

## Brent Wadden on Embracing the Unknown in His Handwoven Paintings

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Weaver and colorist Brent Wadden is presenting a new body of handwoven paintings—including large-scale pieces—in his solo exhibition WHIMMYDOODLES at Pace’s Los Angeles gallery. On view from May 13 to June 24, the show is Wadden’s first-ever solo presentation in LA. To mark the opening of WHIMMYDOODLES, we spoke with the artist about his approach to abstraction, his process, and his interest in visual idiosyncrasies. Wadden’s statements follow below.

**What was the inspiration for the title of your exhibition with Pace in LA?**

I know it’s a bit funny sounding, but I recently heard the term on the radio with an interview with Bill Nye the science guy talking about climate change and the feeling of overwhelm we get, which then in a way causes us not to do anything about it in the end.

**How did you first become interested in weaving as a medium?**

My friends had been telling me for a while that my paintings would translate well into textiles, and one of the major influences on that shift in my practice was seeing an exhibition of Moroccan rugs in Ireland in 2010. The colors and patterns in those weavings were captivating to me. After returning to Berlin, I connected with the

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textile artist Travis Meinolf and he introduced me to the process using a small laser-cut backstrap loom—pretty soon weaving became my main focus. I bought my first floor loom and gradually filled my studio with all these different supplies and tools.

I'm interested in the ways that weavings are viewed as craft objects rather than fine art. In my practice, I want to unite traditions of painting, design, craft, and folk art to collapse those kinds of hierarchies among mediums or disciplines.



## **Would you say there's a balance between control and spontaneity in your process?**

Most of my works begin with a colored pencil sketch, which offers some kind of control over proportions and distinctions between panels. It's definitely a labor-intensive process—these paintings are made line by line. I can only see about a foot of textile at any given time while I'm making a painting, so I never know exactly how a piece will look in its final form until it's unrolled and released from the loom.

There's something magical and exciting about that element of surprise. I think that those idiosyncrasies or "imperfections" that emerge through warp and weft are part of what draws the viewer in. I've learned to embrace those subtle disruptions in line, color, texture, and form.

## **How do you source materials for your works?**

I try to get most of my materials secondhand using sources like eBay, Facebook Marketplace, and Craigslist. Most of the time it's from ex-weavers who have retired or passed away. The materials I gather really inform the work itself—I don't seek out materials with a specific vision in mind. It's usually in the process of sorting whatever materials I've found that inspiration will strike.

## **Can you discuss some of your artistic influences?**

While studying at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in the early 2000s, I found myself primarily

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interested in artists and collectives from alternative subcultures such as Barry McGee, Margaret Kilgallen, Chris Johanson, Fort Thunder, Paper Rad, and Dearraindrop. I could relate to them as I came from rural punk, hardcore, and DIY scenes, and I encountered their work through zines or online, which was the media of my community. I was also introduced to folk and outsider art during this time.

My work with geometric abstraction and color has been influenced by abstract expressionist painters and Bauhaus textile makers. A book about the Bauhaus weaving department is one of my most prized possessions—it taught me about Anni Albers and other women artists who were relocated to the textile studios. Artists like Agnes Martin, Donald Judd, and Sol LeWitt have inspired me with their processes of creating structures and formulas to make work within. The Gee's Bend quilters have also been important for me. Their work is stunning and represents an important movement.



My greatest love is still folk art. The region I am from in Nova Scotia has a rich history of folk artists. Every time I visit, I make an effort to travel around to meet them and collect their work. I can relate to the repetition and labor in their processes. It feels like creativity is a strategy for mental health and personal expression. In their context, there isn't access to art and there aren't many resources for mental health.

They use what's on hand and they aren't influenced by external forces or trends—it feels unself-conscious. I think that is admirable and really a challenge these days, once you've gone through art school and are educated on what holds value in contemporary culture.