I like things that have been shed or discarded by others, by nature, and I love the power and the simplicity of the needle and thread, of scissors and glue, simple ways to transform. My main interest is not so much the material, but the transformation of the shreds of the things I find, of the world around me, and of myself.

All minds quote. Old and new make the warp and the woof of every moment. There is no thread that is not a twist of these two strands. — Ralph Waldo Emerson

There were many beginnings, but one of them was when I began working on tapestries found. Intrigued by their kitsch colours and their deranged pixilation, I started working on needlepoints of iconic masterpieces of art, because they are a fascinating way of revealing how some people look at art.

I am not what I am, I am what I do with my hands... — Louise Bourgeois

Unpicking elaborate needlework and re-stitching it to find some truth, is a subversive activity, especially in a world where time is money, and money is everything. Also, the act of stitching the toiling and frowning of a needle and thread is pleasing and calming. By quoting wisdoms and poems of writers and thinkers that made me into who I am, I stitch back together my own universe.

I am in my own world but it is ok because they know me down here. — Sigmar Polke

I work with the debris of reality which I have always found quite hard to accept or fit in to, and turn it into my own magical world. Flotsam found on various beaches and dropped feathers are turned into bird spirits carrying embroidered messages.


Wool, acrylic and lurex on cotton canvas sewn into ash frame, 61 x 41 cm.

The Day David Bowie died, I cut my hair. Rebel Rebel. Ground control to Major Tom. Wild is the Wind. I am happy hope you are happy too (David Bowie)
The Blue Boy (Thomas Gainsborough, 1770).

fig. 1.

Any piece of flotsam and jetsam within our grasp should be considered a precipitate of our desire. — André Breton

Large mussels are the canvases for collages about love, bits of fabrics are wrapped around stones and turned into flower-like vulvas; discarded fashion magazines filled with female bodies are cut up into collages, entering into a world of lurking female desire.

I commissioned three sisters to make arusas or dolls in Egypt, dolls that usually protect the house from the evil eye, they too I have embroidered with wisdoms and the thoughts of the past and the present, they became a battalion of strident female voices, my Wayward Sisters.

In times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act. — George Orwell

I was, and I am, responding to these times now. And in doing so I felt I was changing... The word that jumped to my mind was metamorphosis.

We must invent the heart of things if we wish one day to discover it. — Jean-Paul Sartre

I had a pattern cut of my body, and I slowly sewed the pieces together, limb by limb, and covered them with more wisdoms I re-membered. Like a snake, it felt like I was shedding skins.
The fresh artistic voice in reMembering features layers of word and image, ancient myth and everyday life, in textile, needlepoints, collage and embroidered cloth dolls and sculpture.

Born in Belgium, Sylvie Franquet read Arabic and Islamic Studies at Ghent and Cairo universities, and speaks fluent Arabic. She has spent years of immersion on both sides of the Mediterranean, assiduously studying, exploring and writing extensively on Middle Eastern culture. Her artistic creations represent the culmination of understanding gained in years of seeking out cultural origins and potential futures, in historical sites, poetic traditions, language and art forms.

'I like the idea of words as pattern as well as having meaning. In Islamic art Arabic calligraphy, arabesques and geometric pattern all blend into one.' (Franquet)

Equally intrigued by the immediacy and rules of social media, the pixel-like stitches of her needlepoint commentaries look like flashbacks of a morning twitter-feed juxtaposed with found images, creating a meta-commentary on our time and place.

The artist is inspired by what women's fingers have fashioned throughout history; needlepoint, embroidery and knitting have traditionally been the domain of the female, considered craft, outsider or peripheral art. She is fascinated with cliché images chosen to represent women through the ages, reading, gazing out of a window, with a child, with a lover. She trawls junk shops and chooses stitch-by-pattern needlepoint of iconic images, undoes stitches, and works in her own. Her unstitching, restitching, remaking, embroidery is part of the process by which she recreates her world.

