

# REVIEWS

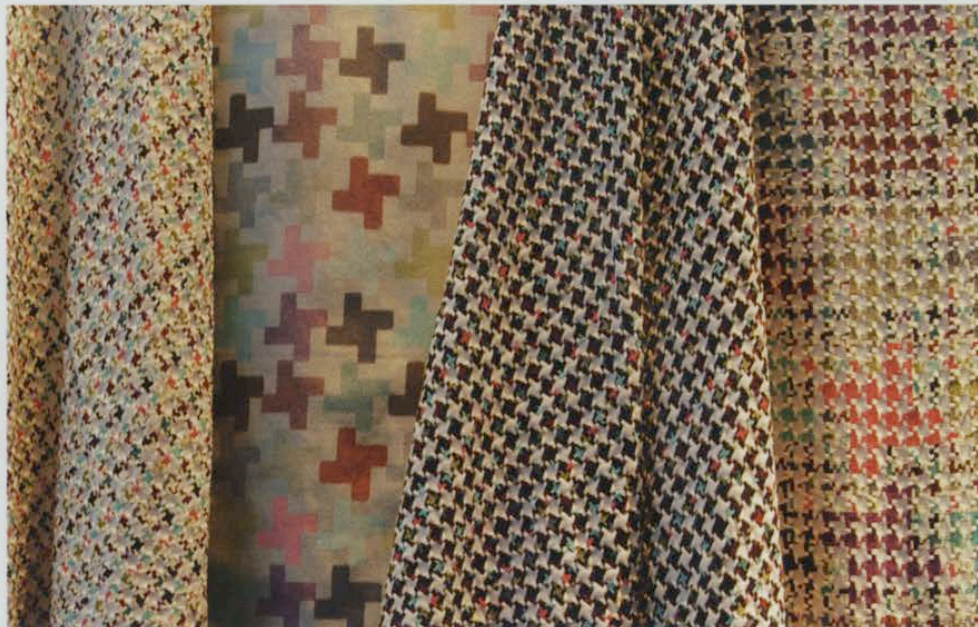
## ELAINE BREMNER

THE LIGHTHOUSE REVIEW GALLERY,  
11 MITCHELL LANE, GLASGOW  
1 MARCH - 1 JUNE 2008  
REVIEWED BY ELLIE HERRING

Located in a discrete space on the mezzanine level of the Lighthouse, the innovations of Glasgow-based textile designer Elaine Bremner are difficult to express to non-practitioners. After all, weaving is a complicated business of preparation and technique – like playing a very skilled game of noughts and crosses, only your back hurts and you might eventually need glasses – but the Lighthouse and Bremner have sought to make these innovations accessible.

Bremner has combined the practice of weaving with ink-jet printing – a means of digital image transfer on to specially woven cloth – and manages to stretch the possibilities of both. Her work is supported by the Centre for Advanced Textiles (CAT), which was established in 2000 and operates as both a business and a research centre pursuing advanced research in digital textile design and printing. The fairly limited range of pre-treated fabrics which can be deployed by CAT's printer – mostly natural fibres and all with very simple yarn structures – inspired Bremner to experiment with different weaves, and to ask what happens if you introduce other variables into the mix? Would it destroy or interfere with the print? With a view to resolving these questions, for the last year or so Bremner has tested and experimented with structures, yarns, patterns and dyes in a highly controlled way – the results of which form the basis of this exhibition.

The show is small, little wonder considering how time-consuming the



Textiles, Elaine Bremner, 2008

creation of these textiles are: each one has had to be prepared, then hand-woven, washed, stretched, coated, printed, washed again. It can take up to four weeks from conception to realisation. As such, some of the longer lengths have been outsourced to a manufacturer. To make a viable product the industry must increasingly be involved at some point in the process, yet it is encouraging to see that the manual craft skills of weaving still retain a value. Knowing how the fabric changes through the use of different yarns or weave structures is essential if you are prepared to let someone else weave it for you.

The colourful prints are geometric, and the repetition and scale of these patterns create visually bold statements. Closer examination illustrates how the print seems to mimic the structure of the weave. For those unfamiliar with peg plans and point paper, the application of particular yarns or structures can affect the surface of the image. Certain weave structures exaggerate the print, some intensify it, and others diffuse and distort it. The results are each individually unique, for despite originating from a single warp, the possible permutations are extensive.

If all of this sounds very technical, it is – yet the exhibition experience is very different. The Lighthouse encourages

interactive exhibitions, which explains why it doesn't seem too out of place to see functional textile designs in a gallery setting. Textiles must be touched. Just like a chair cannot be truly understood until you have experienced sitting in it, to prevent someone from touching a textile is to misunderstand the very nature of the work. Touching makes people curious. A design exhibition without it provides only an incomplete sense of the object's nature. It seems deliberate then, that visitors make their own assumptions about the application of the textile. Although the draped lengths suggest interior hangings or curtains, they equally lend themselves to fashion. When I visited the exhibition the samples on display were being folded by a group of other visitors to mimic garments. Textiles exist in the abstracted stage before they become a product, and this scene demonstrated that sense of involvement and imagination. Given that Bremner seems occupied by technical issues of structure and scale, the way that the threads interact with each other, and how the introduction of new yarns affect the overall print aesthetic, it is all the more remarkable that her private obsession with making translates so easily into the public gallery.

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