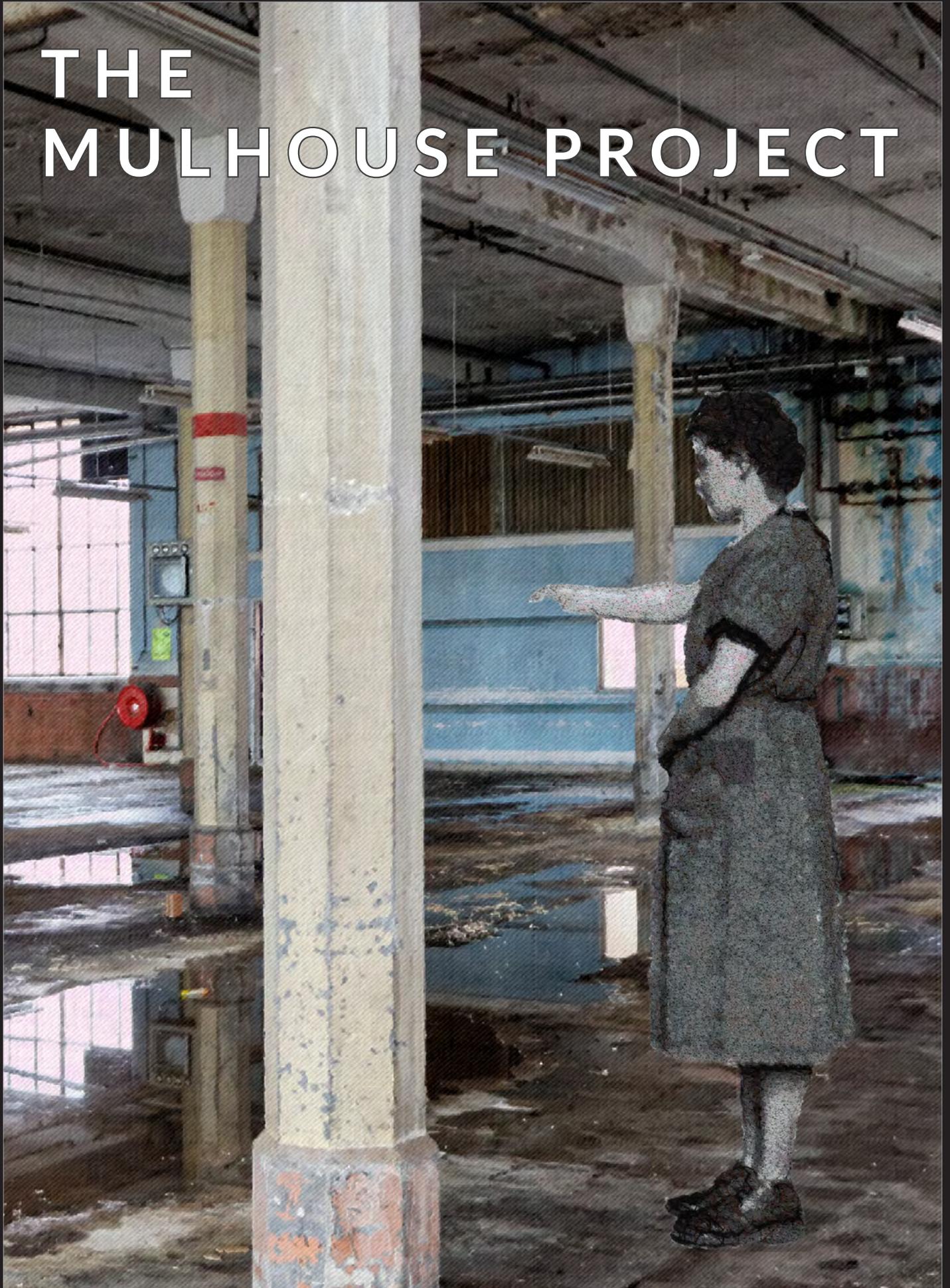


Tanja Boukal

# THE MULHOUSE PROJECT





*The Kunsthalle Mulhouse and the Municipal Archives of the City of Mulhouse welcomed Tanja Boukal for a long-term research and creation project around the DMC archives.*

