Espace
Art actuel

Chris Kline and Yam Lau: Weave

Andre Jodoin

Numéro 121, hiver 2019

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/89916ac

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Le Centre de diffusion 3D

ISSN

0821-9222 (imprimé)
1923-2551 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer ce compte rendu

Jodoin, A. (2019). Compte rendu de [Chris Kline and Yam Lau: Weave]. *Espace*, (121), 82–83.

Chris Kline and Yam Lau: *Weave*

Andre Jodoin

AGNES ETHERINGTON ART CENTRE QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY KINGSTON
APRIL 28 – AUGUST 6, 2018

Group shows usually do not aim to produce something new in the architectural installation. Preparing the right condition for the works' reception is difficult enough and so installations aim at being simple and pragmatic, distinguishing the works in discrete Euclidean space. Relations among works are subsequently organized and discussed thematically, primarily by way of written texts. This is generally the standard installation practice. For *Weave*, the two-person exhibition at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, the theme, stated in the title, is evident. However, the *Weave* installation creates a novel perspective on both the theme and the work. In what follows, the aim is to illustrate the impact of the installation on the viewer and the works, an effect that for the curators or the artists was very likely not predictable. I will leave aside discussion of the theme and analysis of individual work in order to focus on the aesthetic complexity of the exhibition event.

The exhibition title encapsulates curators Stephen Horne and Sunny Kerr's approach. Weaving is not only a technique but an historical, and at times contradictory, critical position, as indicated for example in Bernard Cache's reflection on Plato's writing in *Solidarity Without Proximity* (2004):

> [Plato's] *Statesman* is an extraordinary dialogue where the knowledge of the most powerful person in the city is defined in terms of a technique—weaving—that in Greek culture was not only artisanal, but also practised solely by women.[1]

For Plato, weaving clarifies a mode of thinking by way of a spatial model. This is the mode of entwining or entanglement. Cache refers Plato's paradigm of weaving to the smooth space of topology. Smooth space is, for instance, the haptic space of a cellular phone that periodically intrudes and weaves through the perspectival vistas of a city. The curators refer weaving to artists' common use of screens: the image of a screen in Klein's paintings, the video monitor screen, the screen of the pavilion walls, etc. The screen catches us up-close, sinking into a space which links the various objects we find there, each of which provides an orientation until the next one appears. This is how the installation is set up.

The exhibition is comprised of Chris Kline's six groups of paintings (collectively titled *La manche*) and Yam Lau's video installation (titled *Nüshu: Echo Chambers I, II*) presented in two adjoining galleries.

Lau's videos are presented in two white pavilions that were built in the Agnes. Their location as well as their material construction sets up the exhibition, drawing together the space of the adjoining galleries. These are roofless rectangular constructions with sheer fabric on the sides. They form a long axis across the galleries' threshold oblique to the gallery walls. Moreover it is a 'bent-axis.' It requires viewers to move along a length of a screen wall before turning in at a right angle at the pavilions' entrance. Along the way, the viewer's attention remains directed to the translucent screen.

The layers of sheer fabric make it possible to see not only Lau's *Nüshu* video images but also Kline's paintings on the gallery walls. One experiences a flow of space through the exterior of the pavilion to the interior of the gallery, or equally, through the exterior of the gallery to the interior of the pavilion. This seemingly incidental experience is repeated many times as one moves throughout the galleries, and is unavoidable owing to the centrality of the axis in the exhibition space.

There is a subtle shift in register from the feeling of being 'in' space to a sense of being 'of' space, an experience that is intimately supported by the pervasive sound of chanting female voices that accompanies the Nüshu videos. Deleuze has discussed this kind of spatial experience in his reflection on nomad art in *A Thousand Plateaux* (1987):

> Where there is close vision, space is not visual, or rather the eye itself has a haptic non-optical function: no line separates earth from sky, which are of the same substance; there is neither horizon nor background nor perspective nor limit nor outline or form nor centre; there is no intermediary distance, or all distance is intermediary.[2]

Images appearing on the fabric screen feel close but also hold a sense of mystery that motivates the viewer to approach the pavilions' entrance. However, a curious reversal happens once inside the pavilions. The video images appear more distant on the monitor than they do on the screen walls and moving closer to the monitor has little effect on this perception, as if the intensity of the high-definition presentation resists the viewer's advances.

Moving from pavilions to the paintings of *La manche*, the most notable effect of the installation is a tendency to move up close to the paintings, walking along the gallery perimeter, examining and comparing figurations, surface patterns and texture without much regard for the individual works or their sequence. The installation of *Weave* runs counter to the what might be called the 'standard' installation in which such a group of paintings will suggest a stationary position in the gallery from which to view it. Despite the depth of the main gallery, viewers are more likely to hang close to the walls.

In summary, the architectural installation of *Weave* creates a bias or inclination towards surfaces that involves the viewer in restless exploration. While the geometry and tight colour range of the paintings and the video pavilions may suggest emptiness at first glance, the viewer's engagement is not contemplative. Rather than surveying the works, the viewer meanders through them. The examinations, disclosures and mysteries are just not synthesized into revelatory moments.

The installation bears on the relation between video and painting. Each medium has its own authority and they do not necessarily play well together in an exhibition. This underlines the importance of standard installation practices. Even so, shows that combine video and painting often appear to promote one over the other, and for a variety of

Yam Lau, *Nüshu: Echo Chambers*, 2015–2018. Installation view. Computer-generated animation and wood and fabric construction. Collection of the artist. Photo: Paul Litherland.

reasons. In contrast, the installation of *Weave* smoothly connects the two by a precise use of stretched fabric screen. Indeed the material connects the images of floating veils in Lau's videos and the figurative traces of the painting stretcher in Kline's works.

The installation also brings the artists' practices into focus. It is already apparent that Lau intends to mitigate the severe form factor of the video monitors through his use of tactile industrial materials. This suggests a desire to achieve a certain distance from the materialist legacy of American Minimalism. Kline's overall design for *La manche* downplays the individuality of the paintings and highlights an interest in process. It proposes arrays of samples, similar to fabric swatches, rather than a group of works. Here the sidelong reference to the clothing industry acts to lighten the art historical weight of painting.

The success of the installation is strongly related to the architecture of the Agnes, owing to the way the pavilions link the two galleries. It is uncertain whether the light, breezy aesthetic feeling of *Weave* could be recreated at another venue. Finally, the exhibition presents an aesthetically complex moment that requires some committed description in order to be understood critically.

1. Bernard Cache, "Solidarity Without Proximity" in Mario Carpo (ed.), *Projectiles, Architectural Association* (London: Kindle edition, 2013), loc. 1275.
2. Gilles Deleuze, "Nomad Art: Space" in Constantin V. Boundas (ed.), *The Deleuze Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 167.

Andre Jodoin is an independent artist working in computer animation. He is interested in hermeneutics and information technology. He holds a master's degree in fine arts from York University and a master's degree in philosophy from the same university. He studied computer animation at Sheridan College. His installation works have been shown in artist-run centres and public venues across Canada. He lives in Toronto.