



META STRUYCKEN, *STITCH!*, A REVIVAL OF DOMESTIC TEXTILE CRAFTS, 2022–2024, APPROX. 35 × 20 CM, EACH

PHOTOS TAMAR OTTINK

META STRUYCKEN  
*STITCH!*

JUNE 15—AUGUST 31, 2024  
EENWERK AMSTERDAM

OPENING SATURDAY JUNE 15, 2024, 17–19 H  
CURATED BY JULIUS VERMEULEN AND JOSÉ TEUNISSEN

EENWERK presents the installation *STITCH!* by Meta Struycken

*'Garments should no longer be regarded as fleeting passersby, but as part of our lives.'*  
(Meta Struycken)

With the exhibition *STITCH!* designer Meta Struycken shows the visual power of simple domestic craft techniques that have been used for centuries as a means to repair and reuse clothing. *STITCH!* is an installation of seventy-five clothing objects, in mini dimensions, all worked with traditional techniques such as quilting, appliqué, felting, embroidery, stitching and darning. In a world where damage from climate change due to Fast Fashion is unprecedented, they are a plea for concern, sustainability and craftsmanship. Struycken takes us on an urgent quest for a way in which we – just as in the past – can cherish our clothes rather than discard them lovelessly after wearing them a few times. 'I think that traditional domestic crafts can provide our wardrobes with lasting beauty,' she says. From the perspective of the art studio, with a focus on texture, form and composition, she gives these age-old crafts a fresh, universal and timeless look.

### **Living with clothes**

Domestic craft techniques were, until well into the 1980s, a skill taught to girls at school. Mending, tailoring and transforming clothes was considered normal, since ready-to-wear clothing was expensive. Being able to make, repair or knit your own clothes was an everyday household activity. Also those who hired a seamstress were closely involved in the creative process. They chose the fabric, the buttons and the desired pattern themselves, thereby clearly having input on the garment's precise appearance. From day one the clothes were personalized according to one's own taste and identity, and they would then remain in the family. What became too small would go to a younger member of the family or be reworked into something else. Because of this, our connection with clothing was naturally intense and close: we lived with our clothes, nurtured them with affection and appreciated the way they conformed to the shape of our bodies.

'Fashion seems to have lost its ancient luster, now that it's being associated to a large degree with a throwaway culture and an excessive urge to consume goods,' concludes Struycken. Due to the Fast Fashion system that manages to put new trends on the market increasingly rapidly and cheaply, we have begun to regard clothing as a disposable product, which is worn on the average merely seven or eight times in Europe. Per person we generate, at this point, fifteen kilos of textile waste every year; and of that not even one percent is recycled or reused. This goes beyond the planet's limits and makes it obvious that the current fashion system, based on growth and speed, cannot continue.

## **Timeless objects**

Taking this as her point of departure, Struycken began to work on simple forms of small-scale clothing with a range of handcraft techniques. This gave rise to proposals for the way 'real' garments could be enriched, enhanced or repaired. 'Traditional domestic craft techniques allow you to look back, but at the same time look forward and define new values that are about awareness, nurturing, transparency, quality, coherence and genuine sustainability,' says Struycken, who posted her project on Instagram during the Covid period. In order to ensure that the clothing would have a timeless look rather than a seasonal one, as in fashion, she adopted the universal visual elements of the art studio as a starting point. With modernist abstract principles – such as form, texture, composition and division of the surface, a play of fine lines or perhaps expressive brushstrokes – she renewed the aesthetic of traditional handcraft. It turns the mini objects of clothing into timeless and stunning artifacts.

