

"When cataloging, the focus is often on the individual book, but the metadata created for the individual records comes together as a whole in the library catalog. Each book in this piece represents the highs for Fremont, California

and is part of the bookshelf catalog for the year. The piece was submitted unfinished in early December so the December books could not be made available as more than a brief outline. This feels very representative of the fact that cataloging is a continual work that never is truly done."

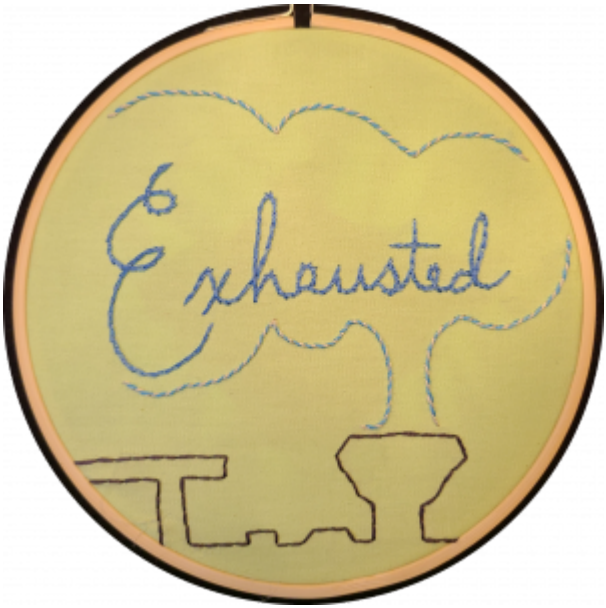
*****

Jeanette Kalchik is the electronic resources metadata librarian at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California.

The cross stitch depicts a bookshelf with twelve shelves that are full of books. Each shelf represents a month in the year, and each book represents one day of that month. The top month is January, the second shelf is February, and so forth down the bookshelf. The books on each shelf are stitched in a color to represent the high temperature for a given day of the month–cool tones for cooler temperatures and warm tones for hotter temperatures. The call number at the top of the bookshelf classifies this work under *Physics — Meteorology. Climatology — Climatology and weather — Geographic divisions — United States — California — Fremont.*

Ann Kardos (Massachusetts)

There's Always More Coming Down the Track



Embroidery
Designed and stitched by Ann Kardos

"Metadata is production work. We add items into the library catalog, both individually and in large batches. Since libraries are regularly purchasing *something*, this is on-going work. Other things we do include handling records for materials moving from one part of the library

into another or into off-site storage. We constantly fix input and encoding errors in records already in the catalog. We help troubleshoot problems with items in the stacks. I could go on, but I won't. The work never ends and has rare periods of slowness throughout the year.

Unfortunately, the constant train of work coming down the track is being done by an ever decreasing number of library workers. The skills, technology and software needed to do a lot of our work is rapidly changing, and there is a misunderstanding that much of it can be done at the push of a button. All the while, our colleagues throughout the library may continue to purchase materials, provide outreach to patron populations, liaise with donors and more, which adds to the steady stream of work. Metadata is the engine that powers the library catalog. But without enough workers to provide the metadata, how can the engine stay on the track? How can we continue to offer high-quality library services with small, exhausted metadata departments?"

*****

Ann Kardos is a metadata librarian at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

The embroidery shows the outline of a steam engine along the bottom of the hoop with steam coming out of the stack. There is a blue and cream plume of steam. The word "Exhausted" is in the middle of the steam stitched in cursive in blue floss.

Ann Kardos (Massachusetts) #2

This is My Job

Embroidery
Stitched and lettered by Ann Kardos / Juggling Ostrich (PAT1307S) pattern available from DMC

"My library was moving a lot of materials off-site, and we discovered a collection of thousands of unbarcoded Rand Papers. We needed to get all of these papers barcoded and moved quickly. Per the Rand Corporation, the Papers were

a product of the company from 1948-2003. They ‘captured speeches, memorials, and derivative research, usually prepared on authors’ own time and meant to be the scholarly or scientific contribution of individual authors to their professional fields.’ (see the Rand Corporation website).

