

Negative Entropy (Digital Ocean NYC2 4U NAS, Blue, Hex) (2017) by Mika Tajima and the history of Jacquard weaving

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Mika Tajima, *Negative Entropy (Digital Ocean NYC2 4U NAS, Blue, Hex)*, 2017. Cotton, wood, acoustic baffling felt, 110 x 55 in (279.4 x 139.7 cm)

Mika Tajima is an American artist based in New York. *Negative Entropy (Digital Ocean NYC2 4U NAS, Blue, Hex)* was created in 2017 as a part of her greater body of work, the series *Negative Entropy*. When I first viewed *Digital Ocean*, it seemed shapeless and lacking detail. After further research, the work's themes of historical preservation and exploration gave the piece a new level of detail and complexity, motivating me to choose *Digital Ocean* for my final project. Like all her works in the series, *Digital Ocean* is made from cotton, wood and acoustic baffling felt. Moreover, *Digital Ocean* explores Jacquard weaving's history and how technocapitalism affects it.

Upon initially viewing *Digital Ocean*, it appears to be a shapeless textile, but when looking closer, its detail becomes clearer. The piece is 110 x 55 inches and made of cotton, wood, and acoustic baffling felt. The picture plane is split in half vertically the top and bottom halves are similar, with roughly the same composition. The top part of each half is a dark,

grayish purple while the section below it is significantly lighter in tone, but the same color. Underneath the two, in a smaller vertical section is a strip of black. Green lines run vertically through the piece and are of varying thicknesses. When the viewer steps closer, they can see the individual purple, gold, blue and gray threads that make up the textile. Through the piece, the threads appear and disappear as they are woven together. Thicker threads pop out of the canvas more than the others, and beneath the threads is the black baffling felt. The piece has been stretched out over a wooden frame, causing the textile to be warped around the edges.

Mika Tajima was born in 1975 in Los Angeles, California. Today she is based in New York. Tajima received an MFA from the Columbia University School of Arts and a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts and East Asian Studies from Bryn Mawr College. After her graduation, Tajima was invited to be a post grad apprentice at the Fabric Workshop and Museum (FWM). Her series *Negative Entropy* began in 2011 during her time as an artist in residence at FWM. The series consists of Jacquard woven portraits of industrial and information production. Works in *Negative Entropy* center around factories that employ industrial textile Jacquard looms and computer data center sites that make up the "new economy infrastructure" (Tajima). Field recordings were made at each site, and linguistic audio software then transmutes them into digital spectrogram images. Each waveform was assigned a color and translated into a pattern by a weaving technician to create a Jacquard fabric. *Negative Entropy* seeks to document the usage of Jacquard looms as they begin to disappear from manufacturing (Daum, 2022).

Digital Ocean is a portrait of Jacquard weaving's history and its role today. Tajima stated in an interview with Mika Yoshitake, "That's why I refer to *Negative Entropy* as portraits because materially it is a rendering of the site, labor, technology and individuals involved in its production." Tajima's statement conveys how the works in *Negative Entropy*, including *Digital*

Ocean are intertwined with the history of Jacquard weaving. The Jacquard system was developed in 1804-5 by Joseph Marie Jacquard in France. The loom Jacquard formulated used interchangeable punched cards to control the weaving of the cloth so any pattern could be made quickly (Encyclopaedia Britannica). Today, Jacquard weaving is becoming electronic, removing all human touch from the craft (Gokarneshan, Gepalakrishnan, Rajeshkumar, Shreelalitha, 1, 2019).

Pieces in *Negative Entropy* immortalize the influence of human touch in Jacquard weaving which has lessened as a result of technocapitalism. Technocapitalism is defined as the changes technological innovations have brought to our economy and lives (“The case against naive technocapitalist optimism,” 2021). Although Jacquard weaving is becoming more impersonal, Tajima intends to immortalize it through transforming the ephemeral, immaterial sounds of human textile workers, to material, more permanent textiles (Jennifer, 2015). Tajima both seeks to bring life back to the craft, and document its death; over the course of *Negative Entropy*, the sounds have transitioned from a mechanical clatter to a steady, more empty hum—*Digital Ocean* was recorded during the midst of this transformation (Daum, 2022). The fabrics created in *Negative Entropy* are stretched over acoustic baffling felt, which are used to absorb sound energy and reduce reverberation (Daum, 2022). By choosing to stretch her pieces over baffling felt, Tajima documents how human influence has been stifled in the creation of Jacquard fabrics (Daum, 2022).

Finally, Mika Tajima’s textile piece *Digital Ocean* from her series *Negative Entropy* has a rich historical background in textile production. Like many of the pieces in *Negative Entropy*, *Digital Ocean* is a portrait of Jacquard weaving and the dwindling role of human labor today.

Digital Ocean NYC2 4U NAS, Blue, Hex from Mika Tajima's series *Negative Entropy* explores Jacquard weaving's history and how technocapitalism affects it.

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