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DIANE MEYER



UK £6.50



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PROFILE





PIXEL PERFECT

Using hand embroidery to explore personal history and nostalgia Diane Meyer investigates photography's ability to supplant memory

Diane Meyer's work sits somewhere between embroidery and photography: she uses thread on photographs to enhance and obscure at the same time, and her finished works are pixelated by her perfectly matched, cross-stitched interventions. Sometimes her embroidery stitches are writ large – at other times it's hard to spot her analogue additions, they appear simply to communicate as areas of distortion in a digital photograph.

Diane studied photography as an undergraduate but in graduate school she took visual arts, which allowed students to work across many different mediums. She stuck with photography in the main: 'It was nice because the programme encouraged you to explore and try different things. So my thesis show had installation and sculpture and things like that.' After leaving education in 2002 she realised that she missed working with her hands but it wasn't until several years later, in 2011, that she picked up a needle in relation to her photography. She had found herself working with carpet squares, turning them into pixels and then turning the pixels into giant landscapes: 'I think subconsciously that is what led me into sewing, especially the pixel structures.'

Diane's first embroideries were worked on photographs she found; family snaps taken by her mother and family, as well as her own personal snapshots. This developed into the series 'Time Spent That Might Otherwise Be Forgotten'. Whilst working on it Diane was considering memory and photography's ability to supplant recollection; of the disjunct between actual experiences remembered and their photographic representations.

Left: Diane Meyer, *Former Guard Tower Off Puschkinallee*, 2013. 27cm x 34cm. Berlin series. Hand sewn archival ink jet print.

Above: *Bernauer Strasse II*, 2016. 13 x 15cm. Berlin series, Hand sewn archival ink jet print.

PHOTOGRAPHY: DIANE MEYER/COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND KLOMPCHING GALLERY

The artist is fascinated by the vast number of photographic images each of us has amassed since the advent of digital photography – and how these images remain stored on our devices and are rarely made tangible. She sees parallels between digital file corruption and forgetting: 'I was thinking about how family photographs show the same things because they're like curated collections of happy moments in life. I felt that covering the faces would make it more universal, like the images could be anybody's family photo album. But I also wanted it to be edited, sewing near the focal points of the image, the places where you would normally look at first. So that it would be disorienting.'

'Berlin', Diane's next project, grew out of an artist's residency she took in Germany. She had expected to continue work on her family photograph series whilst there, but found herself fascinated by the Berlin Wall, the remains and the effects of which she could still see: 'I love exploring cities. It's one of my favourite things to do. And looking around I was really struck by the Berlin Wall. I was 13 when it fell, and I distinctly remember watching it on the news and knowing that it was important. But then when I got into Berlin, I was so shocked by how little I actually knew about it.' She ended up following the whole 104 mile circumference of the original Berlin Wall and taking pictures of it – in the city and through into the suburbs. Diane found there was actual evidence of the wall in places – but also a huge psychological weight to the sites she photographed: 'In many images, the embroidered sections represent the exact scale and location of the former Wall, offering a pixelated view of what lies behind.'



Above: *Group I*, 2016. 18 x 23cm.

Time Spent That Might Otherwise Be Forgotten series.

Below: *Stairs, Bösebrücke*, 2016. 11.5 x 13cm. Berlin series.

1. *Bernauer Strasse (Strelitzer Strasse)*, 2012. 5 x 9cm. Berlin series.

2. *Disneyland I*, 2013. 18 x 13cm.

Time Spent That Might Otherwise Be Forgotten series.

3. *New Jersey II*, 2011. 11 x 15cm.

Time Spent That Might Otherwise Be Forgotten series.

4. *New Jersey I*, 2011. 11 x 15cm.

Time Spent That Might Otherwise Be Forgotten series.

5. *New Jersey XVI*, 2016. 11 x 15cm.

Time Spent That Might Otherwise Be Forgotten series.

6. *House, Wall Area Near Lichterfeld-Süd*, 2017. 13 x 18cm. Berlin series.

7. *Gleinicke Bridge*, 2017. 20 x 25cm. Berlin series.

8. *Potsdamer Platz*, 2017. 20 x 25cm. Berlin series.

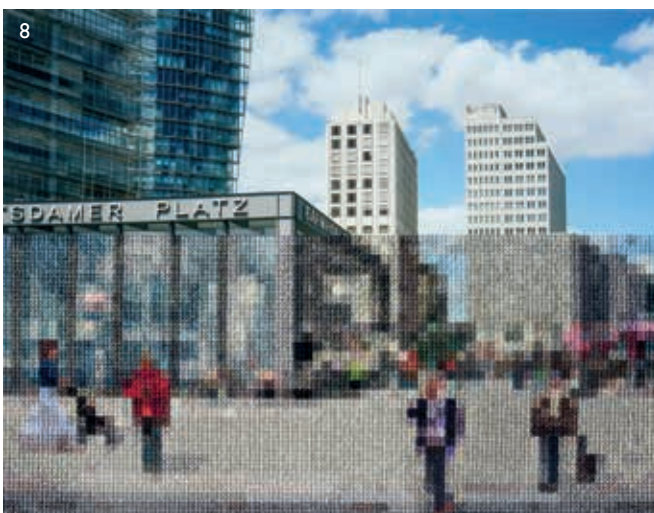
9. *Los Angeles I*, 2018. 15 x 20cm.