One day while applying barcodes, I stumbled upon a gem entitled Optimum Maintenance With Incomplete Information (published in 1968). It made me laugh so hard, because it is the most accurate description of my job that I have ever encountered. Fixing records and problems in the catalog is not always as simple as one would hope! It can be a juggling act to diagnose what’s happening or figure out where an error is coming from. Everyone expects our catalogs to work perfectly at all times. Since many patrons think that the library catalog is like Google, they only know we exist when there are problems. We struggle to keep our balance and keep all the balls in the air so that patrons never experience any problems.”

*****

Ann Kardos is a metadata librarian at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

This embroidery features an ostrich wearing a hat and juggling colorful balls while riding a unicycle. Around the ostrich are the words “Optimum Maintenance With Incomplete Information.”

Amanda Mack (California)

Busy Bees

Cross stitch with buttons
Stitched by Amanda Mack / Plant patterns designed by Susan Bates

"When I was first starting to think about ideas for this project, I came up with the metaphor: Catalogers are the bees of the library world. Like bees, we do a lot of important work without most people noticing or stopping to think about it. Our work allows research to happen, but

I don't think many people are aware of the amount of work that goes into creating just one catalog record, especially for unique materials. There is a lot of thought that goes into it ranging from devising a summary to choosing appropriate subject headings. I'm not sure everyone is aware that it is people creating the records they rely on to find materials.

As a catalog librarian, I really try to think about how people will be looking for materials and the best way to catalog them to make them more discoverable. This past year, I have been working on a project that has forced me to look at our discovery system from the user perspective, and it really drove home the point that if we didn't do our job cataloging materials, people really wouldn't be able to find what they needed. That realization is where the text on my piece comes from. In addition to the bees, I chose to embellish it with succulent plants, instead of wildflowers, to make it a bit different since I work with audiovisual materials. I wanted people to be aware not all librarians work with books or other print resources, and these materials often come with their own sets of problems and complications when it comes to cataloging."

*****

Amanda Mack is a film and television catalog librarian at the UCLA Film & Television Archive in Los Angeles, California.

This cross stitch includes three succulent plants on the bottom with a garland on the top. Three bee buttons buzz among the plants. The words "Without cataloging there is no discovery" are stitched in the middle in shades of blue and pink.

Tina Marie Maes (Wisconsin)

Metadata is the Connexion Between People and Stuff

Embroidery
Designed and stitched by Tina Marie Maes

"Metadata, a.k.a. the words in specific fields and in specific order, is what connects people to the materials that they want. For example, the 100 field is used for personal name of creator, 245 for title, 264 for publication information, and 300 for physical description. Metadata not just about the item itself, but also about its creation, who made it, what that thing is about, and lastly where it lives in the library or in the world. Metadata has to include information

on and about many kinds of materials beyond books: everything from video games, music, movies, TV shows, audiobooks, cake pans, bikes, etc. It also has to include information on formats: VHS vs. DVD, large print book vs. something you can read on your phone. This design is also a nod to OCLC's Connexion, the program that I use every day to make that metadata move beyond the jargon that we (as metadata creators) speak every day and make it accessible and understandable to human eyes."

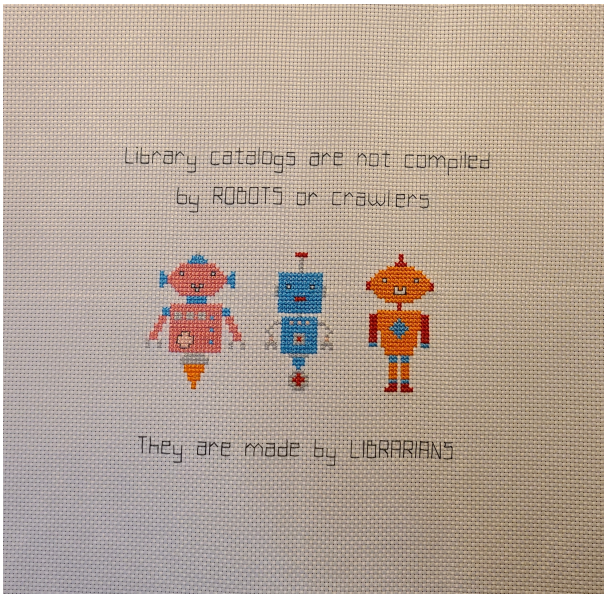
*****

Tina Marie Maes is the lead cataloging librarian at the Madison Public Library in Madison, Wisconsin.

