

Under the spell of light and color

By Woutje de Zeeuw

The theme of glitter fits in nicely with the work of Monika Auch. When I contact her she is staying in Iceland as an artist in residence. I speak to her in early October in her studio in Amsterdam-Noord. The Icelandic landscape and Icelandic weaving have made a deep impression on her and she talks with verve.

When asked how she characterizes herself as a weaver, she has a crystal clear answer: "I am a visual artist. For me, weaving is a tool like brushes and canvas are for a painter. It is craftsmanship and art. That is why I chose the Rietveld Academy, where technical expertise is the tool for art. During my medical studies I started weaving because I missed working with my hands. I took private lessons from a weaver who had trained in Finland. She put me to work with the most difficult material, linen. Ultimately, I wanted to shape and learn more than weaving in a traditional sense. In between my internships I did work periods with Bauhaus weaver Margot Rolf, who introduced me to the precision of weaving. When I had woven a piece, she looked with a magnifying glass to see if it was an equivalent linen weave. She taught me that I had to insert the wire and slide it in, strike with feeling. She saw in the tissue where I had paused. A world opened up for me. In her studio and during a masterclass with the American artist Warren Seelig, I understood the expressive power of material, color and structure."

Investigating

Monika regularly works abroad. Get out of your own 'comfort zone', to discover and investigate. In recent years she has worked as an artist in residence in Scandinavian countries; Norway, Denmark and Iceland. She says that last summer in Iceland she was particularly captivated by the beauty of the traditional weaves and symbols. "Wonderful books have been published about this, such as the 'Íslensk sjónabók-Ornaments and Patterns found in Iceland'. In the northern countries weaving has a high status with great appreciation for the weaving culture and history. In Iceland, the finely spun Icelandic wool and the cloths hand-woven by women in 2/2 twill; called Vaðmál, the economy has been maintained for centuries. Until Denmark introduced industrial looms in the late 19th century, which could only be operated by men. In addition to the industrial cloths, the hand-woven Vaðmál remained the more expensive and exclusive product."

The influence of the country

She says about her stay: "During a residency I will always weave, whether on a computer-controlled loom or with four slats that I use to make a loom. For example, I once built a 4-shaft horse loom from the remains of three demolished looms that I found in the basement of the building. I like to work with what the location, the environment and the culture have to offer me. I photograph, draw, participate in workshops, visit local artists and museums, talk to fellow artists present, weave and make sketches that I work out at home."

"I don't move without a stimulating question. Because of my curiosity and training as a researcher, I will never be able to let go of that. For years I have been investigating how our experience of color is influenced. It intrigues me that fabrics from Scandinavian countries often have such strong colors. Hard blue next to bright green and yellow, they are rarely mixed colors. In the Netherlands we have the light reflection of the water, clear skies with much louder colors. That gives a different color perception than in the middle of the continent. Translated into weaving, different types of textile material give a different light reflection, which you as a weaver can also work with in the bindings."

What affected her most about Iceland? "The light there has a vibrant, vibrant quality, so beautiful. This is probably due to its geographical location. From the studio I looked at the glittering fjord, the mountains, the ever-changing light and on the last night - the Northern Lights! The location of the residency influences you, provided you are open to it. For example, the work I made in Norway is quite dark. The steep rock walls, the forest, lots of rain and the deep blue water created a dark mood - think of the music of Grieg or the paintings of Munch. In the work from Denmark you see the blonde waving cornfields and the dark stubble after the harvest."

Weaving in Iceland

“I brought a linen warp with me for this trip. A 10-shaft Glimakra countermarche loom was reserved. I wanted to work with color and reflection and included glittering yarns in the graphite-colored warp. I learned the Icelandic Glit technique and wove with the famous Icelandic Lopi wool, which has a beautifully soft, natural color palette. This wool has a very loose structure. In the Glit technique, the Lopi wool is inlaid by hand on the base of a woolen linen weave in a geometric, pre-drawn pattern. The colored pattern lies thick and fluffy on top of the smooth surface. It is very laborious and has its own rhythm, once you get the hang of it. In another piece I wanted to recreate the wave movement of the Northern Lights. I worked with a complicated pointed twill weave with a repeat of 63 threads from the 'A weaver's book of 8-shaft patterns'. I left unwoven sections between the colored weft so that my Icelandic color palette can be seen side by side like in a sample book.”

Light, color and sparkle

“Glistening is the visual experience when a color is not only reflected but also moves. You can enhance this experience by moving a work in the airflow. In previous transparent work I used glittering, industrial yarns that are so fragile that they have to run with another thread. They are quite large transparent canvases that hang one behind the other, move softly and instinctively attract the eye through the glitter.”

“An important aspect is the presentation of my work. Photographing these works is complicated because of the shadow effect, the spatiality - also in 'flat' textile work - and the perspective you want to portray. I always have my work photographed by a professional. I usually take some photos first so that the professional has an impression of what I want to achieve. I determine the image, the composition and the point of view myself, but I leave the professional rendering to the photographer. A perfect presentation, especially of textile work, is important for every artist and part of the work.”

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