

ArtMag

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The Politics of Weaving: Xaviera Simmon's Exhibition "Woven" at 60 Wall Gallery

Weaving – many associate this term with craftsmanship and women's work. But the exhibition "Woven" curated by Xaviera Simmons shows other things connected with this technique: abstract composition, modern thinking, and politics.



Xaviera Simmons, Index Six, Composition One, 2013.
Deutsche Bank Collection



Pepe Mar, Untitled, 2013. Courtesy of the Artist and David
Castillo Gallery

The [Bauhaus](#) was a macho organization. When it was founded in 1919, [Walter Gropius](#) initially declared that "Any person of good repute, without regard to age or sex" should be admitted. But then too many women came for his taste. The Bauhaus reacted with a drastic admission freeze, and most of the women who were let in ended up in the "women's class" – the weaving workshop. Yet what female artists such as [Anni Albers](#) produced here in experimental workshops are among the most exciting and progressive works ever created at the Bauhaus.

Weaving is a modern technique, from the Bauhaus to the carpets that artists such as [Pablo Picasso](#), [Paul Gauguin](#), and [Henri Matisse](#) designed in Paris. At the same time, it is a symbol of a very contemporary form of creativity. This includes the fusion of different practices, for example visual and applied arts with music, as well as the search for new literary or visual narrative modes in which various influences and perspectives are woven together. And not least of all, the Internet is like a gigantic meshwork of servers, cables, and data that enables the whole world to engage in exchange.

[Woven](#), the exhibition curated by [Xaviera Simmons](#) at [60 Wall Gallery](#), [Deutsche Bank](#), New York,

features all of these traditions and associations while simultaneously examining the technique of weaving in the current artistic context. Works by 17 artists are on view. In addition to works from the [Deutsche Bank Collection](#), loans from diverse New York galleries are on exhibit. Simmons focuses on various aspects of weaving that these artists deal with in their works: the handmade, the tactile, as well as meditative-rhythmic work with various materials that are woven together.

“Repetition is fundamental within my own practice and in the works of these international artists,” says Simmons in her statement on the show. It is also important to her that there is a focus on color, geometry, texture, calligraphic elements, and formal reduction.

The New York artist, who is represented with many works in the Deutsche Bank Collection, is an all-around talent. In her installations, photographs, performances, and films, Simmons engages critically with the idea of a purely white and male-dominated modern age. She often uses black music, jazz, R&B, and pop as reference points to create an alternative perspective of American cultural history. (Read the ArtMag feature on Simmons [here](#))

In *Woven*, she is represented with artworks from her series *Index*. For these works, she wrapped bodies in cloth, adorned them with a number of objects such as jewelry, animal skulls, glass pearls, and plants, and photographed them. The swathed body parts look like three-dimensional collages in which fashion, spirituality, and debates about gender and blackness are interwoven.

It is surely no coincidence that, together with current artists such as the Romanian [Ciprian Muresan](#) and the U.S. star painter [Amy Sillman](#), Simmons also included [Lee Krasner](#) and [Louise Nevelson](#), two iconic artists from the environment of [Abstract Expressionism](#), in the exhibition. Simmons has repeatedly cited this male-dominated art movement in her work and for *Woven* chose two works that also work with collage techniques and a combination of different materials.

Krasner’s untitled assemblage from 1954 consists of color surfaces, brushstrokes, and strips of paper that are overlain to form a dynamic composition that is typical of her gestural-rhythmic style. Calligraphic forms reminiscent of letters detach from a forest-like construction. The visual language of Nevelson’s collage of pieces of wood and paper, in which the sculptor combines different forms and textures, has a calmer formal vocabulary. But both artists have this in common with Simmons: They are not only concerned with purely formal issues, but also with expressing emotion and spirituality. “I reconstruct the dismembered world into a new harmony,” explains Nevelson. [Jennie C. Jones](#)’ 2014 collage *Score for Sustained Blackness Set 1* could be viewed as a contemporary, technoid response to Nevelson. However, here the artist is interested in conceptual links between painterly abstraction and jazz – in her work Jones transforms sounds into lines and color surfaces.

“Weaving is an abstract and ancient code used by all cultures to connect, depict and define their relationship to nature,” explains [Monika Bravo](#). In her multimedia works, the Colombian artist transfers the principle of warp and woof – the lengthwise and crosswise threads that form a woven fabric – to her computer animations. Graphic lines and geometric surfaces create pictures of plants, landscapes, or clouds. Bravo’s abstract patterns are based on mochilas arhuacas, the bags woven by indigenous peoples out of agave fibers that have become a culture symbol of her home country.

[Sheila Hicks](#) is also strongly influenced by indigenous Latin American art. The grand dame of textile art,

born in Nebraska in 1934, has been shown in important exhibitions such as the [Whitney Biennale](#) for many years. For this year's [Biennale of Sydney](#), sponsored by Deutsche Bank, she created the *Embassy of Chromatic Delegates* in which her textile objects produce a landscape in shimmering colors. At the Wall Gallery, three of her "Minimes" are on view – miniatures that she has made for decades using a small transportable weaving frame. Like Anni Albers, Hicks, who studied with [Josef Albers](#) at [Yale](#), combines modernism with folk-art motifs.

[Jayson Musson](#) documents that textile work today is not solely a female domain. His woven *Coogi Sweater Paintings* are an homage to the bright-colored, wildly patterned sweaters of the Coogi brand, which were popular above all in the hip-hop scene in the nineties. But his woven painting *Black Bisector*, the title of his contribution to *Woven*, also alludes to the [Star Wars](#) films: This is the term for heroes in Gree, one of the galaxy's oldest languages.

[Rashid Johnson's](#) contribution shows how political *Woven* can be. His works are meditations on the cultural phenomena that characterize African American social life. He often combines conceptual approaches with references to traditional craftsmanship, design, and theater. The film *The New Black Yoga* from 2011 that emerged from the eponymous still in the exhibition shows five young black people standing on Persian rugs on a beach practicing a mixture of yoga and various martial arts. In the film, this scene is set to a hypnotic beat and flute sounds. But the photo also expresses the very topical dilemma embodied in this typical wellness scene – the choice that many young blacks have to make of either protecting themselves by using violence or engaging in self-reflection to preserve inner and outer freedom.

Woven

until September 15, 2016
60 Wall Gallery, New York