Tina Marie's embroidery has the phrase "Metadata is the Connexion between" with images of groups of people stitched in purple "&" images of the things a person might take out of a library. Various MARC field tags have been embroidered into the word Metadata, including 100, 245, 264, 300 and others. Connexion is a reference to the software many metadata professionals use to find, share, use and create metadata for records.

Alison Messier & Ann Kardos (Massachusetts)

Librarians vs. Robots



Cross stitch
Stitched by Alison Messier / Designed by Ann Kardos: robots adapted from DMC, font chart by Hayley Pierson-Cox

Ann: “I designed this pattern for my colleague who is a stitcher and advocate for technical services. It’s in

reference to a former colleague, who has since retired. He would walk academics and researchers through my department and tell them ‘This is where all the books get added into the catalog. You see all the empty cubicles because we don’t need many people to do this work anymore. It’s all automated!’ It’s upsetting to know that’s what a colleague told others about my department.

We don’t need less people to do automated work. We need people with the appropriate skills to automate and troubleshoot the work. The reason a process might be automated is because I automated it! People automate processes, and then if it breaks, it needs our very human skills to fix it. The work of metadata is not done by robots. The library catalog is maintained by people–people who have a certain technical skill set that they have learned and apply to their work.”

*****

Alison Messier is the business and entrepreneurship librarian at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

The piece shows three colorful robots in the middle. The phrases, “Library catalogs are not compiled by ROBOTS or crawlers” — “They are made by LIBRARIANS” are above and below the robots.

Julie Renee Moore (California)

Do Not Agonize!

Cross stitch
Stitched by Julie Renee Moore / Designed by Purple Panzy XS, lettering by Ann Kardos & Julie Renee Moore

"This quote pays homage to Jay Weitz, OCLC senior consulting database specialist. Jay is a longtime member of Online Audiovisual Catalogers (OLAC) and host of the Cataloger's Judgment question and answer standing column in the quarterly OLAC newsletter. His catch

phrase, ‘Do not agonize,’ is well-known in OLAC circles, encouraging many catalogers who might have a funny format on their desk to catalog. The idea is that there may be conflicting instructions (or no instructions) to guide our cataloging decisions when it comes to these items. At times, we might feel *stuck* because the cataloging decision is so difficult. Jay encourages us to rely on our best cataloger’s judgment, choose the fork in the road and move on. Do not agonize!”

*****

Julie Renee Moore is the special collections catalog librarian at California State University, Fresno.

This cross-stitch shows a shelf of colorful books and knickknacks. The phrase “DO NOT AGONIZE” is written on the shelves, attributed to long-time member of OLAC, Jay Weitz from OCLC.

Beth Morgan (Kentucky)

MARC is Not Dead

Cross stitch
Stitched by Beth Morgan / Designed by The Witchy Stitcher

"In 2002, Roy Tennant wrote the infamous article *MARC Must Die*, causing an uproar in the cataloging community. Twenty years on and MARC is still not dead. This piece is a play on the phrase **Killin' it**, which MARC is still

doing–for better or worse–fifty years after its implementation by the Library of Congress.”

*****

Beth Morgan is the special collections librarian and archivist at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky.

Beth’s cross stitch shows the Grim Reaper in front of a silhouette of a church or town. The words above and below the Grim Reaper say “MARC – Killin’ it since 1970.” The MARC standard is used to create machine readable records to represent bibliographic information. The article by Roy Tennant is available from the Library Journal archive.

Gretchen Neidhardt (Illinois) & Tina Gross (Minnesota)

This is the Library Now

Cross stitch
Designed and stitched by Gretchen Neidhardt / Story and experience from Tina Gross

Tina's story is about St. Cloud State University in Minnesota. "St. Cloud State University laid off four tenured faculty librarians in 2020, after laying off three staff library technicians in the two years before that. The

provost (known on campus as Smiley Dan) had long been in the habit of holding up his cell phone and saying ‘This is the library now’.”

