

MAKE A LOOM AND WEAVE

Artist Diedrick Brackens's 2019 New Museum exhibition inspires this activity. You can see images from "Diedrick Brackens: Darling Divined" and hear him speak about the exhibition [on our website](#).

KEY WORDS

- **Weave:** to interlace (threads, yarns, strips, fibrous material, etc.) so as to form a fabric or material
- **Loom:** a device used to weave cloth and tapestry
- **Warp and Weft:** two basic components of weaving
 - **warp** is material held stationary in tension on a frame or loom, while
 - **weft** is material drawn through and inserted over-and-under the warp
- **Textile:** material made of interlacing fibers

START WITH ART: DIEDRICK BRACKENS



Diedrick Brackens (b. 1989, Mexia, TX) constructs intricately woven textiles that speak to the complexities of black and queer identity in the United States. Interlacing diverse traditions, including West African weaving, European tapestries, and quilting from the American south, Brackens creates cosmographic abstractions and figurative narratives that lyrically merge lived experience, commemoration, and allegory. He uses both commercial dyes and unconventional colorants such as wine, tea, and bleach, and foregrounds the loaded symbolism of materials like cotton, which links to the transatlantic slave trade.

Here is an image you can zoom in to see the texture and details of the weaving.

- What is going on in this picture?
- Why do you take baths? How do you feel when you do?
- How would you describe the emotions of the person in the tub? Are they comfortable or uncomfortable?
- What colors do you see? How would you describe them (bright, dark, calm, hot, warm, cool...)? Do the colors and how you describe them change when you zoom in and look closely?

Hear from the Artist: In the **audio guide** for “Darling Divined,” Brackens describes this work, titled *how to return*, 2017, which he made by weaving indigo-dyed cotton and acrylic yarn:

“...generally the silhouetted figure is based off of my own body. But for me I feel like they are a space that I would hope that folks can leap into, can imagine themselves there, or folks in their lives potentially. *How to return* is the earliest work in the show and this is about the time that I really started to think about figuration and making these bodies and for me this work came kind of on the heels of a lot of, I would say, the rise of Black Lives Matter and these responses to these extrajudicial killings of Black folks. And a lot of the media I was seeing and consuming were these images of death and violence. And I really wanted to find other ways to articulate these bodies that were about leisure and repose, being relaxed. And the colors in the work really took their cues from the American flag. I was really taking these kind of red, white, and blue colors as a way to sort of make the reference but not lean so heavily on sort of these big flashes of red and white stripes.”

Look Around

- Where do you see **textiles** in your home?
- Do you see anything that is woven? Clothes, blankets, curtains, kitchen items?
- Do you think the materials were woven with a **factory machine**, hand-operated looms, or by hands alone?
- What do you think the materials are made from and how are they different colors?

MAKE ART

Let's make a cardboard loom and experiment with weaving

Materials

- A cardboard rectangle of a comfortable size to hold and turn (6"x12")
- Pencil
- Scissors
- Yarn or embroidery thread

Tape

- Plastic embroidery needle (optional)
- Ribbon, scraps of fabric cut in strips, other long flexible materials (optional)

Making

1. Using a ruler and pencil, mark lines a half inch apart on each 12 inch side of the cardboard.
2. Cut quarter-inch slits at each of the marks with your scissors.
3. Tape a long piece of yarn onto the bottom left of what will be the back of the cardboard **loom** (the yarn should be at least 12 feet, if you have cut 24 slits along each long edge of the cardboard will wrap your loom). Thread the yarn through the slits so that it forms straight lines across the front of the cardboard and diagonal lines across the back of the cardboard. The straight lines are your **warp**. Tape the end of the yarn to the back, leave several inches of tail to tie up your weaving when you are finished, then cut the excess.
4. Multiply the size of your loom by the number of rows you want to make with a particular color of yarn and cut it, or keep it longer if you are unsure, in order to experiment. With your fingers or a plastic needle, thread yarn (your **weft**) over, under, over, under, every other thread of the **warp**. When you have gone over or under every warp from left to right, reverse and repeat your threading from right to left.
5. After each row, push weft threads down close to each other.
6. When you are ready to change colors, cut the weft thread, leaving several inches of excess, and begin again with another color. Change colors as many times as you wish.
7. If you want to remove your weaving from the loom, thread the excess tails of the weft through the end of your weaving. Cut the weft down the middle on the back side of your cardboard. Remove tape. Tie each tail of the warp with its neighbor to create a fringe.
8. If you want to leave your weaving on the cardboard loom, you can experiment and add all kinds of materials, ribbons, dried grasses or other natural materials, scraps of fabric, and paper as you please; you also will not have to tie off the edges.

REFLECTION

Deidrick Brackens has spoken about repetition of weaving in different ways: **meditative and relaxing** but also a **demanding physical process**.

1. How did you feel while making your weaving?
2. Did you hear or feel the pattern and rhythm of the process? Was it relaxing?
3. Did you feel uncomfortable at times? What did you do when something felt difficult?
4. Would you try this again? What new materials, colors, design might you use to create?

5. What are the materials made of?

FURTHER READING

Diedrick Brackens has mentioned many inspirations for his work. Here are some links to find out about a few of them.

- West African weaving, which includes many diverse traditions and methods. Here is a video about Kente cloth created in Ghana: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=toWybhX5ZV8>
- European tapestries such as the “Unicorn Tapestries,” created in the Netherlands in the 15th century and housed at the Cloisters of the Metropolitan Museum of Art: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/467642>
- Gee’s Bend quilts, created by a community of African American women in rural Alabama, have kept alive the passed-down quilting traditions of ancestors who were enslaved: <https://www.arts.gov/art-works/2015/quilts-gees-bend-slideshow>

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IMAGE:

“Diedrick Brackens: darling divined,” 2019. Exhibition view: New Museum, New York. Photo: Dario Lasagni

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