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GALERIE

HANDMADE BY

**Faig Ahmed, Margret Eicher, Seet van Hout,
Victoria Martini, Yukiko Terada and Patricia
Waller**

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13 January – 18 March, 2017

Opening: Friday, 13 January 2017, 7–9 p.m.

In the context of the Berlin Fashion Week 2017, the Galerie Deschler is presenting an exhibition of various artists whose work involves fabrics. In presenting various international positions of textile art side by side in their commonalities and differences, it is hoped that a new light can be shed on the individual approaches and their strategies of creating meaning through art, as well as the way they navigate the territory of differing cultural contexts and traditions.

EXHIBIT
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NOTES

Textiles almost always have a direct connection to the human body, who is clothed in fabrics for most of his life, with only brief exceptions, and whose skin is in constant contact with textiles. As a second skin to humans, fabrics have always played a large role in the history of culture and taken on a host of associations, whether in the most traditional customs or in the most abstract flights of fancy in high fashion. Every one of us shares the haptic experience of this intimate connection of fabrics with the body, which in turn has always prevented textiles to be wholly subsumed under conceptual abstractions.

The techniques employed, however, whether weaving, embroidery, sewing or crochet work, still to this very day are tainted by the somewhat derogatory classification as "mere" handicraft. On the one hand this is an expression of existing social structures and hierarchies of power between different social classes, as well as between the genders. On the other hand it certainly is also owed to the fact that the production process is time-consuming and laborious, and often based on monotonous repetition. In employing these techniques in the context of "high art", the artists in this exhibition always already and quite deliberately play with different levels of the construction of meaning. On the one hand the slow and laborious nature of these of the production process stands in opposition to still dominant demands for efficiency and economy. On the other hand the handmade, particularly in the realm of the arts and crafts and in conjunction with a growing demand for "deceleration," has these days attained an exalted status that was quite unthinkable before the industrial revolution and its introduction of automatization in production. In consciously setting it apart from mass production by virtue of being handmade and exhibiting its characteristic small and individualizing deviations, it has entered the realm of luxury consumption and status: hand-woven carpets are far more expensive than those that are machine-woven. This, however, can in turn create a problem when transposed to the realm of art. For here the element of competence in the craft has experienced a strong devaluation in favor of the purely conceptual since the beginning of modernism, to the degree that competence in the craft is often frowned upon as competence in nothing but the craft, and suspected of tainting, in its seductive beauty, the pristine purity of the conceptual component of a work of art. This blurring of the line between art and the

crafts thus not only questions one of the central tenets of contemporary art, but also raises uncomfortable questions concerning the real but ideologically oftentimes unacknowledged intertwining of art and commerce.

The artists shown in this exhibition all, in their very own respective ways, use the medium of textile handicraft in a subversive fashion. The traditional medium is reinterpreted in surprising ways. Thus managing to introduce, like with a Trojan horse, controversial topics in the deceptive guise of harmlessness.

Faig Ahmed, originally from Aserbaidschan, experiments with the materials and colors of his native country's tradition of carpet weaving, as well as with Indian embroidery. In transplanting carpet weaving into the context of contemporary art, however, as well as in including unexpected and incongruent visual elements into his works, he effects a clear and oftentimes unsettling break with the tradition he is referencing. On some level his works could be read as symbols of the contradictions and conflicts between established local traditions and Western modernity superimposed onto it by globalization, where Western cultural elements are often reduced to their most superficial and stereotypical features. Conversely these works can also point to how these traditions are frequently appropriated by the West in just as much a superficial manner, when they are eclectically taken out of their original context and turned into mere lifestyle accessories.

In her large-format tapestries the German artist **Margret Eicher** combines the original baroque form with well-known images culled from the mass media of today's information society. The tapestry "The Five Virtues" shown in this exhibition is based on the photo shoot of five actresses (Teri Hatcher, Felicity Huffman, Marcia Cross, Eva Longoria Parker, Dana Delany) shown in clichéd postures and published in various print media: fashionable outfits emphasizing femininity, countered by the tools of the busy housewife. Feather duster, vacuum cleaner, baking plate and rubber gloves in fact recall the fixed attributes of saints in the history of Christian art. In a sumptuous courtly ambience they are flanked by two male figures in the poses of baroque noblemen. These are taken from the original tapestry image, but their heads have been replaced by those of two male pin-up models, also shown in the inserts of the bordure as housewife boy-toy fantasies. Societal façade and erotic fantasy function as mutual commentary. The title "The Five Virtues" was chosen in reference to titles of classical painting with their self-image as philosophical commentary. The reduction of originally seven virtues to five is owed to the "Big 5" personality traits (extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, low neuroticism) that, according to current claims of behavioral psychology, are advantageous for success in society and career.

The works of Dutch artist **Seet van Hout** quite literally get out of line and are striking in their delicate aesthetics and their open forms. Van Hout often installs her works directly in the space by attaching threads and fabrics on walls and the floor and thus creating three-dimensional drawings in space as poetic and airy installations. The title of her work shown here, "Memory Lace," already points to the enormous associative capability of the human imagination, ceaselessly creating networks of subtle connections between the most varied memory images and weaving complex nexuses from these.

In her series "Of the Fading of Images" the artist **Victoria Martini**, born in Brussels, uses canvases as the ground for subtle embroidery, which in its very reduced, "faded" color scheme visually approaches classical reliefs. The medium of embroidery allows her to depict breaks in a way that goes almost unnoticed, for the lovely nature of the handicraft only belatedly

reveals the fact that her subject matter is the destruction of human living spaces through natural catastrophes. Whether this can be read as a commentary on the fact that we so often chose to ignore or repress the effects of humanly cause climate change and ensuing natural catastrophes and destruction, remains up to the viewer.

The Berlin-based Japanese artist **Yukiko Terada** creates permeable and multilayered objects from textiles, exploring metamorphoses, transformations and the cycle between growth and destruction. She thus illustrates in a compelling fashion the manifold and fluid interactions taking place between man and his natural and cultural environment. In this she clearly positions herself in the cultural tradition of her native Japan, but gives these themes a very unique and personal spin. For this exhibition she has created a cycle of seasons, again foregrounding the element of change and transmutation from one form to another.

Santiago de Chile-born German artist **Patricia Waller** has been working with the medium of crochet work ever since art school. Highly charged situations are shown in deceptive harmlessness and succeed in surprising established habits of perception. The sheer disproportion between technique and subject matter in Waller's works is simply captivating, they convey elements of art and reality, past and present, idyll and comfort. The coziness of her technique can only briefly delude us with regard to the seriousness of the subject matter: the fun quickly turns to discomfort, and thereby often provokes incredulous bursts of laughter. Patricia Waller, whose work has last month received enthusiastic reception in Shanghai, curated this exhibition.