## THE SOCIOPOLITICAL BACKGROUND

Mulhouse was once a city of the industrial revolution, when innovation in steam and electricity revolutionized the economy and changed the face of the city and the way people live. The large factories have shaped the character of the city for centuries. But what even decades ago seemed like the pinnacle of modernity has today lost its purpose. The industry here was shut down or taken over by machines.

The Alsatian textile company DMC is more than a symbol for this change. From 10.000 workers which were working at DMC Mulhouse, only 250 are left. Being an Artist who works a lot with embroidery and other craft techniques, Tanja Boukal is well aware of the history and significance of this company.

They were one of the first who published a complete manual of textile handcrafts in 1884. The Encyclopedia of Needlework was written by Thérèse de Dillmont (10 October 1846 – 22 May 1890), head of the design department of DMC and head of her own publishing and crafts enterprise. Dillmont's name was an asset to DMC, which continued to publish books under her name after her death. Over 100 books were attributed to Dillmont. New editions of her works have been published to date.

Trained in embroidery in the 1990s at the same school as Dillmont, the artist feels intellectually close to this great embroiderer and to all those who, like her, put their talent and passion for needlework at the display in order to teach their skills.

## THE APPROACH

For several months, Tanja Boukal was engaged in the documentary collection of DMC. She researched the history of DMC and Therese Dillmont in the Archive.

She aimed to reproduce all samples of the Encyclopedia of Needlework, for which the material is still produced by DMC.

She taught some of the techniques in the book to the public. She passed on her expertise and could therefore approach a wide variety of people. With the new skills learned, and sharing one's knowledge and experience, there was a common ground that was a vital base for exchanging stories, finding other similarities and discussing a variety of topics. Not only did she impart skills with these workshops and thus help to spread them, but also got a starting point to ask questions.

She took photos in the former area of DMC and combined this with old photos of various workers of

DMC from the last century. Therefore, she needed to gain a deeper understanding for the structure of the company and different workspaces in different buildings. It was her attempt to get an overview of what has been, what was lost and which evolutions happened.

Most recently she initiated a participatory embroidery project together with the inhabitants of Mulhouse.

## THE CONCLUSION

It is no longer necessary for people to produce most things with their own hands as machines are more effective and cheaper. But once the traditions, knowledge and skills are gone, we become a culture without a past. We run the risk of doing nothing more than riding the technology wave we have created without the ability to achieve similar success again.

Same is true for needlecrafts. The ability to practice them became an asset reserved for a shrinking population of craftsmen and artists. It was set aside as a necessary life skill and relegated to the status of hobby or luxury pastime.

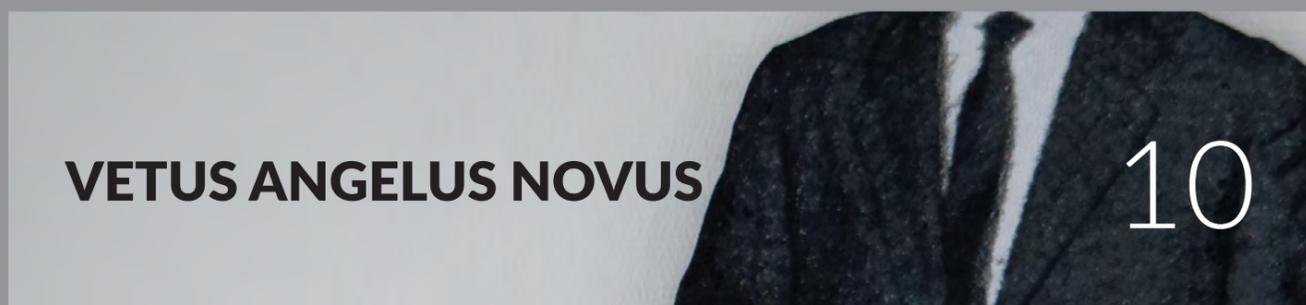
Tanja Boukal's aim is to rediscover this buried treasure. She wants to learn from the past to develop projects for the future.

