



Prisoners are pleased to be stitched up for Gavin Turk's new artworks

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Is it art if you get others to do the donkey work? Gavin Turk's new artworks have been hand-stitched by prisoners across the UK. Turk sent out packs to Fine Cell Work (FCW), a rehabilitation programme that teaches needlecraft to prisoners in 29 prisons. Now 35 prisoners have spent months embroidering the coloured "letter squares" that spell out the name Gavin Turk in various permutations, using an original stitch used by Afghani stitchers.

Suggested Topics

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Prisoners who stitch spend an average of 20 hours a week doing embroidery in their cells for wages; all needlework classes have long waiting lists. When the prisoners found out they were working for Turk, the prisoners "looked him up" and "felt very proud to be involved with the artworks", according to Cherry, a FCW volunteer at HMP Wandsworth. "To begin with we gave them kits to try out a particular stitch that Gavin Turk wanted – it's half running and half back with a special knot to start with. This was for practising."

Turk has been inspired by the Italian artist Alichiero E. Boetti, who has a retrospective at Tate Modern later this month, and who was also interested in the authorship of a work. "I am taking his lead as he used craftspeople in Afghanistan to make his embroidered works," says Turk. "The meditative act of embroidery could also be a positive experience for prisoners."

Over 30 of these small artworks – along with a huge embroidery, made up of 64 3x3 squares, that also depicts his name – will be exhibited next week, as part of Turk's new show, *Gavin & Turk* at London's Ben Brown Fine Arts. "I'm trying to question our contemporary values about authenticity," says Turk. "Everything is now seemingly so mediated – it's as if art is already a *déjà vu*."

Lee, a prisoner at HMP Wandsworth, who worked on Turk's new project, says: "I feel so calm while sewing and free from all the stress, worry and anxiety that life in prison brings."

This is the first in a series of collaborations with leading artists, for which FCW will build up a small collection of work that can travel the country. "What we'd love to see is a touring show that we can pop up in prison car parks," says Mairi Duffie, FCW director, "so that family and visitors can see these works."

Gavin & Turk at Ben Brown Fine Arts, London W1 (020 7734 8888), 10 February to 20 April. For a limited edition of 40 artworks each signed by Turk go to <http://www.benbrownfinearts.com/>; www.finecellwork.co.uk

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