

Storybook Bags: The Whimsical World of Olympia Le-Tan

Description



Olympia Le-Tan

Since launching her eponymous fashion label in 2009, French designer Olympia Le-Tan has earned a cult following for her whimsical, playful and artisanal approach to making accessories. From the outset she has been producing stylised â??storybook bags,â?? hand-woven clutch bags in the same size and shape as limited-edition books, featuring â??coversâ?? with references to pop culture, art, and literature. While her source material is varied and eclectic, more often than not she leans in to vintage book covers, reproducing 1940s and 50s designs for literary classics including *Catcher in the Rye, Doctor Zhivago, Lolita* and *Valley of the Dolls, which are* faithfully rendered in silk embroidery. Her aim, she says, is to merge her two greatest passions: reading and sewing.



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Olympia of Greece Negroni embroidered appliquÃ©d canvas clutch

Le-Tan was born in London and raised in Paris to a family of creatives. Her father is esteemed illustrator Pierre Le-Tan, and her grandmother taught her how to sew and embroider from a young age. â??There is a granny aspect to my aesthetic,â?• she says. At the tender age of 19, Le-Tan interned at the design department of Chanel under Karl Lagerfeld, where her first taste of fashion set her on a lifelong mission. She remembers, â??While I was there picking up scraps of fabric, I would try to make something for myself.â?• Work for Gilles Dufour at Balmain cemented her desire to be a designer, and she dedicated the following years to finding her signature style, one of schoolgirl charm featuring buttoned-up cardigans, peter-pan collars and neat and tidy passages of embroidery.



New York City embroidered appliquÃ©d canvas clutch

During a shopping trip at the (now closed) influential Parisian concept store Colette, Le-Tan wore one of her own embroidered tote bags, which caught the attention of the storeâ??s owner, who asked Le-Tan to produce more for sale. Orders from Isetan in Tokyo and Browns in London followed, giving Le-Tan the confidence to branch out on her own solo venture in 2009. â??It led to a small enterprise making these bags,â• she recalls. â??My boyfriendâ??s mum would help make them. I didnâ??t do collections and didnâ??t really have an email. I would just whip something up.â•



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Jane Austen embroidered appliquÃ©d canvas clutch

The idea for the mini clutch bags, or â??minaudieresâ?? came about after Le-Tan was browsing through her fatherâ??s old magazine collection, as she explains, â??The idea for the book minaudieres first came because I really like the graphic covers of American novels from the 40s and 50s. My dad had loads of them, and I thought theyâ??d look great in embroidery.â?• She has, she explains, occasionally adapted her pop and art culture references, but more often stays true to the original, paying homage to the distinctive charm that vintage designs so often have. â??I have reinvented a few, but generally I prefer to reproduce authentic covers.â?•



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Tomatoes embroidered appliquÃ©d canvas clutch

Size and shape are important features for Le-Tan â?? the bags need to be large enough to fit the essentials, yet small enough to retain their neat, bookish quality. â??They look small but you can actually fit a decent amount of stuff in them,â?• says Le-Tan, adding, â??When I started, I built prototypes to make sure all the essentials fit: cigarettes, phone, wallet.â?•



Tomatoes embroidered appliquÃ©d canvas clutch



Tomatoes embroidered appliquÃ©d canvas clutch

Every design begins with a felt model, which is then faithfully produced by hand embroidery in a Parisian fashion atelier, making each one a true work of art in its own right. They reflect Le-Tanâ??s lifelong fascination with the old-world charm of embroidery, and its ability to breathe new life into the quirky, vintage designs of the past. She says, â??The notion that runs through all of my collections is the connection with craftsmanship, expertise, and the quality of things made by hand. Thereâ??s also that combination of naivety and cheekiness. And every season I add a theme. I guess my inspiration just comes from life, really.â?•

Following Olympia Le-Tanâ??s departure as creative director in 2018, the brand is now run by a small creative team who make up the OLT Studio.

CATEGORY

1. EMBROIDERY
2. FASHION DESIGN

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