'Needlepoint is both a symbol of female subservience and a rebellion against it.' (Franquet)

Needlepoint has been considered women's work, however the portrayal of women in its images have often been designed by men, providing a complex context for gendered production. The tapestries Franquet uses are presumably the work of women, but are based on paintings by men who, have in turn, so often chosen to portray their view of women. Franquet’s work turns gender roles and commonplace scenes inside out, transforming them into hallucinatory revelations.

The figures, cartoons, used in medieval weavings, were most often proprietary to male guilds or artists, and used with permission, as one uses copyrighted images today. It is ironic that weaving, embroidery, knitting, the media of Arachne, and of Penelope, have now been usurped by male-invented mass production techniques.

Her stitchery is fired by imagination, fashioned by hands. She rebels against boundaries that constrict creativity. The backs of her needlepoint pieces intentionally reveal the process of creating the design. She considers stitch-by-pattern needlepoint as an example of the repression of female imagination, as though needlepoint design might be risky or dangerous when left up to the stitcher herself.

During the 1970s and '80s rise of the Women’s Movement, female artists explored textile, weaving, embroidery, tapestry, quilting and needlepoint, to destroy the barrier that marginalized women, and kept their productions out of 'high art.'

All my work is a kind of rebellion against the world in which we live, against the mediocrity, the fake and the sameness. I love randomness, I celebrate difference.' (Franquet)

The history of textiles is interwoven with the artist’s Flemish culture, with the Industrial Revolution, and, counter-intuitively, with the computer age.

Franquet challenges the predominance of automation, the mass production of the belching mills of Blake’s Jerusalem. She does this by celebrating and elevating the simplicity of needle and thread, of paper, scissors, and glue.

English mechanisation of the textile industry was first directly exported to Belgium. Removable punch cards controlled the patterns of the Jacquard power looms in...
detail from 4 to avoid danger. not bury their heads in sand (Struthio camelus Dancing baby ostrich dome, 47 x 15 x 15 cm. Driftwood, seaweed and a concealed. ‘imagine, when that ostriches the Elder (AD 23–79) wrote the Centaurs lived. Pliny the beach in Pelion, where fig. 3. But ostriches do, 2016. 40-character comments can be sent to millions at the tap narratives and murmurings. In the age of social media, portals to individual memories, histories, cultures, the weft and woof of mind and fingers weave many compelling stories. Franquet’s work with its texts, images and pixelation-effect becomes Proustian ‘madeleines,’ opening incantations, commentaries and earworms. Human history and rumours from the palimpsest of social media become charms, sagacity, rumours, poems and riddles. Declarations of a finger, influencing consumer patterns, presidential elections, and impelling some people to suicide or instant fame. Franquet prolifically stitches phrases as if we have lost all truth, making a patchwork of one that suits us. Her tapestries debunk timeworn archetypes of the feminine, challenging received myths. She carefully chooses the images she reworks to comment on social roles and mythologies. Ulysses, bucolic scenes, famous paintings such as the Mona Lisa, all are subjects of her re-interpretation. One example of this is, OK, be Like That, based on Velasquez’s The Toilet of Venus (The Rubens Venus 1647-51). The painting shows the subject’s back and her face in a mirror. It is an elegant example of the gaze, whereby the male becomes the dominant fantasy-creator: a painter has portrayed the object of his desire, yet he shows her looking at herself. But from the way the mirror is positioned, it should be our face reflected in the glass. A suffragette, Mary Richardson, thought the painting was an outrage to women and slashed the work in 1916 at the National Gallery. Franquet, by adding Marcel Duchamp’s comment prière de toucher, celebrates the complex history of the painting. ‘Sappho’s fragments, Nietzsche’s aphorisms, Leopardi’s Zibaldone that’s the way my mind works.’ (Franquet) Mottoes, spells and aphorisms have long been a part of textile traditions and samplers. The Lady and the Unicorn tapestry (La Dame à la Licorne, Musée national du Moyen Âge, Paris), woven circa 1500 in Flanders, was re-discovered mouldering in a castle by none other than author George Sands and archeologist/author, Prosper Mérimée. Sands then introduced the tapestries to the public in her novel, Jeanne. A panel of this tapestry was prominently stitched with the phrase À Mon Seul Désir, variously translated ‘by my sole desire,’ ‘to my only desire,’ ‘by my will alone.’ Alighiero e Boetti made cloth maps of geopolitical ephemera embroidered by Afghan women, with magical formulas and phrases such as ‘order and disorder.’ The 19 th century writer/philosopher Giacomo Leopardi’s Zibaldone di Pensiere, with its dense collation of thoughts, ephemera and philosophies is an important influence. Franquet uses Zibaldone to refer to the textures and array
Akhmim (Egypt) cotton on wood and wire frame.
Body 183 cm high on a variable stand.

