

ARTFORUM

CRITICS PICKS' TORONTO

Barbara Astman

Corkin Gallery 7 Tank House Lane Distillery District

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By [Brandon Kaufman](#)

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Barbara Astman, *The Woven Stories #33, 2023*, woven cotton, nylon thread, 47 x 53".

Since the 1970s, multimedia artist Barbara Astman has turned technology against itself to probe the construction, consumption, and interpretation of

images, especially of women. Astman has found an expression apposite to her decades-long critique in the eight patchwork tapestries that make up “Woven Stories,” her latest exhibition. For the works here, the artist created “film strips” by employing a process that involved transferring newspaper images onto lengths of clear packing tape to weave together.

These forty-seven-by-fifty-three-inch collage-like abstractions are flooded with activity. Recurring motifs include fragmented images of women’s visages and colorful pink-and-puce abstractions. Astman abates the works’ disparate aspects by organizing them into a grid pattern. In creating rhythm and order, the artist limns the process of mass image production, which, as George Trow wrote about television, seeks to “establish false contexts and to chronicle the unraveling of existing contexts [and] . . . to establish the context of no context and to chronicle it.”

Part and sum are mutually constitutive in these tapestries. Astman uses this dialectical relationship in her treatment of images of women. Take *The Woven Stories #33, 2023*, in which the top of a woman’s face is distributed over four tiles in the piece’s lower-right section. The middle two squares are distorted close-ups of her blue eyes. The images, which were created through a digital-weaving process, appear, paradoxically, both pixelated and tactile. They are further overlaid with green-and-taupe abstractions. Were it not for the ears flanking the subject, the middle of this face might be incomprehensible. Astman exposes the seams that hold together pop culture’s images of women, binding distorted and fragmented parts to a more legible, if still monstrous, whole.

Astman’s capacious work is suffused with all manner of tension: between subject and object, digital and analog, abstraction and figuration, painterly movement and sculptural heft, context and no context. Indeed, the artist constructs mass media images of women just as she deconstructs them.

<https://www.artforum.com/events/barbara-astman-2-518025/>