

Hand in Hand with Damien Ajavon: The Material as Part of the Story

VON FRANCISKA NOWEL CAMINO · VERÖFFENTLICHT 23/08/2020 · AKTUALISIERT 08/10/2020

Damien Ajavon is a contemporary and conceptual textile artist currently living and working in Montreal who describes himself as a creative mind, TV-nerd and Dollarstore-Queen¹. For a long time, he did not consider himself an artist because he could not draw – a skill, he believed, a good artist should have. Now, he knows better: Creativity and the ability to share visions and expressions are his paper and pen.

A completely new structure with an extra 3D effect

Weaving and knitting are Damien's favorite techniques. Both crafts can be traced back thousands of years in different cultures all over the world. The



Damien Ajavon: Fluvius, 2019, Linen and cotton linen, © @aokpalad

use of traditional and ancestral techniques can be seen as strategies to bring the past into the present. Damien gives these techniques a contemporary twist by creating not only textile art but also his own yarn for certain pieces. In other words, he creates the object and the material. Damien combines historical techniques with a playful handling of contemporary materials that are normally not used for weaving. He uses, for example, different sorts of ropes usually mended for Canadian households. He finds these materials in the *Dollar-store and thrift shop*. Damien converts these interesting materials into new objects, like a Macrame plant holder.

In another piece, he created yarn by knitting it or them, however, it appears to have a completely new structure with an extra 3D effect. Damien's love for unconventional materials does not stem from trendy upcycling fads. It is rooted, however, in the simple concept of recycling items that would otherwise go to waste. He will also reuse materials that he receives from friends. "I just want to give a new life to things and I like the idea of giving them a second chance," says Damien.



Damien Ajavon: Parure (Tank top), 2020, Knitting on the machine, © @aokpalad

This artistic method allows the unique story of the reused yarns to be maintained as they are transformed by the artist into something new. Damien's process creates new perspectives on this artistic practice within a historical context and opens up a platform for everyday connotations.

A cashmere ball that feels like touching a cloud

Damien loves to make use of textiles with stimulating and pleasing characteristics. For example, he recalls the soft and tender tactile experience of a cashmere ball that he got from Cariaggi In Italy which "feels like touching a cloud", fluffy and tender. Yarns like this would be stored for a

special occasion to be knitted with a particular memory in mind; in this case, his

experience in Italy. Damien also loves yarn with special effects like light reflection, color changing or react on heat. The interaction between visual and tactile experiences play an important role in Damien's work. Mohair, for example, has a soft appearance, but is scratchy to the touch.

The way these unique materials play with various sensory perceptions and optical illusions is like an ongoing performance. Damien turns his materials into accomplices by giving them an agency in terms of Petra Lange-Berndts understanding of materialism: "They can move as well as act and have a life of their own, challenging an anthropocentric post-Enlightenment intellectual tradition."²

The functions of his pieces are multifaceted. Even his tank top creates a distinctive corporal experience for the wearer. It is not only an aesthetic item of clothing but also a soft sculpture which could be staged in a room like a piece of art. He did not intend to address just one function: "I want my pieces to be worn, carried or hung on the wall."