WORKS



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# REWIND:INDUSTRY

ACTUAL PHOTOS TAKEN AT THE FORMER INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS OF TEXTILE COMPANY DMC ARE COMBINED WITH ARCHIVAL IMAGES OF FORMER WORKERS FROM SAME PLACE, WHO ARE MACHINE-EMBROIDERED HERE AND REPLACED BY MACHINES IN REALITY.

TAKEN OUT OF THE WORKING CONTEXT, THEY SEEM TO LINGER AROUND IN THEIR - NOW ABANDONED - FACTORY. LEFT WITHOUT A PURPOSE, BOTH BUILDING AND WORKERS.





REWIND: INDUSTRY

2019  
7 PARTS, EACH APPROX. 82 X 58 CM  
EMBROIDERY ON PRINTED CANVAS

# VETUS ANGELUS NOVUS



The work connects with Walter Benjamin's concept of the "Angelus Novus", the angel of History who looks back despondently at the ruins of the past as he moves forward with the inevitable progress of time:

„A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.“<sup>1</sup>

This passage demonstrates a moment of hesitation, uncertainty and reflection between moving forwards and looking backwards in time, contemplating the pile of wreckage and suffering at the angel's feet. He would like to stay and grow roots on the catastrophe; but his will has been expropriated by the power that forces him to opt

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin, Walter. 1968. Illuminations. New York: Schocken

for the future against which his back is turned. Benjamin's angel of history reveals a greater sense of conflict in the transition between the past and the future than the artists' angels, which appear calm and steadfast.

Boukal Angels are male and embody the gendered foundation of modernity and industrialization. Based on photos of the town archive of Mulhouse responsible men of the company DMC from various times are embroidered. But weather nostalgic, concerned, jovial or hopeful, these men focusing a crucial point of history, stuck in a painful transition between "destruction" and "creation".

They are two-dimensional, one-sided images of a time long past. They are literally hanging in the air, swaying in the wind, with no way to get hold of their roots. What they know best and could transform has become useless. This sense of uncertainty captured in the angels resonates with the contradictions of post-industrial transition.

Are we still moving into the future backwards, reduced to moving forward while casting desperate glances behind? The tendency to define our time exclusively in opposition to what went before (post-modernist, post-metaphysical, post-industrial, post-corona...) lends credence to the hypothesis and underlines our difficulties in breaking free from a past we claim to have left behind.

If we have no other viewpoint from

which to look upon the past than the stance given us by the angels, it seems like an impossible task. The storm blowing from Paradise is still being felt. The angels are still poised the same way. But maybe their stance is merely the result of inertia and the angels have stopped being tragic figures to become puppets in repose.



