



FRAGMENTED ART

A word, a moment, or an idea can be all it takes to inspire Ditte Sørensen's striking work that reflects not only her point of view but a powerful social commentary of the world around her

words | **DITTE SØRENSEN**



My work draws inspiration from fragments of daily life – people, contexts, narratives, materials, texts, and even the process of image making itself. In the majority of my works, these fragments are drawn together to produce a single motif within an overarching theme.

It is usually tiny impressions, comments, and stories – those that sit a little uneasily within me, or those that stay a little longer with me than initially anticipated – that become the starting point for the dialogue within my works. For me, the material elements and the story I tell through a work are intrinsically interlinked. Often, I imbue the material elements, down to the tiniest scrap of paper or fabric, with a story in their own right, to validate that position as a fragment of the final narrative.

It has also been important for me to place myself in the works. Sometimes this is quite literally, by incorporating self-portraits, and other times more abstractly, through the presence of my own artistic working process that involves constantly organising, translating and re-organising, re-using the numerous fragments – which in turn create new layers and narratives that also become entwined within the works.

Perishability

Some years back, I got quite taken by a poem performed by a female poetry slammer – Sara Hauge. The poem was titled 'Når jeg bliver gammel' which translates to 'When I grow old'. When I later worked on a series of portraits about perishability and anxiety, the inspirational performance by Hauge led me to invite her to collaborate on a project. Hauge recorded a spoken poem which can be heard together with the work by scanning a QR code. The QR code is incorporated into the portrait, posing as a flower shaped ear stud.

In this series, I focused on the difficulty that can be associated with talking about death, which is one of the reasons that I also wanted to incorporate speaking voices into the work. I played on the word 'perishable', both with regards to life being perishable, but also in the choice of materials. The portraits were sewn onto water soluble fabric; once the fabric is washed away, the thread creases up - not unlike our bodies as they age. The final result was then placed in a frame within two sheets of glass.

Later on, initially as a bit of an experiment, I printed copies of the originals onto acrylic glass, which are now available through my online shop. I continue to be quite pleased, and a little surprised with how well they resemble the originals.



Previous page left to right: *Please Don't Tell Tell Tell*; *Stitchbed*.

Clockwise from above: *Vi Er Dem De Andre Ikk*; *Vil Lege Med*; *Fristaden - Join The Force*; *Bobeme Woman*; *Kobenhavns Metro - På Klokkeslettet*; *Wonderworld*; *Disappear #1-3*.

Copenhagen images series

The Copenhagen images series consists of seven works from different parts of the city. The areas are all of recent historical importance and entail some of the city's struggles over ideas.

The need to point out inconsistencies is always present in my artwork. I grew up in a family environment, where the idea of 'right and wrong' was set in concrete. My father's occupation as a policeman is probably part of the reason why gentle bending or alternative interpretations of rules, was never really an option. In retrospect, I have probably always felt a need to question those clear cut boundaries, and the conformity and conservatism that framed my upbringing.

In the Copenhagen series, which is a reflection on urban life, I worked with the contrasts, constraints, and conflicts that arise in an urban environment; thus, a central theme in the quilts is a dialogue with ideas of 'right and wrong'.

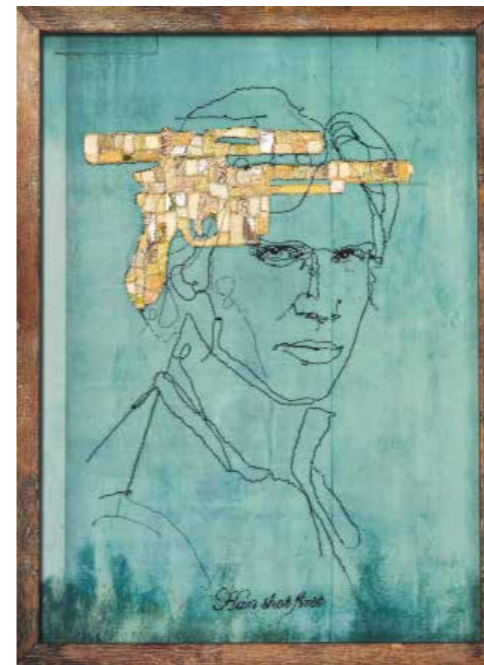
The material is a cotton canvas and the colours present in the works are from thread and photo transfers to the material via glue and ironing. The process has all the features associated with a basic approach to colour transfers. It cracks and is highly unpredictable, which is the primary reason I chose to work with it. The images are quilted and I spend

a lot of time playing by changing the thread. I often use contrasting colours in the bottom thread, which leaves tiny dots of colour on the canvas. It is these minute details, the sense that every aspect of the process matters, and the fact that I use experimental processes, that allows for outcomes I cannot predict or control that makes me engage in an increasing depth with the work. It forces me to consider the minor and major 'mistakes' that evolve; often, they teach me new techniques that I attempt to refine or develop for future works. It gives me a little adrenaline rush.

