

New life for discarded embroidery work

Ulla-Stina Wikander scours flea markets and second-hand shops, searching for discarded embroidery. She uses these to cover all kinds of everyday objects, which she then incorporates into installations.

Kees Keijer April 2, 2025



Photo: AkzoNobel Art Foundation

Go see it!

Sometimes a single artwork is already worth a visit to a gallery or art space in Amsterdam. In the column *Go see it!*, a gem is highlighted weekly. Also important to note: admission is always free, and the gallery owner is happy to tell you (even) more about the work.

A chair and a table with a desk lamp and small items. When you spot this domestic corner, you immediately notice something strange: all objects are wrapped in colorful textiles. Various items on the small table are also covered with embroidery.

The objects on the small table are all items that were found on every desk several decades ago, but not anymore. A stapler, a hole punch, and a calculator - not a pocket calculator but a large model with

a paper roll. The rotary telephone is naturally included. This model is special, an Ericofon, with the handset and the device made as one piece and the rotary dial on the bottom.

The objects might reveal something about the owner. The items on the table are related to working life; the breezy heels and the small handbag could be more associated with leisure time. It's as if a woman has just stepped away from her desk. Perhaps to get coffee, or to go to the bathroom. The title of the work, *Where Am I*, also seems to hint at the absence of the main character. Although the situation isn't very realistic; you wonder who could work at such a small table. And where is the inevitable typewriter? Or at the very least, a writing pad?

Old mixers and sewing machines

Swedish artist Ulla-Stina Wikander (1957) began collecting cross-stitch embroidery over twenty years ago. "These embroideries have been made by women and is often seen as kitch and regarded pretty worthless," she writes on her website. "I have mixed feelings for them but sometimes they are very beautiful and I want to bring them back to life."

Wikander does this by covering household objects, especially from the seventies, with these embroideries. By creating a new skin for vacuum cleaners, sewing machines, and electric mixers, old objects undergo a transformation. There's also a kind of contradiction in this. Worthless objects get a second life by covering them with other discarded items.

It's also contradictory that Wikander must cut apart the very embroideries she 'wants to bring to life' in order to create something new from them. Nevertheless, it's a beautiful tribute to the anonymous women who made the embroidery.

The work of Ulla-Stina Wikander can now be seen at the AkzoNobel Art Foundation, Christian Neefestraat 2

Popular

Ulla-Stina Wikander finds the embroideries at flea markets and in second-hand shops. Though this is becoming increasingly difficult, as cross-stitch embroidery has become extremely popular. Commercial parties are use them to decorate bags, chairs, or clothing.

Living Room

Ulla-Stina Wikander's artwork is part of the exhibition *Beyond These Walls* at AkzoNobel. The exhibition begins with a living room setting, with a seating area, a rug, and small frames on the wall. Architecture is the central focus at the heart of the exhibition.

AkzoNobel

With an acquisition budget of 450,000 euros per year, the AkzoNobel Art Foundation is a major player in the Dutch art world. Since 2016, the organization has had its own art space, freely accessible on the ground floor of the headquarters on the Zuidas.