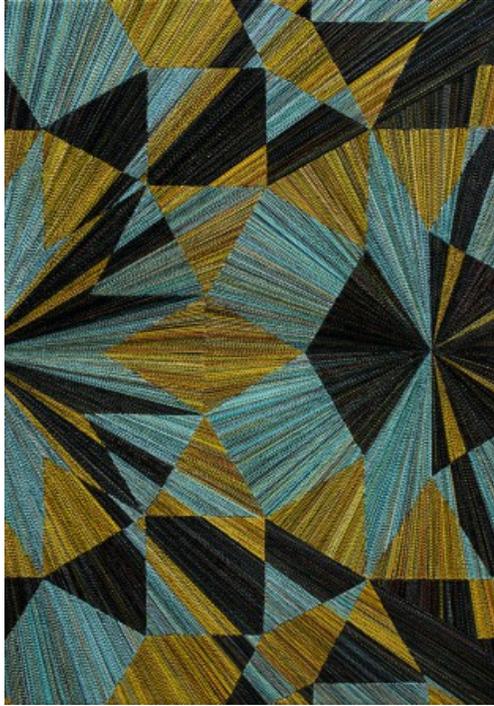


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HOME REVIEW SASHA PIERCE: TESSELLATIONS



Sasha Pierce *Watanabe Ito Soma 12 Fold* 2013 Oil on linen 58.4 x 45.7 cm Courtesy the artist and Jessica Bradley Gallery (Image 1/7)

REVIEW

Sasha Pierce: Tessellations

Jessica Bradley Gallery, Toronto November 28 to December 21, 2013

By **Kelly Jazvac**

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In the early days of the Bauhaus, scholar Sigrid Weltge-Wortmann has observed, there were few course options for women. Many arrived with intentions to study painting or architecture with contemporary masters, but upon entry learned of the gender restrictions for certain workshops.

Instead, Weltge-Wortmann writes, women were to study more appropriate arts, such as weaving. This was a shock to many of the female students, given that the school's manifesto stated explicitly that Bauhaus students would learn painting and that reputable students would be admitted regardless of gender. Further complicating the gendered climate, the Bauhaus weaving workshop emerged at a historical moment when industrialized textile production via powered looms had newly replaced master weaver guilds; in other words, the work of specific men was de-glamourized and the heavy labour was taken up by anonymous workers, many of whom were women.

Weaving is slow and laborious. To implement a geometric design, careful planning and methodical approach is required. In pace and method, weaving shares a strong affinity with the works in Sasha Pierce's current exhibition, entitled "Tessallations." In particular, this connection can be made through the mathematical-looking designs and methods of the Bauhaus weaving workshop, which resemble the products and processes of Pierce's project.

However, unlike the aforementioned anonymous women working in factories, or the comparatively obscure Bauhaus weavers, contemporary women painters have a potential voice and rank—albeit a far from perfect one—through a venerated medium from which they were historically excluded. Visual connections to weaving in Pierce's work seem to highlight this historical deficiency and contemporary potency. As such, these intricate, JPEG-defying works have the literal and figurative texture of a feminist project.

The images in this exhibition are derived from mathematical tessellations: a system of tiling shapes together as

planes. This is of interest to mathematicians and Modernist designers, obviously, but also integral to a host of visual outputs including floor tiling, quilting and digital 3-D rendering. Pierce's painting entitled *[4, 3/2, 4, 3/2, 3/2]*, for example, has visual qualities of all of these practices.

Pierce's paintings and collages look mechanic in their method. However, they are not made by a machine: confoundingly, they are made by hand. Like a tapestry seen frontally from a few feet away, the image takes precedence and the labour is barely visually present. But viewed up close or from an angle, the strands of paint and smudges visible on the edges of the canvas reveal the extreme physical labour required to make these paintings. Weaving has a similarly intense labour embedded in its form; like anything highly crafted, the labour is often so thorough that any evidence of the maker has almost been erased.

Pierce carefully squeezes vermicelli-thin strands of paint out of a plastic bag, then uses a ruler to shore up the strands against one another, not unlike how a reed pushes threads tightly together in a loom. Although "hours clocked" becomes an easy way to fetishize an art object, in Pierce's case it seems like an important supporting attribute that complicates the work rather than justifies its quality. There are many simpler ways to create these images, but there may be no simpler way to create these objects. As objects, the works compel one to look at them in relief, to see the tiny villi-like strands of paint extending off the canvas, to see the subtle piling of paint that occurs where the points of geometry converge.

These woven qualities, when compared to the work of the Bauhaus women, offer an angle on this exhibition that hints at a possible politic through the use of material. Maybe it has something to do with a visual resonance between an era that restricted women's artistic options and a contemporary moment where painting's power persists. From this perspective, Pierce's paintings can communicate visually, and materially, about gender and exclusion within art's own history.