

## Rafaël Rozendaal *Abstract Browsing*

Steve Turner, Los Angeles 9 January – 6 February

Oddly, it's easier to play 'guess the website' when the weavings are reproduced small as jpegs on the gallery checklist. At lifesize, Rafaël Rozendaal's Jacquard tapestries – each of which takes the layout of a well-known web page and transforms it, by removing all text and image content, into a geometric abstraction over two-and-a-half-metres wide – are gorgeous and overwhelming in their vivid, raucous colour schemes. The interlocking rectangles of blended pink and yellow or mauve and magenta threads create a pleasurable, tingling optical sensation.

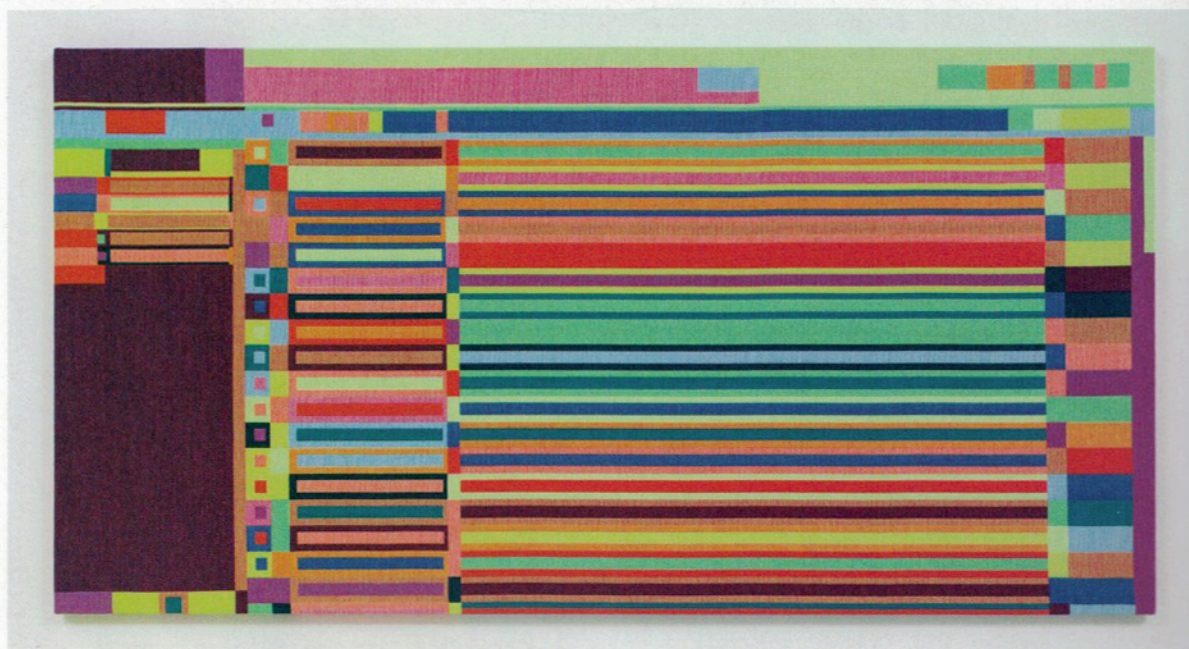
Referring to the checklist, however, returns us to consideration of these tapestries' sources. *15 05 11 Pinterest* and *15 05 08 Instagram* (all works 2015) are perhaps the ones in which the unusual architecture of those websites is most readily identifiable; *15 05 10 IMDb* took me longer, being more generic, and *15 05 05 Twitter*, though obvious in retrospect, did not occur to me because I am so used to reading Tweets on my phone. (Maybe that could be Rozendaal's next series: vertically scaled rugs woven according to the design of smartphone apps.)

The medium of tapestry is in vogue among contemporary artists, especially since Jacquard looms conveniently became digitally programmable and capable of replicating complex photographic or painted images at scale. Pae White, Chuck Close, Gabriel Kuri and Gerhard Richter, to name a few, have all recently produced Jacquard weavings. For Rozendaal, however, the process probably has an added conceptual attraction: the punch-card technology of Jacquard looms inspired the earliest computer engineers, including Charles Babbage, inventor in 1837 of the Analytical Engine.

Beyond that relatively superficial hook, however, what does it mean to purge these websites of content and transform them into monumental, unique and expensive artworks? The web is (putatively) free and democratic; there is something utopian about a site like Wikipedia, running on goodwill and mass collaboration (at least in principle). Rozendaal's translation (not included in this exhibition) of that aesthetically uninspiring site is arbitrarily flooded with fuchsia pink, turquoise and other acid hues. When Peter Halley abstracts

prison architecture, his aestheticisation and capitalisation of his source material is part of his provocation. In Rozendaal's case, it is unclear if a comparable motivation exists. That the palettes of these tapestries also brought to my mind traditional African fabrics adds a further layer of unaddressed unease.

More problematic, however, are the opposing, dystopian implications of web architecture, which is not just about design but also monetisation. Rozendaal's tapestries effectively make you realise what is missing: the distinction between different kinds of information – personal, editorial, informational and advertising – that rub uncomfortably up against each other. This is exactly the intention of the designers. Not to mention that the information itself is often generated by code that tracks your browsing history and analyses your demographic profile, tastes and current interests. Rozendaal's work does not reveal whether it is this insidious aspect of the Internet, or its utopian dimension, that makes his gorgeous tapestries worth thinking about as well as looking at. *Jonathan Griffin*



*15 05 02 Gmail*, 2015, Jacquard weaving, 144 × 266 cm.

Photo: Don Lewis. Courtesy the artist and Steve Turner, Los Angeles