

Kissenplatte, 1916
Entwurf/Ausführung: Sophie Taeuber-Arp
Material/Technik: Baumwolle, Wolle,
Kreuzstichstickerei
53 × 52 cm
Eigentum: Museum für Gestaltung Zürich / ZHdK



The pillow cover is an eloquent example of the careful balance of colors and forms that marked the Swiss artist Sophie Taeuber-Arp's (1889–1943) work in both the applied and fine arts.

Sophie Taeuber, as yet unmarried, used gridded canvas here as a background for her pillow cover embroidered in five rows featuring like patterns. Between square and rectangular monochromatic fields she placed abstracted flowers and flightless birds as figural motifs, which through their changing locations on the stripes lend the composition a kinetic component. Taeuber embroidered the pillow with its dominant red tones by hand in neat cross-stitch, thereby creating an icon of her own design technique. Contrary to the common practice of merely decorating textile grounds, Taeuber's ornament encompasses the entire surface. After attending the Zeichnungsschule für Industrie und Gewerbe in St. Gallen and studying applied arts in Munich and Hamburg, Taeuber moved to Zurich in 1914, where she made a living selling her art and crafts work. In 1916, she became director of the newly founded embroidery department at the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich,

where she earned her livelihood until 1929. An all-rounder in the field of handicrafts, Taeuber steered the floral embroidery of her students in a more geometric direction while showing them new ways to design interior textiles such as carpets, pillows, and the then omnipresent doilies. Together with her fellow teacher Blanche Gauchat, in 1927 she published a manual on how to teach drawing to students training in the textile professions (*Anleitung zum Unterricht im Zeichnen für textile Berufe*), which served as a guideline for their best-known students—Elsi Giauque, Lucie Welti, and Ida Störi—as well as many others. In the manual, Taeuber skillfully presents systematic embroidery using juxtaposition and reflection as well as the use of negative forms, raising this needlework far above the usual decorative embellishments. (Sabine Flaschberger)

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