

A Danish artist trained at the Royal College of Art in London, Rose Eken is a virtuoso at embroidery, ceramics and cardboard sculptures that embody her worship of rock music.

How to talk about artworks you haven't seen (when you don't have Pierre Bayard's talent [1])? Maybe by explaining what makes you want to see them. All I know about Rose Eken is what's available on her Web site. After this partial and virtual experience came an exchange of e-mails. We were in contact to organize her participation in a group show I'm preparing. (2) This is what's called aggravating circumstances. In addition to violating the cardinal rule of art criticism—don't write about what you haven't really seen—here I am getting ready to show a piece by her.

FAN ART

Eken plays with the operational modes of fan art, amateur art spontaneously produced by rock enthusiasts. Fans make such items for themselves and their own pleasure, giving material existence to their passion. They have their own personal way to appropriate the distinctive signs of their idols so that these musicians can inhabit their domestic space. These drawings, paintings, tapestries and scrapbooks are testament to their degree of veneration. Sometimes they are presented as offerings to the rock stars who inspired them. Fan art pieces can also attract attention among cer-

tain circles of an elective fraternity. Fans are happy to display these tokens of the degree of their personal investment. Over the last few years the Net, social networks and fan communities have greatly broadened the potential audience for these products of anonymous labor. Fan art has entered the 2.0 era.

From this point of view, it seems that Eken's Web site actually gives a complete view of her art, acting as a kind of catalogue raisonné even as it blurs the boundaries between creative hobbies and art. (3) We see, for instance, how she has encyclopedically and obsessively reconstituted all the instruments played by selected music idols. There are hundreds of miniature cardboard sculpture fetish objects.

Her most impressive piece reconstitutes all the instruments played by Metallica from 1981-2012: Lars Ulrich's 12 drum kits, Robert Trujillo's 58 basses and the 162 guitars of James Hetfield and Kirk Hammett. Her Lilliputian monuments claim to be exhaustive; their principle of accumulation echoes fans' taste for total possession. We can imagine the amount of time Eken spends refining the smallest technical details of her organological inventories that resemble collections of toys. In the same vein, *Because The Night (Belongs to Us)*—a video installation she made in 2010—brings rock mythologies into a dollhouse world. The montage alternates archival images and miniature reconstitutions of sites that are famous (John Lennon and Yoko Ono's bed) or archetypal (hotel corridors, sound

studios, concert halls, teenagers' bedrooms). The piece's title is taken from a song written by Bruce Springsteen and performed by Patti Smith. Furthermore, the symbolic functioning of Eken's scale models recalls the way Smith, in her autobiography *Just Kids* (2010), describes the New York hotel where she lived under the same roof as Janis Joplin, Lou Reed and other underground celebrities: "The Chelsea was like a dollhouse in *The Twilight Zone*, with a hundred rooms, each a small universe. I wandered its halls in search of spirits living or dead."

THE SPIRIT OF OBJECTS

Despite rock's radical and uncompromising airs, its specific identity is embodied in many everyday objects, some extraordinary, others ridiculous. Eken strives to reproduce them faithfully, using unexpected media like ceramics to make a rock lover's collection of altarpieces (records, turntable, jacket customized with a group's name), musicians' equipment (amplifier, cables, mic, special effects pedals) and even trash mementos scavenged from sound studios (empty beer cases, bottle caps, cigarette packs and ashtrays). These homemade representations recycle the traces rock leaves behind by turning them into decorations, thus amplifying the disjunct between the prosaic character of these items and the aura conferred upon them by their connection with the rock world.

This is even more blatant when Eken does embroidery. She reconstitutes groups' set lists by writing them in huge letters on silk sheets. These lists of songs musicians hastily scribble before going on stage are meticulously hand embroidered to be exhibited like art tapestries. "Everything I do is very time-consuming and repetitive," she admits. "This temporal dimension is like the process of making music itself, where you play the same song or the same chord over and over, maybe hundreds of times, before you are satisfied with the result. My embroidery work parallels this perseverance stitch by stitch." In subverting traditional media, Eken reaches the heights of fan art and demonstrates that in rock, like everywhere else, there is no desire without an object. ■

Translation, L-S Torgoff

(1) Author of *Comment parler des livres que l'on n'a pas lu* 7, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2007).

(2) *Fan attitudes : images de l'adoration*, le 106, Rouen, through May 4, 2013.

(3) www.roseeken.dk



« Record Collection » (détail). 2010
Pâte à papier émaillé. Glazed paperclay