For more information, check out the story from Library Journal.

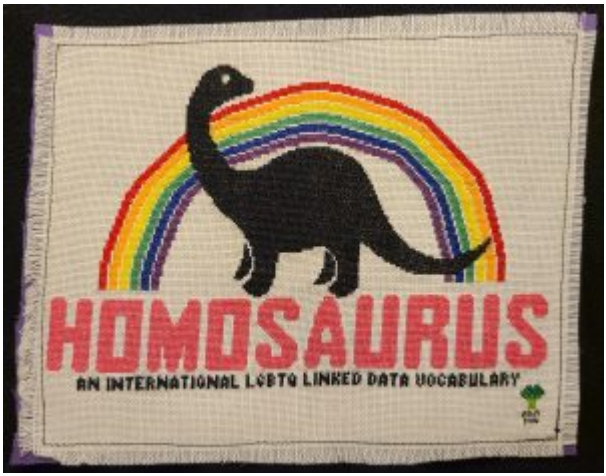
*****

Gretchen Neidhardt and **Tina Gross** are both cataloging and metadata librarians. Gretchen lives in Chicago, Illinois and Tina lives in Moorhead, Minnesota.

Gretchen and Tina collaborated to make this cross stitch happen. Tina was looking for someone to help bring her lived experience to life on fabric. Gretchen designed a flame border on the top and bottom of the piece. There are the words “This is the library now” in the middle of the flames, next to a large smart phone full of Google icons. The words are being said by a small man in a suit. The man is standing among the flames on the bottom and is wearing devil horns on his head.

Miranda Nero (Rhode Island)

Homosaurus



Cross stitch
Designed and stitched by Miranda Nero

"As catalogers, we are tasked with providing access to materials, but the default vocabulary for subject headings are often obsolete for marginalized communities. The Homosaurus vocabulary expands on those headings to help make the catalog more inclusive for members of the LGBTQ community. This piece represents the extra work we choose to do for our communities. The edges are left frayed because no matter how much we do, there will always be loose ends."

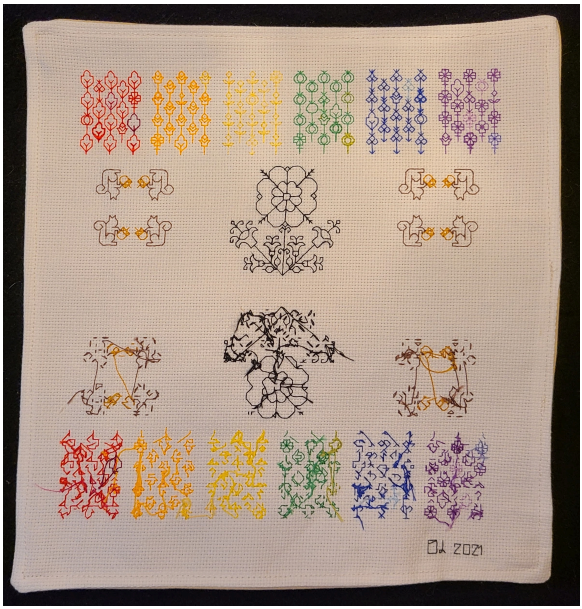
*****

Miranda Nero is the cataloging librarian for Ocean State Libraries in Warwick, Rhode Island.

The cross stitch shows the logo for the Homosaurus linked data vocabulary. It is stitched onto a purple backing and all four edges have been frayed.

Dai Newman (Ohio)

Collocated Foliage



Blackwork
Designed and stitched by Dai Newman

"One of my favorite parts of cataloging are the decisions about how to group things together using their **aboutness**. The tools and rubrics we have don't always capture everything, so we have to decide what is good enough. Much like these floral shapes, objects could go in multiple

spots, but ultimately catalogers have to prioritize one aspect or subject over the others. Also, similar to stitching, most people only see the polished, finished product and I wanted to use the mirror image here to offer a peek into the messy back end."

*****

Dai Newman is the cataloging and instruction librarian at Columbus College of Art and Design in Columbus, Ohio.

