

Narelle Jubelin

Marlborough Contemporary, London

BY LILY LE BRUN



Narelle Jubelin, *As Yet Untitled* (Christopher Wool, 1992), 2014, cotton on silk petit point, 28 x 22 cm. Courtesy the artist and Marlborough Contemporary, London; photograph: Francis Ware

Before her first solo show at Marlborough Contemporary, 'Specific Objects, Common Parts', in 2013, Narelle Jubelin commented that she had learnt, over time, that 'whatever I place into the public realm, each person takes what they want as a thread and they run with it'. This idea is woven into the fabric of her latest exhibition at the gallery, 'Flamenco Primitivo'.

Thread is not just a metaphor here; 14 embroidered pictures hang in a straight line across two walls of the exhibition room, punctuated at irregular intervals by five bronze sculptures. The modest scale of the sewn works draws you in: these are concentrated objects, dense with skill, time and visual associations. The title of each piece is prefixed 'As Yet Untitled', as though waiting for viewers to decide their own meanings.

Jubelin uses sewing like some use drawing, copying images found online and in books in meticulous, small and densely packed cotton stitches. In the sewn works on display, all made between 2013–15, Jubelin has chosen to represent artworks associated with international modernism. She begins with a black and white rhombus by Mira Schendel dating from 1963 and ends with a rendition of a 1959 work by the American sculptor Lee Bontecou. The motif of the hole recurs – clearly evoked by some works, such as the reproduction of Christopher Wool's *Head* (1992), implicit in others, like a Ree Morton piece that states: 'I'll only read you the good parts.'

As they reproduce modernist tropes in a traditionally domestic craft form, these sewn works could be read as feminist reclamations. Indeed, many of the works Jubelin has selected are by women half-forgotten by mainstream art-historical narratives. But the medium itself underlines some of the themes represented pictorially: embroidery, like much of modern design, is constructed on a grid and reliant on pattern, repetition and modular structures. And there are holes, of course, in the silk gauze that is scaffolding for the thread.

Jubelin's work reflects not just on the reproduction of images and artworks, but the ways in which these transmit cultural narratives. *As Yet Untitled* (Pablo Picasso, 1932) (2014) was inspired by a detail of a Picasso painting found on a catalogue cover for MoMA's 1984 exhibition "'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art". The motif's convoluted journey from paint to embroidery via print – with the museum as a catalyst – is an illustration of the ways in which artistic movements can spread across the world. It also hints, albeit subtly, at the conflation of Spanish and non-Western cultures alluded to in the exhibition's title.

Jubelin, an Australian who has lived in Madrid for the last 20 years, channels the idea of global pathways in many of the works on display. The bronze sculptures that hang alongside the embroideries are casts of packaging designed to secure items in transit. Though symbols of physical movement, they are also visually reminiscent of modernist concrete buildings with their block-like forms, neutral colours and rough texture. Titles such as *Untitled 3 (Granada)* (2016) reveal the places where the artist found the packaging – Granada, Madrid, São Paulo, Sydney – and their global reach reflects not only the artist's travels, but also the way in which design weaves its way across the world and into different forms.

Jubelin seems acutely aware of her physical environments and the histories inherent in them. For 'Specific Objects, Common Parts', in 2013, the artist embroidered copies of images of Marlborough's viewing room that she found in the gallery archive. Here, she has again picked up on the heritage of the space by giving some of the works linen mounts, echoing the way the gallery commonly framed pictures in the past.

The show also contains two brief videos documenting moments from the artist's life. *Flamenco Primitivo* (2015), shows a guitarist and singer miming a Flamenco song, while the second, *Queen* (2012), is of a female aboriginal artist from the Tiwi Islands off Australia, shown dancing and weaving. At first, the films seem largely irrelevant – a noisy interruption of a quiet, concentrated exhibition. But, slowly, the connection becomes apparent: they are snapshots of the cultures that combine in Jubelin and speak through her pieces, giving an insight into the many threads of personal experience with which her work runs.