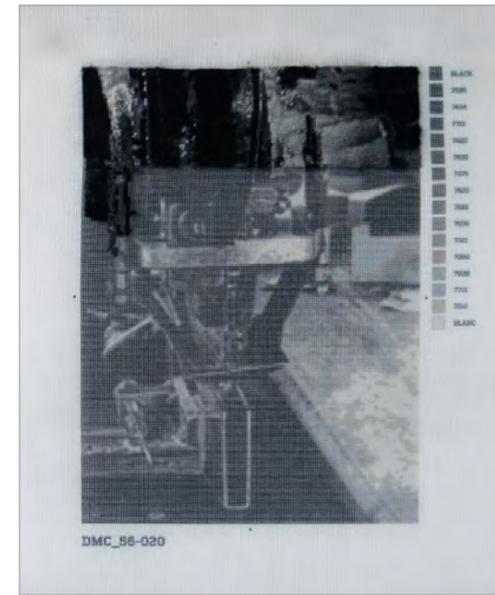
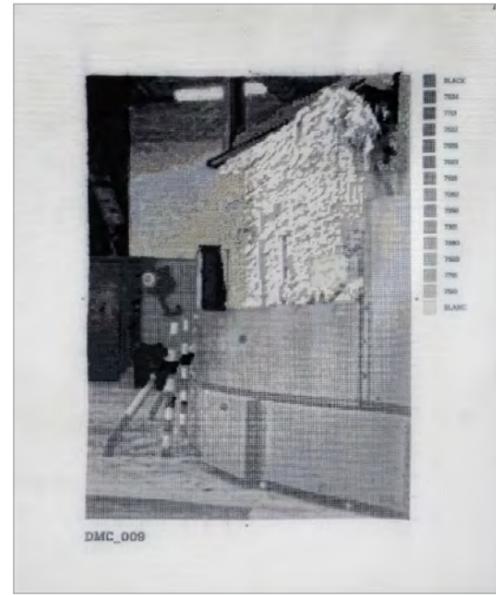
# VETUS ANGELUS NOVUS



VETUS ANGELUS NOVUS  
2020  
9 PARTS, EACH APPROX. 95 X 34 CM  
FREESTANDING EMBROIDERY ON CANVAS



# BRODER LA MACHINE



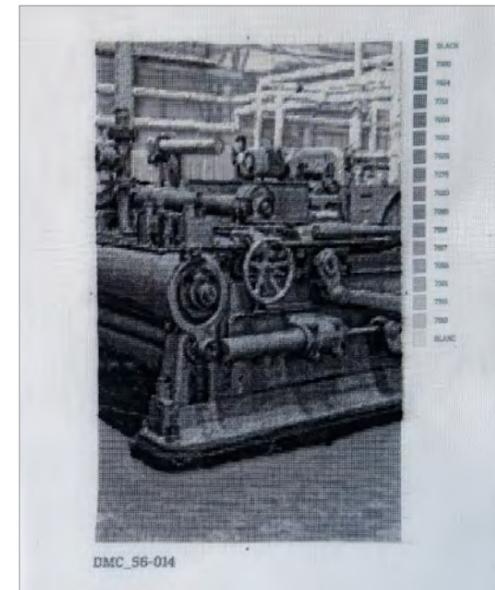
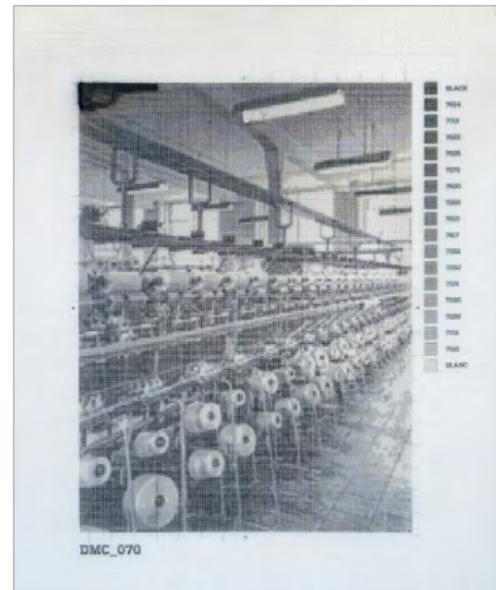
Society is changing. Large parts of manual work were taken over by machines. The fewer jobs there are, the greater the feeling of powerlessness. Machines determine our lives, international corporations our future.

