ALMINE RECH

Brent Wadden
Soft Peace

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Brent Wadden
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To the casual observer, Brent Wadden's woven paintings (how else to describe his trademark combination of woven wool, cotton and other fibres stretched over canvas) seem to articulate an often hypnotic geometry of form and colour. A work might feature a series of repeated triangles and rectangles (or horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines filled with colour); each iteration slightly different from the one next to it: the angles slightly altered; the colours deployed varying; a visible seam suggesting that this is a work made in parts, rather than a uniform whole. There's the visual rhythm of a machine, but the disruptive trace of the handmade. Moreover, Wadden might call such a work 5 Green Bars (double fade) (2015); but you might see five orange triangles (those bars, for you, having receded into the background). A dialogue starts. Perhaps you feel that you're part of an experiment in perceptual psychology. Perhaps you're uncertain about what, exactly, you're looking at.

When the artlover is confronted by Wadden's works, they might trace within them the influences of geometric abstraction, the bold colour treatment of Abstract Expressionism (although many of his earlier woven works were largely black and white), a little Op-art, a touch of the conceptual and perhaps a little bit in the works that use colour of Paul Klee's colour theory (itself a strong influence on the Bauhaus's weaving classes, originally led by the Swiss painter Johannes Itten). Ultimately, and by necessity born out of the methods Wadden uses, there's a continuation of a Modernist confrontation with the grid. And for the artist, who began his artistic career as a painter, all that is there; it's the language with which he speaks and, one might suppose, in which he thinks. But more than that, his latest works contain a multitude of information about human life as it manifests itself in the past, the present and perhaps even the future as well.

Brent Wadden is from a working-class family. 'Work is in my blood', he has said in interview. And each of his works is work: an expression and record of labour. There are the months of gathering materials, the days spent setting the loom, then, lest we forget, the weaving itself and the piecing together of different fabrics into finished works. Slipping two threads set at right-angle over and under each other, the weaving retains a memory or trace of the energy imparted in the yarn, via the loom, by the weaver. Perhaps it's that which leads to the mystical associations weaving has often carried (as one's eyes and mind wander though one of Wadden's works one might recall, for example, some lines from the fifteenth-century Indian mystic poet Kabir's Weaving Your Name: "I weave your name on the loom of my mind/ To clean and soften ten thousand threads/And to comb the twists and knots of my thoughts"; although for the artist, there are also associations with the traditional crafts of his native Nova Scotia). That and the fact that in Western society we're often told that manual labour is a thing that's dying out in the age of machines, automation and computer-controlled manufacture.

Weaving is an ancient artform. Certainly Neolithic, possibly Paleolithic and definitely a key indicator of the emergence of early civilisation. Much later, it was at the forefront of the mechanisation processes that drove the Industrial Revolution and some of the manufacturing philosophies on which our present society is based. And yet (and, in part, because of that process of industrialisation, later automation), today weaving by handloom is often associated with the homely, the age of

leisure (it takes (spare) time to weave), and resistance to technological progress. A status with which Wadden's stretched works (the loose threads at the edges of his weaving carefully tucked away) certainly play.

If weaving is in part about taming a material, then the geometries, variations in the colours of yarn used (it's hard to find enough the artist says) and even expressionistic abstractions in Wadden's work also serve to set it free. What seem to be at a distance rigid geometries turn out on close inspection to be much more fragile, perhaps even wobbly or ragged lines and divisions. Today we might even describe the lines as rastorized, for somewhere between the lines of warp and weft there is certainly an originary pixel. And in the loom, an early computer, there is a generator of mathematical patterns, an organiser of information. So much for the Neolithic.

Threads of a particular colour are generally sourced second-hand (that, is where the computer, and Ebay, does come into play), and in quantities that may not be enough to complete an entire work or section of a work. In that way Wadden's works are also a record of exchange, of forms of communication that existed in Medieval Yarn markets and earlier international trade (let's not forget that Wadden's woven works are such that once taken off the loom they can be folded and transported before being fixed and stretched on a canvas and hung on a gallery wall); they go beyond the visual language of form and colour to articulate something about the networked and mobile. Which in turn brings us back to the loom and its assembly of threads into warp and weft, and the way in which it can make incongruous elements congruous. And there is no denying that one of the attractions of Wadden's work lies in precisely that.

During the latter part of the nineteenth-century the French novelist Gustave Flaubert began to compile a 'Dictionary of Everyday Thought'. Unfinished when he died, it was published posthumously and purported to record the often unfounded, sometimes superstitious and always comic opinions of everyday folk in France. Under the entry for 'art', Flaubert records this: 'Leads to the poorhouse. What good is it, since it is being replaced by mechanical processes that do the job better and faster?'. Wadden teaches us otherwise.