Dai's piece includes a row of floral and foliage motifs in rainbow floss on the top. The next row is a pattern of squirrels with acorns, with a blackwork flower in the middle. The pattern is repeated in mirror below, but with the backside of the stitching showing instead of the finished front.

Emily Nimsakont (Nebraska)

X Marks the Spot

Embroidery
Designed and stitched by Emily Nimsakont

"To me, the work of catalogers can be thought of as creating a map to help our patrons find library resources. Without the map, they have no way of locating the information in our collections. That inspired me to create an old-fashioned treasure map."

*****

Emily Nimsakont is the cataloging and metadata trainer at Amigos Library Services, not-for-profit membership-based organization dedicated to serving libraries.

This piece is an embroidered treasure map. At the beginning of the map is a hand holding a pencil. The hand is drawing a line through some rough terrain, with a volcano and a desert island, to get the patron to a bunch of books. There is a big red X ending at the books.

Michelle Paquette (Massachusetts)

Enveloping

Embroidery
Designed and stitched by Michelle Paquette

From Dian Fossey's personal correspondence to the Schwartzels, 1967-1976 and undated. Betty Schwartzel collection of Dian Fossey correspondence, photographs, and clippings, Sophia Smith Collection of Women's

History, SSC MS 00386, Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Massachusetts

“This piece is an envelope from the Betty Schwartzel collection of Dian Fossey correspondence, photographs, and clippings, a collection held by Smith College Special Collections, which is now available online. I’ve stitched my own initials underneath the envelope, leaving them simultaneously hidden but still slightly visible beneath the white fabric. I was heavily involved in the process of making this material available online, and its corresponding description, but you won’t find my name on that anywhere.”

*****

Michelle Paquette is the metadata and technical services archivist at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts.

This embroidery is a stitched version of an air mail envelope from Dian Fossey and addressed to Betty Schwartzel. The envelope has two stamps with postmarks. The image of the envelope is stitched onto brown fabric with a white flower pattern. If you zoom in very closely, you can just make out a the dark place where the lettering of Michelle’s initials lies underneath the white envelope.

Heather Pretty (Newfoundland, Canada)

MARC to Linked Data

Canvaswork with cottons, silks and metallic ribbons
Designed and stitched by Heather Pretty

"This conceptual piece represents the transition of MARC metadata to Linked Data through the application of RDF triples of Work-Expression-Manifestation-Item (WEMI) relationships."

*****

Heather Pretty is a cataloging librarian at Memorial University of Newfoundland in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada.

Heather's piece is shows a diamond of nodes in orange, blue, purple and green. They are surrounded by diagonal wavy ribbons of the same colors. The Resource Description Framework (RDF) is a World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) standard originally designed as a data model for metadata.

Amy B. Rachuba (Minnesota)

Shine Your Light

Embroidery
Designed and stitched by Amy B. Rachuba

"Without the attention to details in metadata creation and curation, we would have a chaotic library leaving everyone in the dark. In order to help make the connections, librarians work in the background by climbing up the mountains of metadata to provide the clearest path possible for researchers."

*****

Amy B. Rachuba is an electronic resources librarian in Minnesota, working at both St. Olaf College and Carleton College.

This embroidered piece shows a large stack of books with a woman kneeling on top of them. The woman holds a flashlight and is shining the beam down from the top of the stack of books. Part of the large stack of books is in the dark and part is in the light. Sitting in the middle of the beam of light, at the bottom of the stack of books is a person reading a book. Images of flowers float around the reading person. There is a postmark for Northfield, Minnesota, with the date November 2021 and the hashtag #sewmeta, which was used by some of the library stitchers on Instagram.

Lindsey Ryer (Maine)

A Few Inches of Something

Embroidery
Designed and stitched by Lindsey Ryer / Ossuary design is adapted from a pattern from the crypt in Igreja de São Francisco in Évora, Portugal

"A quote from Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own inspired this piece. The image of unseen, unheralded labor accumulating to create something special–something

beautiful and vital–seems to perfectly describe the act of cataloging. I wondered, where else might this happen? Each section in this piece is an example of the transformation of individual entities into a new, possibly unexpected design, some lasting only a moment, some a season, and some for generations.”

