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Ethereal, remote, glinting out of impossible ages past, the traditional pointed star is associated with the heavens, religion, fairytales and celebrity. In her paper-based *BlackStar* silkscreen prints, Danish textile artist Vibeke Rohland just barely contains this starburst in the more mundane and earthy body of a blunt star. The blunt form remains a constant throughout the *BlackStar* series while composition and color become its variables, making her images appear to twist, roll, radiate, rotate, deepen and, occasionally, grow hushed and still. In this sense, Rohland's stars are both static and kinetic. They might be said to be running in place or singing softly.

Rohland has worked at the intersection of art, craft and design since the mid-1980s. In fact, it is difficult to disentangle art from design and vice-versa as one traces the threads of her creative life. They are lengths of the same skein, the warp and weft of a single fabric, each invoking, informing and enriching the other through the evolution of her experiments. On one hand, since establishing her studio in 1995, her design has been sought after—everything from linens and t-shirts to scarves and porcelain patterns—by iconic brands like Hay and Georg Jensen Damask, Ikea and Agnes B. Kvadrat produces her upholstery fabrics and drapery. For Paustian, she has designed bed linens and graphical umbrellas and for Esprit N.Y. and FDB Møbler, bed and table linens. She has fashioned tableware patterns for Royal Copenhagen, upholstery for the Royal Danish Railway and tapestries for the Royal Theater.

On the other hand, as Jean Givens, professor of art history at the University of Connecticut, has pointed out, Rohland's work challenges the assumption that fabric is incomplete as-is, that it is merely an industrial material in the process of "becoming something else". In Rohland's ever-expanding creative universe, a textile is also an end, in and of itself. Which is to say that, while she has been busy designing, she has also been exhibiting in world-class art venues like the Borås Museum of Modern Art in Sweden and Copenhagen's Kunsthal Charlottenborg. Her work has been added to the permanent collections of the Design Museum Denmark, Focke-Museum Bremen and Neue Sammlung München. In 1981, she helped launch the experimental gallery KONGO, where she and her colleagues collectively ran exhibitions year-round and published the art, music and poetry magazines KONG and ATLAS.

Computer screens and silk screens, the digital and the analog, the virtual and those things that we can touch, the "functional" and the "merely" aesthetic: It seems increasingly clear that the human cloth would no longer be whole if it were woven from only one of these strands and not the other. By its nature, if not explicitly, Rohland's work responds to recent cultural changes. Spending much of each day in front of a monitor or on a mobile device, we crave physical and emotional experience, while, with natural disaster imminent and technology rushing headlong, we are being forced to look at materiality in a whole new light. These changes have pushed craftable, "authentic" materials to the fore, among them textiles, which represent shelter, security and softness in a world that, as it shrinks, is becoming increasingly abrasive and fraught.

Mindful of needing both armature and comfort, we are drawn to tapestries, weaving, wallcoverings, fashion and upholstery, which, in renewing intimacy, have found a renewed role on our bodies and in our spaces and lives. There are tears in the "fabric" of society that we must endeavor to repair: more violence in the name of God, less freedom in the name of safety, anxieties of gross proportions, economic instability and a fierce instinct alternating between self-destruction and self-preservation. Refreshed values have sparked a fresh interest in the handmade, the maker and the making process, particularly those tending toward unpredictable outcomes. Once again, we have begun to privilege perception as much as "fact", the senses and intuition in addition to the purely rational, viscera and spontaneity along with formulae and rules, and masterful flaws in proportion to the mass-manufactured (and, preferably, both). We want to slow down and ponder the details, to see the signature and the fingerprint, to know whose hands made this, with what tools, and where.

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Rohland was born in 1957 in Gladsaxe-Søborg outside Copenhagen. As a child, she embroidered, knit and crocheted—not in imitation of her elders, but independent of them—without imagining that these would play any role in her future. With little concern for the finished product, she would instead become engrossed in the thread, the yarn, the texture and the colors. Only much later, after studying art history at the University of Copenhagen, would she go on to earn a degree in textile design at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 1986 and travel to Paris on a two-year grant to hand-paint fabrics for use in haute couture and interior design.