Christiania

One of the Copenhagen images depicts a police officer sharing a joint with the viewer in the Free State of Christiania. Christiania is well known for its liberal view on cannabis, which used to be openly sold on Pusher Street. The liberal approach has led to clashes with the law, which has meant that depending on the current political stance, Pusher Street often becomes the stage for battles between cannabis dealers, residents of Christiania, and the police.

I attempted to give the officer the appearance of someone enjoying a break after one of these confrontations, as a humorous comment on the fluidity of these lines that leads quite violent confrontations at times.



Clockwise from left:
Dronning Louises Bro;
Hans Spot First;
Enthralled; *Arbejdsbillede*.

Dronning Louises Bro

The motif in yet another work in the Copenhagen images series is of the Danish Royal Lifeguards marching across Dronning Louises Bro (Queen Louise's Bridge) towards the inner city of Copenhagen, as if they have just come from Nørrebro - an area of Copenhagen well-known for its diversity.

The Royal Lifeguards stand guard at, among other places, the Royal Residence, Amalienborg, which is a short bicycle ride from Nørrebro. Consequently, the Royal Guards and Queen Louise's Bridge are both part of a vibrant Copenhagen and are both frequently visited by tourists, but they also represent some of the contrasts and divisions that play a part in defining the city. The thought of the Guard ceremoniously tramping their way through Nørrebro's streets amused me because it is such an unlikely scenario.

In the foreground of the image is a nude woman who steals one of the Guard's hats, which is a cheeky comment on how the Danish Royal Lifeguards continues to use bear skin from the Canadian Black bears - a protected species. It brings into focus the uneven application of the laws and rules that govern us.

Sewn paper collage

Most recently I have chosen to make sewn paper collages - often mixed with unsewn threads which create silhouettes or contours in the image. The final images are collages held together between two sheets of glass. It has the appearance of a mosaic with the loose thread and stitching appearing as the sealant.

Again, the technique is quite simple. I assemble the collage on ordinary copy paper and draw the rest of the contours, which I later stitch. Finally, I tear away the copy paper with a pair of tweezers, leaving the thread without foundation. The paper I use for the collage is often leftovers from photo or colour transfers on material. In that sense, each piece of paper holds a story that relates to me - scraps of paper with photos I took of surfaces, cityscapes, rubbish bins etc. I cut these little fragments of past works into pieces and organise according to colour. It sounds structured, but my work surface is a chaotic mess. I find that it is this structure in chaos that I often gravitate towards; I always create more chaos than I will ever be able to organise my way out of. I think part of the reason I structure my work in this way, is less that I like things organised but more that I enjoy submersing myself in the process of organising and sorting out. These organising and re-organising processes allow me to engage with, and relate to the materials, colours and textures that make the final pieces.



Left to right: *Woman In Blanket - Inspired By Schiele; Havet Gir - Havet Tar; World of Disco.*



Egon Schiele

The above mentioned techniques that mix transparency and sewn paper collage are used in my latest exhibited work. The pieces pay tribute to Austrian painter Egon Schiele.

The idea of taking inspiration from Schiele's work was not my own. I was asked by a curator to produce works for a group exhibition. Three artists collaborated under the heading 'Schiele in Thread'. One artist worked with metal wire, another embroiders by hand.

I was somewhat apprehensive by the thought of working based on another artist motives, and slightly concerned that the framework would limit my ability to express myself. However, I was positively surprised - it was both challenging and inspiring to engage with Schiele's works through my materials and media. I wanted to show more aspects of his works and therefore a couple of the pictures were sewn onto paper, presenting some of his letters and poems. Schiele made a big deal out of not having been inspired by Gustav Klimt; as a remark to this, I chose to throw an excess amount of golden colours into the works. I had to eat a great amount of chocolate to gather enough golden wrappers for my work.

It is always a fragile process working with glass, being very difficult to hold threads in place between sheets of glass. And, it is cumbersome to remove every unwanted speck of dust off the glass, although very gratifying when it is finally assembled.

Later, I made some fine-art posters based on the Egon Schiele series. Here, I ripped away parts of each and built up new sewn collages. As they are not fully original images, I have chosen to call them 'Limited Edition Mixed Media Works'.

