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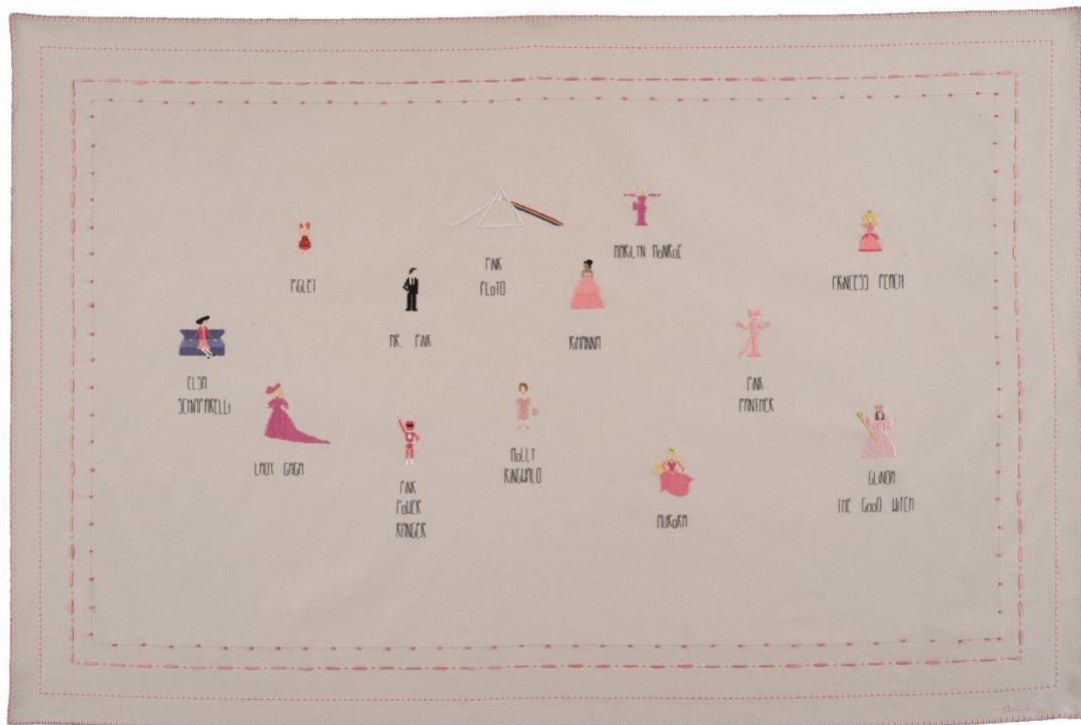
GALLERY

WIDEWALLS

Elsa Hansen Oldham's Whimsical Hand-Embroidered Textiles Take Over Berggruen Gallery

Exhibition Reviews

July 29, 2023 | Kame Hame



The American artist **Elsa Hansen Oldham** has successfully combined the long tradition of American needlework with the digitized aesthetic resembling eight-bit Atari characters, creating her own unique artistic expression that has garnered the attention of art lovers and critics alike.

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Oldham's current show, *Entitled to Love* at Berggruen Gallery, features 21 new fiber works divided into two major series. The artist explores the complexity of passion, human connection, and love in this first solo exhibition with the gallery.



Elsa Hansen - Kentucky Quilt (detail), 2020-23. Gold, silver, silk and velvet hand embroidery on cotton and linen. Hand quilted on cotton; 62 x 43 inches

Intriguing Pairings

Once Elsa Hansen Oldham discovered embroidery, she decided there was nothing more important, not even school, so she began skipping classes in favor of doing needlework. The artist's unique artistic expression was inspired by **Craig Robinson's famous Minipops** - the 8-bit designs of people; as well as works by Agnes Martin, Gunta Stölzl, and Gee's Bend quiltmakers.

When asked how she chooses her subjects, the artist is often unable to explain. The entire creative process is highly meditative, and much of her subjects, whether they are from **pop culture, mythology, history, or politics**, seem to come straight from her unconsciousness. The exceptional storytelling which is ever present in her works is accomplished by simply placing two people together. In most cases, these pairings have no real connection, but together they immediately capture the eye, such as the pairing of Pee-wee Herman and Marie Antoinette or Coco Chanel paired with Shelley Duvall.

