

# The approach

## Sara VanDerBeek *Lace Interlace*

21<sup>st</sup> April – 27<sup>th</sup> May 2023

Sara VanDerBeek's fourth solo exhibition at The Approach began with her recent research into early British photographers Julia Margaret Cameron (1815 – 1879) and Isabel Agnes Cowper (1826 – 1911) within the collections of the Victoria & Albert Museum.

Isabel Agnes Cowper was the first female Official Museum Photographer at the Victoria & Albert Museum, where she lived with her four surviving children. For VanDerBeek, it is Cowper's expertise in documenting lace that is most fascinating, with lace acting as a direct and metaphorical proxy for female production. Lace in the 19th century was primarily created by women for women. Its production by hand was heavily politicised at the time of its capture by Cowper. During the rise of industrialisation, Jacquard and other mechanical looms were met with protest, and the negative and sometimes fatal impact upon the, often female, loom operators was widely reported.

VanDerBeek sees this simultaneous confluence and conflict of the body and the machine as it evolved in textile manufacture as not only paralleled in the development of photographic reproduction, but, as the new works in *Lace Interlace* explore, to be foundational to contemporary society's complex relationship with photographic images. These nascent technologies are increasingly cited as the origins of early computational programming and design, and become symbolic in VanDerBeek's use of the ongoing impacts of mediation upon individual and collective memory.

While Cowper's style might be defined by a highly meticulous and methodical approach, in order to accurately index and organise museological objects, Julia Margaret Cameron worked from the other end of the medium, both in style and subject matter. Cameron's practice can be distinguished by her use of soft-focus, creating romantic photographic portraits of friends and family – mostly women – including her niece Julia Jackson Stephen, mother of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell.

Prompted by the differences between Cameron and Cowper's work, *Lace Interlace* synthesises the historical and the personal, the institutional and the private. The work combines photographic fragments of past and present practitioners - including rephotographed images taken by VanDerBeek of Cowper and Cameron's work – alongside more enigmatic images taken from life and from the television and computer screens used in VanDerBeek's home and studio. Fragments of lace appear amongst various textile and surface details captured by the artist during her simultaneous research at historic artists homes and art institutions including most significantly Charleston, West Dean, Prospect Cottage and Sissinghurst in England and the Prada Foundation and 2022 Venice Biennale in Italy.

Emulating the eclectic arrangements she found in the “guard books” of the Victoria & Albert museum, VanDerBeek's image array includes silicone lace employed in a garment from Commes Des Garçons Pret -a- Porter Spring 2012 collectio , a c.1700 Point de Venise needle lace mantelet, a costume created and worn by Leonore Fini, costume details captured on screen from the TV show *Legendary*, and an up-close image of the artist's maternal

## The approach

grandmother's lace wedding veil - purchased in Brussels while she was stationed in Europe during WWII as an US Army nurse.

These images are toned in colours inspired by the Albumen prints created by Cowper and Cameron then layered and combined into freestanding and wall mounted screens. The artist's design for these screens references the photographic mattes employed in the Victorian era, industrial lace looms, and the unit-based engineering of museum and studio storage systems. Addressing the evolution of the medium, VanDerBeek has utilised different photographic techniques, layering digital iPhone and SLR capture with the shifting focus of medium format film, as well as incorporating contemporary print processes such as Dye Sublimation and UV printing.

*Lace Interlace* emerges from VanDerBeek's long-form and ongoing project *Women & Museums* which explores both the recognised and unrecognised contributions of women towards contemporary understandings of material cultures, mediation and female experience across time and place as it is collected, housed and displayed within an international network of museums and art institutions.

Sara VanDerBeek (b. 1976, Baltimore, MD) lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Recent solo exhibitions include *Chorus Altman Siegel*, San Francisco, CA (2021); *Women & Museums*, Metro Pictures, New York, NY; *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek*, (with Stan VanDerBeek), Black Mountain College Museum, Asheville, NC; *Women & Museums*, Minneapolis Institute of Art, MN (all 2019); *Front Room: Sara VanDerBeek*, Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; *Sensory Spaces 6*, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam; *Electric Prisms, Concrete Forms*, The Approach, London, UK (all 2015); *Sara VanDerBeek*, Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, OH (2014); *Sara VanDerBeek*, Fondazione Memmo, Rome, Italy (2012); *Sara VanDerBeek*, The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2011); and *Sara VanDerBeek: To Think of Time*, Whitney Museum of Art, New York NY (2010). Selected group exhibitions include *Future Variations, Soft Network*, Showroom, New York, NY, organised by the artist (2022); *Up To and Including Her Limits: Sari Dienes, Carolee Schneemann, Sara VanDerBeek,* Halsey McKay, East Hampton, NY (2021); *Never Done: 100 Years Of Women In Politics And Beyond*, Tang Museum, Saratoga Springs, NY; *Controlling the Chaos*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA (both 2020); *Walt Whitman and the Poetry of Art*, Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Rollins College, Winter Park, FL (2019); *Remember to React*, NSU Art Museum, Fort Lauderdale, FL (2018); *The Artist's Museum*, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (2016); and *Photo-Poetics: An Anthology*, Kunsthalle Berlin; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY (2015).

VanDerBeek's work is in art collections worldwide including Baltimore Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum, New York, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Cincinnati Art Museum, Dallas Museum of Art, Guggenheim Museum, New York, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, NSU Art Museum Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Florida, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, The Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

For further information or images please contact Alba Herrero [alba@theapproach.co.uk](mailto:alba@theapproach.co.uk)