

Egle Jauncems: *Tapestry from an Asteroid*

Exhibition text by Isabelle Utzinger-Son, December 2022



"If we did something wrong we will hear a *poof*," a saleswoman explains sternly to the elderly man looking to buy a Christmas present for his grandchild. "Let's build a Nuclear Plant" is a game that promises wholesome fun for the entire family: "Here, the combustion chamber, uranium rod, cooling system, neutron accelerator and the safety dome. Everything is beautifully crafted." A comment on the antinuclear power movement, the iconic 1968 sketch *Christmas with the Hoppenstedts* by the German humourist Loriot, dovetailed with a global Cold War rhetoric. Some six years later across the pond, Chicago-based free jazz musician Sun Ra and his Arkestra incantated his song *Nuclear War*:

Nuclear War (Yeah)
Nuclear War (Yeah)
They're talking about (Yeah)
Nuclear war (Yeah)
They're talking about (Yeah)
Nuclear War (Yeah)
It's a motherfucker, don't you know
If they push that button, your ass gotta go

Spilling over into the absurd, both Loriot and Sun Ra use irony as a tool to shift in between humour and catastrophe. The gravity one anticipates from a song about nuclear annihilation paired with improvisational jazz melodies makes for a particular kind of abstraction - one that takes real world descriptions and renders them obsolete through playful gestures. A self-proclaimed alien from Saturn and godfather of Afrofuturism, Ra transcended the logic of Western science and fetishized its institutions. Albeit culturally set apart, Ra and Loriot deliberately downplayed the destructive forces of nuclear energy, using political abstinence as a vehicle to frame an alternative cosmology. Where Loriot's painfully pedantic engineer language encapsulated the BDR's development of mass consumerism, Ra's music and its lyricism became "a metaphor of being elsewhere, or perhaps of making this elsewhere your own" (Anthony Reed).

With *Tapestry of an Asteroid*, Lithuanian born, London based artist Egle Jauncems presents a new body of work that dwells in an “elsewhere” at once local and universal, provincial and cosmopolitan. Making a direct semantic reference to Ra’s 1967 composition *Tapestry from an Asteroid*, the exhibition marks a continuation of her weaving practice as painting, where she expands the confines of the exhibition space to the infinite potential of a loom. An ongoing pursuit in her process, the artist tests preconceived ideas of what painting ought to look like and how its forms may dissipate: many woven strands originate from older works, cut-up and recycled. In another body of work, Jauncems uses packaging materials amassed through the all-pervasive habit of ordering consumer products online. Throughout, her signature palette of muted colours make for an atmosphere of flurry and deceitful abandon.

Such formal attributes stand in stark contrast with her ongoing interest in the psychology of masculine archetypes. A painterly interception in the biographies that shaped cultural fields within which we navigate today, her previous works have addressed the emperor Napoleon; contestants in the Great British Bake-off; the solitary Lithuanian pattern-maker Paulinas Kaluina; or John Conway, the British mathematician who developed the “Game of Life.” The seeming haste and imprecision which she unabashedly displays through her choice and treatment of materials is carefully composed to make exaggerated gestures about her subjects. In Jauncems’ works, the hero emerges as a figure of paradox – pictured with irony, reverence flips into its opposite.

Jauncems’ works thrive on material and semantic antagonism. Thus, she names some tapestries after asteroids; pre-volcanic leftovers from the formation of the solar system, whose chemical make-up serve as an indication of what earth is made of, while posing an uncertain threat to its longevity. But if asteroids indicate what materials earth comprises, her manner of transposing them into hand-made tapestries denotes a blurring of material history: These tapestries make as much space and time as they take up, and posit a material reality that is always subject to change and destruction. Moreover, Jauncems doubles down on their homonymic nomenclature, as in the work *951 GASpra*, an asteroid named after the black sea retreat once visited by Maxim Gorky and Leo Tolstoy. Or the tapestry *AURORA, no 94*, an asteroid that shares its name with her father-in-law’s favourite chicken. She considers other works to be control panels, charged with hypothetical potential to transport its onlooker elsewhere - *if you push that button*, so to speak. In striking a tone that enables one to laugh about one’s own conventions, her humour operates as a cipher for a post materialist worldview. When objecthood morphs into the absurd and develops its oxymoronic patterns, Jauncems’ tapestries reveal a double-bind that allows for manifold considerations of what makes painting at once specific and generic.

Tapestry of an Asteroid makes for a funny and strange cosmos, not necessarily dark and by no means harmless. Matter-of-factness paired with play in the face of impending nuclear annihilation suggests more than an ironic shrug - much like Lorient’s miniature power plant, her work enrobes serious business with play (*poof*). Reverberating within the confines of geopolitical locality and historical linearity, her paintings strive to dodge time in favour of a-chronology and subliminal dissonance (*your ass gotta go*). Working with an awareness of the absurdity of human life and social interaction, she tacitly weaves together threads of collective history and biography, implicitly referring today’s zeitgeist while explicitly enchanting the imperfections in its fabric.