

# Anne Low

## *Enfilade*

by Mitch Speed

Stripes had been running through my mind for a while, when Anne wrote to me. A few weeks earlier, having noticed the striped sweater of my neighbour in the Berlin library where I go to write, I'd sheepishly waved. Would they mind, I'd asked, if I took a photo of the pattern? They cocked their head, understandably skeptical. I mumbled something about collecting samples of patterns. They nodded: sure.

Not all stripes are made equally. Imagine several coloured bars, their hues weighed against one another, so that the surface, viewed together, compels an agitated focus—unity in and despite difference. But then consider the colour's substrate. What are we working with? Pigment in plastic, paint on wood, or dye in fibre? Ask the question, and the effect deepens. One possible answer: weaving hits differently.

In weaving or dyeing, the perceived boundary between colour and material collapses. The former can be seen as something integral. But be careful, here, of value judgements. Surfacey things get a bad rap. At least from Modernist types, who prefer truth-to-materials over decoration. And anyway, plastic has its own interior colour, its own invisible molecular drama. So the inquiry into what weaving does, needs to go deeper, or somewhere else.

As a field of perforations, formed by overlapping fibres, and therefore a specific mechanism for receiving and processing light, the weave underlines, in a particularly effective way, the porousness and the interiority of what we call surface. This form is distinguished by how it shows us this; or put another way, the invitation is to see things this way.

Following this invitation, I returned to Anne's new piece, *Grave Theatre Bed* (2025)—a large, horizontally stretched textile bisected into two halves, each striped vertically. On the left: blue and green, cut through by thin white strands. On the right: soft, yellow-grey, with deep indigo bracketed in white.

This kind of tonal split lends itself to a particular way thinking. In Anne's case, the material decisions seem to be operating in concert with a view of manual production as something that could be—or should be—an alternative to mass production. For a few minutes, I turned this thought over in my hand, secretly craving some revolutionary Luddite bluster, a cottage industry manifesto. Not a chance.

What instead arrived was a wiser utopian spirit, in the devotion of time, energy, and care to material, and work. I think we can agree that the global mass-production apparatus deserves our wrath. But

it's probably just as true, Anne's stuff seems to say, that the critique embodied in this contempt might be better articulated through action-in-material. As if to suggest: here is another way something might be made. Which means: here is another way we could live.

Nervousness about bloviation aside, this project, and in particular the question of what it gives to us and the world, has allies in the history of ideas. "Use value," Fredric Jameson writes in his reading of Marx's *Capital*:

...is the life of the body, of existential or phenomenological experience, of the consumption of physical products, but also the very texture of physical work and physical time... Quality is human time itself, whether in labor or in the life outside of labor; and it is this deep existential constant that justifies that Utopian strain in Marxism which anticipates the transformation of work into aesthetic activity (from Ruskin to Morris, from Marcuse to Paolo Virno's virtuosity)...

In Anne's work, too, the labour itself edges on becoming the aesthetic thing. Otherwise, machine weaving and dying would suffice. Handwork must certainly produce a specific aesthetic effect in the conventional usage of the word: the specific *almost*-perfection of lines, forms, and texture. But here, the aesthetic effect is bigger than that. What it means is that the act of immersing oneself — no distinction between body and mind necessary — in unalienating work is, for its creative quality, itself an aesthetic experience. Ergo, the effect of craftwork exceeds a connoisseurship of handmade things. The objects' final position in the gallery is really just part of the story, a way of displaying the evidence of a more consequential appropriation and transformation of labour.

What the gallery presentation provides is the opportunity to convert this act into an essay-in-material, which tells us how any such engagement with work will always transpire in the realm of profane reality. Out of this comes a feet-on-the-ground romanticism.

Case in point: *Grave Theatre Bed*, a piece to whose edge receipts have been tacked, like margin notes. The receipts are also like magnets, drawing both the art and us into an everyday world which has less to do with hand-woven textiles than trips to the shop, loose change, bills, and receipt-spilling shoeboxes.

A proposition is being made, concerning the possibility, even in the midst of this junk, of a more deliberate or nourishing relationship to material. And the suggestion is being made, as well, that human beings might not be alone in this situation. In *Estate sale* (2025), two hand-woven curtains are folded inside a cardboard box on the floor. The fabric is striped again—red, white and blue—with squiggly horizontal lines crossing through the verticals. The pattern rhymes with a silverfish motif screen-printed on the box. As insects ride cardboard, funniness piggybacks tragedy.

In his essay *The Lamp of Memory* (1849), Ruskin made the case that architecture, even more than art and writing, holds and transmits history. Architecture, he argued, records and becomes marked by the actual passage of life and history, independent of authorial pretense. Would it be too cute a shortcut to imagine a similar meaning emanating from a literal lamp, in Anne's new work? Given how her title – *Fir candle (reproduction)* (2025) – leads us towards the surrealist practice of absurd combinations, it seems a fair liberty to take.

Here, a hand-dyed and hand-woven silk lampshade is affixed to a run-of-the-mill wall-mounted lamp stanchion. The shade's surface is worked through with an overlay of horizontal and vertical stripes. Behind the foregrounded bands of green, black, and white, grey forms drift like pixelated weather. It's odd, and it's touching, this nesting of craft in the base componentry of a home life that could have been, or still could be, anyone's, in another timespace of work and material.

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