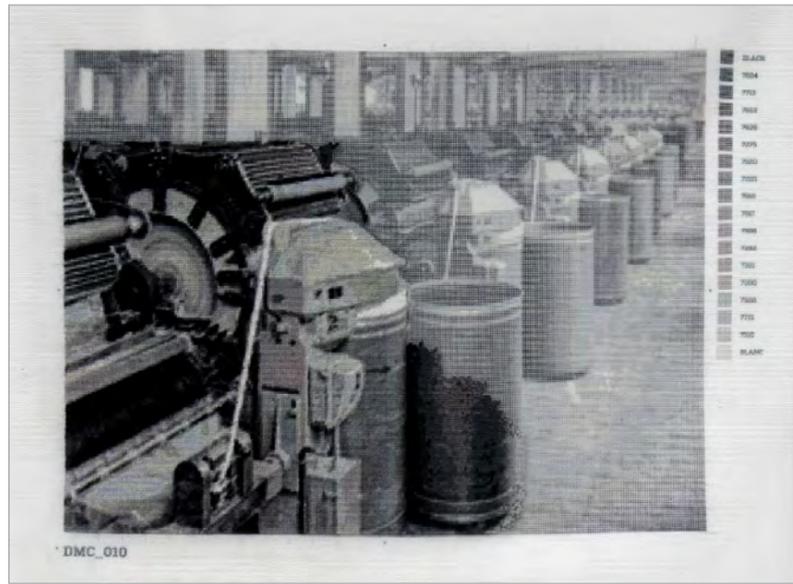
But there are still things that cannot be produced by machines. The old technique of tapestry embroidery can only be created by hand. What happens if we embroider the machines? What does this release in people whose history and identity have been shaped by these machines? What does it do for people who have no work due to this shift in employment? Or in people who feel powerless in the face of social change?

Can we regain the feeling of control by being able to do something machines can't?

Twenty pictures of DMC production machines were printed on Stramin. The embroidery frames were set up at different locations in Mulhouse and people were invited to participate. There was a lively participation from various social classes. The joint embroidery work created a basis for discussions and stories. The workshops were both a place of encounter and productive work.

This new creation of the machines was taking place voluntarily and unpaid in many hours. Thanks to all the participants.





