

Alighiero Boetti, Alvaro Barrington, Zoë Buckman, Christina Forrer, Sonia Gomes, Jessie Homer French, Kimsooja, Piotr Uklanski, and Pae White

Thread Routes

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"I am a creator of rules. And once I've created these rules, these games, these mechanisms, I can play or make other people play."

- Alighiero Boetti, 1984

Nearly three decades since the passing of Alighiero Boetti, who counts among the greatest voices in the history of art of the 20th century, MASSIMODECARLO is delighted to announce a group exhibition dedicated to one of Boetti's most cherished artistic mediums: textile.

In an extraordinary convergence, *Thread Routes* – a title that pays homage to one of Kimsooja's eponymous 16mm film series – displays the artistic visions of Alighiero Boetti, Alvaro Barrington, Zoë Buckman, Christina Forrer, Sonia Gomes, Jessie Homer French, Kimsooja, Piotr Uklanski, and Pae White, fostering an "impossible" dialogue that defies the confines of time, space, and artistic styles. Textile emerges as the centrepiece, embodying the power of connection. It serves as both subject and object, unravelling the narratives, traditions, and personal stories of each artist. At the intersection of cultures, practices, and philosophies, *Thread Routes* pays homage to the timeless tradition of textiles, inviting contemplation on the threads that have woven our collective identity.

Through the intricate interplay of every weave and thread, the art of textiles transcends its material form and becomes a gateway, preserving the echoes of history and encapsulating the very essence of time and space. Rooted in this ancient craft, interwoven with delicate knots and bound by resilient threads, *Thread Routes* unfurls a tapestry of artistic expression.

Born in 1940, Boetti initially aligned himself with the Arte Povera movement before embarking on a distinct artistic trajectory of his own. In search of a transformative experience, he found solace and inspiration in the vibrant city of Kabul, Afghanistan. His first encounter with the city in 1971 marked the beginning of a profound connection that would shape Boetti's creative journey for the next 23 years until his passing in 1994. More than a mere traveller, Boetti immersed himself in the fabric of Kabul's culture, going so far as to establish the renowned One Hotel and making recurrent visits until the region was

unsettled by the Soviet invasion in 1979. It is Boetti's extraordinary collaborations with Afghan craftswomen that remain his most remarkable achievements, commissioning them to craft monumental embroideries that embody the essence of his artistic vision.

Drawing from the legacy of Boetti's collaborations with artisans, students, and craftspeople, as well as his insatiable curiosity, the contemporary artists featured in *Thread Routes* embody a shared inquisitiveness and fascination with both remote traditions and contemporary practices.

Among them, Sonia Gomes, Afro-Brazilian artist that weaves fabric to decolonise the past, reclaim the present, and celebrate her black heritage. Hailing from Caetanópolis, Brazil, Gomes's formative years were immersed in the enduring allure of textiles. With familial ties to a textile factory and the wisdom passed down by her grandmother, a skilled midwife and faith healer adept in binding and braiding, Gomes's upbringing nurtured a reverence for the art of needlework. Through a medley of fabrics, beads, and metal, her sculptures exude the vibrant dynamism of the rich history she seeks to revive. Her artistic mission resonates in the literal and metaphorical stitching and assemblage of communities and marginalised voices, giving prominence to the overlooked narratives of people of colour and women in her country.

Linked to family traditions is also the woven work of Alvaro Barrington. Born in Venezuela and raised between the Caribbean and Brooklyn, New York, Barrington discovered the art of sewing as a means to forge a connection with his Grenadian aunts. Inheriting a lineage of textile art, Barrington delves into the realm of sewing yarn to pay homage to and establish a bond with his heritage. In his contributions to *Thread Routes*, Barrington showcases strands of embroidery thread meticulously woven and stretching across a burlap canvas in a vivid array of colours. The earthy tones employed in his work evoke a sense of nature, while Barrington's artistic vision centres around "celebrating communities in the same manner they celebrate themselves." Kimsooja, a Korean-born artist, had a transformative encounter with textiles that shaped her artistic

journey. In 1983, while sewing a traditional bedcover alongside her mother, she felt an electric surge as the needle pierced the fabric. Reflecting on this, Kimsooja states, "the relationship of the needle to fabric is like my body to the universe." In *Thread Routes*, a title that holds personal significance for the artist and references her previous iconic film series exploring textile making and trade, Kimsooja presents her renowned cloth bundles known as bottari. These bundles embody a tradition of preservation and transition. Derived from the Korean word for "bundles," bottari historically served as a means to wrap cherished belongings in cloth, particularly during times of departure from one's homeland. Within Kimsooja's artistic practice, these cloth bundles are created from used bedcovers and symbolise the concept that homeland extends beyond physical boundaries, encompassing a state of consciousness and belonging.

Christina Forrer, a Swiss-born artist currently residing in Los Angeles, explores the realm of textile art with a strong grounding in classical tapestry and a nod to folk traditions. Through the use of cotton and wool, her weavings in *Thread Routes* offer a glimpse into her rich imagination and unique interpretation of human emotions. In her vibrant tapestries, fantastical characters traverse a vivid forest of colourful trees, symbolising the complexities of personal anxieties often hidden beneath the surface. The contrasting colours in her visuals mirror the inner turmoil experienced by individuals in their daily lives.

Zoë Buckman, a London-born artist, uses textiles as a medium to sew her personal traumas into her art. Her work explores the arduous experiences faced by women, including heartbreak, violence, miscarriage, and abandonment. By confronting these challenges, she aims to highlight the strength that women find within themselves. Buckman's works in *Thread Routes* include two hanging pieces that represent reconstructed uteruses. Through these pieces, she addresses issues such as abortion, contraception, and rape. Buckman captures the daily aggressions endured by women, utilising materials commonly associated with domestic settings and women's traditional roles.

Pae White, hailing from Pasadena, California, embraces an interdisciplinary approach in her art, utilising a diverse range of materials such as tapestries, ceramics, and tinfoil. Blending elements of design, craft, and architecture, she ventures into the realms of abstraction and surrealism. In *Thread Routes*, Pae presents a depiction of snails, seemingly tracing their path on the canvas and creating a map within a dystopian natural environment.

Another artist captivated by nature and fauna is the Californian Jessie Homer French. In *Thread Routes*, French's predominantly pink tapestry, crafted from fabric, thread, and ink, portrays a deconstructed natural landscape with a river flowing from top to bottom. Her work employs a simplified visual language and delves into themes of death, nature, and rural life. Drawing inspiration from her experiences in the American and Canadian landscapes, French internalises these surroundings, gradually translating them into her artistic expressions. Her works often evoke a dreamlike quality reminiscent of old memories or found images.

Piotr Uklański, a Polish artist, delves into societal, personal, and political themes, employing unconventional techniques to create compelling canvases. By incorporating materials like electroplated embroidery thread, cotton and polyester floss, rhinestones, gemstones, crystals, ceramic beads, and leather on velvet, he constructs a visual landscape reminiscent of a cosmic galaxy. Embracing creative freedom, Uklański transcends the confines of traditional art production, infusing his work with bursts of innovation across diverse mediums. Through this process, he establishes cultural connections and interweaves craftsmanship with aesthetics.

The works in *Thread Routes* intricately weave together continents and cultures, displaying the creative legacies of artists from diverse backgrounds.

Beginning in Southeast Asia with Boetti, traversing Europe with Forrer and Uklański, and finally arriving in the American West with White and French, these works, whether woven, spun, or knotted, bear witness to the artistry of a generation.