

HEIDI WOOD

USE-BY DATE, INTERVIEW

Nathalie Hegert: So you were born in London, spent quite a lot of time in Australia, what brings you to Paris and how long have you lived here?

Heidi Wood: I'm Australian but I also have a British passport. I wanted to live somewhere in Europe and learn a language. After I graduated from a Melbourne art school, I visited a few capitals and chose Paris. I've been here for 19 years. You have to love a country where they make apprentice plumbers do philosophy classes.

NH: Your current exhibition at Galerie Anne Barrault changes every week, like an interior decorator's showroom. Today you have some lovely antique wallpaper on one side of the room, a setting for your art work. What is the relationship between your art and the context, the environment in which it is set?

HW: The starting point is my vocabulary of signs or pictograms. I see the forms I create as bi-products of a generic, omnipresent modernist language. We have seen the forms before but can't quite place where. They compete with logos and signage in a world saturated with signs. They can no longer hope to spark a transcendental experience or provoke a Bolshevik revolution, as artists intended at the outset of abstraction. We expect them to carry a commercial message or an instruction. I want to place this language in a contemporary context, both culturally and economically. I want to take back the visual impact that advertising and communication have fine-tuned. In 2001, I started making my own marketing materials for my abstract paintings. These were slick, mail-order catalogue style photographs of my paintings in domestic settings. The photographs then became artworks in their own right. The relationship, or exchange of brand image, between appealing settings and the pictograms I create for those settings has been at the heart of my work ever since. I'm all about giving consumers what they want. The weekly turnover of serving suggestions for my paintings and photographs at the show at Galerie Anne Barrault reflects the art market's hunger for novelty.

NH: How do you conceptualize and create the shapes of your abstracted motifs? How does color come into play, and how do you achieve the texture on the canvas?

HW: I create signs for a specific context. This context can be an interior or an urban environment. I see each new vocabulary of signs as the elaboration of visual identity for a given place. I start off collecting data by drawing. Then I break it down into pictograms. I make collages and scan them. In this form, I can manipulate them on the computer, inserting them into settings through photomontage or simulating diptychs or triptychs that can be made to order. When I make a digital proposal into a painting for a specific project or a commission, I use upholstery fabric, which creates a texture on the painting's surface.

NH: What connections do you find between domesticity and abstract painting?

HW: I'm interested in the dialogue that has always existed between applied arts and abstract painting. My use of upholstery fabric is a reference to the "domestication" of abstraction, which was almost instantly recycled into patterns for furnishings. I like the double status of paintings as both elements of a cultural dialogue within a museum or gallery context and as decorative additions to an interior that are often chosen because they match the curtains.

NH: Your work is an investigation into the methods and tactics of advertising and commercialism; is it in the spirit of play or critique that you appropriate these methods?

HW: Initially, I appropriated advertising strategies. Now I have promoted myself from Marketing Manager to CEO. I run my artistic practice like a business. I manage my product from the design phase to distribution. Streamlining production

to maximize return has led me to abandon the everyday practice of painting. Now I create digital proposals that are materialized as paintings, photographs, wall paintings or wallpapers when funding is secured. From now on, any paintings I make that are not sold within 5 years will be destroyed. The digital file will go back into a catalogue of dead works to be revived, possibly in a different form, for other projects or needs. Is this a critique of contemporary life? I'm grappling with the world I live in. Mercifully, nobody's asking contemporary artists to herald a new utopia or give helpful hints on transforming society. At best, I'm holding up a mirror to the art market.

NH: Have you ever been commissioned to create an actual logo for a company? Is that something you'd be interested in?

HW: No, I need layers of meaning in my work. When I create a sign or logo, that logo is the product. Making a logo for someone else's product is not my job.

NH: In the *Authentic New Mexico* series, you created Kachina dolls, set next to photographs of the local vernacular architecture, both symbols of Santa Fe and driving sources of that area's tourist economy. Do you plan any other investigations into place and identity like in Santa Fe?

HW: I'm currently working on a series called *Mount Isa*, based on photos I took and anecdotes I wrote during a stay at a mining town in the north of Queensland, Australia. I have two residencies planned for 2009: in Meymac, a village in the center of France, and Bremen in Germany. I am definitely interested in the promotion strategies used in tourism at the moment. It will be interesting to apply that to destinations that are not tourist draw cards.

NH: What's next for Heidi Wood Enterprises?

HW: Over the next two years, I'll be gathering material for a new publication devoted to my wall paintings. I'll present both the digital simulations and documentation of the work in various exhibitions. I plan to emerge from the global recession with a whole catalogue of proposals ready to go.

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