

Spider's thread / Veronika Čechmánková

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curator: Viktor Čech

A spider weaves its web like a trap. Veronika Čechmánková's textile images actually depict traps too, drawing on our memories, associations and shared archetypes that stem from the traditional role of textiles in our society. Through stitching, embroidery, printing and weaving, she layers the webs of memory.

Arachne is guilty of her pride. Something that is one of the greatest sins in the eyes of the gods of Greek mythology. Not only did she provoke the goddess Athena into a carpet-weaving contest, but she depicted scenes in hers that were in blatant rebellion against the cruel passion of the gods who chose human women as the targets of their desire. Indeed, these tales of the supreme Zeus and several other deities are the cause of most of the tragic stories of Hellenic mythology. Just as the three goddesses of fate, the Moirais, unwind, and ultimately cut, the thread of each individual's destiny, Arachne weaves hers into her carpet. Her transformation into a spider was actually an act of grace. Cruelty and pity simply go hand in hand in the decisions of Greek anthropomorphic deities.

The carpets that Arachne and Athena wove in their competition were at the same time images filled with mythological scenes that add another symbolic layer to their dispute. On the one hand a celebration of the gods and their gracious power over humanity, on the other a critique of their capriciousness and cruelty. Especially in Ovid's rendering, this ancient story thus acquires a broader existential dimension, where these woven images become the carriers of a political message of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless, between order and malice.

Fabric and its ornamental shaping, whether by weaving or printing, structure or texture, has carried with it for many millennia the cultural memory, the language of symbols and the aesthetic vision of the world of many human communities and epochs. The ornament or motif is something that has been carried through history as a constantly mutating form, acquiring new stylistic roles with each new interpretation of the motif. In its shape, form or color, it can carry with it various symbolic messages, traces of perception of the world and its order, as well as mere playful examination of its beauty.

For the Czech environment, in a country once so famous for its textile production, which at its peak was able to cover the ornamental needs of not only European but also many more exotic customers, for example African, each of these fabrics is also part of the history, both general and very private, associated with their wearers, their taste, sensibility and physicality. Whether we perceive textiles as part of today's mass-produced material culture or as a folkloric heritage of densely synthesized cultures of the past, very often the one associated with our bodies in particular takes on a highly personal dimension. It combines the role of pure functionality with that of an instrument of identity, fetish and social ritual.

In Veronika Čechmánková's textile paintings, the pieces of fabric used are also traces of reinterpreted memory. Clothes that were worn by our grandmothers and great-grandmothers and sometimes even their male counterparts. The patterns of textiles, which were defined both by folk tradition and local mass production, fulfilled folkloric requirements even during the 20th century. Many of us can recall a garment associated with someone close to us in our childhood. Its pattern, haptic structure and smell. Fabric is often not only our outer skin and at the same time a

visually eloquent surface, but also the bearer of a range of sensory stimuli, physical proximity, intimacy and desire.

The main source of inspiration for Veronika Čechmánková is her family's rural and folklore memory. She has used this experience in various ways in her previous projects, whether her inspiration was the tradition of home baking or the annual manual village work such as scything. These moments also appear in these new works as visual references to archetypal traditions of rural life. The almost prehistoric-looking scythe quiver made of cow horn was in fact commonly used until recently. Bread knitted into a wreath or a typical folk scarf with rich fringes. These are the motifs around which the composition of each of the textile paintings is layered. For the artist, folklore and traditions are not an escape from the complexity of the contemporary world into the non-existent order of an idealized past, but a reconstitution of the positive values based on them as an open form for contemporary life.

The paintings are composed in the context of metal frames, on which the artist stretches individual textiles and shapes them with artistic expression in the form of embroidery and digital printing. They are created by layering, intersecting and interconnecting these elements. In contrast to today's mass production, where you can buy the same piece of clothing in Singapore, Prague and New York, each of these pieces carries its own history, whether it concerns its production or the memory of its owners. The seemingly highly decorative form of these works is thus at the same time an intimate dialogue between each of the fragments of memory used with the artist's delicate fingers and the frame into which she inserts them like a nimble seamstress.

The textile, not only in its role as clothing, but also in its many other applications, is in a sense also a language, albeit on a very low semantic level. However, this rational and conscious role is often taken to unexpected ends by its other properties, whether the aforementioned smells and scents and other sensual stimuli such as the softness, coarseness or slipperiness of the material, its rustling, weight or lightness. That which for the traditional understanding of painting means an imaginary pictorial space is here replaced by a depth of interpenetrating material and symbolic stimuli that irresistibly compel us not only to perceive but also to touch, feel and become aware of the very specific role that textiles have played in our culture for millennia.

Viktor Čech

Veronika Čechmánková (born 1996) is a photographer and intermedia artist. She focuses mainly on the transformation of symbols and traditions in time and their new meanings for the present. She studied photography and new media at FAMU, Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and her work has been shown in galleries, institutions such as the Centre for Contemporary Art FUTURA, Karlín Studios in Prague, and the BF Artist Film Festival in London. During her studies she participated in Studio Vortex residencies in Arles and Joya: AiR Asociación de Arte y Ecología, Artist Residency, Vélez-Blanco, Casa Lu in Mexico City. She is currently working at FAMU in Prague as an assistant to the head of the department and assistant to Rudy Prekopa's Imaginative Photography Studio. She was nominated by the Fotograf Gallery under the Future Photography platform in Amsterdam.

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