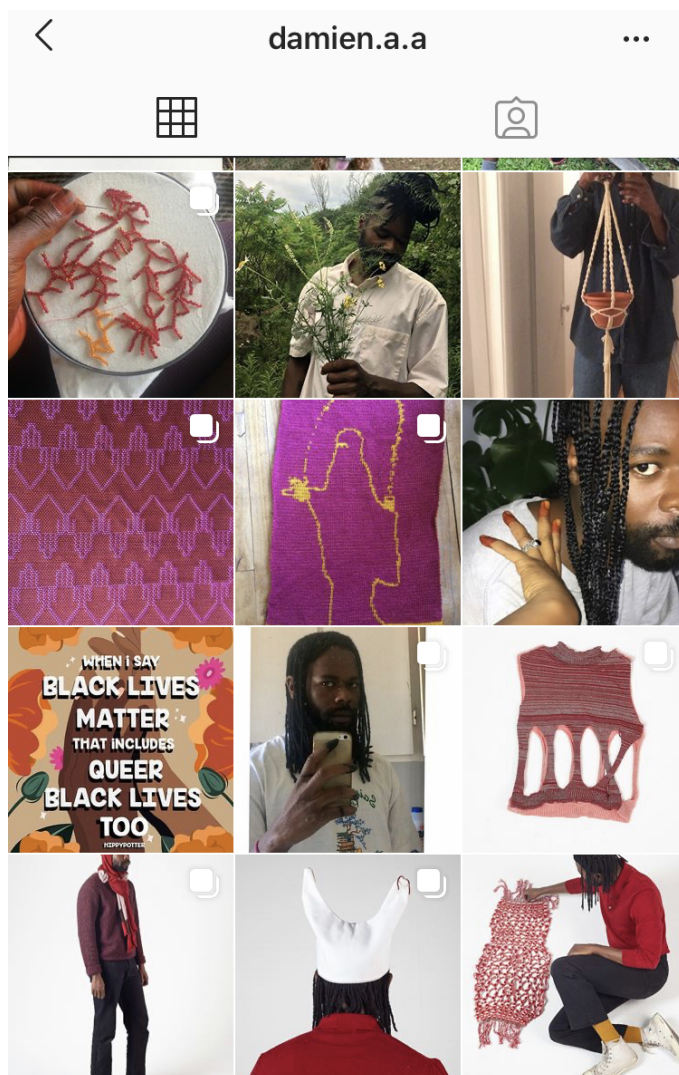


Damien Ajavon: Parure (Tank top), 2020, Knitting on the machine, © @aokpalad

Different tones of red and pink next to natural light

Damien's Instagram feed ([@damien.a.a](https://www.instagram.com/damien.a.a)) is formatted like a woven surface consisting of knitted patterns and woven prints, spiked with some fashionable selfies of him wearing some of his artworks. Besides the color palette consisting of different tones of red and pink next to natural light, one recurring motif are hands. For Damien, hands (the motif and the gripping organ) are a form of protection – metaphorically, culturally and physically. Hands are his working tool; an emotional gesture with which one can destroy and build. Additionally, hands are symbolic of a family tradition that he shares with his grandmother, in which they paint their fingertips and palms with henna for a spiritual feeling of protection. Speaking with him, it becomes clear that the sensation of touching and being touched corresponds to his motif of

weaving. Touching his woven works is like holding hands. Damien explains, “It’s a form of collecting and saving memories; something to hold on,” – something to hold hands with.



Combining pop-culture with a historical textile medium, Jacquard’s knits represent occidental beauty standards and their impact on black beauty in African countries. People whiten their skin and straighten their hair in an attempt to meet these imposed standards. Damien translates two-dimensional photography, which represent BPoC in a complex knitted structure. He transfers the photographed moment into an analog craft process which begins with choosing the colors he wants to transfer from the photo into his textile. For the Jacquard-technique, it is necessary to reduce the motif to tree or four colors. The

transferred motif must allow for the reduction of the color palette without the loss of the structure or contrast of the image. This graphic challenge is part of how Damien highlights not only the Black fashion scene but also a deliberate process of contemporary representation of Black culture and beauty.

Damien Ajavon’s art offers a shift in perspective towards a transcultural practice. He understands the materials he uses, as well as their inherent stories. As a result, his textiles are not only a medium, but also a message.

Let’s be touched by Damien Ajavon, the creative mind, Series and TVshow-nerd and Thrift-Queen.

If you want to know more about the artist go and visit his website.

1. Dollarama is a Canadian Dollarstore chain which sells special items, most of which cost under one dollar. [\[↗\]](#)
2. Lange-Berndt, Petra: How to Be Complicit with Materials, in: dies. (Hrsg.): Materiality, London 2015, 12-23, hier S. 14. [\[↗\]](#)



Suche in OpenEdition Search

Sie werden weitergeleitet zur OpenEdition Search

In alle OpenEdition

In The Article