



SOMETHING LIKE  
A COMPLEX FIGURE  
IN A PERSIAN CARPET  
TAPIS EN LAINE, STRUCTURES  
EN POLYSTYRÈNE / WOOL CARPET, FRAMES  
IN POLYSTYRENE  
640 X 640 X 300 CM  
2008





# SOMETHING LIKE A COMPLEX FIGURE IN A PERSIAN CARPET

ELISABETH WETTERWALD  
INTERVIEW  
WITH SAMMY ENGRAMER

**Elisabeth Wetterwald: you more or less drew inspiration for this project from Henry James' short story, *The Figure in the Carpet*. To what extent, how and why?**

Sammy Engramer: I often start from a literal interpretation I then transpose to another plane, another context or another discipline. The centerpiece of this show is a 64m<sup>2</sup> carpet on which the layout of a one-bedroom apartment has been drawn. It just so happens that this layout repeats the structure of Mondrian's painting titled *Komposition mit grosser roter Fläche, Gelb, Schwarz, Grau und Blau* (1921). Since the 1960s, Mondrian's works have been reduced to mere patterns printed on other objects, the most famous example being Yves Saint Laurent's dress (1964). During a promotion for the Département des Aigles du musée d'Art moderne (1971), Marcel Broodthaers wore

a shirt decorated with a pattern drawn from *New York City*, one of Mondrian's later works. So, it's about a pattern in a 64m<sup>2</sup> carpet that no longer has much to do with the pattern in James' short story, just as Mondrian's work has nothing to do with the huge enterprise for which it has become the corporate image... The drift of significations and the multiple interpretations generating a story are what interest me. I have the feeling that we always fail when facing a text or an image; we never have the right key. You always have to break the lock...

**According to what you say, the interpretation is not only literal...**

No, the choice of this short story also refers to Henry James' cross-disciplinary technique of blending literature with the developing field of psychoanalysis, then in its

early stages. Henry James places a secret that is inaccessible to the narrator at the centre of the story. The hidden pattern in the carpet, in this case the secret of literary creation, is also invisible to the reader. James puts us in a position of want, as if we were dealing with a Lacanian analyst—whose lips are sealed—supposedly in on the secret of what the crux of artistic creation is. Here I am referring to the “subject who is supposed to know”: the patient supposes that the analyst knows something about his symptoms, thereby conferring powerful authority on the analyst, who logically encourages this fool's game... In fact, James lived at a turning point in the history of the arts. In the same text, he expresses the impossibility of revealing the “essence” or the secret of creation, and the necessity of any modernist to expose all its ins and outs. *The Figure in the Carpet* revolves around an original enigma that depends on a rational story, without fantasmagoria or suspense; it is very disturbing... This paradox is like Americans, capable of producing high technology and its related scientific discourse, while simultaneously holding on to archaic beliefs. This point of view is similar to that of Jules Romain in his novel “The Creators”: “After all, the history of scientific discovery is perhaps the outcome of the main revelations God has seen fit to make from time to time, to certain people, despite their profound unworthiness.”

**There are two recurring themes in Henry James's work: the secret and the double. It seems to me that the double, splitting, or even reflections are important concepts in this exhibition.**

Strange as it may seem, we are more inclined to recognize ourselves in a pattern deeply woven into a carpet than to identify with an individual, who by definition, implies the Other, difference, and I would even say wariness. Current media production encourages narcissistic games—these images full of bodies and words, from the obscurest to the most banal, are mirrors of our desires. Beyond the carpet, I show mirrors in motion in the form of two identical parallelepipeds (*Dervish Mirrors*). These rotating “doubles” reflect the exhibition space and at the same time produce a mise-en-abyme. There is



also the position of the viewer, who alternately appears and disappears within the mirror frames.

**In addition to, or beyond the double, there is infinite multiplication.**

Indeed. By means of reason, law and technique, we have never ceased to isolate and separate objects any more than individuals. Faced with this factual state of things, either we choose a monomaniacal and highly identity-based practice, ranging from the significance of economic barriers and the permanent control of signs, or we opt for a complex and fragmented world—or worlds—composed of multiple identities with varying temperatures. In the latter case, one obviously runs the risk of losing oneself; but this is the one I am developing in. I see the world like a brain: it is more like a mirror ball than a granite monolith. The joy is in discovering the links that enable you to arrange, accumulate or interlock signs and thus create indices and entities intended to awaken the mechanisms of the imagination. In this context, the *Dervish Mirrors* serve as a manifesto of the multitude.

**Above the carpet, there is a volume that evokes the representation of the pattern I three dimensions.**

Made out of slabs of expanded foam, the black structure composing Mondrian's painting is actually raised above the carpet, hanging above our heads. We move from the plan to a kind of architectural module (pod?). The "pattern in the carpet" unfolds in the space, as if the mental space of the carpet were expanding into the exhibition space ... A bit like Tom Baxter in a movie theater springing from the screen and leaving behind the film in which he plays the hero, Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*.

**And what does *Moonwalk* have to do with this story?**

I think I am fascinated by loud and talky images. *Moonwalk* shows a moon against a black background with an angle cut out of it. This image is simple, legible, and at first glance without a story. And yet, it invites me to deploy other fragments of images. In the first place, we see Pac-Man, the little digital critter that was all the rage along with break dancing in the 1980s, hence the title. By extension, one can also think of an unconventional interpretation of the moon's movement: the moon rotates around

the earth whereas Pac-Man follows his linear path on a plane. *Moonwalk* is also inspired by art history and the painting *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* by El Lissitzky (1921).

It also evokes an unlikely figure de style, like an "angular quarter moon." Finally, we might think of a pie chart of statistics. In short, the images are playgrounds; you just have to find the one generating the loudest racket...

**You mentioned the noisy "chatter." But this image, as well as the other pieces you are showing in the exhibition, can seem *contraire* silent and rather enigmatic.**

**Of course one can project stories or puns onto them, but one may also wish to let them "rest" in their quasi abstraction...**

Being somewhat the opposite of mine, this interpretation shows that the works are autonomous and all in all they do not require a discourse or even my signature. I am delighted. All that is left is for me is to keep my mouth shut and for the viewer to discover the show.

TATI BAH  
EH



MOONWALK  
IMPRESSION NUMÉRIQUE, PEINTURE /  
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