

Jennings Kerr

Threads

Boni Cairncross, Tristan Chant, Hannah Cooper, Harriet Goodall

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Our lives are complex, increasingly fast paced in the contemporary world. There is always something to rush off to, always late to the event or leaving early to get ahead. This show tells a story of these shifts in pace, an unraveling of how we harmonise with material, how we wrap ourselves up in it, apply our hands to it, images on and in it, as well as how threads can be descriptive of us. We were weaving in the Neolithic era, often for utility and the history of cloth and woven fibre is one to look to when thinking about our fraying into a throw away culture. Gone are the days of darning, or maybe a return to quality and refinement. The celebration of wear and tear, the ageing gracefully and awe found in exposed threads, like the honesty of an ancient textile. Sure, time and labor are somewhat relevant here, however I would say that it is something deeper, an ingrained relationship to fibre and cloth. We live on and in it, wicking sweat or insulating the body, repelling water or reflecting light, expressing who we are and what it means to be individual. How do we relate to it in order to suggest something of ourselves? These works come together from very different practices, disparate approaches to the soft but undeniably interlaced through a shared appreciation of craft and skill, technologies (both contemporary and ancient) as well as the relationship between many of these techniques and the prevalence of them in contemporary painting. There is a topographic, a geography and somewhat accidentally there is the land threaded between all of this work. Lands infused into the threads and other materials, lifted from the land and woven in order to echo it. A slowing down to understand, an absorption of our places.

Boni Cairncross compositions come about through interventions with found cloth in relation to the history of painting and specifically geometric abstraction. The patterns are often reminiscent of gene splicing, seismic activity or more broadly data graphing but they are softened when placed back under tension. There is a wobbling that results from the act of stretching that brings them to life and accentuates the piecing and stitching together, splicing cloth while also placing them in direct relation to painting. Her machined embroidery is finer, its language brings to mind ancient artefact, like cloth or embroideries lifted from a tomb. They float loose in their frames like fabric of a lost civilisation in a natural history museum vitrine. The open state of the work with its loose structure echoes the wobbling line, charting rhythm and sequence and in this show provides the perfect counter to the tight structures of the hand loomed pixels in the works of Hannah Cooper or the accuracy of the jacquard loom in the work of Tristan Chant. The reconfiguring of pattern and interruption of geometries speak to the work of Anni Albers and also sit in conversation with the aerial perspective and topographic demarcation that informs the wall relief sculpture and weaving of Harriet Goodall.

Tristan Chant brings an appropriation to the show and a transference through a clever subversion of tapestry. These pieces lift landscape from vintage tobacco advertising, stripping it of its slogans and catchphrases through digital manipulation. The iconic and enticing image signing adventure and escape but with a lesser abstraction than the pixel-scapes of Hannah Cooper. Here the photograph still operating in a representational sense but softened and like always in tapestry the binding of material as image. An obfuscation through the dragging of analogue material into the digital and back out with romance, tradition and the association of a medium that is steeped in grandeur. Chant is able to reinvent it and once again like Cairncross and Cooper, the wrapping of it around timber stretcher bars, pulled taught and flush against the wall, we find a direct relationship between painting, photography and textile. Here we feel safe, connected to the spirit of the wild and free but without the irritation of the smokers cough or pungent haze and a nod to the Marlboro Man cowboys of American artist Richard Prince.

Hannah Cooper squeezes her palette from her surroundings, threads floating around in natural dye baths, patience and skill in equal measure. Her loom is guided by hand, slowly weaving in the traditional analogue realm but with the visual language of the digital. Here the pixel is the signifier of the digital circulation of photographic image, slowed through thread and gold leaf. There is a tension created between the traditional craft and the conceptual, resolution and the language of screen technology and image making. I think of the ways in which Sterling Ruby is able to lift from his Amish heritage, quilting, ceramic and the crafts made contemporary. Cooper is looking to the 'Heidelberg' School of artists who frequently worked 'en plein air' in the rural landscapes outside of Melbourne. Cooper lifts the iconic landscape once again, pastoral but reduced to its pixel in an attempt to question our relationship to the image, its power over us and our absorption of it through social media feeds. The immediacy of access, the speed at which the expanse is compressed into the digital raises the questions of how do we relate to these spaces but more importantly do we sacrifice experience for evidence?

Harriet Goodall contributes a topographic perspective, compositional structures that bring to mind the demarcation of space, the carving up of the landscape, our attempts to assert control over it. The wall mounted pieces connect to painting through both their surface treatments and processes, including natural rock impasto applied to the welded steel. These welded steel frameworks acting as both a support for the woven element but also a compositional structure for the softer elements to contrast with. Here we see both rigidity in the geometries of the work but a softening in the curves that bend like a stream passing through farmland. Here the idea of perspective also gives way to a passion for the history of cloth and fibre based works, the aesthetic of patchwork and quilting techniques combined with the undulation of the landscape in relation to a mimicry of the drop and drape of cloth. This is achieved through control of her various processes and materials but with the intention of expressing the importance of living with respect to one's surroundings. Here, like Cooper's natural dye baths, Goodall weaves her landscape from and with her surroundings. The material often foraged and preserved, broken down, dried out and new life breathed into her threads and fibres through patient hands.

It went ignored for so long, as the support for painting, Belgium linen, cotton canvas, polyester, overlaid and forgotten. I was always fascinated by the Quilts of Tracey Emin, or the installation of Senga Nengudi, the undulation of wire in a Ruth Asawa or the patterns in an Anni Albers. The shift is in the lens, the framework of acceptance and glorification. We now see a tilting of the scale, a wave of ceramic into cloth into glass and an opening up to the great beauty found in these traditions. It might be foraged grasses,

Jennings Kerr

aged and preserved or a digital manipulation of image into woven tapestry, it could be a geometric abstraction in found textile or a pixelated landscape, but these pieces are all successful in how they respect material and surface. They are fused together in the room through a shared appreciation of threads as the building blocks, the pixels of our world around.

James Kerr, 2023