

Textile artist Malin Lager (Swedish, b. 1946) creates astonishingly detailed wall works using a sewing machine and thread. Her masterful creations resemble illusionistic paintings that address evocative and challenging universal themes. Her subjects range from lichen-covered rocks, wet cobblestone streets, sun-dappled meadows, and portraits of her family and friends. Creative experimentation has been part of her environment since childhood, belonging to a Swedish family rich with four generations of skilled craftsmen and artists. Making objects that spring from both the head and the hand is a knowledge and expertise that Lager possesses and holds dear to her heart. Both her grandfather and great grandfather were blacksmiths, and her father was a sculptor and lithographer. Her grandmother who knew how to sew, embroider, and weave became a furniture maker, and her mother is a painter and fiber artist. The passing of traditions in her family instilled an appreciation for nature and imagination. Lager's dexterity and skill in adapting centuries-old materials has led her to profoundly develop her work into a contemporary aesthetic.

Lager studied sculpture at the School of Design and Crafts in Gothenburg, Sweden. She applied this training to her textiles using layers of thread to create color and implied dimension. Preferring materials and methods that came naturally, she sews images on cloth that are so expertly rendered and sharp that they are often mistaken for oil paintings. Her mastery in this medium borders on the implausible and must be experienced in person to be fully understood. Lager's process is meticulous and promotes a 'slow art' philosophy—a practice that values being mindful of details, cherishing the inherent history of the materials, and encouraging a meditative state during the creative process. This progression can be seen in her work, *The Shadows and the Light*, 2009, as she brings together sixteen landscapes exhibited like a mosaic, creating a larger, more powerful image. In the absence of a pigmented medium, the artist may change the spool of thread hundreds of times in order to systematically construct the effects of natural illumination seen in the skin-tones of her portraits or the reflective puddles of water of her cobblestone surfaces. Using the sewing machine as an expressive

tool, Lager begins with a contour line drawing using a neutral thread over a patched fabric background to outline her desired shape, similar to traditional methods in under-painting to lay down a color ground and composition. Using a lockstitch—the most common mechanical stitch made by a sewing machine—she then incorporates a broad, colorful palette of threads from dark to light. Unlike many textile artists that often expose the gnarled underside of the thread joins, Lager further attaches and sews her finished works to stretched canvas to create a clean finish.

Though Lager pushes boundaries as a contemporary textile artist, she also sews together intimate memories. She creates movement by combining translucent and metallic threads, so that the portraits and landscapes shimmer when light hits their surfaces. Creating mood and expression, the reflective quality of her materials imbue her subjects with a liveliness that reminds her of loved ones or moments in time. The orange threads seen in *Rattlesnake Grass*, 2014, ignite with a firelight color, and the brilliant spikelets look like tiny ornaments dancing in the breeze. The soft fibers mimic life-like qualities, seen in the hair of her portraits or the satin blouse in *Maria*, 2011. In the work, *Emelie I*, 2013, her daughter poses in the style of Johannes Vermeer's painting, *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, circa 1665, (The Mauritshuis, The Hague, Holland). Here, Lager captures the master's effects with her classic, stoic gaze and long, flaxen tresses glistening in the light.

Stitch-by-stitch, artist Malin Lager creates a world that celebrates the details that make-up what is whole. She teaches us that every fiber of each experience, like her family, is connected.

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