Eyes Candy
He loves me he loves me not He loves me he loves me he loves me he loves me not HELOPERSHON!
To be naked is to be oneself.
To be nude is to be seen nude and not recognised as oneself (John Berger)
Desire makes slaves out of kings. Patience makes kings out of slaves (Al-Tusi)
Happy was she, was she who could believe without seeing, at one with the duration and the continuity of life (John-Cortazar)
Every night I put you together: Bone by delicate Bone (John Berger)
Wow! Your nipples are so symmetric! (Jo Cook)
Il m’aime un peu, beaucoup, passionnément, à la folie, pas du tout…/ Un amore che Kronos non capisce (Cesare Pietroiusti)
Love deceives the best of womankind (Homer)
Woman has served all these centuries as a looking glass possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size (Virginia Woolf).

Run Ragged, 2016.
Akhmim (Egypt) cotton on wood and wire frame.
Body 183 cm high on a variable stand.

Slowly she dressed herself in a history that belonged to her gender (Germano Celant)
I am here and I will do it (Ancient Egyptian shabti)
Venus favours the bold (Ovid)
When the heart speaks, the mind finds it indecent to object (Milan Kundera)
Hands are the windows of the mind (Immanuel Kant)
I am just as interested in her body as I am in her gender (Germano Celanti)
I wanted people to listen to the pulse of nature, to partake of the wholeness of life, and not forget under the pressure of petty destinies, that we are the children of the earth, part of the cosmos (Hermann Hesse)
Whose honey are you?? (Fats Waller)

8 9

fig. 7.
Run Ragged, 2016.
Akhmim (Egypt) cotton on wood and wire frame.
Body 183 cm high on a variable stand.

fig. 8.
Akhmim (Egypt) cotton on wood and wire frame.
Body 183 cm high on a variable stand.
Phoenix, 2016. Driftwood and Persian carpet wool, 41 x 18 x 16 cm. Rising firebird (Phoenix), whose pedestal caught fire. She was found stranded on Winchelsea Beach, 21 August 2016, carrying the message: ‘You were born with wings, why do you prefer to crawl through life?’ (Rumi).

Associated with the Sun, the legendary Phoenix obtains new life by arising from the ashes of its predecessor.

fig. 9.

fig. 10.

fig. 11.

Prisoner of Love, 2016. Wool, acrylic and lurex on cotton canvas sewn into ash frame, 80 x 100 cm.

‘Love’? Winnie the Pooh: You don’t spell it, you feel it! (AA Milne)

Nymphomaniac: A woman as obsessed with sex as an average man (M. McLaughlin)

Cave Canem: My works are erotic displays of mental confusions (Marlene Dumas)

We are all clitoridian (Carla Lonzi)

The clitoris is the only organ purely for pleasure (Aristophanes)

Women who seek to be equal to men lack ambition (Timothy Leary)

Eros again now, the loosener of limbs troubles me, Bittersweet, sly, uncontrollable creature (Sappho)

She was so much like a foreign language, that you’ve learned but never understood (John Cale)

Venus of Urbino (Tiziano Vecellio, 1538).