Over time, the work that has appealed to Rohland has not been visible in her own, but abstraction, naïvete and the candor of handcraft, rich with unpolished sincerity and imperfect, resonate with her. Her work shares the spirit of handprinting by Josef Frank, Göta Trägaard, or Marie Gudme Leth; embroidery, crochet, lace, knit and woven fabrics from Eastern Europe and Scandinavia; ceramics tattooed with signs and symbols; old patchwork repeats; the boldest examples of street art, some of which she calls “urban craft”; Kalkmalerier; and the Bayeux Tapestry, which made a deep impression during her second year of high school. She may admire the work of Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois, Georgia O’Keefe, but she lacks the patience to follow a recipe, to exploit them as a source of patterns, formulae or references.

Rohland’s work evolves from minimal and abstract motifs, including pluses, minuses, dots and squares to which she returns again and again. Her artist’s notebook, *The Hole Story* (2014), for instance, is a study in black and white that focuses on juxtaposed forms, the weight, density and opacity of brush strokes, hand-drawn interventions over grids of dots, drops of paint splashed deliberately on the page as if to gauge and describe their kinetic energy, the occasional sampled image of a fan or an X-rayed apple used as graphic devices on a series of silk scarves (one of her few figurative designs) and, periodically, rough stitching down the edge of a page in thick black thread. Rohland takes an intuitive, low-tech and emphatically hands-on approach to making, a strategy that may be seen as a reconciliation of the practices of artisanry and art, which are still obstinately viewed—at least by the market—as discrete pursuits.

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In 2000, Rohland embarked on the *BlackStar* project, riffing on her signature plus sign in offset layers rendered in multiple overlapping colors to form the blunt star. In the following pages, *Blackstar* 1-208 invites viewers to browse 15 years of experiments in form and color that have used traditional, analog tools and primary textile pigments mixed in-studio to create a collection of unique, hand-printed silkscreens on 400gr Canson paper. As of the spring of 2017, the artist has edited her many experiments down to 208 unique prints, but the number will inevitably grow.

In this series, from print to print, the artist makes incremental and arbitrary displacements of the screen and overlays intense, sheer pigments in various combinations. The juxtaposition of a plus and a plus turned 45 degrees (an x, signifying multiplication) makes the basic blunt form. By adding color displaced along with the form, she manu-factures (literally, “hand-makes”) new shapes and colors. *BlackStar*’s plusses represent graphical lines so simple that they were part of the earliest written communications: cuneiform, glyphs, Kanji, the first typefaces—signifiers that speak in every language, that remain familiar without conveying explicit meaning until grouped with others, composed. These signs are simultaneously rational, Rohland points out, and the irrational that lies beyond the rational.

