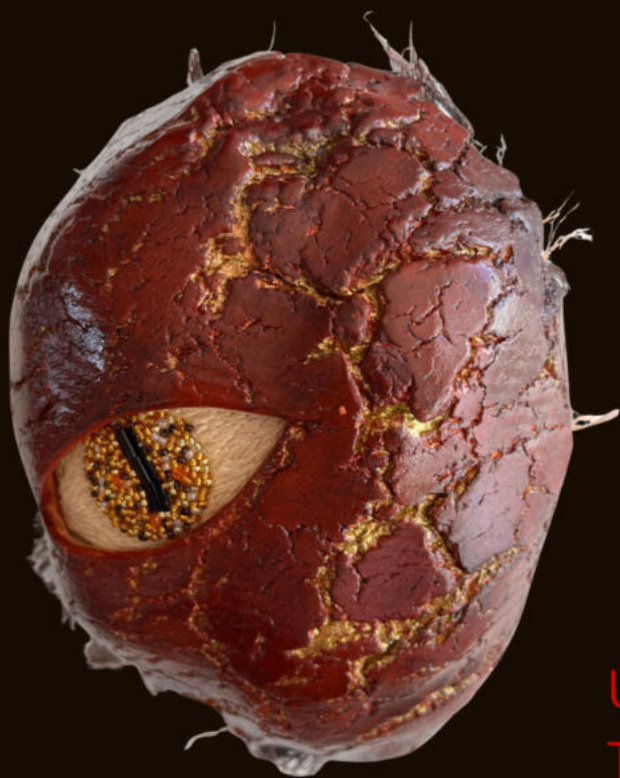


the  
PENELOPE  
project



UNDER  
THE GAZE  
OF  
THE SUITORS

Axel Morel

sculpture + embroideries

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2025

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# the PENELOPE project

Axel Morel

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1

## **Penelope, a queen who assumes power**

In the Iliad, we are told that when Ulysses embarked on his perilous voyage to Troy, Penelope was entrusted with governing Ithaca and protecting their son, Telemachus..

**She ruled the kingdom of Ithaca with prudence and strategy, seeking to maintain peace and balance.** Faced with her husband's rivals, she deployed ruses to keep them at bay to keep a firm grip on the kingdom's affairs.

However, the society of men refuses a woman the right to rule alone, and urges her to take a new husband. She then gives her condition: she will agree to become engaged when she has finished weaving the shroud she is making to cover the remains of Ulysses' father Laertes, who died in battle. Such a project could not be thwarted, as it would be an offense to Laertes and the gods.

## **Every night, Penelope unravels her work to buy time...**

When she is betrayed by her own servant, and refuses to choose between the suitors herself, she decides to organize a game of skill. The winner will be named King of Ithaca and will marry her. Hidden from everyone's view, Ulysses returns from his voyage, wins the trials and, through a subtle interplay of secrets, reveals himself.

## **The couple are reunited.**

réf.

Homère. L'Odyssée.

Dingremont François. Pénélope, la meilleure des Achéennes. In : Gaïa : revue interdisciplinaire sur la Grèce antique, N° 15, 2012. PP. 11-40;  
[https://www.persee.fr/doc/gaia\\_1287-3349\\_2012\\_num-15-1-1581;](https://www.persee.fr/doc/gaia_1287-3349_2012_num-15-1-1581)







# the PENELOPE project

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3

*the concept*

**The intuition that Penelope cannot be a poor submissive woman, object of men's desire.**

My work, my research, constantly intersects with questions of identity: gender identity, issues of power and, more generically, the complex and sometimes dysfunctional links between "who we are" and what "we are supposed to be".

The myth of Penelope is an excellent example of this questioning.

Penelope is supposed to be a queen who is submissive to the desires of the powerful, an instrument in their conquest of power because she has been abandoned by her protector.

She is not, therefore, a free woman, a woman free to exercise power, a woman who can solely assume her vision of how to use the power entrusted to her.

**Her assignment is total: woman, wife and mother.**

This archaic vision of the world, which is resurfacing today even in the younger generations and almost everywhere in the world, is unacceptable. Penelope's case resembles the case of all those people who continue to be instrumentalized with the aim of fragmenting our humanity, for the benefit of a handful of people who have declared themselves all-powerful and act as such.

**Penelope is an agent of resistance.** An inventive figure, who avoids confrontation but masters all the intricacies of strategy, and cleverly imposes her own rules of the game to maintain her position of power.

**The power to be.**

# the PENELOPE project

Axel Morel

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For this project, I'm presenting **5 pieces.**

**They are a combination of groups : a diptych and a triptych, combined with a monumental sculpture.**

This modules can be exist separately in any combination, but my desire is to at first present them all.

They are a combination of 29 embroidered eyes, linked together as a gazing constellation, observing every gesture of the protagonist.

In this way, the viewer is at the heart of the device, as Penelope observed by the power-hungry suitors.

