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The art of the present ceaselessly continues to expand its procedures and possibilities. As a result the notions of art that are current also keep changing. In the 1970s crocheted or knitted objects were still new phenomena in the context of art, and it was not clear whether they could be considered “high art.” Women who produced art with needle and thread were long regarded as outsider artists, and their works were deemed curiosities. The needleworks like crocheting, knitting, or the sowing of clothes were frowned upon by art critics of the time, for they associated an age-old female stereotype with these activities.

To counter this, female artists in the 1970s employed the needleworks precisely in order to break up traditional gender roles. After a long period of contention between artists and critics over the question whether such works could be considered “high art,” the position of critics today is no longer one of rejection or even derision. On the contrary, female artists have by now conquered the international art scene and galleries. The Egyptian artist Ghada Amer, for instance, uses needle and thread to counter clichéd sexual roles, in Rosemarie Trockel’s work knitting is a recurrent element, and Louise Bourgeois once remarked about the technique, “I have always been fascinated by the magic power of the needle.” Contemporary textile art is now part of the collection of reputable museums and private collections around the world.

Long gone is the time in which this technique was considered a typically female form of creative expression. By now there is a whole series of male artists who have made needle and thread the basis of their cultural activity. One of the best known among them is Jochen Flinzer. Recent research, furthermore, has sharpened our view for the high quality of historical textile art discovered with mummies or in tombs all around the world. This has contributed to the heightened support for this art. By now we are also familiar with the remarkable and extraordinary textile creations of people with physical impairments (art brut), the fascinating and moving textile masterworks of Agnes Emma Richter und Marie Lieb, for instance, created around 1885. These experiences have

contributed to the high level of interest in textile works of contemporary art in the general public these days.

With her stylistic tool—crocheted objects—the artist Patricia Waller from Berlin occupies a special place among artists working with needle and thread. She is a precise and critical observer of everyday life and has by now created a multifaceted “world theater.” Her ambiguous universe wrought from our turbulent modern existence is focused on art, commerce, technology, and pop culture, and by now consists of numerous thematic blocks. In a subversive tongue-in-cheek manner, Patricia Waller has mixed together the absurd and the bizarre, careful observations of everyday life and an interest in humanity that borders on the anthropological, to create these different phases of her work.

Her works may be picturesque homage to the heroes of high art, such as Vincent van Gogh or Picasso, or satirical commentary of the exalted rituals of the cultural industry. Or she might, in a wonderfully bizarre manner, poke fun at the affectations of the powerful or at macho swaggering, or create ironic parodies of gene technology or psychic phenomena. But it is quickly apparent that Patricia Waller’s oeuvre is neither superficial nor does it invite harmless amusement. Rather it is anchored in the concrete world of daily experiences and its problems. What in some of her settings at first sight looks like harmony is deceptive, as the viewer will soon notice. The beholder senses that the evil and unimaginable may at any time disrupt the beautiful outward appearance of sheltered worlds.

The surreal, the absurd, and the paradoxical also appear in the artist’s most recent works. Not infrequently do we encounter bizarre domestic accidents or curious fatalities. Turtle, mole, and rabbit have become victims of the fetishized orderliness of a “Homes and Gardens”-lifestyle. A run-over cat completes the scenario. “Idyllic homes” are thus exposed as sites of both comedy and tragedy. The predator that is man can strike anywhere and anytime without warning.

Let us not be deceived by the fact that Patricia Waller’s objects often, on a superficial level, seem child-like, soft, and colorful. The content the artist present to us is marked by aggression, violence, and cruelty. Pluto, the favorite of all Mickey Mouse fans, is suffocating in a can of dog food, Miss Piggy from the Muppet’s Show is being turned through a meat grinder while continuing to smile in an unperturbed manner, Bugs Bunny has been impaled by his favorite food, a carrot, and dolls and stuffed animals are being

tortured or cut up by pairs of scissors. The gentle deer Bambi has been brutally hacked to pieces with a meat cleaver, and all that is left of Pauline from the *Struwwelpeter* (*Slovenly Peter*) is a black burn mark, a few bones, and her shoes. Something uncanny and terrible is hiding in reality, and even the once so sheltered world of children is showing cracks. There is no indication, however, who has in such a vicious manner attacked these well-known figures from the culture of comics and cartoons. The culprit does not reveal himself.

In her present exhibition Patricia Waller examines the popular industrial mass culture and its media super heroes. And she confronts us not only with a commercial, cultural, and media-related industry that incessantly delivers experiences of aggression and violence into the “idyllic homes,” but also demonstrates, in a both original and profound manner, to what extent we have become fundamentally conditioned by the influences of these industries. While everything seems so harmless, we are in reality surrounded by a perilous world, a world furthermore that we have been raised with from early childhood on. Nobody gets away, there is no abyss that we cannot fall into, no violence or misfortune that might not befall us.

Across all the abysses of our uncertain daily existence Patricia Waller spins her (woolen) threads. In a tongue-in-cheek manner and with her very own artistic strategies she scrutinizes the influences of television, popular culture and general notions of education. And she raises pertinent questions with regard to our ever-increasing enjoyment of violence and the growing acceptance of brutality.

In assessing the importance of this art, for once there is Patricia Waller’s unmistakable place within international contemporary art. But there is also the relevance of the themes of her oeuvre. When considering for its roots, we come back to the anarchistic art of the Dadaists. The viewer of Patricia Waller’s art may also to some extent be reminded of the Fluxus events of the 1960s, events that attracted a lot of attention with their cheerful anarchy in the face of the exalted rituals of high art.

We experience fascination and enthusiasm for what is presented to us. But also irritation, uncertainty, and reflection. But the artist presents us with her own Ariadne’s thread for a pleasant and thoughtful journey through the “labyrinths” of this very particular world of art.