ArtReview

Margo Wolowiec Double Blind
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Double Blind, 2016 (installation view).

There is something discomfortingly familiar about Margo Wolowiec's woven, image-transfer works, and this feeling has little to do with their imagery, which is culled, algorithmically (and so somewhat randomly), from the Internet. If you've come across just these pictures before - big red lips, sharpened coloured pencil tips, apple cleavages, fingertips and painted nails-you've likely spent too much time in the depths of a Google image search of one kind or another. Bur no matter. The non images of the web are familiar in an anodyne way. They purport to carry information, but are in fact mute and dumb. A web search is itself an algorithmic procedure, only the first half of which is ma-chine executed; we humans still have to parse the results, and make further selections and assessments. It's a give and take.

Wolowiec presents her works in two formats: freestanding in large metal frames and hanging on the wall. The freestanding works play up the transparency that results from Wolowiec's woven medium. Every work (all 2016) is composed of polymer threads onto which the web images are transferred using a dye-sublimation process; the weave is loose, evoking a celluloid translucence. The images are legible from both front and back, where the horizontal striations of the fabric are more pronounced, the images more muted. Those images mostly adhere to a stable grid, either creating bands that reach across the entirety of the works, or blocks that stack up two-by-two to fill the dimension, as if the grid of the fabric weave were itself the organising logic of the work.

This band and grid organisation moves Wolowiec both towards and away from collage. Towards, because the juxtaposition of discrete images suggests some kind of narrative inten-tion, some voice speaking behind the scenes; away, because the grid arrangement and horizontal banding look like the material manifestation of a 1970s television broadcast viewed on a set with vertical-hold problems.

This is where the familiarity of Wolowiec's work can be found. The television and collage characteristics of the panels recall Robert Rauschenberg's Thirty-Four Illustrations for Dante's Inferno (1958-60) and other solvent transfer works of the 1960s. The striated, veiled and diaphanous aspect of Rauschenberg's images, achieved through the rapid rubbing of the back of a solvent-soaked image to execute the ink transfer, share a lot with the form of Wolowiec's technique, from the back and forth of her handweaving to the transfer process itself.

For both artists, the image is present and absent at once, both there and not. Bur Rauschenberg was confronting the onslaught of commercial imagery that television, newspapers, magazines and billboards were carrying in ever-greater amounts (James Rosenquist is another impor-tant precedent here). Wolowiec is confronting the onslaught of web-ready imagery that is neither purely commercial nor solely personal, but rather some synthesis or conflation of the two (and in which commerce always tends to dominate).

Though Wolowiec's imagery is updated and her technique is a bit more 'crafty', her art seems to circle the same set of coordinates that occupied the genesis of Pop so years ago. For Rauschenberg's generation, the challenge was just to capture the image itself, to get it down in order to contend with it and, if pos-sible, to recode it. For Wolowiec's generation, capturing the image is simple, and recodings occur with every like and share. The challenge appears to be how to slow the image, to check its promiscuity. Wolowiec's solution is to tie it down with threads, which is an effective, if ultimately conservative, strategy.