

dan coopey: the double

04.02 – 11.03.2023

The Weave of the World: loose threads and affective considerations on the practice of weaving in Dan Coopey's art

/ Victor Gorgulho

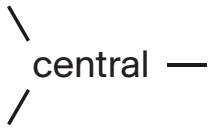
1. Standing apart from contemporary production which – precisely for the wide array of potential thematic and material possibilities that today provides us – Dan Coopey's work is irrevocably based on the practice of weaving, which dates back to the artist's childhood, in his native Stroud, a small rural town in the English countryside. There, the practice of weaving plays a central role in the town's industrial and artisanal production chain, significantly shaping the local landscape – both literally and subjectively. The town (and thus its residents) are connected by a web of threads and fibres that design a peculiar affective and social cartography through its geography.

2. Although historical sources point towards different temporalities and imprecise geolocations, there's some kind of consensus on the fact that weaving is among one of the oldest most widespread artisanal practices in the world, occupying both an indispensable useful dimension for numerous peoples since ancient times and affirming itself also in a singular dimension of artistic expression, crossing centuries of civilisations that went beyond and expanded the everyday/vernacular dimension of these objects.

3. By osmosis, or even by an unsuspected unconscious interest from the artist himself, Coopey ended up internalising basketry and weaving knowledge, from his childhood to the present day, with such peculiarity that it ends up informing his current art production. In the series of works gathered in this current exhibition it becomes evident (although not explicitly or literally) and more - through a deliberate conduction that there is nothing empirical or rational in the act of weaving these threads. Here lies the defined starting point for Coopey's studio work. There is however, no project or sketch seeking to outline a previously and well thought-out result. Weaving, perhaps, is like walking, albeit the route – whether the route is short or long, – takes place within the artist's creative space of production.

4. The discussion around any working artist's gesture and their use of the body and its strength is recurrent of any artist, particularly within the fields of painting and sculpture. Contrary to this common consensus, there are numerous other art practices that also demand physical force from those practising them, albeit in other ways, often hidden behind the delicate beauty that the finished work imprints upon the eyes of the viewer, especially if observed within the politeness of polished galleries and institutions. Here this ultra complex dynamic that is (at least to the contemporary art scene) less common, crosses the production of weaving.

5. When, during the exhibition's installation, I asked Coopey about the physical effort and the time spent on the works presented here, enchanting my own eyes sometimes with their feeling of lightness and fluidity, the artist reveals a nebulous relationship that occurs with each of the materials he elects to work with in his pieces. There are those which will hurt the artist's hands, given their thickness and the long time spent tracing them, defying them, reconfiguring them into new subjects. I reiterate: Coopey's productions naturally draw attention for their beauty and exuberance, for their formal cohesion, and for the sophisticated rests they find within the exhibition space, making fine dialogues with each other, inviting the viewer to decipher what they whisper through their many and dense layers. Here the wires are organic, radically distant from the frivolity of



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electrical wires, machinic – in fact today already becoming scarce, transformed into clouds, ethereal, transparent and heavy clouds, resting on our heads. Clouds of all sorts, hidden mysteriously over our innocent heads. Lets focus on Dan's threads, a little more interesting of course.

6. Like the title – here also in a somewhat uncompromising comparison with a so-called historical narrative with a capital H – weaving, from the intense flows of exchange suffered for centuries over the globe, is also in itself an artistic practise capable of carrying other stories and narratives of original, missing peoples; narratives forcibly marginalised and hidden among the thick fibres which, within its many slits, remind us of the many semantic layers accumulated by these materials. Maybe that's where lies the most radical and complex sense of contemporaneity of Coopey's poetic body of work: the artist throws us constantly to a yesterday-today that operates like an incessant Ferris wheel in an abandoned theme park on the side of the road. Our eyes stare at the present, of course, yet they also gaze on a palimpsest of different times and narratives evoked by the artist. Although in the quietness of his sculptures and even in the delicateness of his speech, there's another aspect to be highlighted in the artist's production. Intelligent, sharp and self-aware, Dan knows where he steps – and where he places his own hands.

7. Rarely using artificial materials in his works and employing materials acquired mostly on and around Rua 25 de Março, in São Paulo – in addition to other specific materials brought from Britain and abroad, but of the same symbolic and even financial value – Coopey oscillates, in the realisation of the current set of works between the urge to weave pieces that visually evoke baskets of all kinds (wandering, open, gloriously rebellious in their sovereign voices) and more strictly formal "conventional" sculptural works albeit entirely contemporary. The Double, for example, a work that gives title to the exhibition, comprises a vertical wicker, iron and chewing-gum structure (located inside of the work, hidden within its curvatures), has approximately the same height as the artist, evidencing the intrinsic relationship between Coopey and his works. A curious (and to some extent humorous) art-life relationship unabashedly presented here to the public. The artist is present in body, wicker, sisal, hands marked by fibres, in his sweet and eloquent discourse, and in a vibrant orange hued pigment which warms our eyes and the grandeur of the grey concrete exhibition space, softening it while the artist's works inhabit it. We are surrounded by beings, entities more or less known by us, remembered. Let's get closer – both! – once again. And many times more.