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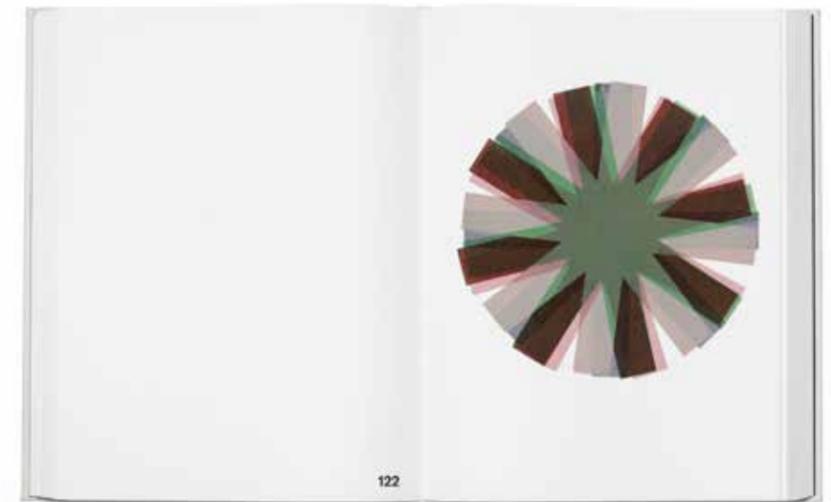
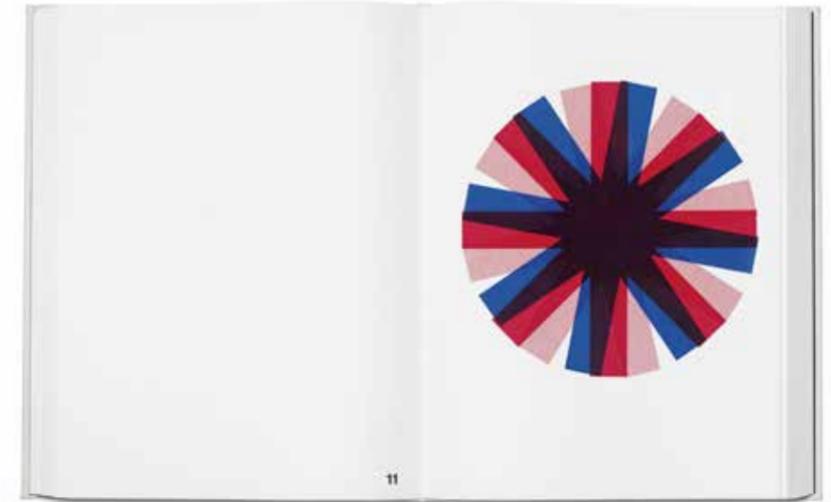
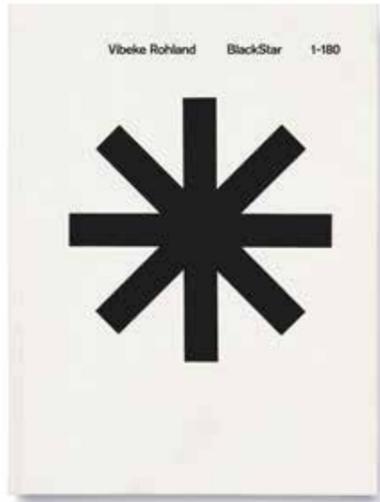
Rohland works in a high-ceilinged basement in Copenhagen’s Kgs. Nytorv neighborhood. In the anteroom, over a concrete floor and under a crystal chandelier, she works at a wooden table flanked by gunmetal grey industrial shelves and a wall of mood board images and inspirations. Here, she is surrounded by previous experiments: an X-Ray of her old watch, a *BlackStar* painted with brush and ink, a dish towel from Georg Jensen, lengths of fabric draped from overhead pipes, posters for Stilleben. In the larger of the two rooms, beneath a 1,5 × 5 m table on which she has worked since 1987, Rohland stores piled tubes of rolled-up tapestries and wall hangings. Its surface is often littered with prints drying for a couple of hours before receiving their next color. She mixes her pigments—from two shades of red, two blues and turquoise, hue brown, and both cold and warm yellows—in scores of plastic tubs stacked around a black sink where she also washes the silkscreen frames. These wood or metal framed panels are coated with photo emulsion using a reprofilm (a film image transferred onto a transparency), so that areas exposed to light remain opaque while areas not exposed become porous—creating, in this case, a plus sign, a fine, mesh-like stencil through which color can be pushed, using a blade or Squeegee.

Color—applied in anywhere from two to eight layers—generates Rohland’s forms. The blunt star becomes a reference that is defined by color, while the color is “controlled” by its shape. She chooses color instinctively, mixing until she achieves something she likes, and wields the frame unconstrained by registration marks, moving it arbitrarily at the moment of printing, without anticipating the result. Any small shift in the direction of the frame can, she says, “change everything.” She must work quickly or the color will dry in the mesh pores of the screen. It is a process of hurry-up-and-wait: mix color, print color, clean frame, wait for it to dry. Repeat. Rohland is both impatient and doggedly persistent. In fact, the process—the pattern, ornament and visual repetition—becomes a form of meditation.

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Rohland prints her *BlackStars*, in part, to explore and register the diversity that is to be found in very small changes to a single basic form under the influence of diverse color combinations. How many layers and displacements can she execute before the paper gives way or a black star emerges? Repetition and variation reveal the emotional power inherent in color and in only seemingly slight degrees of difference.

Bound together as a series, the *BlackStars* should enjoy an infinite shelf life: they become a how-I-did-it, without being reduced to a DIY manual, a meditation that balances the eye and mind with a soothing litany of shape and hue, and a color study that Josef Albers, himself, would have appreciated. The simultaneously serene yet graphical work in these pages represents the weaving together of art, design and craft and Rohland offers new constellations for creatives to explore in any design or artistic discipline—interiors, product, fashion, fine art—that relies on color and composition. Even the layman, however, curious as to how hue and form influence and enrich one another will find in *BlackStar* a source of unexpected details that bear revisiting again and again. *BlackStar* is an ongoing investigation, a semiotics of limited form and infinite possibility. Like all of Rohland's work, it is an outward introspection that distills the elements of our material world and examines the human relationship to ourselves, to our fairytales, and to the unknown that lies ahead, glinting out of impossible ages past.



Vibeke Rohland BlackStar 1-180

