The object of *Margo Wolowiec*'s artistic scrutiny is the constant flow of digital images on social media, which she captures, fragments and distorts while embedding them into the coloured threads of her woven works. *Words: Muriel Zagha.*

MARGO WOLOWIEC

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What, the artist wonders, is the impact of digital representation on the visual language of desire, on personal histories and sense of space? Hand-dyed and tactile, rich with irregularities, her works are expressive of a beguiling tension between the transience of the image feed and the permanent, painterly presence of the woven panel.

By what technical processes do you produce your works?
I have always been interested in a textile's ability to hold information and act as an index of time and place. Making marks on threads and allowing those threads to move in and out of the woven plane is of huge interest to me. I began looking at a lot of Kasuri and Ikat dyeing techniques. I borrowed their logic to apply a commercial sublimation-dye that transfers the full four-colour CMYK spectrum of a digitally printed image onto polymer substrates. I developed a process in my studio to achieve this dye transfer onto sets of loose polymer threads that can be hand-woven together after the dye process takes place. During the hand-weaving process imagery slips in and out of focus as polymer threads that are saturated with the image-information align or misalign due to a combination of my own choices and chance occurrences.

How valuable are mistakes, irregularities and asymmetry in your practice?
My work is filled with mistakes and irregularities. Irregularities mark the trace of the hand—as opposed to fully mechanized processes that erase the hand. I like playing with a push and pull between the two. For me, this relates to the balance between the physical and immaterial worlds that are continuously evolving together in the digital realm. Digital technologies are giving way to new physical experiences (for example, through virtual realities, like Oculus Rift) where seams, imperfections and not-quite-real or even more-real-than-real moments snap the user into an awareness of a veneered interface. I think that is what is so attractive about a mistake—its ability to disrupt a daydream.

Social media platforms like Instagram provide many of your images. What is it about that type of image that interests you?

I'm interested in the daily sharing of information and personal moments. This is one of the largest shifts in daily life that I have experienced in my lifetime and it is having a huge impact on our culture. Everything, from personal self-image to politics, is shaped by it. It is also by design a fleeting thing. News and image feeds constantly replace themselves, we right-swipe to keep or left-swipe to erase, we share and watch videos that disappear as soon as they end. I'm not sure what this is doing to our long-term sense of history or place. Maybe holding on to something just isn't relevant anymore.

How randomly or deliberately do you select your images from the constant flow of "sharing"? How much planning goes into your compositions?
I try to be as democratic as possible when selecting images. I often set up algorithms using different social-media-productivity and organization apps that trigger user-created events. One algorithm might be set to download every image that is posted in a single geo-tagged location during a particular length of time, or to download images connected to a specific hashtag. These actions that run automatically result in thousands of images saved in various folders that I then archive. Culling through and choosing which images to use in compositions depends on what sort of images were collected. Some algorithms result in hundreds of nail-art pics, make-up tutorial shots or product shots, sometimes all of the images are super-lush landscape and sunset/vacation shots. In this way, I often let the work direct and build itself based on whatever the dominant trends are of the image-collection sets.

Could you tell me a bit about the relationship between weaving and computing?

Many weaving and computing historians point to a common link between the two. Joseph-Marie Jacquard built a mechanized loom in the early 1800s that revolutionized the textile industry. The Jacquard loom produced complex patterning in cloth using a system of punch cards to control the information in an automated fashion that otherwise took hundreds of hours of labour. On the one hand, this led to horrific labour revolts; on the other, it led a man named Charles Babbage to solve a problem with a machine he was building that later became known as the first computer. Jacquard's punch-card system was borrowed to input and compute information in Babbage's adding machine, and punch cards remained the primary way to create, edit and store programmes on computers up until the 1980s. The binary logic of computing dictates that something is either on or off, a punch in a card or no punch in a card, a zero or a one. This same logic is present in weaving—a thread is either up or down, under or over, on or off. The link between the two and the metaphors it conjures are central to my practice.

Your works have a sensuous, tactile presence, an air of permanence and materiality. In what ways is this a response to the accelerated flow of online images?
It is a direct response to the over-saturation of our image-based culture. But it is also a form of day-dreaming. The images constantly shared largely belong to the world of desire. They are projections of our idealized selves and places, proliferated hundreds of times and stuffed into the cloud—there couldn't be a more perfect metaphorical place to house our dreams. So if my work floats at all between a place of sensuous desire and permanent materiality, I feel I've accomplished something.