

Brent Wadden Spins High Art With A Grounded Stance

By Dayna Mahannah



Photo by Trevor Good

VANCOUVER – “There is no going back into a weaving unless you unravel the whole thing,” says Brent Wadden. “So I usually just keep all the mistakes, as it’s a total pain in the ass to remove them.” With a resume of solo art exhibitions in galleries spanning from Paris, London, and Berlin to South Korea and New York, the charm of humility hasn’t been lost on the autodidactic weaver. This self-taught naivety may just be the warp and woof of Wadden’s work.

Trained in painting, the artist’s woven pieces still exude the spontaneity and abstraction that brushstrokes allow. Bold geometric shapes, lots of lines, and contrasting colours embrace imperfections and shrug off the anxious rigidity of strict patterns or faultless topography. But Wadden is matter-of-fact. “Don’t romanticize the medium or process,” he says.

To present his deliberately described ‘paintings,’ Wadden’s weavings are stretched over a canvas. “Just to clarify, there is no paint used.” Acrylic is often listed as a material in the pieces, but he points out it’s also a term used for synthetic yarns. A photo of a Brent Wadden tapestry on social media may give the viewer an impression of a painting, but seeing the real deal will expose the reality of the cozy canvas. People will “understand that I’m speaking the language of painting, as they are presented in this manner.”



Photo by Trevor Good

For his upcoming solo exhibition, *Two Scores*, at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver, Wadden is creating all new works to showcase. Using one of his three looms, the artist spins away while listening to podcasts, YouTube interviews, and avoiding responding to pressing emails. However, he credits weaving for teaching him organization and patience. "When most people see [the looms], the first thing they say is, 'my grandmother or great aunt was a weaver,'" Vancouver-based Wadden says. "As if it's an ancient technology (which it sort of is) that died with their loved ones years ago. Everything is moving so fast now!"

Using thrifted fibres, Wadden begins by sorting them into piles "to see what materials might work together and how much I have of each one." He uses a rudimentary drawing as a reference for colour placement, but the nature of the pre-used material creates a variety of lines and textures. "The quantity of each colour plays an important role in the final piece."

By intertwining a 27,000 year textile practice with the edge of a modern hand, Wadden engages his audience in a beautiful blend of the traditional and the avant-garde. "Weaving, as well as many other general craft practices, seem more common in Canada but have difficulty entering a certain kind of art world." In Berlin, where the Nova Scotia-native lived for many years, he noticed that between painting and weaving, "no one really questioned the crossover."

Two Scores will be a multi-dimensional showcase of Wadden's paintings, utilizing the floor and extensive wall space with works up to seven and a half metres in length. His piece, *16 Afghans*, salutes the 16 deconstructed blankets with photos of each original afghan displayed with its conglomerate. Though Wadden's chosen craft is exhaustive, perhaps it brings a sense of relief that the paintbrush never did. "Weaving is a time based medium, so you know when you are done," he says. "With painting, there is always this feeling of not knowing exactly when to stop."