

Weed and Feed

by [Melinda Kozel](#)

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It's fitting that a crocheted hat became the biggest unifying symbol of the Women's March.

After all, yarn is a medium that connects gender roles, warmth, industry, labor, mechanization, fashion, comfort, durability, and tradition. It communicates and elevates the past women have fought through, the dependency placed on them daily, and the responsibility of being stewards for others and the future of the planet.

Where domestic craft has been traditionally consigned to being "women's art", crochet, ceramics, and stitching have taken up the mantle as the mediums of the resistance.

WEDES, a collaborative exhibition at Darger HQ with Omaha's Sarah Rowe and New York-based Angela Simione, illustrates the challenges of self-identity, boundaries and protection women face in their political and humanitarian struggle.

The title has many meanings; weeds/wedes bring visions of unwanted spreading, infestation, tangling and confusion. It is also a traditional mourning garment that inspired Rowe's central piece, "Earth, Air, Firewater".



The shawl stitches together different linens and transforms a symbol of mourning to a protest placard. She acknowledges the imbalance of these elements as they are targeted and destroyed for the sake of business interests.

In fact, the fragility of environmental safety is felt as a line of oil-filled teacups by the wall is threatened by an accidental kick—the oil literally under our feet and at risk of being spilled.

The mismatched pretty teacups the oil sits in highlight a delicate layer of protection that many feel a great responsibility for but are not prepared to manage.

Rowe, as always, demonstrates a personal connection with tactile iconography. “The Refinery” intertwines her layered meanings in traditional and modern materials with Simone’s handmade crocheted flowers to tell a gritty but poetic story.

The collaborative piece runs straggly yarn through a found meat grinder mounted on a table that blends into a pool of oil on the ground. Emerging from the pool, glitter and colorful crocheted flowers break free from the dark surface.



Like Rowe, Simone embraces the contrast of traditionally feminine mediums with a hard-edged humor. Much of her work comes from journal writing in which her personal biography elicits fragments that become the subtitle of a sweater or blanket.

Her textile works, like “twist my braids” turn a garment that is a staple of any woman’s wardrobe into an unwearable item—a billboard too large and unwieldy for the woman to carry.

This piece was a product of a four-year-long process, the lines of poetry edited over and over again. The lines are not perfect and symmetrical and their length helped determine the piece's length.

Simone's crocheted pieces have varying degrees of precision and tightness. An afghan that reads "I'm So Happy I Could Die" stretches out neatly on a bed in the space, the letters in block title with DIE filling the blanket.

On the wall behind it a loose, uneven black blanket states "if only" three times. Simone said in her artist talk that the more recent looseness in her work is the result of being able to make peace with regrets while relaxing her expectations.

WEDES signals a tradition of craft-making tied to the circumstance of women. Rowe imagines women doing needlepoints centuries ago, secretly loathing the activity and the message on the sampler. Looking at the examples of these crafts in the works in the exhibit, you feel these women stitching the messages they want people to hear.

The notion of "women's art" doesn't match its old meaning relegated to niche hobbies that manifests in quaint objects. Women's art carries the full capacity of artistic tradition transferred through the objects we live with every day and onto the protest signs we carry—both literally and figuratively. We forget sometimes that environmental, economic, and justice policy are also women's issues.

Most of the pieces in *WEDES* hang, drip, or sag from their surface or hook. It emphasizes how women carry the weight of the world and are encumbered by all of their feelings and dreams in addition to their responsibilities and expectations.

But this tangled experience women have, one that *WEDES* offers us, makes the message and the pursuit of equality in our shared experience meaningful and genuine.

WEDES is on display through June 4 and Darger HQ, 1804 Vinton Street. For more information, visit dargerhq.org.

