

THE TEXTILE ART MAGAZINE

embroidery



Also
Craftivist
Collective's
**SARAH
CORBETT**
Anna
Gravelle
Aran
Illingworth
Abigail
Booth

Lisa Smirnova
LIFE ILLUSTRATED

UK £6.50
05
9 771477 372037



Lisa Smirnova models her own hand embroidered illustrations. PHOTO: ANISA KUZNETSA

Life illustrated

DISCOVER THE WORK OF THE RUSSIAN ILLUSTRATOR & EMBROIDERER LISA SMIRNOVA

The dramatic embroidery of Lisa Smirnova possesses a life force all of its own, thanks to its rich kaleidoscope of colour and movement. The key to understanding this artist's practice is through her expressive drawing. Fearless marks and vibrant colour conjure images full of energy and emotion that are reminiscent of the dynamism of Fauvism. 'Usually I'm exploring myself in my art work, looking into my fears, trauma, dreams and the memories of my childhood. I like the process of diving into my feelings and thoughts. I like trying to find a graphic form to my feelings.'

For this artist, drawing is a kind of therapeutic practice – a way to escape into another reality. The thing is that I'm drawing all the time, and changes in my illustrative techniques are mirrors of my inner changes. I'm always growing and my artistic style reflects this. Almost every one of my non-commercial artworks illustrates one of my life periods. Probably this is why it's so difficult for me to let them go.

As long as Smirnova can remember, she's been practicing art in different forms. 'I grew up in an artistic family. There were always a lot of materials for drawing at home and my parents supported me in my artistic experiments. I liked to draw, to knit, to work with textiles and clay sculpting. Later I improved on my skills in art school.' Today, at only 28, she has established a career as an illustrator who's in demand thanks to her unique approach to working expressively with textiles and embroidery.

Smirnova, who lives and works in Moscow, originally graduated from the city's Institute of Theatre Arts, majoring in costume and set design. She had fun sewing and painting sets, but one day she decided to experiment further by drawing with embroidery. This new approach fired her imagination. While she still works in watercolour and acrylic, embroidery is now her main tool of expression.

'I'm inspired by the texture and the opportunity of spending time with textile materials. I can finish a painting in a few hours but embroidery takes much longer, so I can take my time and think deeper into the artwork. My embroidery has changed a lot in the last 10 years: the stitches have become longer and more voluminous, and I'm adding in extra elements. Recently I've started to work with volume, creating objects that are more sculptural. The illustrations look different as well. In my early work there was hardly any colour and now the main feature of my drawing is the complex colour combinations.'

As well as collaborating with brands and fashion designers, Smirnova also tutors those keen to learn expressive embroidery. 'I've got my studio where I work, and also teach my embroidery masterclasses. It's a light space located in the creative quarter in the centre of the city. The atmosphere is great because of the other artists and designers here. I get inspired around them. I teach two educational programmes at the moment, so I start and end my day by communicating with my students. During the day I work on my own stuff – drawing, sewing or on commissions through my agent.'

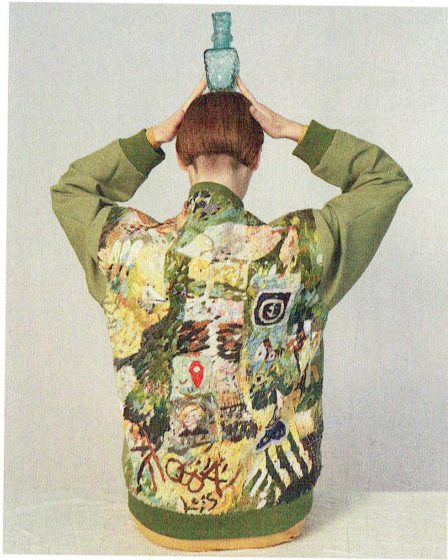
As for the future, Smirnova is working towards a solo exhibition: 'I'm working on a series of textile works using embroidery and appliqué. It's based on childhood memories of the toys I used to play with. I'd like to reproduce their images from an adult point of view. I'm trying to express my delight at the imagined world I've created with their help.'

When Covid-19 struck, Smirnova took her embroidery masterclasses and weekly workshops online and launched a new sketching class. While the classes are currently only available in Russia, she has found fans throughout the world via social media. No doubt, we expect it won't be long before we hear a lot more about this unique artist. 📍

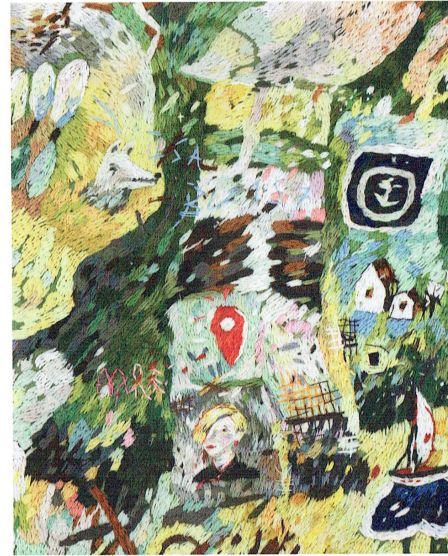
behance.net/lisa_smirnova



Lisa Smirnova, *Elijah*. Hand embroidered portrait.



Usually I'm exploring myself in my art work, looking into my fears, trauma, dreams and the memories of my childhood. I like the process of diving into my feelings and thoughts



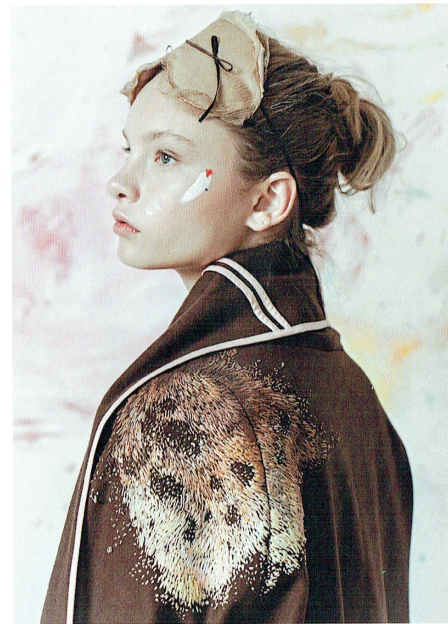
Embroidered Maps, 2018. A collection of five jackets from Lisa Smirnova's Studio Of Modern Embroidery. The hand embroidery was inspired by dreams of travel and fictional landscapes, resulting in abstract cartography of non-existent worlds featuring people and plants. The embroidery on each individual jacket took more than sixty hours to complete by hand.
PHOTOGRAPHY: ANNA ARCHEN



Above: Lisa Smirnova, *My Embroidered Year*. Two works from a series of embroidered illustrations completed in 2019.

Right: Lisa Smirnova's embroidery for the Artists at Home Collection for Olya Glagoleva's eco-friendly brand GO. The collection tells the story of a painter's home and studio. Each garment was a one-off with Lisa completing over 100 hours of embroidery on each. Fabrics included cashmere, organic Indian hemp and cotton, 1980s denim jeans and vintage towels sourced from London's Portobello Road, as well as plaid blankets from flea markets in Wales.

PHOTOGRAPHY: IRINA BORDO



I can finish a painting in a few hours but embroidery takes much longer so I can take my time to think deeper into the artwork