*****

Lindsey Ryer is the cataloging librarian at the South Portland Public Library in South Portland, Maine.

The quote on this embroidery is from Virginia Woolf: “It was as if the great machine after labouring all day — had made with our help a few yards of something very exciting and beautiful–a fiery fabric — flashing with red eyes, a tawny monster roaring with hot breath.” The MARC field for the author is at the end of the quote: 100 1_ |a Woolf, Virginia, |d 1882-1941.

Each image block includes the image and the subject heading for the image. The top image block has the subject term 650 _0 Murmurations. The second image block is 650 _0 Honeycombs. The final image block is of bones and skulls, with the subject field and heading for 650 _0 Ossuaries.

Sarah Tackett (Indiana)

This is More Work Than I Expected!

Cross stitch
Designed and stitched by Sarah Tackett

“I was thinking of all the unseen work it takes to get a resource into someone’s hands and the codes that are used to build it. I only show a couple of blocks: a MARC record and Dewey numbers, but there are many more.”

*****

Sarah Tackett is a technical services librarian at the Jeffersonville Township Public Library in Jeffersonville, Indiana.

Sarah's design features a full MARC record of the Unseen Labor exhibit. Above the MARC record is the list of Dewey Classification ranges and their accompanying subject categories. At the top of the piece is a row of books, with a cat sleeping at the end of it. The piece is reflective not just of the work of providing metadata for library resources, but also of the amount of work and unseen labor that went into stitching such a detailed MARC record for the exhibit.

Laura Taylor (Maine)

InvISible

Cross stitch
Designed and stitched by Laura Taylor

"Signifying the amount of unseen labor that goes into creating metadata, a portion of the piece is invisible at first glance. Only upon closer examination can you see it–much as with metadata creation. And yet, metadata can be a beautiful thing, as shown at the top of the piece."

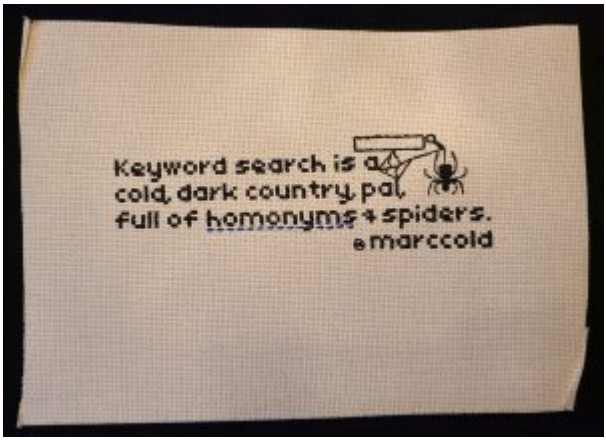
*****

Laura Taylor is a metadata librarian at University of New England in Portland, Maine.

Laura's cross stitch depicts a row of large books on a shelf with the word "metadata" written in cursive across them. The books are stitched in shades of blue and green. Below the shelf of books the rest of the phrase "is invisible labor" is stitched in white on the white fabric. The phrase is barely able to be seen. A detail close up of the words is provided.

Ruth Kitchin Tillman (Pennsylvania)

Homonyms and Spiders



Cross stitch
Designed and stitched by Ruth Kitchin Tillman / Tweet by Marc in a Cold Climate @marccold (anonymous)

"This tweet spoke deeply to my experience of trying to improve search for the hundreds of millions of records our library makes available. It's an enormous challenge."

*****

Ruth Kitchin Tillman is the cataloging systems and linked data strategist at Pennsylvania State University.

Ruth's design features a quote from Twitter by MARC in a Cold Climate (@marccold), which says "Keyword search is a cold, dark country, pal, full of homonyms & spiders."

