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# Catharina van de Ven's Tranquility tapestry

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Discover how domes inspire the artist's mesmeric work



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*Tranquility* (2020) is a wool tapestry by artist and sculptor Catharina van de Ven. Working in collaboration with Karen Zeedijk who tufted the work at the renowned TextielLab in Tilburg, Netherlands, this 'simple' design—a circle within a circle within a bordered square field—recalls a quote by poet Charles Bukowski. 'An intellectual says a simple thing in a hard way. An artist says a hard thing in a simple way.' *Tranquility* is a complex concept expressed with 'simple' geometric shapes and realised using a seemingly 'simple' technique—gun tufting.



Catharina van de Ven

'The dome is a shape that triggers me all the time,' says van de Ven. *Tranquility* is mesmeric. Its shapes and varied pile height (the inner circle is a low profile dome that rises above the single uniform pile height of the surrounding fields) are transformed into a mesmerising viewer experience through colour and technique. The colour choices for *Tranquility* express chromostereopsis—the optical illusion of perceived depth created through deliberate colour choice. Chromostereopsis is a colour-based sleight of hand usually expressed in pairs of red-blue or red-green, but it's also highly effective in the red-grey colour configuration van de Ven chose for *Tranquility*. The tapestry's central dome has an almost vibrational luminosity.



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*Tranquility (detail)*, Catharina van de Ven x Karen Zeedijk

Referring again to Bukowski, the art of making something look simple isn't easy. Van de Ven says tufting becomes sculptural when 'you vary the pile height'. Trained as a fashion designer before she turned to sculpting, van de Ven has always been drawn to textiles. She describes tufting as 'a difficult technique,' that requires 'many years' for proficiency which is why she prefers to collaborate with an expert. 'Karen and I are a good team,' she says, and together 'we had to figure out how to make a perfect woollen dome.' A recurring motif in her work, domes are an appreciably 'female' shape that express van de Ven's 'feminist approach' and 'female identity'.



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*Tranquility's* central dome enhances the work's chromostereopsis. A different tufting technique was used to achieve the dome effect of the central circle—an effect most noticeable from a side-on or profile view. Graduated fibre lengths were used. A pneumatic tufting gun 'shoots' yarn fibres into a stretched textile base. Karen Zeedijk—the tufter—explains, 'To hand tuft a perfect dome the amount of yarn should be evenly distributed. If you tuft in circles you can control that feature.'



*Tranquility* (detail), Catharina van de Ven x Karen Zeedijk



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The central dome was tufted concentrically using a series of gun needles whose length corresponded with shorter pile heights on the perimeter and longer pile heights as the centre of the circle—4.5 cm in height—was reached. The outer circle that encloses the central circle dome was tufted in vertical lines of low pile, a choice that enhances and contrasts with the dome and adds considerably to the tapestry's meditative and tranquil qualities.

*Tranquility* is a new project. 'I have more works in this new series, but only [this] tapestry. I don't know yet what will follow and how the series will evolve. The dome, however is a shape that triggers me all the time. So who knows?'

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*Tranquility* is available exclusively through Priveekollektie Contemporary Art | Design, Heusden, The Netherlands



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