



# CHARLOTTE JOHANNESSON

11 February – 7 May 2023

The work of Charlotte Johannesson (b.1943, Sweden) represents a synthesis between the artisanal and the digital. Over the past 50 years, she has explored the formal and conceptual connections between the craft technology of the loom and the digital technology of computer programming. These instruments have been her tools for making images.

**There was great synchronicity between the two machines, which I thought I could use – on the computer there were 239 pixels on the horizontal side and 191 pixels on the vertical side, and that was exactly what I had in the loom when I was weaving.**

The art world has always enforced its own ideas about what art is and what it can be. Largely self-taught as an artist, Charlotte Johannesson has never played by its rules. Neither of her chosen tools were part of the fine art discourse of the time. When she trained as a weaver in the late 1960s, textiles were seen as a decorative craft. Johannesson was instead interested in textiles as a medium of protest.

**I knew all along that I wanted to make images via this medium... I wanted to create images, and also to use text or something else loaded with content – something kind of slogan-like. I was interested in the real world – in politics. This was the reality that struck me.**

The realities in her woven images reflect the social and political dissent of the time: 1960s counterculture, feminism, punk, and the militant activism of the 1970s.

In 1978, Johannesson traded her weaving *I'm No Angel* for an early version of the personal computer. At a time when they were mostly designed for processing data and text, Johannesson taught herself to program so she could make graphics for the screen. Many of these images were then plotted onto paper to produce prints, long before conventional printers were commonplace.

**If you wanted to use a computer to make images back then, you more or less had to figure everything out for yourself. There was no software program you could go out and buy, or anything like that... The process was much more hands-on than now. It all took a very long time – not unlike weaving.**

Johannesson's graphics drew on a wide repertoire of motifs, ranging from images culled from contemporary mass media to those that reflect a more personal sensibility. Some are strangely ethereal and almost abstract, while others anticipate our new dependence on communication technologies and the networked nature of the internet.

**I used to read the American magazine *Scientific American*, which was more in line with my interests – in various scientific research fields and in the future, generally.. As a source for new thoughts, I'm much more interested in reading about developments in science.**

In 1981, Johannesson and her partner Sture established the Digital Theatre, Scandinavia's first digital arts laboratory. Over the next few years, advances in computer technology made image-making much more accessible. For Johannesson, who was engrossed by the slow labour this process had demanded, it largely lost its appeal. By 1985, the Digital Theatre brought its activities to an end and Johannesson ceased making art with computers.

However, the continuity between textile and digital production continued to preoccupy her. Some 35 years later, she began a collaboration with the Danish graphic designer Louise Sidenius, who was interested in the idea of 'a circular type of production with no beginning and end'. Together, they speculated on whether 'this loop or spiral could be extended by weaving Charlotte's digital works'. The resulting textiles, which the artist has called 'woven digital graphics', translate some of the first computer images that she made in the late 1970s back into woven form using a digital loom.

This exhibition brings together textiles, digital graphics, plotter prints, paintings, screenprints and installation made over the past 50 years as a way of seeking out the internal coherence within Johannesson's practice. Image, pattern, colour, texture, material and language recur and play out across time and different mediums. The survey brings handmade paper works from the early 1990s, presented here for the first time, into conversation with new experiments in lace made especially for this exhibition. It proposes that these little-known facets of Johannesson's work might be understood in connection with the rest of her practice as a form of what she calls 'fibre art'. But more than anything, this exhibition underscores the politically and artistically radical nature of her work, positioning her as a forerunner of today's post-feminist and digital art.

## RELATED EVENTS

### Exhibition Walkthroughs

**Wednesday 15 February, 12pm**

Welcome walkthrough  
Explore the exhibition with our team and join us for refreshments and conversation in the café afterwards.

**12.30pm every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, starting 21 February**

Join one of our friendly Gallery Assistants for a short exploration of one of our exhibitions. For more details visit our website.

### Artist talk

**Saturday 11 February, 3–4.30pm**

Charlotte Johannesson in conversation with art historian and curator Lars Bang Larsen.

### Free Family Activities

During school holidays:

**14–16 February, 4–6 and 11–13 April**

Explore the exhibition's themes through making and play.

*Charlotte Johannesson* is curated by Nicole Yip, assisted by Niall Farrelly.

The exhibition is generously supported by the Swedish Arts Grants Committee; the Embassy of Sweden, London; Hollybush Gardens; and the Charlotte Johannesson Exhibition Circle: Eleanor Cayre and ArtAV.

For more information about the exhibition, related events and learning programmes, visit [nottinghamcontemporary.org](http://nottinghamcontemporary.org) or scan here:



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