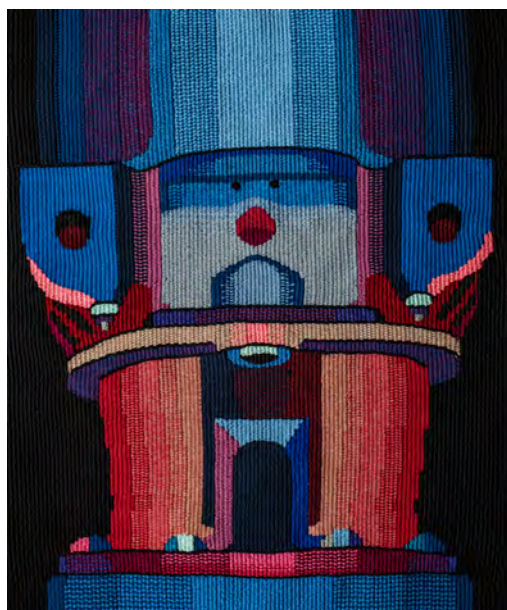


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Zhenya Machneva was born in 1988 in Leningrad, a Soviet city whose name existed between 1924 and 1991, also known as St. Petersburg. From the beginning there is the story of a disappearance, of a ghost. During her studies at the Stieglitz State Academy of Art and Design, Zhenya Machneva chose to train in the textile department. She is immediately struck and seduced by weaving techniques. At this time, she is not yet free of the subjects she wishes to weave, the tapestry is confined to a strictly decorative function. A function and a role that she will shift when she starts working alone in her studio.

On two manual looms, she creates tapestries representing industrial landscapes, factories emptied of their workers, useless machines, patterns and colors. Why would you try to represent by hand a heritage that no one seems to care about anymore? The artist finds in it a family history, as well as the fallen fantasy of an era. She points out that "the Soviet industrial period has enjoyed great glory, but now what we can see are just collapsed dreams. It seems important to me to collect different objects and different landscapes in the process of disappearing."

Like an archaeologist from the Soviet industrial era, Zhenya Machneva begins by visiting the factory where her grandfather worked. On site, the machines appear to her as sculptures, organisms and autonomous entities. She needs to «touch her subject.» Before weaving, she sets off to explore deserted factories, abandoned sheds, wastelands turned into landfills. On site, she photographs what she calls «patterns.» The collection of images will give rise to extremely graphic drawings rendered in black and white. The drawings are the sketches from which she will implement the tapestries. Zhenya Machneva creates a contrast between subject and technique. The steel is made visible by cotton, the rate of work at the factory gives way to slowness, while the weight, coldness and rigidity of the buildings are soft and subtle in the weaving. The black and white drawings are transformed into colorful tapestries. Colors are intuitively chosen.

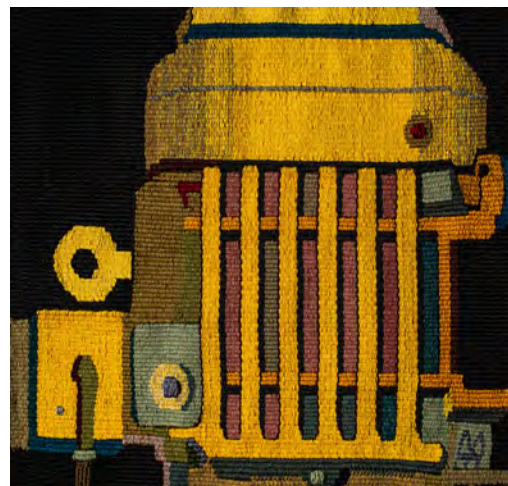
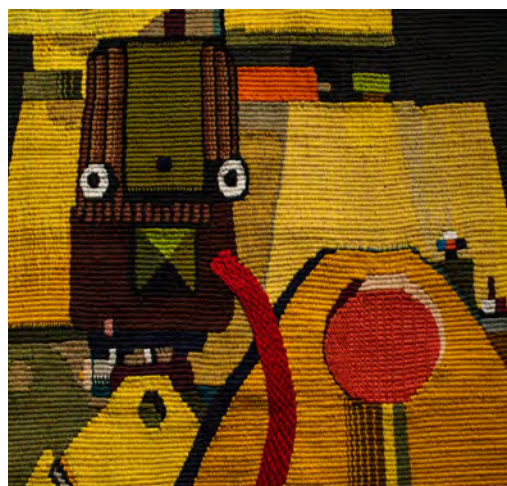
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## PILAR ALBARRACÍN

« No apagues mi  
fuego, déjame  
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*The Drawer*



Zhenya Machneva wants to maintain a part of improvisation within a laborious manual process. "I hope that you can feel my energy through the works." The choice of tapestry is physical. Zhenya Machneva gives the technique an organic dimension to which it is intimately attached. Sitting in front of the loom, the artist tirelessly repeats the same gestures to generate successive frames. Repetition, slowness and loneliness are part of a meditative state in which each cotton thread becomes a mantra. A gestural repetition that echoes that once applied by workers, active in these factories that today are ghosts. The choice of tapestry is also political. If you look at the history of art, tapestry is a medium.

It has an authoritarian, timeless, sensory aspect. Through the thread and the loom, Zhenya Machneva represents the Soviet industrial heritage that has become invisible and unproductive. The motifs, machines and buildings are the archives of a bygone era, a time when industrialization and the figure of the worker were over-glorified. A vanished era of which barely visible ghosts remain. It is then for the artist to embody this heritage to give it a new existence. The making of tapestries is a physical incarnation, but also metaphorical. She pays particular attention to patterns, or to the details of machines whose zoomorphism or anthropomorphism she accentuates. She then plays with the pareidolia, which brings out familiar faces, skulls and other forms.

The artist thus engages a new reading of the woven motifs by opening a fictional space. Through her weft threads and her chain threads, Zhenya Machneva awakens ghosts, revives and makes the poetry of sleeping landscapes palpable.

Julie Crenn

