

**Berend Strik - 'Threads that Echo'**

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Berend Strik gave this rather enigmatic title to his first exhibition at the Hopstreet Gallery, but looking at his work, the meaning becomes clear.

Upon entering the first room, visitors are immediately struck by a large, colourful piece. A Pollock? No, a Strik! In this uninvited collaboration with Pollock, Strik explains his relationship with art history, with the 'great' masters – his icons.

The work is composed of photographic images that have been enhanced with textile techniques including threads, appliqués and different types of stitches. This fusion of photography and textiles is a rare combination. For Strik, who also creates drawings, ceramics and theatre, the choice of photography was based on one of its essential characteristics. "A photograph shows an image of something that once existed, but is no longer physically visible. It does not exist, yet it can be seen in a photographic image. Memories, references, descriptions, suggestions and spatial indications are all part of it." And the textile work opens that space up. The Pollock piece is part of an ongoing project Strik has been working on for several years, entitled *Deciphering the Artist's Mind*, in which he seeks to position himself in relation to art history and reflect on his role as an artist within society.

The Dutch artist Karel Appel, also one of Strik's icons, is also featured in *Deciphering the Artist's Mind*. Appel became notorious for saying "I just mess around a bit." In reality, Strik discovered, Appel allowed the unconscious to surface, but he knew exactly what he was doing. It is precisely this kind of hidden meaning that Strik seeks to uncover or highlight. To that end, he chose to cover certain areas with velvet (what is being concealed?) and to add all manner of stitches, holes, and fabric fragments. He didn't work on a photograph of a work by Appel but on a photo of a work that no longer exists because Appel himself painted over it. The original work was concealed under layers of paint, but was revealed through infrared light.

Strik deliberately avoids the word *embroidery* as he feels it steers the viewer's thoughts in a particular direction, which is precisely what he wishes to prevent. He wants the viewer to bring their own context to the work, and in doing so, reach something more universal. For Strik, the artist's studio is above all the place of genesis; the place where a work comes into being.

The series about mothers, presented in another room, also relates to the idea of origin. By concealing some elements and accentuating others, these works exude a subtle, intimate atmosphere that is universally recognisable. Strik aims to evoke a sense of shared memories, a feeling like 'oh yes, my mother...' and 'we all have a mother'.

In Strik's work, we can see very clearly how it was made; unlike, say, a painting where one can only guess at the suggestions. We can literally see the stitches, how a shape has been cut from fabric and sewn on, how the stitching varies from rough to precise. Sewing is an ancient technique; it's instantly recognisable to the brain. Human brains are equipped with mirror neurons that associate results with movements: splatters with a mess, a cut with a knife. Sewing is one of those gestures, deeply rooted in our cognitive process, going back to the beginnings of humanity and the earliest human societies. The combination of these two elements, photography and sewing, has a unique effect on the brain. On the one hand, there is the photograph, which feels deeply personal precisely because of its universality.

The image is then pierced by the familiar gestures of sewing. In our minds, these elements do not naturally belong together. It's precisely this sense of the unexpected that compels the viewer to keep searching for meaning. Strik's art is an active event: a process of manipulation, transformation, and reinterpretation of images and materials. It plays with revelation and concealment, with the human desire to understand, and the necessity of leaving space for the unknown. Altering photographs with a needle and textiles is a form of dissection and reconstruction.

“As a photographer I capture,” Strik explains, “and as an editor of the image, I liberate it. Only then does the photograph gain value as an autonomous entity with presence in the here and now.”

Marja Bloem, Director of the Egress Foundation

**Berend Strik** (born 26 April 1960, Nijmegen) is a Dutch visual artist who lives and works in Amsterdam. He studied at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam from 1985 to 1988. Between 1998 and 2000, he participated in the International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP) in New York.

Strik's work is held in various public collections in The Netherlands, including the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Fries Museum, Leeuwarden; Kunstmuseum, The Hague; Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen; Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede; Stedelijk Museum Schiedam; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; Schunck Museum, Heerlen; TextielMuseum, Tilburg; and Museum De Domijnen, Sittard.

His work is also represented in numerous corporate collections, such as Stichting Kunst & Historisch Bezit; ABN AMRO; Achmea Art Collection; AkzoNobel Art Foundation; AMC Art Collection; Bouwfonds Kunstcollectie; Kunstcollectie De Nederlandsche Bank; LUMC Art Collection; Ahold Collection; BPD Art Collection; and the Rabo Art Collection.

His work is currently on display in the group exhibition ‘Things I’ve Never Seen Before’ at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. It is a selection from the donation made by gallery owner and collector Fons Welters, who donated a series of exceptional works to the museum in 2022. The exhibition runs until 19 October 2025.