

Thomas Bayrle

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Thomas Bayrle's apprenticeship as a Jacquard weaver during his twenties in the 1950s and his visits to Communist China later are all part of the influential artist and educator's mythology. Weaving had a remarkable effect on the Berlin-born, Frankfurt-based artist, emphasizing not just technique but also the interconnected nature of modern life—hence, there is no pun when the artist speaks of the “social fabric.” “All-in-One,” a four-venue touring retrospective, brings together a large swath of the septuagenarian's production including his early moving paintings to his prints, sculptures, installations, and even books.

Bayrle's “superforms” or “super images,” in which hundreds if not thousands of miniature images are collaged together to create a larger picture, are both a celebration and a critique. For example, in *Stalin*, 1970, many little images of mustaches make up the visage of the dictator, while in *Canon Meets Utamaro*, 1988, an Utamaro geisha is composed of cameras. Even his sculptures bring to mind this endless weave: *Glücksklee-Dose*, 1969, a sculpture of a giant condensed-milk can, is made up of actual cans of the same condensed milk.

If Andy Warhol had been born in West Germany, he may well have become an artist like Bayrle. But where the American celebrates the gossamer surface of celebrity with the Fordist factory line, Bayrle's weaves are more ambiguous statements that point equally to the mass production of capitalism and to the massed humanity of communism. By melding this intense repetition with larger cultural figures (e.g., Jesus, Mao, the Virgin Mary, Carlos the Jackal) Bayrle's art walks a distinct tightrope between a critical Pop-infused design and sharp wit.