Alexa Torchynowycz (North Carolina)

A Pattern of Anonymity

Embroidery
Designed and stitched by Alexa Torchynowycz

"I've never embroidered before this project, but I have been sewing since about age 10 so I took my inspiration from a vintage pattern packet that I have from the 1960s. My pattern shows all the different types of materials that can be described with metadata. When that metadata is

broken down it doesn't really make sense, like when you just have pattern pieces for a garment. They look really funny and you can't tell what it is supposed to be when they aren't connected to anything. But once the cataloger trims up all that information and starts to stitch it together, you end up creating a finished record. I also decided on the *Anonymity* title because most of the work of metadata professionals is anonymous. I can't tell who did what in a metadata record, but I know a community of hardworking individuals put in the effort to 'stitch' meaning together out of data bytes and bits and that's what makes us special!"

*****

Alexa Torchynowycz is the systems and cataloging librarian at Davidson College in Davidson, North Carolina. The piece says "A 'How-To-Catalog' Pattern" across the top, stitched in pink. Along the left side are the words "Anonymity Stitched Metadata +4m" stitched in shades of blue and yellow. The piece has a blue dress stitched in the lower right corner. The dress has lines of floss showing connecting images of the pieces and parts that go together to make the dress.

Elliot Williams (Texas)

Code

Cross stitch
Designed and stitched by Elliot Williams

"Most catalogers are intimately familiar with the MARC 21 standard, which is used to encode the descriptions we create about library resources. But non-catalogers, including other librarians, often think of MARC as a kind of impenetrable code. That sometimes makes the work

that catalogers do seem foreign and mysterious, rather than simply a technical skill that anyone can learn. With this piece, I wanted to play off the idea of MARC as a secret code. I surrounded the MARC 21 logo with a border of MARC tags (e.g. 040, 110, 245) depicted in Morse code–another long-standing (some might say antiquated) encoding standard that serves a need but often seems impenetrable to people who don't use it."

*****

Elliot Williams works at the Texas Digital Library in Austin, Texas.

This piece is of the MARC 21 logo cross stitched in blue and black. It is surrounded by MARC field tags written out in Morse code. The Morse code border says: LDR 040 110 245 264 300 522 545 650 655 856.

Acknowledgements

This project could not have been done without the support of the wonderful people and communities listed below.

Thank you to my amazing colleagues:

- Paulina Borrego, from the University of Massachusetts Science and Engineering Library. You helped me turn this little idea into a reality. Your guidance and support as my project manager for the exhibit helped make this a success, and your management of my timeline, the process and the space made this truly magical and fun! Your gentle care framing the flat stitched pieces is the glue that made the final stretch happen! I couldn't have done the exhibit without you.
- Jess Lajoie, also from the Science and Engineering Library, who helped me with a lot of physical labor in getting the exhibit up and ready. From wrangling the hanging system to printing out labels for every single piece, Jess was my right hand! Thank you!
- The rest of my colleagues from the Science and Engineering Library at UMass: Marcia Burkavage, Anne Graham, Ellen Lutz, Melanie Radik and Rebecca Reznik-Zellen! You have been so welcoming, interested, helpful and supportive. Also the occasional ice cream was a

nice bonus.

- Erin Jerome, another longtime UMass colleague and friend, for your wisdom and guidance on permissions, PressBooks and more.

Thank you to Amanda Mack, from the UCLA Film & Television Archive. Not only did you submit a really beautiful piece of stitchery, but your offer to proofread and edit all of the front matter sections and the acknowledgements was such a huge help. Thank you for finding all of the typos and weirdly worded sentences after my brain went haywire!

I send sincere and heartfelt gratitude to every single metadata creator who made something beautiful for this exhibit. Your stories and creativity were more than I ever could have hoped for. I can't believe we organized and created all of this virtually. I hope I get to meet some of you and stitch together in person one day.

Extra special thanks go to my husband, Lee Morrissette. He helped me to iron and photograph every single embroidered piece I received. Since none of you know how truly terrible I am at ironing, this may not seem like a huge deal. But his patience and care with so many of these pieces helped make the actual display a success. An architect by trade and artist when he chooses, he also sketched the portrait that is the basis for my embroidered self-portrait in the Aboutness section.

I virtually met so many library workers, supporters and makers around the world who cheered this project on! I have constantly felt awed by the interest this strange idea has attracted. Thank you all.

And finally, thanks to Badass Cross Stitch and the SewCrafty community for the inspiration and encouragement to try something new. Wow–look at what I started!