

## READ

**This latest tome in Phaidon's medium specific series** offers another indication that textiles are finally receiving the attention many feel is long overdue. Compiled by an international nomination committee and overseen by editors Louisa Elderton and Rebecca Morrill, the result is a seemingly encyclopaedic survey that tops 300 pages and covers 110 artists. The scale of the book suggests an effort to be as comprehensive and inclusive as possible and the editors have not left themselves open to criticism that one region is over represented at the expense of another. But despite these efforts, this publication is far from inclusive. The nominators represent a specific cog in their respective geographic locations in the art world, which makes this survey frustratingly homogenous. As a result, *Vitamin T* creates a very particular map of a very particular use of textiles, circulating in a very particular type of space. Jenelle Porter's introduction is written from a distinctly American perspective. Scandinavians would be dismayed when reading the historical overview to see no mention of the tapestry weaver Hannah Ryggen; fibre (whichever way you spell it) is not a term with currency in European discourse.

The relatively brief texts on each artist often rely on material already in print. This is curious because the artist's questionnaire supplied by Phaidon asks useful questions about, for example, why textiles may currently be experiencing an increased interest and if the use of textiles in daily life is a help or a hinderance to the textiles standing as a fine art material? Attention to these themes would have been a useful inclusion and helped to offset the confusion created by the alliterative title which emphasises threads. It would also have been fascinating to see where each artist studied. Few, I would wager have made it into this highly networked world of contemporary art without the entry ticket of a recognised arts education, but more, I suspect, may not have even studied textiles. Elderton and Morrill admit in the Preface that some artists declined the invitation to be included in the book. This is a truly refreshing admission, experienced by many but voiced by few. While textiles is enjoying a welcome from contemporary art, there remains anxiety for some around what exactly a material categorisation of their practice means for their artistic identity. *Vitamin T* is an inspiring publication for the textile community, but it is based on difficult preconceptions.

The editor's Preface defends the book's subtitle assuring readers that 'this survey embraces pluralism' rather than 'segregated categories'. The challenge is that it can't be a survey organised by material which also, as the editors conclude, 'aims to unravel those categories, to unpick the divisions between them and to weave together new patterns of thinking about art'. *Vitamin T* maps a certain type of collectable textile that circulates today in sanctioned spaces of contemporary art. There is nothing wrong with this, other than the fact that textiles are also so much more.\*\*\* **Jessica Hemmings, *Vitamin T: Threads and Textiles in Contemporary Art*, Phaidon Press, 2019, £49.85, Selvedge readers save 20% using the code VTA20 at [www.phaidon.com](http://www.phaidon.com)**

