

FORT GANSEVOORT

VOGUE

Summer 2016
The STITCH List

VOGUE view



Rich tapestry: left, cushions from Gucci's Westminster Abbey resort show, and, *below and bottom*, Kate Hersch's embroidered motifs appear on August Morgan cocktail napkins



Artist Zoë Buckman and, right, the vintage underwear she embroiders with lyrics

The STITCH list

A NEW CROP OF EMBROIDERERS IS PROVIDING AN ANTIDOTE TO TODAY'S INSTA-GRATIFICATION. BY VIOLET HENDERSON

One night in June last year, in downtown New York, artist Zoë Buckman attended the opening of *More Material*, an art show at the gallery Salon 94 Bowery. Over a black dress she wore her own art, a Twenties floral silk kimono on to the back of which she had embroidered, in cross-stitch, a lyric by the rapper Tupac Shakur: "I swear I'll never call you bitch again." The kimono drew Buckman attention, particularly from the show's curator, fashion designer Duro Olowu. Roll on a year, and a clutch of Buckman's

embroidered lingerie – all of it vintage, all of it bearing the lyrics of either Tupac or the Notorious BIG – is on display at Olowu's current show,

"My pieces are really not designed to be worn, only displayed"



Making and Unmaking, this time in London's Camden Arts Centre (until September 18). Because, says Buckman, "My pieces are really not designed

to be worn, only displayed" – as earlier this year 98 of them were at her solo show, *Every Curve*, in Los Angeles, close to Tupac's former neighbourhood, Compton.

Buckman, today in a Prada shirt, denim culottes and Gucci loafers, is hypnotically beautiful. Her voice, too, is seductive: low and hoarse, it suits her east London accent – she was born and raised in a home full of feminism and politics in Stoke Newington. The artist's embroidery project originated when she was putting her baby, Cleo, to bed. "I literally cannot sing a nursery rhyme," she says. "So I used to rap Cleo to sleep." (Cleo's father, Buckman's husband, is the actor David Schwimmer – they met when she was working as a cocktail waitress in >

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London's Cuckoo Club. That was 10 years ago. Cleo is now five, and the family live close to Salon 94 Bowery.) During her adolescence, the artist committed all of Biggie and Tupac's lyrics to memory. Problem was, the lyrics were often not just X-rated, but violently misogynistic. "And I thought, I am raising this young woman in the making, I need to put these men, both of whom are now dead, into some sort of context." So she sewed their work, which is variously sexist, crude, even abusive towards women, on to underwear which implies the female body without objectifying it as the lyrics do.

Buckman, who learnt to embroider at school, will also sew in her next project, *Mostly It Is Just Uncomfortable* – a phrase women everywhere will recognise as the precursor to any sort of gynaecological treatment. She has prettily reupholstered a Fifties gynaecological chair, and plans to sew into the fabric the poem she composed (and once performed live in a boxing ring) about how she exercised her right to have an abortion.

Buckman is not the first artist to use embroidery – the traditional craft of the domestic woman – to express contemporary feminism. Louise Bourgeois, Tracey Emin and Ghada Amer are some of the more famous names embroidering women into the artistic canon. In the case of Peruvian artist Ana Teresa Barboza, it is her female subjects who are sewing themselves together, attempting to shore themselves up from exposure so aggressive that it reveals their organs.

The work of Chilean embroiderer José Romussi always explores the boundary between movement and stasis. He has embellished black-and-white photographs of ballerinas with lines of diffracting colour, as if their tutus were spinning about them. To mark the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta in 2015, installation artist Cornelia Parker asked MPs, judges, activists and prisoners – those defining the justice system today – to stitch the treaty's Wikipedia page, as it read at the time, on to a 43ft-long canvas. She turned something transient into something permanent, which went on display at both the Bodleian and British Libraries.

And yet, even if embroidery is now a museum-worthy medium, it hasn't quite shaken its association with twee tea towels and linens bearing homespun hokey messages in the vein of "home

is where the heart is". And this association makes it ripe for exploitation by irreverent wit. A bestseller on Etsy is a framed embroidered message saying, "Please don't do coke in the bathroom" – images of it have gone viral on Pinterest and Instagram. Meanwhile, Kate Hersch has designed for August Morgan a range of cocktail napkins stitched with cheerful animals over jaunty,



punning messages: "Hair of the dog", "Shell we have another" and more. At Stubbs & Wootton, the embroidered slipper has been revamped and made naughty. One pair in the collection has a right shoe bearing a screw and a left shoe bearing a U.

Embroidery is slow, painstaking work. From the Chelsea shop Tapisserie, which she shares with her mother, model and embroiderer Petra Palumbo says that finishing one of her custom-made clutch bags can take a week. To make her business more commercial, and reduce hand strain, she is looking into digital embroidery – a design is input on a computer, a machine stitches it on to a canvas. And yet, as Palumbo herself acknowledges, it is

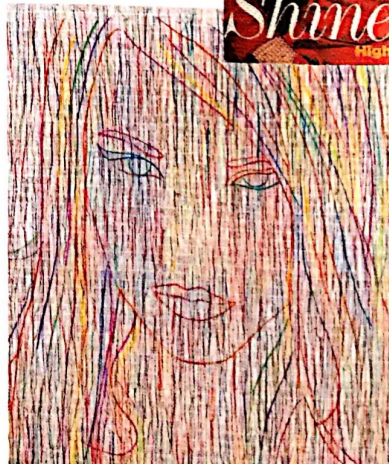
the time that each piece of embroidery represents that is so appealing in today's fast-moving culture of instant gratification. Artist Inge Jacobsen particularly plays with this. She appropriates fashion photography from big-brand campaigns, *Vogue* covers or newspaper front pages and embroiders the images with stitching that is dazzling in its intricacy and microscopic detail. "I take something that is widely available and make it one of a kind," she explains. She makes keepsakes.

Gucci, too, knows all about the allure of a keepsake. Not only do many of Alessandro Michele's recent designs bear fine embroidery and sequined appliqué, at his resort show this year each seat in Westminster Abbey was marked with an embroidered emerald cushion, and the cushions were almost more Instagrammed than the show itself. After the final model walked, not a single one remained on those benches; they were taken instead by those who had sat on them, as a tangible reminder of a moment lost to time.

Top: Stubbs & Wootton's college slippers. Above: José Romussi's *Alla Schellest (Dance 13)*



Above: Inge Jacobsen's embroidered version of *Vogue's March 2011 cover*; and left: *The Rainbow Girl* (2014), by Ghada Amer



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