

Juliette Vanwaterloo Tout cramer [Burn it all down]

A graduate of the École Supérieure d'Art et de Design in Angers (France) with a master in Tapestry and Textile Arts from the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels (Belgium), Juliette Vanwaterloo (FR, 1998) works with hand embroidery, bobbin lace, tufting¹, and other textile techniques, which she combines with an installation-based practice. As an activist artist committed to feminist, ecological, and decolonial issues, she has tackled the long-term issues of State violence, injustice, and systemic oppression throughout her career.

In 2018 and 2019, Juliette Vanwaterloo embroidered laws, excerpts from the Civil Code, the Labour Code, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Citizen on table doilies and cotton handkerchiefs. While these citations are embellished with floral or Japanese-inspired motifs, this contrast serves to highlight, paradoxically, the decoration of a cosy home where a woman is expected to conform to her assigned duties. Although these dated legal articles may seem amusing today, it is important to remember that the "Code civil des Français", for example, promulgated by Napoleon at the beginning of the 19th century - reintroducing, among other things, the death penalty, life imprisonment, and branding - remained in force in France until 1994. From the picturesque to the symbolic, from the right to wear trousers² to the right to abortion³, Juliette Vanwaterloo illustrates the fragility of hard-won rights and the ever-present risk of regression for women's rights, both in Europe and worldwide.

The following year, Juliette Vanwaterloo began to address the issue of police violence. As early as 2018, the Yellow Vest movement provoked significant police and judicial repression, particularly in France. In *La démocratie en état d'urgence*⁴, legal scholar Stéphanie Hennette-Vauchez questions the incorporation into common law of a series of emergency measures, as well as the passing of eight anti-terrorism laws, an "anti-riot" law (2019), and a global security law (2020). These measures, which today restrict the freedom to protest, to report, and to oppose reforms, have been marked by the use of excessive force against thousands of demonstrators. Far from the narratives legitimising police actions, the artist created several delicate lace pieces, including the ironically titled *Au coin du feu [By the fireside]*. This lace depicts a burning, overturned police car, with loose orange woollen threads, soft and fuzzy in texture, escaping from the artwork to evoke flames.

In response to these images of protests, often portrayed in the media in ways that absolve the police and criminalise the protesters, Juliette Vanwaterloo produced a series of small hand-embroidered pieces - none larger than a postcard - some of which are exhibited at BPS22. These images, taken from copwatching⁵ and/or photo-

1. A weaving technique that emerged in the 1970s in Hong Kong and was initially used by large manufacturers to produce carpets. Tufting is done with a tufting gun, a highly manoeuvrable tool that allows for the rapid creation of carpets in all shapes.

2. In 1800, the ordinance of 16 Brumaire, Year IX (7 November 1800), stated that "any woman wishing to dress as a man must report to the police prefecture to obtain permission." It wasn't until 2013 that the ban on women wearing trousers was officially repealed!

3. Over the past three decades, more than sixty countries have introduced legislative reforms to improve access to abortion. For example, abortion was legalised in Ireland in 2018. Contrary to popular belief in Europe, some countries continue to penalise abortion. It remains illegal in Andorra, Poland, Malta, and Liechtenstein. Outside the EU, other countries like Nicaragua, El Salvador, and recently some US states, maintain or reintroduce draconian, discriminatory laws that prohibit abortion in all (or almost all) circumstances.

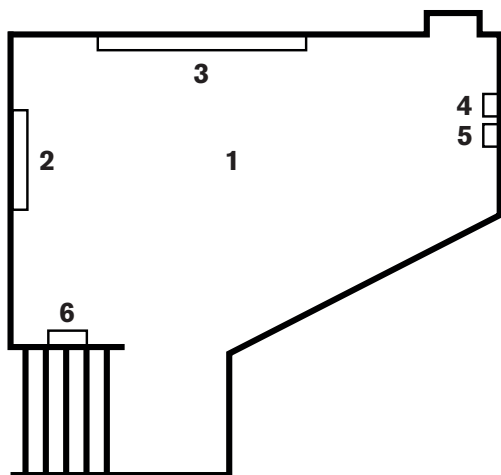
4. Hennette-Vauchez, Stéphanie, *La démocratie en état d'urgence*. Quand l'exception devient permanente, Paris, Seuil, 2022.

5. Copwatching: The practice of filming and distributing images of police officers in the course of their duties to prevent or expose abuses.

graphs captured by the artist in public spaces, question how police violence is represented in the media, on social networks, and in television and film fiction. Whose perspectives are prioritised? What are the sources? Who is allowed to speak? In opposition to the dominant narrative, that of the police, the judiciary, the political sphere, and certain media outlets, the fight against police violence requires the creation of a diverse and multifaceted counter-narrative. Fuelled by the rise of digital technologies and the internet, this counter-narrative is also a form of resistance that the artist chooses to amplify.

Juliette Vanwaterloo's works draw their power from the unexpected combination of subjects reflecting the state of the world in its most extreme excesses and a delicate, comforting treatment rooted in the long history of tapestry. A courtly art form in the Middle Ages, tapestry adorned the walls of castles and churches, serving as a luxury object, a medium of exchange, or a diplomatic gift, celebrating the glory of monarchs and Historicism, even if its intentions remained decorative. In the 20th century, tapestry was expected to meet the demands of public and popular art. Today, contemporary artists blend techniques and materials to subvert and reappropriate them, transcending prejudices and giving tapestry a sculptural - sometimes even monumental - dimension. Yet, tapestry has always warmed the atmosphere, absorbed light, softened noise, soothed the eye, and calmed the mind. Aware of this duality, Juliette Vanwaterloo has embraced an activist, violent, rage-filled art that literally immerses us, as her installations leave the wall and force viewers to navigate through charred car chassis.

Behind this apocalyptic landscape, the large tapestry created especially for her exhibition at BPS22 addresses current social, economic, and political concerns: police repression, dismantling of ZADs, agricultural pollution, urban sprawl, homelessness crisis, capitalist consumerism, and more. While governments and certain major media outlets continuously emphasise the violence of social movements, Juliette Vanwaterloo raises the question of legitimate violence. In our Western society, protest practices are discredited, systematically depicted as violent, whereas police and state violence is heavily downplayed, to the detriment of the social cause. Is self-defence an act of aggression? When protests are no longer enough, should we reconsider the constant demand to condemn the young people who burn cars? Soft, gentle, and colourful, Juliette Vanwaterloo's work reminds us that dominant media and the State lead us to interpret power's violence in ways that lose sight of those engaged in it.



1. *Tout cramer II*, 2024, series of seven tufted rugs (wool, acrylic, jute). Artist's studio.

2. *La ZAD vivra*, 2022, tufted rug, bobbin lace (wool, acrylic, cotton, linen, silk, wire). Artist's studio.

3. *Tout cramer I*, 2024, tufted rug (wool, acrylic, linen, lurex, jute). Artist's studio.

4. *Stop Amazon*, 2020, hand embroidery (embroidery thread, silk, cotton). Private collection.

5. *23 Février 2017 - Paris*, 2021, hand embroidery (embroidery thread, silk, wool, cotton). Private collection.

6. *1793*, 2019, hand embroidery on a recovered doily (embroidery thread, cotton). Artist's studio.

This exhibition is part of the anniversary edition of the Prix Médiatine, established in 1983 by the Centre culturel Wolubilis in Bruxelles.