

ARTFORUM

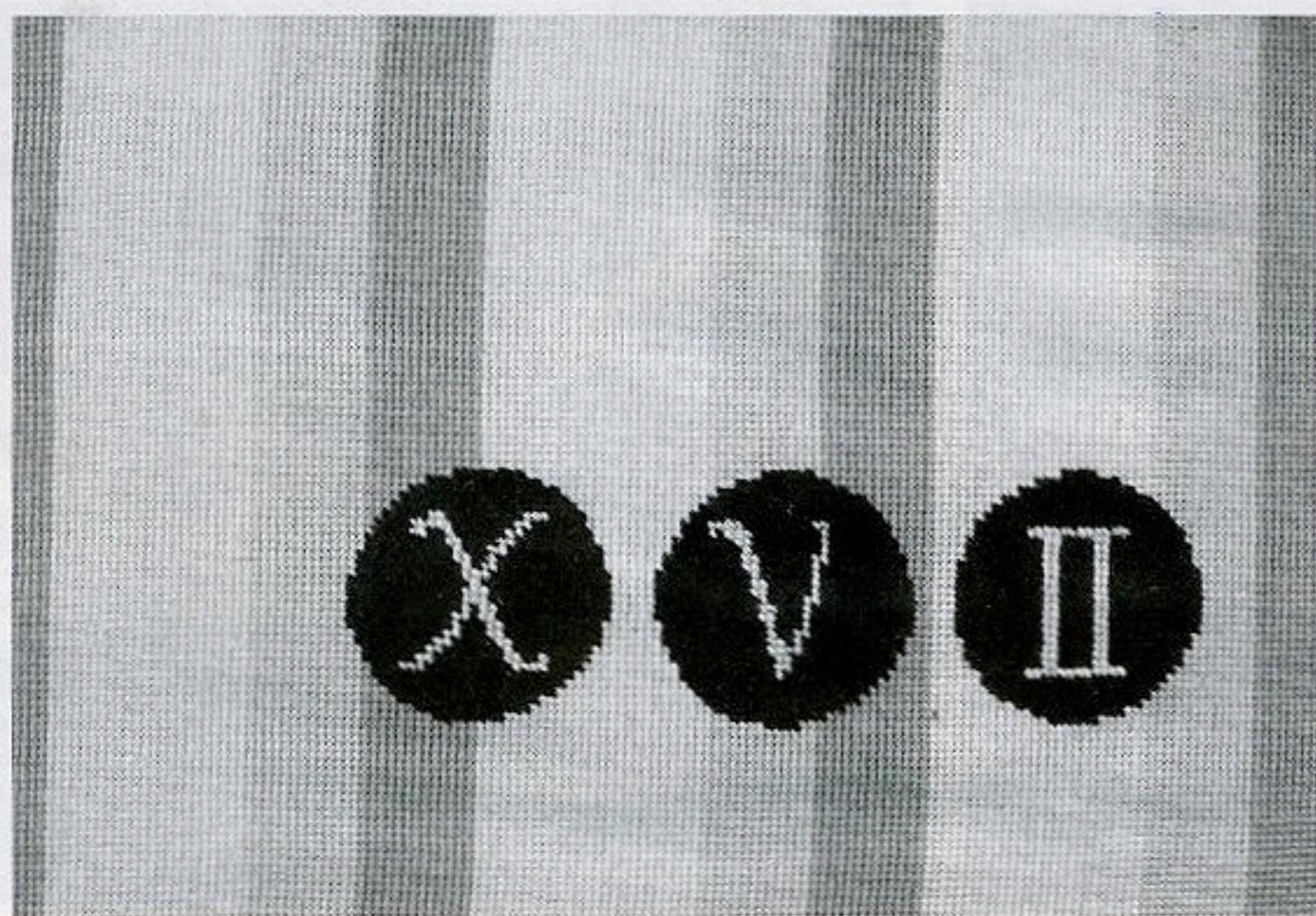
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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

BILL DAVENPORT

CRISTINEROSE

In this recent exhibition Bill Davenport placed an assortment of small, quirky objects around the gallery—a tinfoil starfish, various readymade ephemera, needlepoints sporting motifs ranging from early Modernist to early Atari—with an extreme attention to detail. Occupying walls, floors, and custom-built shelves, the pieces enjoyed space and lighting worthy of a museum show, a treatment at odds with their cheerfully slipshod facture—wool needlepoints hanging unstretched and out-of-square, woodwork that would barely earn a “C” in shop class—and palette of bright, happy colors (especially pink, orange, and turquoise).



Bill Davenport, *XVII*, 1994, wool needlepoint, 8 3/4 x 12 1/4".

References to the Pop era abounded, such as a knitted Popsicle echoing Claes Oldenburg, or a crocheted hubcap cover resembling an Irish tam-o-shanter crossed with a Jasper Johns target. More recently, LA artist Jim Isermann comes to mind in pieces such as *Washer Cover*, 1995, a woolly slipcover for a plywood washing machine, or *Tire Cover*, 1995, which recalls a plaid dog-bed purchased from a mail-order catalogue. Rather than a Pop commentary on commodity culture, however, Davenport's work is often simply baffling. What do the words RICH WOOD, spelled out in red, white, blue, and olive in humble needlepoint, signify? Or the plastic milk bottle half full of dried glue, placed next to lumps of painted concrete that resemble partially chewed vegetables?

Pathetic as these objects seem to be, they still have a plucky optimism. As Davenport has said, "They don't want your pity—they're getting along just fine." In contrast to Mike Kelley's soiled afghans and stuffed animals, with their suggestions of emotional abuse and Catholic guilt, Davenport's sculptures seem rooted in the joys of a happy, untraumatic childhood (his mom even helped with the crochet work). But this isn't to say the work is free of irony. The conceit of the prepubescent allows Davenport a kind of "plausible deniability" to follow his eye wherever it leads him—handicrafts, pixilated computer patterns, or an intriguing scrap of foam rubber—without having to justify himself. In this sense, he is a true slacker aesthete.

—Tom Moody