

## DANIELLA WOOLF

*Bundle 4315, 2014*  
Paper and Thread, 8.5 x 8.5 x 1.5 in



COLLECTION: WAX WORKS WEST. PHOTO: RR JONES

## AÍFE MURRAY

### Bound and Stitched

Books as  
a life and  
death matter

**W**hen you're on a nonfiction reading streak, you somehow don't question it. For me it started with Margalit Fox's *The Riddle of the Labyrinth*. I was fascinated by Fox's resuscitation of Alice Kober, the little-known linguist who laid the painstaking groundwork for the decipherment of Linear B. Margalit Fox's vocation is the "rescuing of lost souls" like Kober, as she is lead obituary writer for *The New York Times*. That's an occupation I've harbored a secret desire for, and in my own way I practiced it, when I exhumed stories of the household staff who once worked for Emily Dickinson. At this moment, though, with my small tower of nonfiction deliciously perched on the round copper table in the living room, I was the one who needed to get lost. I demanded rescue from souls going missing. I picked up *Labyrinth* and was happily captured from page one.

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"Allan," I said when he walked in on Sunday morning with his book bag slung over his bony right shoulder. He stood on my living room rug in his stocking feet, his army-green T-shirt hanging loose from his shoulders like drying laundry pinned to a line.

"Well, then," he said, smiling in that slant way that meant *what have you got new*, his hand out, palm up, urging me to say more or put a book in it. I waited for him to sit down. He always chose a corner of the couch, folding his large frame into the smallest possible space. I bounced down next to him, in the wide center of the couch. Because I had to. Big motion. Noise to balance his quiet. I welcomed him the way a large dog might.

He eyed my stack of books, most of them covered by thin cellophane with which the library wraps its cloth-bound books. These were titles I couldn't hang on to if I grew attached. I liked it that way. The anonymous sharing. Turning a page to find the slipped-in photograph of a Bulgarian man in traditional hat, slightly blurry; or the previous reader's check-out list topped by *The Merry Misogynist* by Colin Cotterill. "How could you?" I thought, speaking to my predecessor. "And the new J. K. Rowling," I said reprovingly. I scolded in my head, but I was excited by these traces of someone else in "my books." I suppose it was much the same way men felt at the baths, before the city closed them down in the 1980s, when bodies were