**work in progress**



# the PENELOPE project

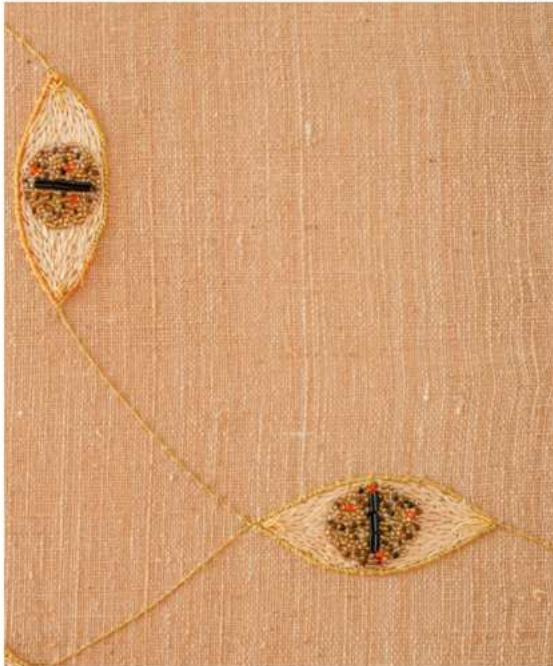
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5

*the motif*

## about the motif



The eye is a highly symbolic element in all civilizations. In Greece, Egypt, Turkey, Bulgaria... it's a symbol of good fortune.

It also symbolizes knowledge and enlightenment.

Here, it's the symbolic element of observation and surveillance.

**“I see you”.**

## about the silk

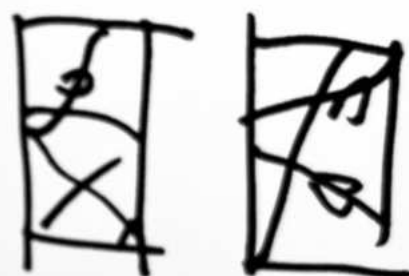
I use natural silk from Laos. It's a raw, undyed silk, woven by traditional methods, by hand by craftsmen.

It is generally used to make garments or as an everyday textile.

It has a rough, rather uneven appearance, and is gray in color, giving it a raw, authentic feel.







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the PENELOPE project

# the PENELOPE project

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*technical informations*

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## The dyptique

The frame is 50x70cm, draped in natural silk from Laos, and embroidered with gold lurex, thread, gold 14 carat canetille, glass breads and tubes and coton threads.

## The tryptique

The frame is 50x200cm, draped in natural silk from Laos, and embroidered with gold lurex, thread, gold 14 carat canetille, glass breads and tubes and coton threads.

### **The work is yet realised.**

Eatch eye needs around 4 hours of work, with a total of 29 eyes, its around 120 hours, then for the lines its around 6 hours each panel, wich makes 30 hours more, so not less than 150 hours of embrodering time, corresponding to around 40 working days, equivalent to 1,5 / 2 month.



## Why do I use embroidery as a means of artistic expression ?

I've always been fascinated by needlework, whether it's lace, pearl or gold embroidery. The first piece I embroidered was a **heart** in glass beads on a square of silk satin.

This experience immediately delighted me, and I really enjoyed bringing this object to life, trying to make the motif emerge, to compose with colors, to seek to tame volume, **to struggle with the resistance of materials**. I then threw myself frantically into the production of a series of embroidered hearts, each borrowing from a different period of art history.

As a costume designer, I've used embroidery extensively, notably for **corset** ornamentation, but also when creating painted canvases for theater sets, seeking to imitate **the movements of embroidered lines** on very large formats.

I had the great good fortune to be a **student** of Anne-Françoise Benhamou - playwright, Florence Delay - writer and academician, Véronique Simon - costume designer, and a close friend of costume designer Jacques Schmidt, the greatest in my eyes. Virginia Woolf, Louise Bourgeois, Louise Labbé and Christian Dior are among **my greatest inspirations**. Thanks to them, I've found an artistic path that combines extreme rigor, the desire to eliminate the unnecessary and the need for meaning.

In this way, I pursue a fairly personal line of work, **using different techniques demanded by the works themselves**. Experimenting, seeking to create complex pieces - whether realistic or imaginary - seeking simplification and sometimes opening a space towards abstraction.

It's work that's at once meditative, requiring withdrawal from the world, and nourished by the impact of the outside world. The physical intensity - sometimes the pain - produced by **the engagement of the body**, implies a number of pauses that I like to be contemplative, like phases of aggregation, which stretch out the time of creation.

The thread sums up my approach to this medium. Connecting things, marking distances from one point to another, and in this way building paths - symbolic, utilitarian, amorous - **perhaps recreating a lost link ?**

# the PENELOPE project

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references

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## **Embroidered corset.**

Black silk from thailand (shantung),  
breads, sequins, coton and silk  
threads.



## **Embroidered Vanity**

Pink • Gold and black

Glass beads and pearls, coton thread, sequins.

*((private collections))*





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## **“David”**

*Water color*

Black water color on Baohong 300gr paper

135 x 275cm

*(private collection)*

# the PENELOPE project

Axel Morel

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**Axel MOREL**, a french artist based in Europe explores the boundaries between sculpture and volume embroidery, developing a singular artistic approach that fuses tradition and innovation. This innovative approach gives rise to pieces in which the thread, traditionally associated with the surface, extends and rises, creating singular and moving organic and dynamic forms.

He is presented by the **gallery Little Bird Place** and **Atelier 28 Gallery** in Bulgaria and collected in several **private europeans collections** in France, Belgium and Bulgaria.



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**Axel MOREL**

+33 6 31 99 64 65 • France  
+359 877 177 304 • Bulgarie  
axel.morelmornaud@icloud.com  
www.axelmorel.art



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**Ателие 28**