Refugees

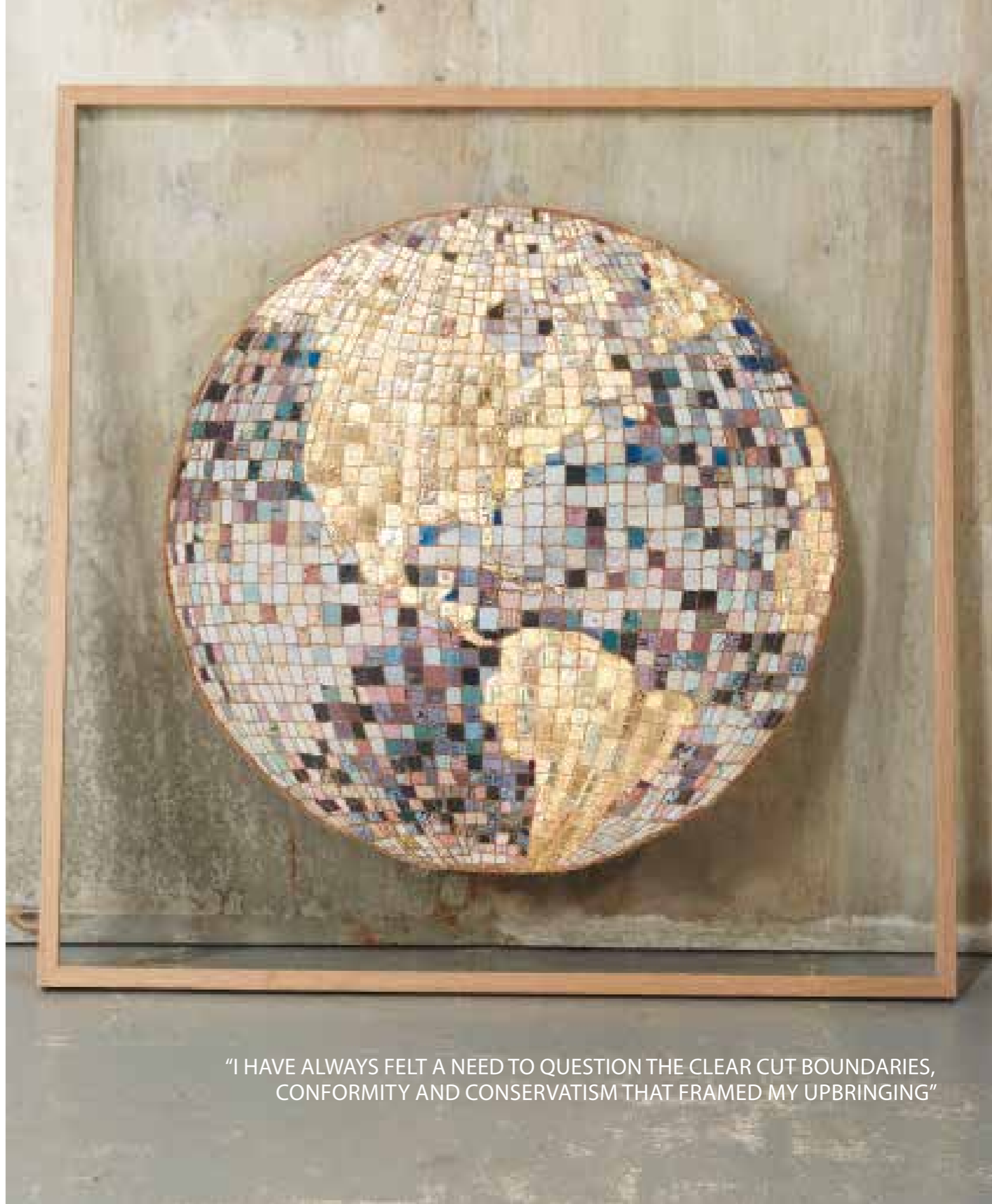
During 2015, when refugees were walking through and across Europe, the majority from war-torn Syria, I began to work on a piece that proved to be more of a challenge than I had encountered previously. As part of an exhibition, I decided to produce a work that referenced the debate around refugees. I wanted the work to symbolize fragility, and the sense of hopelessness and powerlessness that can overwhelm you when facing these huge injustices such as not only escaping from war, but also meeting a less than welcoming Europe.

The work portrays a ship capsizing, framed within a heavy wrought iron frame. I installed headphones to accompany the work. The soundtrack came from a storm so you could hear waves crashing, but in addition, I edited this with sounds of creaking wooden floorboards and rain into the audio file. The ship consisted of black thread hung between two sheets of glass in a two cm wide air gap, only fastened by a few threads. The original thought was that the threads should be in movement between the glass sheets. However, the installation of a computerized fan in the left corner of the picture only blew a few of the threads into movement.

Future work

I am currently working on some pieces portraying some of the raw sides of Nørrebro, Copenhagen - the place where I live. Inspired by some of the graffiti that has decorated the murals through time and the diversity of the people and the atmosphere that surrounds this area - I can already promise that my future works will not be the outcome of any less unpredictable or challenging processes or techniques. ©

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