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Kristina Benjocki

AT SUNSET WE RETREAT ONCE AGAIN, UP THE HILL,
TO WHERE WE CAN WATCH THE SKEINS OF WATER
REFLECT COLOURS WE'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE



Kristina Benjocki, 2022. © the artist

“At sunset we retreat once again, up the hill, to where we can watch the skeins of water reflect colours we've never seen before” is the first solo presentation of Amsterdam-based artist Kristina Benjocki in Belgium. Benjocki’s work explores the political mechanisms of forgetting and remembering in the context of former Eastern and Western Europe, and materializes through installation, audio, textile, and film. Engaging with the local history of the cloth industry in Eupen as well as her own biographical attachments to textile production, the exhibition at IKOB is a poetic interrogation of how textiles and the very practice of weaving intersect with technological progress, political histories, and the construction of cultural identity.

In her practice, Kristina Benjocki employs methods that are similar to those of an archeologist, with a particular interest in artifacts and stories that are overlooked, hidden, or repressed. In telling the story of human evolution, historians often focus on hard materials such as stone, bronze or iron. But without perishable materials woven with thread, produced mostly through women's labour, civilization is unthinkable – and up to this day, we depend on clothing, furnishings, and fabric of all kinds to survive and function.

Incidentally, the town of Eupen, where IKOB is located, and its surrounding areas are historically tied up with textile production. Eupen became a significant center of the industry in the 18th century, particularly famous for its dark blue and black cloths (*swarte Laeken*) that were exported throughout Europe. The first part of the exhibition focuses on this local history, presenting objects on loan from historical collections in the region alongside a drawing in vinyl by the artist of an *Isatis tinctoria* plant, an important source of blue dye since ancient times.

Several objects on view refer to the process and products of the local dyeing operations, belonging to powerful textile companies that left a lasting impact on the geography, architecture, and the social fabric of Eupen. They also reflect the wider transition to capitalist modes of production at the time, where workers were subject to tough working conditions, no longer had control over what they produced, and in the case of the cloth industry, work moved from the home into the factory. These artefacts introduce thematic threads that will reoccur throughout the exhibition, such as the relationship between weaving and (computer) coding, the cultural significance of textile patterns, and the manual labour and skill that goes into making fabric.

The central work of Kristina Benjocki's exhibition at IKOB, *Tableaux VI-VII, La composition* (2022) is a new installation consisting of large-scale, two-sided textile pieces that are draped over metal structures and hang at different heights throughout the main exhibition space. Using her own loom to weave these rugs by hand, the artist reproduces specific knowledge and movements that have been employed, mostly by women, since ancient times. Both culturally specific and strangely familiar, Benjocki's tapestries emphasize the domestic ubiquity and the majestic splendor of textiles in our daily lives. The patterns of these works are based on a series of drawings for rugs woven in the *Pirot kilim* tradition, manufactured in the artist's home country of Serbia. They can be traced back to Islamic-Ottoman rule in the Middle Ages and were later used to construct a post-Communist national identity, pointing to how textiles are intimately intertwined with migration, trade, and political power.

The importance of weaving in the historical development of technological advancement is the starting point for the sound piece included in the exhibition by composer and musician Seamus Cater, developed in collaboration with the artist and responding to the individual tapestries of *Tableaux VI-VII, La composition*. The loom can be considered as the first computer, as it allows its user to control a sequence of operations, an essential mechanism for developing computing hardware. Following this logic, the composer arranged a quote by the British mathematician Ada Lovelace about the 'Analytical Engine', an early computational device which she helped develop together with Charles Babbage, into a song. Further connecting the thematic threads of weaving, coding, and musical notation, Benjocki's hand-drawn grids, flanking different ornaments are on view in the same space.

A skein, the striking word used in the title of the exhibition, may refer either to "a length of thread or yarn, loosely coiled and knotted", or to "a flock of wild geese or swans in flight, typically in a V-shaped formation". Both definitions are at play here, resonating with Kristina Benjocki's rigorous practice of textile making and her imaginative approach to the worlds it opens up, from Zrenjanin to Amsterdam to Eupen. Following the threads that coil and twist themselves through history, this exhibition complicates the established, frequently subordinated position of textiles and urges us to take a closer look at how they form part of the very fabric of our lives.

The exhibition is generously supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and is accompanied by a four-language publication including a text by the researcher and curator Christel Vesters, as well as a public programme expanding on the themes of the exhibition.

Kristina Benjocki (b. 1984, lives and works in Amsterdam) studied at the University of Arts in Belgrade, Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam, and Royal Academy of Art in The Hague. She has also been an artist-in-residence at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht. Her research-driven artistic practice encompasses the moving image, sculpture, textile, and photography. Benjocki's work has been exhibited at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka (Croatia), the American University of Beirut Art Gallery, and Izolyatsia in Kyiv. In 2022, besides her presentation at IKOB, she will present solo exhibitions at

Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade, Legat Čolaković and at the National Museum Zrenjanin. From 2019 until 2023 her practice is supported by the Mondriaan Fund.

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