

BIRKE GORM

Installation view, "gift anachronism," Vestjyllands Kunstmuseum, 2022



All images: Courtesy: the artist and Croy Nielsen, Vienna

Birke Gorm (*1986) is no less painstakingly abundant in entwining variety and subtlety in her work. Her material sources, though, are exclusively poor: She gathers stones, branches, cartons, fabrics, brick, nails, keys, and so many other metal scraps, wandering the streets in search of residue spit out from the flow of goods, jetsam worthy of a second life. See the loose fabrics arranged like clothes in "terms and conditions" (MuseumsQuartier, Vienna, 2024): The floor filled with shiny can ends, six folded jute sacks – each placed on the back of a gray plastic pallet – are covered with nails, terracotta pieces, and stones, among so much else. They are set piece by piece in neat patterns like devotional objects, juxtaposing the rawness of the materials with the artist's careful handling; despite all the trash, the installation looks like a place of worship. Gorm's dedication to the outdated and outcasted,

the useless and worthless, exudes a tenderness not only touching, but

sedition. In a world run on profit, optimization, and novelty, what and who deserves to be attended to?

In her neatly organized studio, surrounded by containers full of found or cheaply bought goods, she explains to me that weaving with scrap has historically been used in times of economic instability to provisionally patch up holes in shopping bags. Gorm's use of jute, now a hallmark of her work, captures her sensibility towards gendered structures and roles: "Jute sacks, as references to agriculture, are interesting to me in relation to the emergence of the concept of private property or the prerequisite for monogamy – a system in which men could earn, own, and inherit, but women could not. The roots of this attitude are reflected in the shift from a feudalistic to a capitalist system: Production for the

View of "dead stock," MAK Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna, 2023



Photo: Kunst-dokumentation.com

View of "to raise, to fold," Croy Nielsen, Vienna, 2023



Photo: Kunst-dokumentation.com



View of "Gib dein Bestes!" Museum Sønderjylland, Tønder, 2024

Photo: David Sjöerholm

The slow work of crafting and collecting evolves around mindfulness and time.

market was defined as a value-creating activity, while reproductive labor was considered worthless from an economic perspective, leading to the invisibility of its economic importance and function."

It is exactly the "inferior," "female" activities that the artist moves to the center of her work. In her show "to raise, to fold" (Croy Nielsen, Vienna, 2023), Gorm presented a series of aprons hand-sewed from leftover fabrics she'd found in the drawers and boxes of hobby crafters. Hung upside down on the wall, the aprons tear loose from their purpose, reappearing like portraits of quirky personas. The colorful textiles are opulently adorned with loads of pockets that partly interlock, one birthing the next, finely corded

here and there to more small terracottas – a scrupulous attention to detail that doesn't obey a "rational" function, but dallies with surplus. Simultaneously, the pockets' eclectically playful shapes and patterns double as careful pictorial abstractions, attesting to a painterly sensibility in a work equal parts clothing, wall decor, and image. Where the apron has long stood for manual work – in foods and craft trades as much as domestic care – the pocket has marked out prestige and independence: European women, whose domestic obligations were supposed to prevent them from moving around extensively in public, only gained the pocket in the 17th century (even today, their trousers hold laughably less than men's).