



Artist Wang Ye's extraordinary embroideries bridge generations and traditions

'I absorb stories as feelings and weave them into my work,' they said ahead of their presentation at Art Basel Hong Kong

By Duncan Ballantine-Way | Mar 12, 2025 | 2 min read

In 1989, Auntie Li – a master weaver from Changsha, China, and the woman who taught Wang Ye everything they knew about embroidery – took her first and only trip abroad. Invited to Japan to demonstrate the intricate techniques of centuries-old Hunan embroidery, she found herself wandering through a department store in Kagoshima. There, she stumbled upon a series of books on Western Modernist painting – an art form entirely unfamiliar to her. 'She never forgot what she saw,' Ye recalls. 'Though she continued practicing traditional embroidery, that moment planted a seed.'

Years later, working alongside Auntie Li, Ye, who is also from Changsha, sought to honor and extend that pivotal memory. Together, they began translating Modernist works into embroidery – a process Ye describes as 'an opportunity to learn from each other, to understand each other, and to connect through art.' Among their pieces was a reinterpretation of Meret Oppenheim's *Object* (1936), the Surrealist sculpture of a cup and saucer enveloped in Chinese gazelle fur. Through their collaboration, they transposed the sculpture's material strangeness onto the nearly two-dimensional plane of embroidery, allowing its surreal presence to unravel and evolve within the delicate threads of the new medium.



Wang Ye, Object, 2020. Courtesy of the artist and YveYang.



Wang Ye, Twins, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and YveYang.

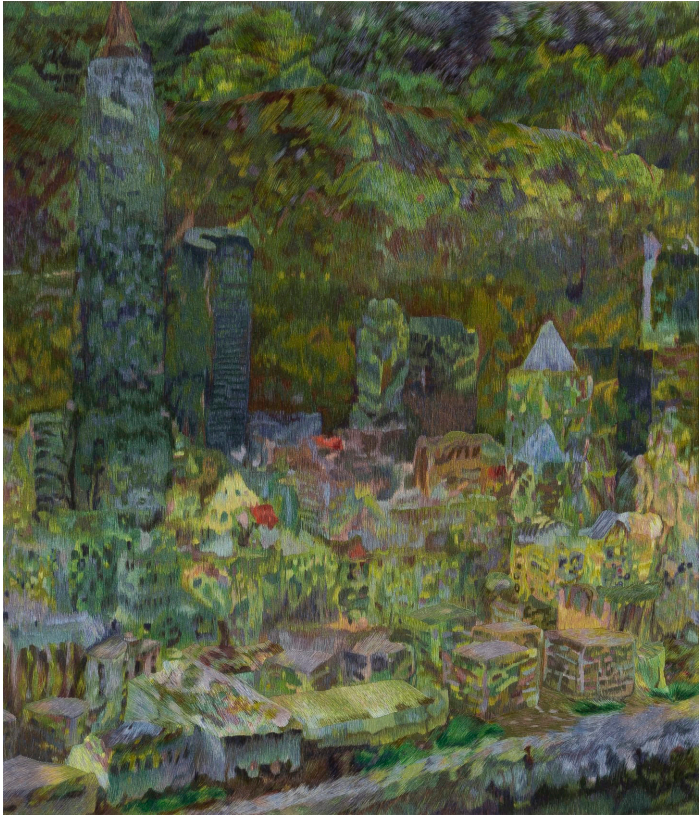


Wang Ye, Beads of Dew (detail), 2024. Courtesy of the artist and YveYang.

That deeply collaborative process reflects Ye's working practice: they view embroidery as an ongoing conversation across time, generations, and artistic traditions. Though their oeuvre also includes film and installation, embroidery remains at the heart of their work, nearly always created in partnership with weavers in Changsha, a region celebrated for its rich embroidery heritage. 'During breaks, the workers tell me stories about their lives, the changes in my hometown, and local customs,' Ye shares. 'Maybe it's unconscious, but I absorb these stories as feelings and weave them into my work.'

For Art Basel Hong Kong, Ye explores these ideas through a series inspired by the hair accessories worn by the embroiderers they work with. 'Since embroidery is done at a desk, I often notice how their hair is pinned up,' Ye explains. 'Our work follows an ancient practice of relying on natural light, as the sheen of the threads shift throughout the day. Sometimes a piece will change direction entirely based on

how the material reacts or because I see something new.' That intuitive response is essential to their work, allowing them to 'explore the overlap and separation of different perceptions in embroidery. The passage of time, the breeze outside the window, the rhythm of breath, the touch of the needle on fingertips, and the friction of silk thread against skin.'



Wang Ye, Manhattan A (detail), 2021. Courtesy of the artist and YveYang.



Wang Ye, Soft (detail), 2024. Courtesy of the artist and YveYang.



Wang Ye, The Imitation of Imitating Pines, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and YveYang.

Credits and captions

Wang Ye is represented by *YveYang* (New York). Their work will be on presented in Art Basel Hong Kong's *Discoveries* sector by YveYang.

Duncan Ballantyne-Way is a writer, editor, and art critic based in Berlin.

Caption for header image: Wang Ye. Courtesy of the artist and YveYang.

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