



"Textile is a new material to me; although a few years ago, I looked through some boxes in my parents' house and found these women's portraits I had made on my mom's sewing machine. They were dated 1985 when I was in 5th grade," — Helene Lund Den Boer

Helene Lund Den Boer latest series focuses on the female spirit through textiles

Much of your art depicts the female figure. How do you choose your subjects? And what initially attracted you to them?

HB: Looking back, I realize I have always portrayed women, even from a young age. I guess it's who I identify with, and it's been natural for me to tell stories through a female character.

My continuous aim is getting the figure right

and catching the light in the eye and the life in the person. When going to art museums, it's always art focusing around the human figure that has my interest. And then I guess I tend to gravitate towards female, contemporary artists.

RRM: Women sewed, did needlework, darned clothing, weaved, spun silk, etc. Is portraying women through textile art a metaphor or a statement?

HB: The portrayal of women in my textile art did not begin with that idea. It is a great question, and the connection is obvious, but I was drawn to the material, to begin with. I was curious to see what I could do instead of painting, and I wanted to challenge myself to a new medium. But I love that the materials and techniques have been linked to women's work for centuries; it feels like a feminine medium and the suitable medium in

Interview and portrait of the artist by Dennis Ray



She begins with a drawing on paper.



After tracing the image onto cloth, Boer sets to work stitching and adding fabric.



Den Boer finishes the piece by embroidering the hair and adding shading to the figure if needed.

this context.

RRM: Each of your subjects tells a story. How much research goes into understanding each subject to capture their femininity, secrets, and failures or success in a single image?

HB: It depends on the subject. In some cases, I feel it gives itself, and other times I have to work harder at it. Sometimes the magic doesn't happen as I hoped or expected, and I give up or put the piece aside for later. I look at my works as a moment in a larger narrative, which belongs to the viewer. And it fascinates me to hear people's different interpretations and responses to my work.

RRM: You grew up in Denmark, a country I'd love to visit; it has lots of rich art history with artists like Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg, Constantin Hansen, and more recently Carl-Henning Pedersen, to name but a few. Was art a substantial part

of your childhood? Were your parents both

artists?

HB: No, my parents are not artists, although both are very creative in each their way. And both are interested in art.

I grew up in the 1980s on the Danish west coast, close to the North Sea. It was a very artistic environment, and I remember going to local art exhibitions with my parents from a very young age. I loved it. My mom noticed my interest in drawing and asked around for art teachers. I started taking art classes in the home of a local artist when I was nine years old. She was an extraordinary person, and I think of her often.

Being let into her world has taught me so much - not just about art techniques but about life, history, and culture. Her house was magic, full of stories, heirlooms, and exciting people. Theater and music were also vast in the area, but I realized very early on that my main interest was painting and drawing.

RRM: Your husband recently retired from the



Finished: "Studio 54" by Helene Lund Den Boer, textile, 18" diameter



"Spectator" by Helene Lund Den Boer, textile, 28"x19"



Den Boer uses thread as here paintbrush.



A work in progress.

US Air Force, and you spent many years living all over, from the UK to Guam to cities in the US. Has experiencing different cultures, meeting artists from various backgrounds influenced your art?

HB: Yes, most definitely. Every new place gave me a different space with a new angle and a new view of the world. The differences between the cultures we were thrown into can't be overlooked. It feels like each new environment has added another layer to my work, and it has pushed it in new directions I could never have imagined.

I have been lucky to have some improvised workspace, no matter where we were. It felt like a substantial base, a home for my creativity. My first "studio" was a utility room in an apartment building in Tacoma, WA overlooking the Puget Sound. Next one, a tiny bedroom in a condo in New Jersey, with a parking lot outside my window. And then, on Guam, I worked in a tiled room with big windows, palm trees, and iguanas sunning themselves right outside.

I feel incredibly privileged to have been able

to move around so much - living and creating in such different places. In Hendersonville, where



we have "landed," my studio is on the first floor and is open and well lit, with trees outside my window, and there's room for all of my materials. I feel absolutely at home in this studio. Sometimes

I think of my younger self, drawing in my room in the windy western part of Denmark - she would never have dreamt of this.

RRM: You recently started this textile series. What mediums did you work in before? Is there an underlying theme throughout all of your prior artwork?

HB: I have gone through pencils, charcoal, oil paint, acrylic paint, and collage over the years. I quickly realized that oil paint dried far too slow for my liking, so I moved on to acrylics.

I especially enjoyed the addition of collage to the painting. Those two combined were the perfect way to express my ideas at the time.

Textile is a new material to me; although a few years ago, I looked through some boxes in my parents' house and found these women's portraits I had made on my mom's sewing machine. They were dated 1985 when I was in 5th grade. I brought them home with me, and they have hung in my kitchen ever since. I look at them every day, and I think they may (subconsciously) have inspired me to go back to this medium, which I

had only played around with a bit when I was 11.

Realizing my subject matter hadn't changed was quite interesting.

RRM: Talk a little about your textile work. Except for a few pieces, mostly everything is fabric.

HB: I work in two different styles within textile: larger, machine-sewn pieces that have some simplicity to them.

Then, during the pandemic, my daughter and I went to Denmark for a few months, and without my sewing machine, I had to work and think a little differently. That was the beginning of my hand-sewn portraits. They are a mixture of embroidery, appliqué, and a few have a shade of color pencils or acrylics. I feel these provide plenty of room for experimentation with materials and new opportunities.

The fabric has a much more subtle feel than the intense colors I used when working in acrylics and collage. But even

more so, it is an entirely different way to think of a painting; drawing with thread and using tulle fabric for shadows. This style is most probably the closest I have ever come to sculpting in my life.

RRM: What inspires you to create, and do you work on a set schedule?

HB: I try to stick to a fairly set schedule, but it always has room for changes. I take my daughter to school, have breakfast, play fetch with my dogs, and then settle in the studio for the day. One day I feel I get very far and find new exciting openings in a piece. And the next, it's like I took some steps back, and I wonder if the idea was even any good. And strangely, that is the essence of why it keeps being so interesting; the constant challenge.

When it comes to inspiration, I, like probably all artists, find my mind is always alert to anything of visual interest. I've experienced so many times that ideas can hit me anytime, anywhere. I may see a hummingbird in my garden, come across a vintage poster of a circus performer, or discover a beautiful fabric. Something suddenly could spark the beginning of something. I am not much of a sketch maker; instead, I use words describing ideas for a new piece. I collect words, sentences, images, cut-outs, and postcards. I'm always hunting for stories to tell, for great motives,

exciting narratives, and just the right color and texture combinations. I enjoy the hunt immensely, and it's always a glorious moment when idea, motive, and fabric come together.

END



A collection of new work to show at the Gallery at Flat Rock



"Fragmentation" by Helene Lund Den Boer, textile, 23" diameter

INFO

The Gallery at Flat Rock
THOUGHTFULLY CURATED ART AND CRAFT

"Stories on a String"

Meet Helene Lund Den Boer and see her process of hand-embroidered portraits on
Small Business Saturday
November 27, 2-4 pm

Flat Rock Square
2702-A, Greenville Hwy., Flat Rock
Wed-Sat, 11-4pm, Sunday, 11-3pm
or by appointment

galleryflatrock.com • (828) 698-7000
Artist: StoriesOnAString.com

IF YOU GO