

BROOKLYN RAIL

HELEN MIRRA *Waulked*

At Peter Freeman, Inc.

By Alexander Shulan

7 October 2014

Helen Mirra's exhibition *Waulked*, currently on view at Peter Freeman, Inc. presents a series of works that are united through a contemplation of walking and its related state of mind. The exhibition, spaced over two rooms, brings together a series of discrete works that muse on the rhythm and activity of a long walk with a series of 15 wall-pieces woven from sheep's wool. In the introduction to her 2001 book *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, Rebecca Solnit writes:

To make walking into an investigation, a ritual, a meditation, is a special subset of walking, physiologically like and philosophically unlike the way the mail carrier brings the mail and the office worker reaches the train. Which is to say that the subject of walking is, in some sense, about how we invest universal acts with particular meanings.

Mirra's exhibition investigates the relationship between walking and the process of making a work of art. The exhibition's title, *Waulked*, plays off this, alluding both to the act of walking and to an old Scottish word that refers to the act of soaking and beating woven cloth to increase its density.

Entering the gallery, the first work one encounters is "Kestrel" (1997). A single slide projector throws a series of muted photographs of a tree line in Arizona over a blue square painted on the wall. The projection is comprised of a series of 56 images and the image changes every few seconds. The clicking of the slide projector changing the image, like a metronome, suggests the ordered movement of someone who is walking at a steady pace. The painted square comes in and out of view as the projector changes the slide, and the pictures, at times, take on the feeling of bucolic paintings, inciting a profound feeling of nostalgia.

A few steps further in the space, "Walking commas, 28 June, Cape Breton" (2014), consists of seven photographs hung on a wall, each of which is accompanied by a short fragment of text on a brown matte. The photographs show the ground that one might cover on a long hike through a

forest. They have texts like “ABOVE COVE, BURNT PEANUTS, BLUE SKY, BREEZE,” which appear like a diary of what someone might see and experience standing in the area surrounding the photograph.

In the largest room of the gallery is a series of 15 woven triangles, each titled “Waulked Triangle” (2014). Every piece is comprised of wool from two different black sheep stretched across a cedar frame. A single strand in the center is dyed with a different species of mushroom. The horizontal strip that divides the different shades of black wool gives the works the appearance of an abstract painting. Yet, despite their seemingly self-contained abstraction, these wool pieces are connected with the rest of the exhibition; each one appears as if all of its elements were taken from the same site, perhaps even one of those displayed in “Walking Commas.” Furthermore, with the dual meaning of their title and the title of the exhibition, Mirra draws an elegant connection between the repetitive motion of weaving and of walking.

Walking around the last room, viewing the succession of “Waulked Triangles,” or watching the succession of photographs in “Kestrel,” creates an experience very similar to that of going on a long walk; the viewer traverses a subtly changing scenery and becomes acutely aware of a slow change in their own thought. The works, with a quiet power, come together and appear like the remains of a forgotten memory.