

Samantha Bittman

Artist Statement

In my work, I play with the expectations around weaving, and painting, and visual perception. Weaving is both a medium and a subject, while the object and picture qualities of my work are situated within painting. Pattern and other optical cues draw attention to one's own subjectivities and how we make sense of what we are looking at.

What appeals to me about weaving is the ability to create patterns and pictorial imagery through the architecture of threads and the process of weaving itself. For example, if I pull a thread out of a piece of woven cloth, I am changing the structure and picture of the fabric at the same time. Also, I am fascinated by the history of weaving technology and how it evolved simultaneously across cultures throughout history. As different groups of people began interlacing together materials that were available to them, they developed looms to improve the speed and efficiency of their production. Each loom came with specific limitations in terms of what it could weave, and these limitations became reflected in the woven cloth itself. This relationship between what is woven and the technology that wove it is still essential to weaving today. However, regardless of the variations in pattern and form that the weaving takes, and despite major leaps in innovation, including the full automation of looms, the basic over-under interlacements of the warp and weft has never changed. The ones and zeros remain perfectly efficient and always will be, presumably maintaining its place in material culture for years to come. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss two bodies of work related to these ideas, my woven paintings and digitally printed wallpapers.

In my woven paintings, **which I consider to be both weavings and paintings**, I begin by weaving a cloth on a 12-harness floor loom, this fabric is then stretched around traditional stretcher bars and augmented with acrylic paint. The stretcher bars act as a compositional framing device and allow for the illusion of spatial depth (or flatness) within the picture, while the paint draws attention to the surface by interacting with the patterning of the weaving in meaningful ways. The weaving, often considered “women’s work”, and painting are conflated into one, sharing a visual vocabulary reminiscent of 20th century abstract painting, and again ask the important question, why are there not more representations of women and weaving throughout the history of art? I also use strategies of Op Art, such as high value contrast, complimentary hues, and small-scale patterning, to catch the viewer’s attention and draw them in to examine more closely what they are looking at. The history of Op is also tied to my research into visual perception and gestalt psychology, both of which seek to understand the way our sensory systems and brains work together to see pattern.

The site-specific digitally printed wallpaper works are Photoshop representations of enlarged weave drafts, or a set of diagrammatic instructions that a weaver uses to design fabric and set up their loom. This usage of Photoshop highlights the similarities between itself and weaving, in that both create pictures via a grid-based arrangement of colored pixels. *Interlace*, as seen in my images, is based on a sample blanket, which is a type of weaving that tests out many combinations of pattern and color before committing to a final design. Sample blankets often result in pleasant surprises and can be found in the archives of textile mills. In my wallpaper, I use the idea of a sample blanket as an end in itself, and, think of it akin to the instructionally based drawings of Sol Lewitt. *Interlace* depicts a family of weaves called color-and-weave, which are unique in that they utilize combinations of basic weaves (plain weave, basket, and twills) with warp and weft striping to generate graphic patterns, often found in

apparel fabrics. I use these same weaves in my woven paintings, therefore this piece also exists a personal weave reference and archive. Ultimately, it is my intention that the large scale and environmental form of the wallpaper destabilizes the viewer's expectation that weaving is always polite, gendered, or supplemental to another object or use.