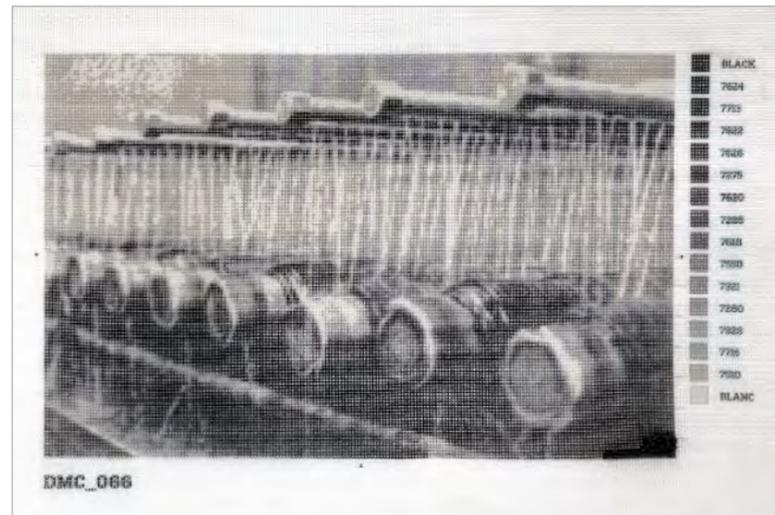
DMC\_010



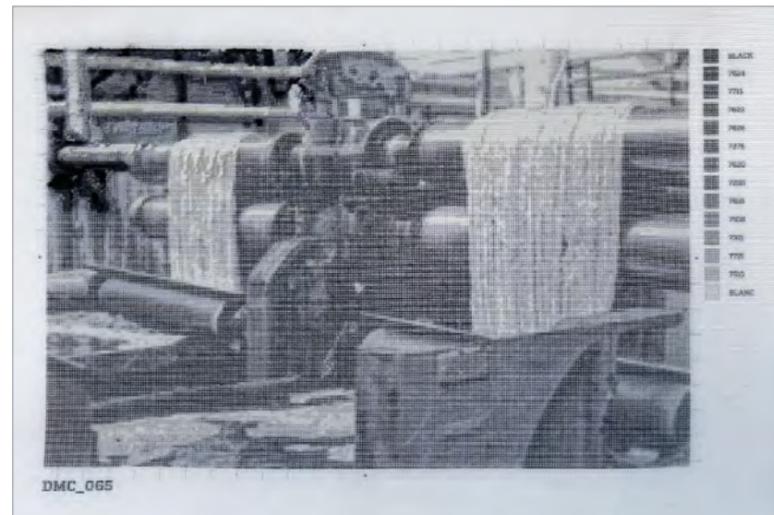
DMC\_012



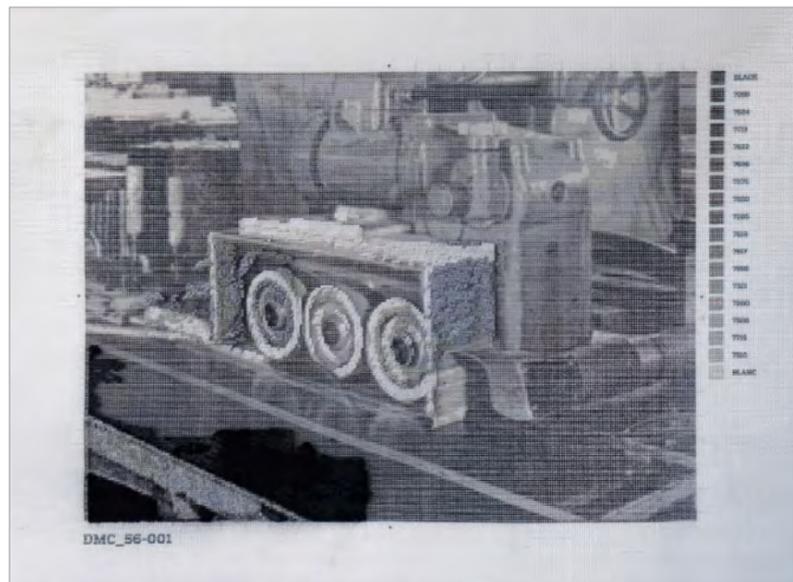
DMC\_56-012



DMC\_066



DMC\_065



DMC\_56-001



DMC\_079



BRODER LA MACHINE

BRODER LA MACHINE  
2019 - 2020  
18 PARTS, VARIOUS SIZES  
TAPESTRY EMBROIDERY



## VIDEO: ON THE TRACES OF DMC



TANJA BOUKAL PRESENTS A VIDEO ABOUT THE PROCESS OF RESEARCH DURING HER RESIDENCY 2018-2020 IN MULHOUSE. THE DOCUMENTARY OFFERS VIEWERS AN IMMERSION INTO THE VARIOUS PLACES THAT HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THE CREATION OF THE WORKS: FROM THE DESOLATE DESERTED DMC HEADQUARTERS TO THE MULHOUSE ARCHIVE. THIS WALK, GUIDED BY THE ARTIST, LEADS TO ALL THOSE PLACES THAT FASCINATE HER AND REMINDS US OF HER RESEARCH AND REMEMBRANCE WORK, WHICH IS AT THE CENTER OF THE WORKS OF THE MULHOUSE PROJECT.



THE VIDEO IS AVAILABLE AT: <http://www.boukal.at/en/gallery-e.html/video-on-the-traces-of-dmc/>

Directed by Marie Bannwarth and with the participation of Tanja Boukal and Eliane Michelon, Director of the Mulhouse Archive, the film was produced by the Kunsthalle Mulhouse.



TANJA BOUKAL

THE MULHOUSE PROJECT  
2018-2020

[WWW.BOUKAL.AT](http://WWW.BOUKAL.AT)

The Project was realized in partnership with La Kunsthalle Mulhouse, the Archives of Mulhouse and with the support of the company DMC.