

Reviewed by Jessica Hemmings

Lisa Oppenheim: Spine

Derrick Adams: Transmission

Museum of Contemporary Art Denver
Denver, Colorado, US | mcadenver.org

Two summer exhibitions at the **Museum of Contemporary Art Denver** mark the extremes of textile practice now welcomed into the exhibition spaces of contemporary art. **Lisa Oppenheim's** *Spine* uses jacquard weaving and photography to make conceptual connections to textile labor. **Derrick Adams** employs the textile in popular culture references to create work that invites audience participation. For both Adams and Oppenheim the textile provides an initial foil for the difficult content that underpins the work: the exuberance of Adams' exhibition belies difficult racial commentary, while the aesthetic sophistication of Oppenheim's exhibition is in stark contrast to her source material about the labor of textile manufacture.

Oppenheim's exhibition takes as its starting point photographs by the early 20th century American photojournalist **Lewis Hine** (1874–1940) whose career included nearly a decade of work as a photographer for the **National Child Labor Committee**. Oppenheim repurposes a number of Hine's black and white images of young female textile factory workers by splitting the original images into pairs that bisect the subject's back. Attention is drawn to the visible physical asymmetry presumably caused by factory work undertaken from a young age.

The *Remnants* series uses vintage fabrics sourced from the same era as Hine's work, photographed and printed as a color negative that replaces the original palette with complementary colors. *Jacquard Weave* inverts the colors once more and reproduces the photographs as woven cloth. Flaws in the production of the cloth run like an analogue screen glitch across the surface of the aptly titled *Jacquard Weave (Errata)*. The compositional simplicity of *Jacquard Weave (Polka Dots)* woven in cotton, mohair and linen trusts the beauty of the woven structure to stand its own ground. The long floating threads of *Jacquard Weave (Apple Blossoms)* are an evocative reminder not only of the fragility of cloth, but of the bodies tasked with making cloth.



Lisa Oppenheim *Jacquard Weave (Flower)* 2017, cotton, linen, mohair, jacquard woven, wood frame, 22¼" x 17¾". Courtesy the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York. Bottom: detail.



Gallery view right to left: **Lisa Oppenheim Jacquard Weave (*Apple Blossoms*), Remnant (*Apple Blossoms*)**. Photo: Jeff Wells.

Oppenheim’s exhibition requires effort. I suspect few visitors will make the leap from Hine’s images to the patterned fabrics of the era, photographed and then woven without the assistance of some written or spoken explanation. Clever installation decisions do assist: Oppenheim’s photograph of *Apple Blossoms*, for example, sits back-to-back on the diving wall from the textile made of the same pattern. While the steps of Oppenheim’s working process aren’t immediately obvious, I am unsure if easy is what we should always expect from the textile. If you are willing to be an active, thinking viewer *Spine* offers a poetic and troubling reminder of the cost at which textiles have—and continue—to be manufactured.

On the floor above, Derrick Adams’ *Transmission* conjures a different atmosphere. Here textiles are exuberant: bright, shiny and hastily constructed. The exhibition text quotes Adams: “I like materials with a physical appearance. Imagination is in everyone, and if you can envision things and not worry about high production, you can do more and affect people in a way that’s equally relevant and impactful.”



Gallery view right to left: **Lisa Oppenheim Remnant (*Flower*), Jacquard Weave (*Polka Dots*), Remnant (*Polka Dots*)**. Photo: Jeff Wells.



Derrick Adams *Colorbar Constellation #3* and *Colorbar Constellation #2* 2016, acrylic, paper, fabric, pigment-printed canvas, 88" x 44" and 83" x 44". Photo: Jeff Wells.

Colorbar Constellations use the TV set as a recurring frame. Brightly printed strips of textile allude to the color bars used by video engineers in North America to calibrate analog recording or transmission signals. The same striped pattern (from left to right horizontal bands of white, yellow, cyan, green, magenta, red and blue) is painted on the walls of the gallery hosting *On*, which invites visitors to film themselves staring in fictional talk shows or infomercials livestreamed on the Museum's website. The dominance of celebrity culture and media worship seem to be readings of this work, but the term color bar also refers to social and legal systems in which people of different races are separated and not given the same rights and opportunities.

Adams invitation to role play suggests a desire for a more inclusive representation of who gets to be on stage. But in a further twist of meaning, my online visits to the site found an empty livestream. Perhaps few of us today are eager to role play in an era of post-truth politics. Nearby, *Future People* straps visitors into pseudo-spaceship seats to witness an Afrofuturism (a movement that critiques questions of race and the African diaspora often presented through a sci-fi aesthetic) inspired video of an imaginary future. Hand-in-hand with the visual cacophony and invitation to performance is a far less benign legacy of racial stereotyping and vacuous celebrity culture. Adams may seem interested in the future. In reality, his work is a reminder of all that remains wrong with the present.

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Derrick Adams *Fabrication Station #10* 2016, fabric collage, 48" x 108". Courtesy the artist and Vigo Gallery, London.



Derrick Adams *On* (installation view) 2018. Museum of Contemporary Art Denver. Photo: Jeff Wells.



Derrick Adams *Fabrication Station #4* 2016, fabric collage, 48" x 108". Courtesy the artist and Vigo Gallery, London.