

WIDEWALLS

Hidden Messages in the Woven Works of Margo Wolowiec

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May 10, 2017



Margo Wolowiec's practice entails remarkable labor. The artist sources her imagery online and on social media through tags and geotags, grouping together images that are then printed down and transferred onto plastic polyester threads to be hand-woven on a loom. Different woven panels are usually joined together, stitched into stretched canvases or presented as freestanding structures. As a result, Wolowiec's works are **complex visual devices**.

The woven pieces show every imperfection and every accident of their making. At each step in the process, something of the original imagery goes missing, slightly shifting the meaning. **Every interference of the starting image reiterates the physical nature of weaving.**

Wolowiec's choice to work with such a traditional technique couldn't be more programmatic. The artist has been working on a loom since her student years, in the pursuit of a method to put into shape the contradictions of our society. In this research, her relationship with the Internet and technology has a special place. On a purely formal level, some of her panels, for instance, closely resemble disturbed digital images or the grainy visualizations of white noise. Furthermore, the very process of weaving on a loom has a strict analogy with computing. Both types of work are based on a strict binary logic of different configurations and repetitions of the same basic couple of elements: warp and weft, "0" and "1".

Wolowiec complicates these relations by **manually painting some of her threads**, or at times invalidating the canvases with gestural marks made directly on the surface of the works.



Exhibition View Margo Wolowiec, 2017, Jessica Silverman Gallery, Courtesy of the Artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery

Coded Language

For her current exhibition *Evergreen, Searchlight and Rosebud* at Jessica Silverman Gallery, San Francisco, Margo Wolowiec has gone one step further in complicating her medium. The title of the show lists three codenames used by the American Secret Service to address, in their respective order, Hillary Clinton, Richard Nixon and Sasha Obama, hence referring to a coded language.

In this new series of works, the artist has extensively included text lines, integrating them with images through her usual process of weaving-collage, reaching an effect that has both formal and conceptual strength. These text lines, blurred beyond legibility, come from online news articles, whose sources are sometimes reliable and otherwise fake. The words are shelled into the pattern of the woven threads, emphasizing the horizontal course of the weft's lines. Reduced to composite elements, every now and again some legible word emerges from the texture of the tapestries. I can read, "all we have" in one, and "pictures of her children, pictures of ..." on another, however their original meaning has been long forgotten.

Rose Garden Strategy

To balance her compositions, Wolowiec wove colorful images of roses into the works. The subject matter is very deliberate: in Western culture, roses generally have a positive connotation, but here they also have a more specific relation to American politics.

The White House Rose Garden, which borders the Oval Office and the West Wing of the White House in Washington D.C., was used by past administrations for special ceremonies and press conferences. The phrase "Rose Garden Strategy" refers to a re-election strategy based on staying inside the White House's grounds to strengthen the incumbent's political influence.

Hidden behind the flowers, Wolowiec subtly introduces another ghost-like set of images, initially illustrating the online news she took her lines from.



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Copper Tapestries

The exhibition features a series of freestanding structures space. These works, echoing room dividers, pair a woven panel, free of any support, with a copper mesh wire in different configurations. The structure of the copper visually mimics the texture and the feeling of the tapestries, creating a sense of continuity; Wolowiec has decided to include them because of their particular properties. These meshes are, indeed, used to build "Faraday cages", spaces completely impermeable from any radio waves and cellular frequencies. Seen through the lens of today's discussions over news and media, the copper meshes become a contemporary version of a shield, thereby assuming positive connotations.

Once again, Wolowiec proves her cleverness and sensitivity, granting attention first to the properties of her materials. In front of her work, one is constantly invited to renegotiate the relationships between digital culture, media, reality and art making. Considering today's political climate, this is nothing but indispensable.

Featured images: Exhibition View Margo Wolowiec, 2017, Jessica Silverman Gallery, Courtesy of the Artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery.