

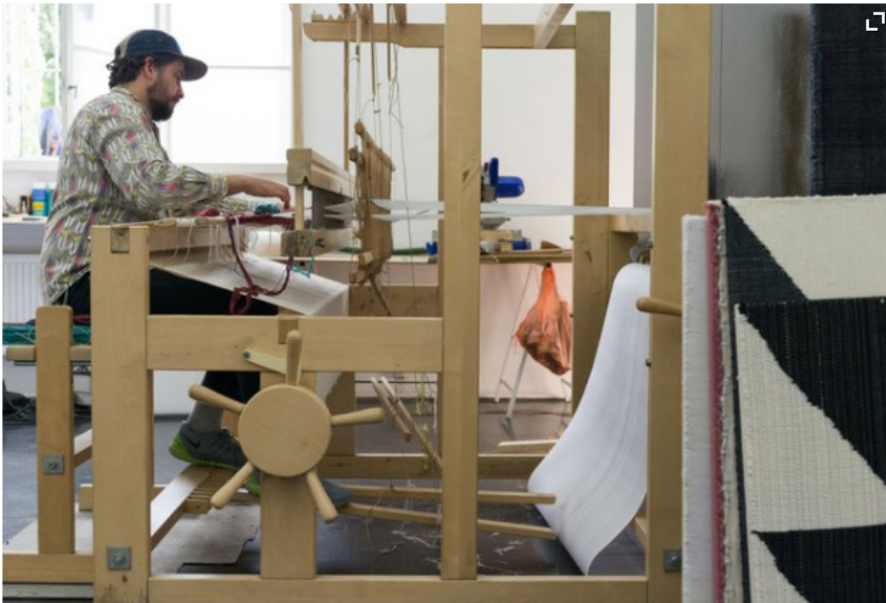
Brent Wadden: Two Scores

by John Thomson



Brent Wadden, "Score 1 (Salt Spring)," 2018, installation view at Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver (photo by Michael Love)

From a distance, they look like hard edge paintings; five large pieces affixed to canvas and hung on the wall. Another lies on the floor. Close inspection reveals something else. They're not paintings but weavings and the weaving is imperfect, even sloppy. Artist Brent Wadden, who has a BFA in painting from NSCAD University in Halifax and now splits his time between Vancouver and Berlin, wouldn't have it any other way. "I'm an untrained weaver," says the internationally exhibited artist. "Someone who is traditionally trained would do things a lot differently. At this point, I like and accept all the mistakes."



Brent Wadden weaves in his studio, 2015, (courtesy Peres Projects, Berlin; photo by Trevor Good)

Wadden calls his work woven paintings. His latest exhibition, *Two Scores*, at Vancouver's Contemporary Art Gallery until March 25, probes the relationship between the spontaneity of painting and the mechanics of weaving. Traditional weaving produces a uniform pattern. There's a rigidity imposed by the process of interlocking threads. Wadden fights this by taking a casual approach to the craft, making things up on the fly, often without preliminary sketches. He listens to music when he weaves. He even watches videos. When he runs out of one colour, he tags on another.

Score 1 (Salt Spring), the exhibition's centrepiece, is a breathtakingly monumental series of horizontal stripes that fills an entire wall. Some stripes are uneven, a product of both poor tension and the process of stretching the finished piece onto canvas. "Compositionally, the mistakes in the weaving are important," Walden says. "They're part of it."



Brent Wadden, "Score 2 (16 Afghans)" (detail), 2018, installation view at Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver (photo by Michael Love)

He buys secondhand stock, often from eBay or from other weavers. "I wouldn't call myself a hoarder, but I'll take whatever material I can get my hands on," he says of his habit of making do with what he has, a result, perhaps, of his working-class upbringing. *Score 2 (16 Afghans)*, for instance, is a product of 16 blankets the artist purchased from various thrift stores and then painstakingly unravelled, repurposing the yarn into a floor covering. Photographs of the source blankets hang on the wall.

It's tempting to see these machinations as a way to draw attention to process, not content, but, for Wadden, the two are inseparable. "I guess it depends on what you see as content. For me, the wonkiness of the line is part of the content," he says, referring to the painterly aspect of his work. This tension between colours, a key element in post-painterly abstraction, is most evident in a series of four individual pieces hanging on the wall opposite *Score 1*. The muted greys and greens of *Untitled (5 Vertical Green Stripes)* evoke calm. On the other hand, *Untitled (5 Vertical Red Stripes)* is more dynamic, with the luminescent yellow playing against the red and grey. ■