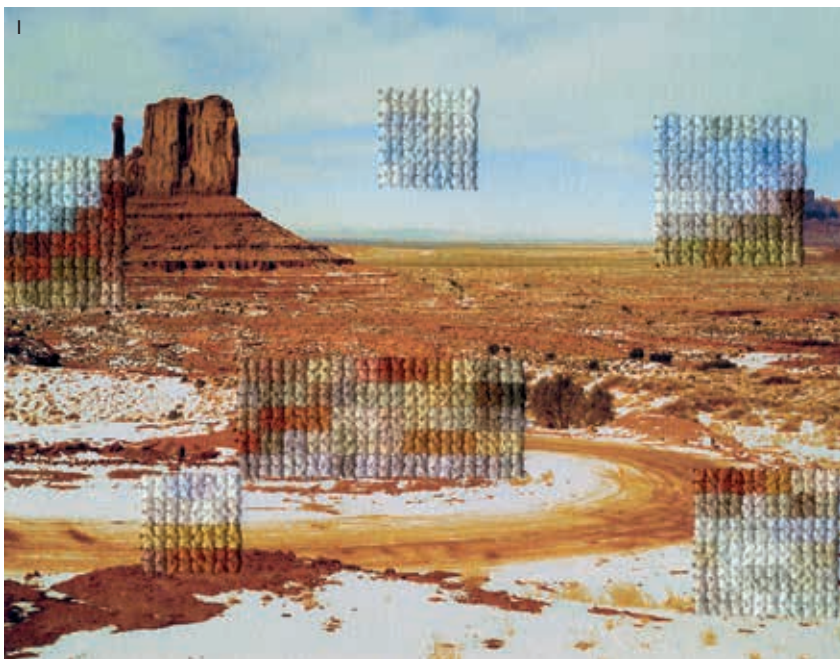
Time Spent That Might Otherwise Be Forgotten series.

All hand sewn archival ink jet print.



PHOTOGRAPHY: DIANE MEYER/COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND KLOMPCHING GALLERY





PHOTOGRAPHY: DIANE MEYER/COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND KLOMPCHING GALLERY



1. *The West I*, 2011. 15 x 20cm.
Time Spent That Might Otherwise Be Forgotten series.
 2. *New Jersey XII*, 2014. 15 x 10cm.
Time Spent That Might Otherwise Be Forgotten series.
 3. *New Jersey XIV*, 2016. 13 x 18cm.
Time Spent That Might Otherwise Be Forgotten series.
 4. *Interrogation Room of the State Secret Police, Hohenschoenhausen*, 2014. 13 x 18cm. Berlin series.
 5. *New Jersey IV*, 2012. 29 x 29cm.
Time Spent That Might Otherwise Be Forgotten series.
 6. *Brandenburg Gate*, 2015. 90 x 103cm. Berlin series.
 7. *Engeldamm*, 2019. 25.5 x 33cm. Berlin series.
- All hand sewn archival ink jet print.





She found herself working in a slightly different way on the 'Berlin series' too, planning the photographs around the embroidery, having meticulously calculated the ratio of stitch size to photographed image. Diane mounts each digital print on watercolour paper, which provides a stable base to stitch into. The ratio of the stitches is always the same, about 14 stitches per inch – she found if the stitches were bigger you could see the paper underneath; smaller, and the paper would fall apart. And so the size of her final pictures varies based on how much detail she wants to show or obscure. The smaller the photograph, the more abstract the embroidery appears. And the bigger the image, the more the embroidery looks like pixelation on a digital image: 'The Brandenburg Gate, for example. I knew I wanted that to be really big, because I wanted you to be able to see the people, all the tourists taking photos.' She has now finished the 'Berlin' series, marking that (appropriately enough) with an exhibition of all 43 works on the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Wall, at the Klompching Gallery in Brooklyn, New York. Diane is now back in the classroom, as it were. She has returned to the 'Time Spent That Might Otherwise Be Forgotten' subject of the class photo. She has extended it into a new series called 'Reunion', using school photos from Generation X, of which she is part. In the original 'Time Spent' series there was a photo of her brother's elementary school class. 'I really became interested

in that image, that everyone was posed very similarly in a very particular way. And then I started looking at other school photos, and started collecting those on eBay.'

The children in these photographs are the last generation before the advent of digital photography. In the new, found images, Diane shrouds the faces of the children and teachers with embroidery, obscuring their identities, allowing us to focus on the formulaic poses, the fashions, the awkwardness of the formal rituals of photography.

Digital photography today is she notes: 'more of a vehicle for impression management.' The selfie generations are so used to photography that the occasion of taking a photograph has less importance and is certainly less formalised than these stiff but endearing groups of 1970s children.

Diane Meyer has shown her work here at the Photographers Gallery in London, the Diffusion Photography Festival in Cardiff and at the British Textile Biennial 2019 and it would be fascinating to see more of it. The analogue and digital threads in her work are best appreciated up close in person. And perhaps she might then be tempted to take on some aspect of UK life and history, to bend our memories with her needle and thread – and her exacting photographic vision. 📍

Jane Audas

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