10 HAWTHORNE STREET
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94105
TEL 415 781 4629
INFO@BERGGRUEN.COM
BERGGRUEN.COM

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Elsa Hansen - Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, 2023. Silk, velvet and gold hand embroidery on linen; 13 x 13 inches

Two Series

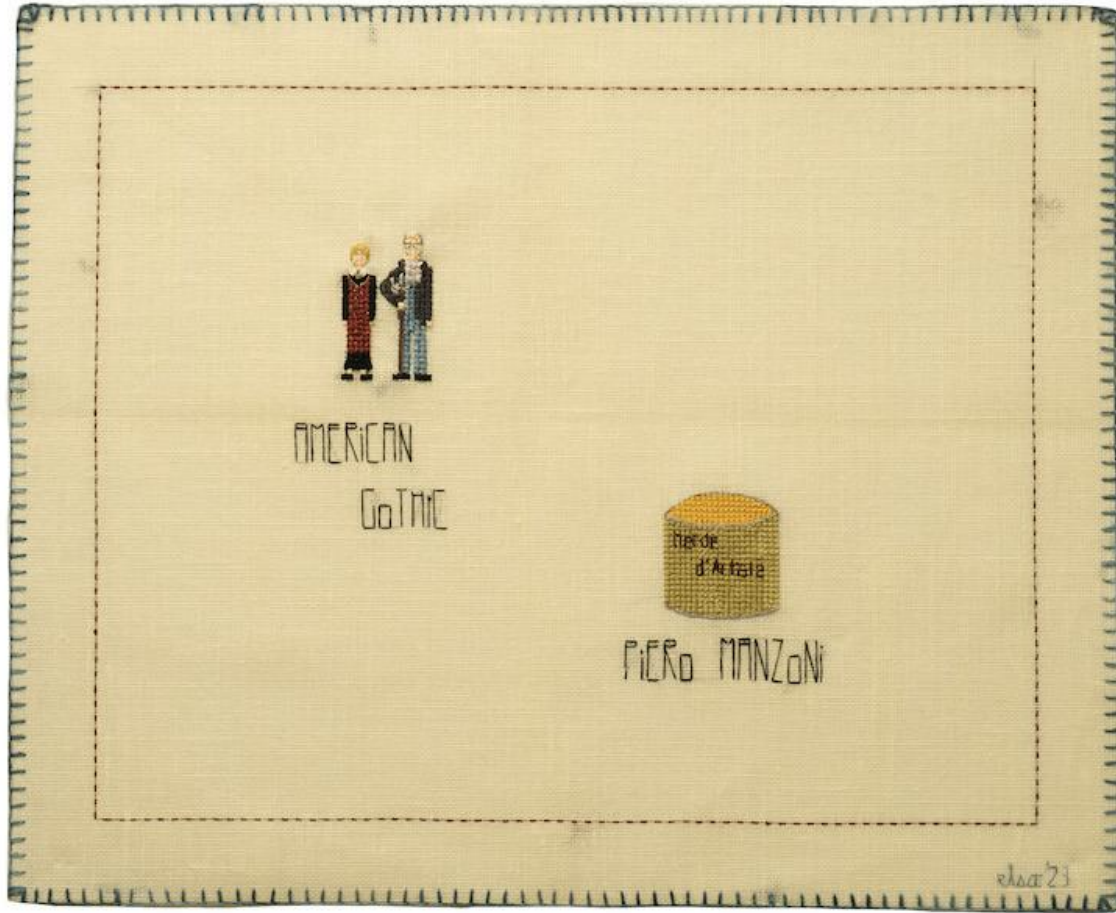
The exhibition *Entitled to Love* showcases two distinct series, each one unique in its exploration of desire and humanity. The first grouping of works encompasses the large textiles featuring **a solitary princess at their center**. These pieces were created through the artist's collaboration with her 4-year-old daughter. These hand-dyed textiles examine the duality of these archetypal characters - while they are uplifting, each one carries undertones of problematic narratives.

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The second series features an unlikely pairings of iconic characters. By skillfully combining them, Hansen Oldham has created provocative scenes that comment on various subjects, from contemporary culture to relationships and current events. The playful humor present in these compositions stands in contrast to the darker themes.

Hansen Oldham greatly enjoys using fine materials when hand-stitching intricate fiber works, including velvet, silver, silk, and gold threads, on hand-dyed Eastern European linen.



Elsa Hansen - American Gothic, 2023. Silver and silk hand embroidery on linen; 17 x 20 1/2 inches

Entitled to Love at Berggruen Gallery

Elsa Hansen Oldham has successfully utilized the expressive quality of **embroidery as a medium for contemporary storytelling**. Her textile works that span a diverse range of sizes, from large-scale quilts to small creations, all feature intriguing pairings. Some are paired just because they share names, such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Buffy Sainte-Marie; while others have similar injuries, like Greg Louganis' 1988 dicing accident and John F. Kennedy's assassination. Each artwork in the show features connections that resonate with our shared humanity and the evolving fabric of society.

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The exhibition *Entitled to Love* at Berggruen Gallery in San Francisco will be on view **until September 8th, 2023**.

Featured image: Elsa Hansen - Pinked, 2023. Velvet, gold, silver, and silk hand embroidery on cotton 33 1/2 x 50 1/2 inches /