

Not-Yets Hana Miletić

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by Kathrin Bentele

Can an abstract form depict social reality? What is the relationship between abstraction and life? Abstraction is often associated with autonomy, e.g., with an idea of self-referentiality and distancing from reality, whereas the clearly recognizable and figurative is considered better suited to picturing the real. Hana Miletić's practice, which has grappled with questions regarding the nature and possibility of representation for more than a decade, deliberately works with abstract forms in making social reality tangible. Interestingly, her work stems from documentary photography – a medium dedicated to the politics of visibility – which she consciously left behind in order to find a less directive and exploitative form of representation in weaving. Photography is present in her work to this day, however, as a sketch or template (but never an aim in itself) that she transfers into the far slower, haptic medium of weaving. In her work, photographic exposure is replaced by a *re-enactment* or reproductive act: A photographed one-dimensional object is translated into a three-dimensional object, with the extended physical temporality of weaving taking the place of the momentary quality of the photograph.

Materials (2025) and *Joins* (2024–2025) are abstract works whose connection to and rootedness in reality is not immediately apparent, but which are closely bound up with the political materiality of everyday life. They are based on photographs of makeshift repairs Miletić took in New York's Financial District and in the old town of Bukhara, Uzbekistan (the latter for the 2025 Bukhara Biennial, *Recipes for Broken Hearts*): In *Materials*, it is the shattered glass window of a small business, held together with adhesive tape, while in *Joins* it is the cement-filled cracks in the facade of a house. The sensitivity of Miletić's work lies in this attention toward *minor gestures*, as she calls them – toward supposedly marginal acts of material care that people carry out every day in order to make do with lack and deficiency. As a sort of improvised, self-organized technology, they speak of resilience and resistance in the face of precarity and a lack of state care.

The task of taping together and filling, spawned by necessity, produces a specific form, which is an abstract one – similar to the branches of a tree or a spidery, web-like structure. What appears as an autonomous abstract form, then, is in reality the product of reproductive and reparative labor. Works like this suggest the possibility of thinking about abstraction not as a removed and isolated category that has no relevance to life, but as something that is actively produced by it and which constantly surrounds us as form and presence.

Hana Miletić's interest in reproduction is not limited to the level of representation, but can also be seen in the way her process of artistic production itself follows a reproductive logic. This is most apparent in the decision to work in the medium of weaving, which is bound up with a long history of reproductive or "feminine"-connoted labor. Yet in a further sense, the act of manually transferring the photograph to a woven object also calls for a highly

time- consuming and physical process of artistic reproduction – that is, for a *re-enactment*. This process also sees Miletić speculate into and imagine space, in an attempt to reconstruct it via the flat, one-dimensional medium of photography. The woven work is slowly built up through layering and overlaying and thus becomes an act of care and reconstitution of the photo that originally served as a reference – as well as an appreciation of these “marginal” inventive gestures, which stubbornly resist a capitalist logic. The freehanging *Joins* (2024–2025) reveals a further layer of labor: its rear side bears the traces of the work of the gold embroiderers Bakhshillo Jumaev and Mukkadas Jumaeva who collaborated in its production.

In a place as wealthy as Zurich, whose character is increasingly determined by digital finance, the intangibility of financial assets, and the largely invisible nature of material deprivation, minor gestures might not to be found on a physical surface. The title of Miletić’s exhibition, *Not-Yets*, suggests an unrealized, anticipated potential and a speculation into the future, bringing to mind the historical practice of holding gold reserves as well as the speculative trade in options. An element of virtuality resonates in each case. Produced using an industrial Jacquard loom, *Untitled [Softwares]* (2018–) similarly plays with the idea of a virtual space – more specifically, with the transparency grid, a virtual tissue that lacks any substance of its own and serves as a “transparent” underlay for all digitally produced images. Like the Jacquard weaving technique, it is built on a logic of 0 and 1 (grey–white) and offers little room for deviation. If *Materials* and *Joins* point to the incomplete and erroneous nature of a rhetoric of economic growth, *Untitled [Softwares]* quite literally refers to gaps in the system: Here, Hana Miletić experiments with the possibility of introducing irregularities and errors into the Jacquard’s industrial production process, with loose hanging threads producing small gaps that offer a glimpse of what lies behind.

In her forthcoming book *Infrastructural Critique: Between Reproduction and Abolition*, the late American critic Marina Vishmidt describes the gap as a form of political potential. Unlike the void, the gap is not defined as the opposite of wholeness; it is not a vacuum that is to be filled but a temporary negation and suspension. It is a form that exists in a space of the in-between: permeable, temporary, and full of possibilities. The gap might allow us to think differently about absence and non-presence – about all that stands in “negative” relation to capitalistic production, and which occurs beneath, beside, and in quiet opposition to it around us every day.