

Hate-based graffiti defaces Western University event posters

The vandalism called to “fight” against the collaborative embroidery event

Cynthia Jimenez. Posted: Oct 8, 2025.

Anti-LGBTQ+ vandalism was found on two event posters for Threads that Unite Us on Tuesday Sept. 30, in the John Labatt Visual Arts Centre. The vandalism characterized the event as “woke academe” and called readers to “fight gender ideology.”

Woke academe is a term used by some in a derogatory manner to criticize what some see as the prioritization of social justice issues on campuses.

Campus Safety and Emergency Services were notified of the defacement by event organizer and associate professor Amanda Grzyb. Western’s special constables investigation into the identity of the vandals remains ongoing, said Western University’s media relations team in a statement.

Several security measures were put in place in response to the vandalism including increased Special Constable patrolling and closed CTV monitoring of the event and other event posters across campus were monitored for further vandalism according to the acting Dean of FIMS Susan Knabe. Knabe shared in an interview she worked alongside Grzyb and Bill Chantler, director of Western University Campus Safety and Emergency Services, to develop the security measures.

The event was scheduled for Thursday Oct. 2, 2025, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and on Friday Oct. 3, 2025, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. in the FIMS and Nursing Building atrium. The event ran without any disruptions, said Grzyb.

Before the event, Knabe and Grzyb made the decision to notify students, faculty and other university Deans about the poster’s defacement via email the morning of Wednesday Oct. 1, 2025.

“This is not something I am prepared to accept as a ‘new normal,’” Knabe wrote in the email, obtained by a reporter, and encouraged people from across the university to attend the event despite the backlash from the unknown vandal(s).

Later in an interview Grzyb commented on the decision to send out the email.

“We needed to let people know that this kind of hate and fascism and right-winged feeling is on our campus. It’s here. It’s with us. It’s not just south of the border.”

While Grzyb and Knabe both said they found the graffiti deeply worrying, they also insisted the graffiti served as proof of the need for the event. According to event posters, participants, through the co-creation of collective embroidery, would “use craft as a tool of solidarity and defiance against fascism.”

Other event organizers also felt similarly to Knabe and Grzyb.

“For me, Canada is a country made up of immigrants. It’s supposedly one of solidarity,” said Teresa Cruz, Salvadoran embroiderer and visiting artist, in an interview conducted in Spanish and translated into English.

Cruz organizes similar workshops in El Salvador and led the collective embroidery at Threads That Unite Us. She stressed the event's intended purposes. To bring people together, to talk about and reflect on solidarity and resiliency and to stand against rising authoritarianism through artmaking.

When asked about the community’s response to the defacement Knabe noted other senior leaders within the university took the vandalism seriously and then also jokingly commented, “but did they come and embroider? No, they did not.”

Still, Grzyb considered the event to be a success with more than 200 embroiderers in attendance, originally had only anticipated between 20 and 30.

People outside of the Western University community also attended the event. Local Londoner, Amelia Burt, shared she saw a post about the event on social media and decided to attend. The event was a way to create a physical manifestation of people coming together, said Burt.

Other community members such as London West MPP, Peggy Sattler and London North Centre MPP, Terence Kernaghan attended as well. Both were invited to attend the event after the graffiti incident. Sattler and Kernaghan both also gave speeches of support and condemned the messaging of the vandalism during the event.

Grzyb shared that 80 individual embroidery pieces were completed during the event and they will be stitched together in a single tapestry in the coming weeks.