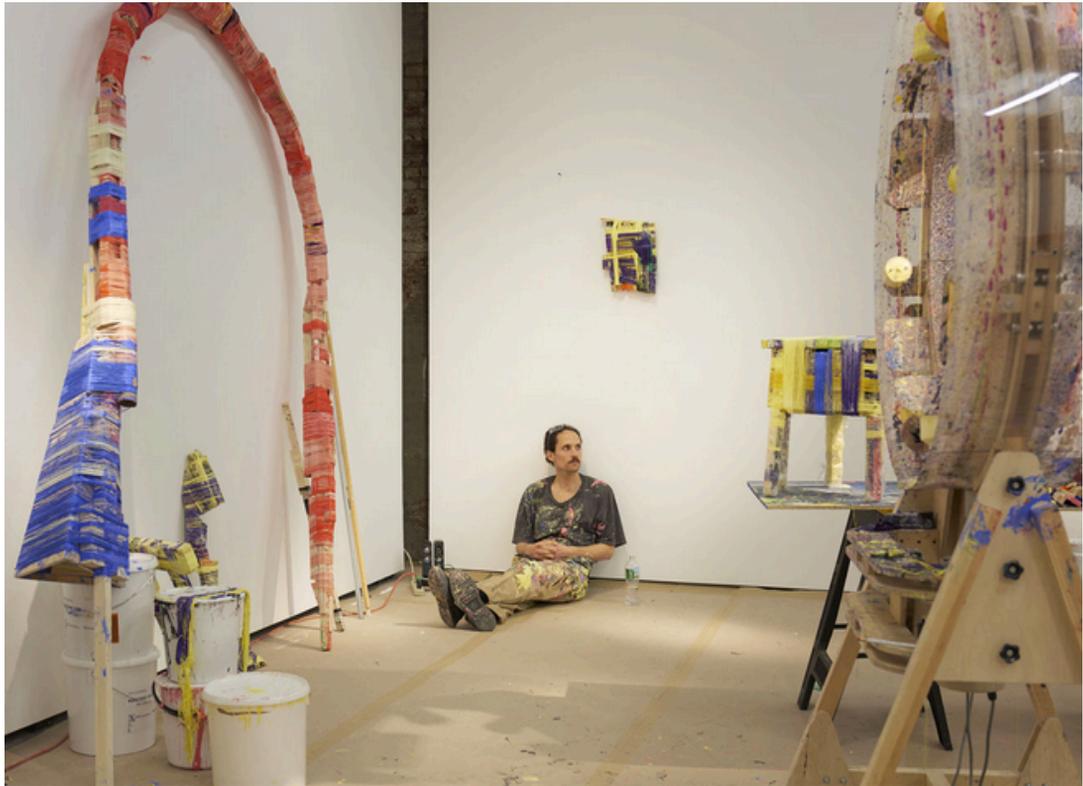


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*THE STUFF THAT REFINES YOU

Wrapsody in hues: Aton Alvarez's new show redefines the solo exhibition
By Stephanie Murg



Photography: © Kyle Knodell; Courtesy of Studio 94

For most artists and designers, a solo exhibition is the culmination of months or years of work - and cause for a sigh of relief. But for Aton Alvarez, who arrived in New York from Stockholm this week for his first U.S. exhibition, Wednesday's opening was just the beginning. The Chilean-Swedish designer came to town with only his tools and materials and has transformed the concrete-floored, timber-columned downtown outpost of Salon 94 (<http://www.salon94.com>) into a studio-cum-showcase for the craft of thread-wrapping.

'There is a performative aspect to this show, because I'm here making the pieces,' says Alvarez, a graduate of the Royal College of Art (design products) and Konstfack (interior architecture and furniture design). 'It's a good thing that people understand the process - it's quite direct, from the machine.' That would be the thread-wrapping machine, a wooden sewing-machine-meets-spin- art contraption of Alvarez's own design. With the help of an assistant, he feeds materials - blocks of plywood and poplar; plastic tubing, fiberglass rods, textiles, metal - through the large central loop and watches as they are wrapped tightly with colorful polyester threads soaked in wood glue that is often dyed with pigments.



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'This is a method of joining different materials together and making them into something that they can't be by themselves,' he explains, perched atop a thread-wrapped stool in the gallery. 'When I add something, it could be for reasons of construction - to make it stronger, for example - but it also could be to change the outer shape in some way.'

Alvarez came to develop his thread-wrapping process several years ago, while still a graduate student in London. After giving himself the challenge of making one new object every day for 120 days, with a variety of techniques, he noticed two recurring interests: how to join things and thread. 'During that period I had done everything by hand, but I understood that I needed something that could wrap the threads for me,' he says. 'So I made the first prototype of the machine.'

Having applied his thread-wrapping process to create work that ranges from object to architecture, functional to atmospheric, Alvarez will focus on smaller-scale pieces such as chairs, side tables, and lamps during his time at Salon 94. The gallery is open Wednesday through Saturday, but he plans to work six days a week and will title each piece with the date on which it was completed. The final week will see a more traditional exhibition, moving out the machine, tools and vats of glue to show the pieces completed during the month of April.

Preparing to crank up the machine, Alvarez is invigorated rather than intimidated by the sight of an empty gallery with freshly painted white walls. He prefers to take each day - and object - as it comes. 'When I begin to make a piece, I choose some materials to start with,' he says. 'Then I try to keep on adding things to the process, which makes me not so sure about the outcome. To become good at a craft has its benefits, but there's a lot to say for uncertainty. It has its own strengths.'