

ARTFORUM

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By Pamela Kort

BERLIN

Brent Wadden

PERES PROJECTS

Working on a back-strap loom, this young Canadian artist intertwines acrylic yarns with hand-spun wools that he then stitches together and finally mounts on raw canvas. The large-scale works that result are more than simply intriguing: They take to task all kinds of preconceptions about painting. For starters, they brazenly refuse conventional distinctions between so-called “folk art” and “high art” practice. These works flaunt their indebtedness to indigenous traditions of artmaking, particularly those from the coast of Nova Scotia, where Wadden grew up. Initially just as important to him was the heritage of Abstract Expressionism. Remember the description of Jackson Pollock as “systematically weaving” his images “into an impenetrable web of lines and dribbles” so as to deliberately veil them? Steven W. Naifeh and Gregory White Smith’s biography of Pollock was popular in the 1990s, just as Wadden came of age as a painter; twenty years later, he seems to have returned to this intriguing notion, applying its consequences to his own technique of working.

As significant is the time Wadden spent in Berlin between 2005 and 2010. Part of the consequence of this sojourn has been a budding engagement with the heritage of the Bauhaus. In particular, the new paintings in this show, “About Time,” follow up on strategies pioneered at the school by Paul Klee. Even before Klee held design courses for weavers at the Dessau Bauhaus in 1927, he had made paintings that recall the look of woven textiles and that sometimes were even made



Brent Wadden,
Alignment #21, 2013,
hand-woven fibers
(wool and cotton) and
acrylic on canvas,
80 3/4 x 72 3/4".

his art, regardless of gender, race, or use-value. By channeling the energy first required to produce the yarn, often by another party in his or her own creative endeavor, into his own work, Wadden aims to achieve what he terms a new kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk*." Recently he commented: "The weavings retain a kind of energy which I feel partially comes from the laborious process of making, which is both meditative and physically demanding." This has led him to source his yarn from a variety of places, often obtaining it secondhand.

The pared-down gray, black, and beige hues of these works and Wadden's concern with material also recall Minimalist aesthetics. Like Carl Andre's *144 Squares*, 1969—in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada—Wadden's work references classificatory systems outside the scope of his own art, but related to it. Although he doesn't include concrete citations of this—such as, for example, the periodic table of elements that accompanies the Andre sculpture—the notched shapes that fill Wadden's canvases recall the highs and lows of various systems of grading. In so doing, they invite the viewer to also gauge the effectiveness of these works of art to upset various yarns spun about painting.

—Pamela Kort

directly on jute fragments. Wadden reverses this process: Not only do his works consist of fibers, but he considers them paintings. And verily from a distance, their unfussy, repetitious shapes look as if they have indeed been painted. Like Klee, Wadden seems to appreciate that canvas itself is nothing more than a cloth woven together from jute, hemp, or other such coarse threads.

This artist also seems to know all about the optical variations that can be achieved by deploying different textures of yarn, interwoven with varying degrees of tension. The upshot is a kind of painting that does away with divisions between "women's work" and "masculine" avant-garde art. Wadden is much more concerned with integrating past histories of labor into