

Doing – Undoing – Making-Do: Meditations on Impermanence.

The loom is one of the oldest mechanisms in human history, a weaving device that dates as far back as the 5th millennium BC. Conventionally associated with crafting, the loom does not, as does the painter's brush and palette, readily come to mind as equipment associated with the making of art.

Karen Rubado deploys her loom, to do, to undo, and to make-do, both materially and to trouble and loosen our attachments to and associations with things. A strong element that runs throughout these works is that they are unresolved, and by being situated between being done and undone, woven and unwoven there is a sense that we are part of a fleeting moment in the fabric of time. This particular and fragile poise, between realized form and abject collapse, seems timely in a world that is equally poised. They are decidedly undecided and precarious.

In this vein, Rubado's works pulse with confusing signals, where raw materiality threatens to overwhelm worldly manufacture, beauty finds its place amongst the lowest of things, and the worn and aged gain their dignity by being placed within the most cultured and revered of institutions, art.

In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Martin Heidegger makes a clear distinction between the work of crafter and the work of artist. This is not prejudicial, declaring craft lesser than art in aesthetic value, rather it is about what these different, but closely related forms of doing, do. According to Heidegger, for craft to do its work, the source materials need to disappear seamlessly into their use value. For art to do its work, on the other hand, the source materials should resist being 'swallowed up' by their use value, leaving the artist to struggle with keeping the endless strivings between the earthliness of materiality and the worldliness of language, in view.¹

The gentle, fuzzy warmth of fresh, raw alpaca fleece (*sister*), rather than disappearing from the world of sky and earth that belongs to the beast, and reappearing in the human world of wearable fabric, is balanced precariously on the horizon between them. Fragrant traces of animal body and mud tangled in the dense, black hair prevents the work of the loom, as a craft instrument that transforms rude, earthly materiality into sophisticated, worldly cloth, to perform its conjuring act. The curious doubleness of these rectangular woven fleeces, like other works here, nod to

¹ Martin Heidegger. "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Martin Heidegger: Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-52.

the colour field painters, whose best work caused the viewer to become entangled in conflicting sensations of being absorbed into fields of colour while similarly being repelled by them. But there is less self-conscious sophistry in these works, being as they are the open collaboration between the artist and the animal, so the shock is more that as we enter into their orbit, our own animal selves show up, making us want to sniff, stroke and linger, dreaming of earth and sky.

The small flower weavings, (*meander, picolette*) are shockingly tender and strangely endearing. Here the artist has refrained from archly eschewing the sweetness of the tiny dried flowers that she found among the sweepings outside a florists shop. What would have disappeared into the morass of city garbage is given a reprieve, to present a challenge to the viewer who is left to negotiate her own issues with loveliness and its problematic position within the echelons of contemporary art. These tiny, colourful, dried fragments are so frail and impermanent, that to see them so delicately woven together reminds us to pay attention to small and seemingly insignificant beings in the world. Our proclivity to choose to forget to care, to cherish and to nurture things, to see in them plenitude, and our wealth and wellbeing, is tested here.

In as much that Rubado infects the hermetically sealed world of fine art with the craft of the loom, she also infests it with rank earthiness, compelling tenderness, and restless beauty. The smooth tension of fabrics are invaded by coarse threads and twigs (*transit*) that undo their cohesion, to bloom and taint their integrity while refusing to lead toward a new solution, a new thing, an answer. In this way they fail, and it is important that they do.

Discarding, dismissing and failing to look, as we seek entertainment and distraction from the condition of being human, is put on pause, and this is what this doing – undoing – making-do does.

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