## **Loved clothes last**

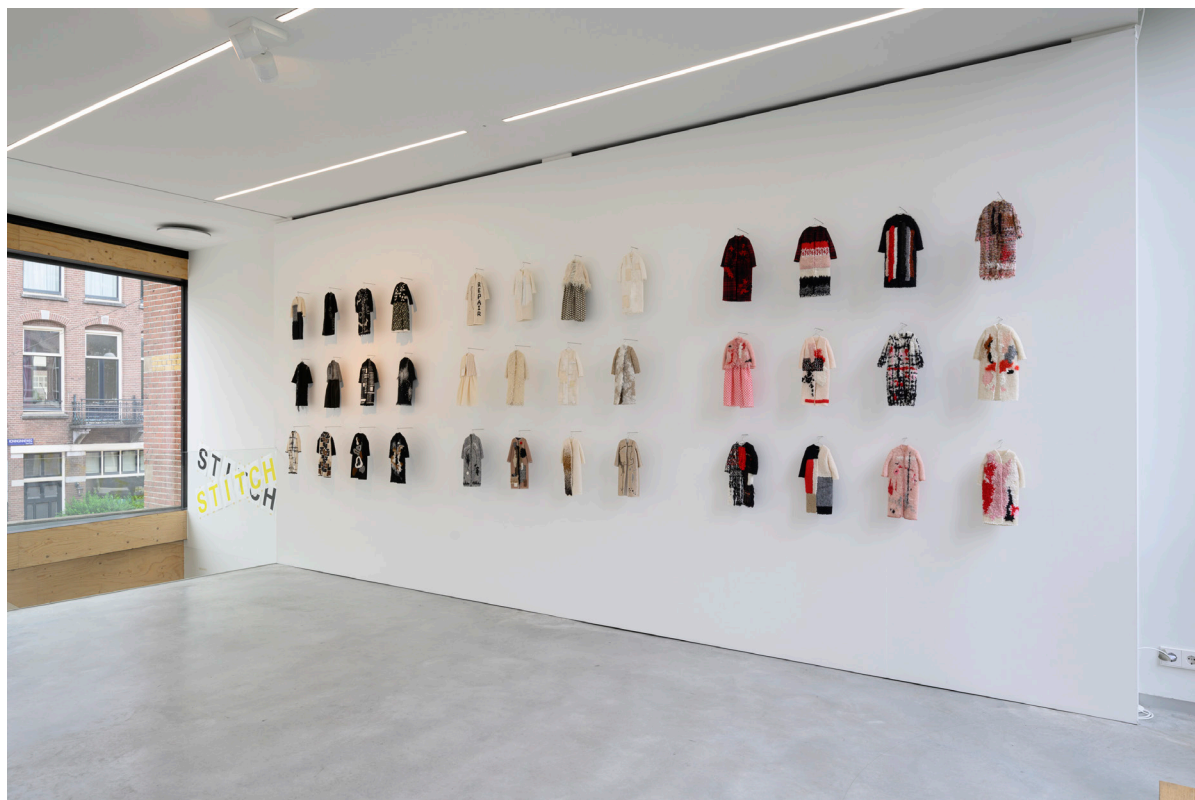
But at the same time *STITCH!* is a manifesto that asks for another way of dealing with our clothing, as it presents us with concrete ideas for getting started with our own wardrobe. With handcrafts you can not only extend the life of a garment; in the process you build a loving relationship with it, too.

The project links seamlessly with a broader movement of reassessing clothing, its connection with nature and a focus on the creative process. An important part of this circular thought aims to extend the lifespan of a garment via an R: repair, redesign, revive, reuse or rethink. In the *STITCH!* project a few of these slogans are beautifully embroidered and worked into the mini articles of clothing. 'The endless variety of wonderful materials and techniques offer endless possibilities for developing one's own DIY aesthetic and creating clothing that you really love. More importantly, it transforms us from passive consumers into active makers.' Struycken strongly believes in an intercultural dialogue where traditions, values and techniques from various cultures are brought together in a network of creators throughout the entire world, as a means of bringing about a dialogue involving past and present and all sorts of cultures, traditions and values. This will determine how we dress ourselves in the future and consume those goods in a creative, new and sustainable manner.

*'Crafting clothes is a labour of love'*

Meta Struycken was trained at ArtEZ, University of the Arts in Arnhem. She has had her own fashion label, worked as a designer and trend forecaster for years, and was co-founder and chief editor of the trade magazine *newStyle*. After a versatile career in the world of fashion, she is now working on this project from her studio.





PHOTOS PETER COX

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