

TEMPLON



FRANÇOIS ROUAN

ARTFORUM, April 2025



REVIEWS

NEW YORK

François Rouan

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Between 1965 and 1966, François Rouan (b. 1943) developed *tressage*, a practice that has underpinned his painting for nearly six decades. Each work is made from two or more independently developed compositions that the artist then cuts into bands, weaves together, and stretches. The process challenges the received conception of the cloth support as a screen for projection, emphatically foregrounding painting's literal thickness and opacity. Often likened to the material investigations carried out by his generational peers in Supports/Surfaces and widely exhibited in France from the early 1970s, Rouan's *tressages* also enjoyed a certain visibility in New York during the '70s and '80s, thanks to regular presentations at the Pierre Matisse Gallery. Curated by Alfred Pacquement and comprising thirty works from 1968 to 2024, this expansive solo show—the painter's first with Templon on this side of the Atlantic—invited a fresh appraisal.

Displayed in the main ground-floor gallery were a half dozen canvases from the artist's "*Recorda*" series, all completed between 2023 and 2024 (though some were begun years earlier). Taken from the Catalan verb meaning "to remember," the title also resonates with Rouan's long-standing interest in psychoanalysis. Indeed, the preponderance of the show, installed across three ensuing rooms on two floors,

François Rouan,
*Recorda III (To
 Remember III)*,
 2017–23, oil on
 woven canvases,
 78 ¾ x 63".
 From the series
Recorda, 2023–24.



largely eschewed linear chronology for condensation, interlacing works from different periods and series. The overall drift was nonetheless ever deeper into the past, a movement accordingly reversed on the return trip through the galleries.

The two earliest *tressages*—*Orange, brun, rose et blanc* (Orange, Brown, Pink and White), 1968–71, and *Mauve, rose et vert* (Mauve, Pink and Green), 1970, separately installed directly opposite one another in the two lower-level spaces—rooted the procedure in a distinctly corporeal register. Particularly in these sumptuous initial forays, the grids formed by weaving are markedly irregular, with roughly sliced strips that snake erratically through the allover mesh. Replete with indices of their intensely physical making, these paintings speak to an embodied beholder in other ways as well: Both are vertical and, at roughly six and a half feet tall, just slightly over life-size; bilaterally symmetrical (this aspect is especially striking in *Orange, brun, rose et blanc*, in which a large dark X emerges from a quilt-like array of differently colored quadrilaterals); and “footed” with lower sections distinguished through subtle disjunctions of color and pattern (see, for example, the slightly darker tier, almost a ground plane of sorts, in *Mauve, rose et vert*).

Rouan consistently reworks his composite surfaces, braiding in additional visual incidents, and this show revealed a range of approaches and effects. In the aforementioned works, the artist meticulously applied variously colored crosses, dashes, oblique lines, and other quasi-notational elements in repeating sequences regulated by the alternating bands. In each case, the result is a kind of optically dazzling ornamental scrim. On the ground floor, meanwhile, two somber, near-monochromatic *tressages*, predominantly rendered in shades of dark brown and black, showed the painter opting for less visually contrastive but more varied overlays. The teeming microgestural daubs and squiggles in *Porta del tramonto*, 1972–74 (loaned by the Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation), part like diverging streams along the painting’s

vertical axis, while the abstract gray inscriptions in *Porta Appia*, 1974, suggest an ancient undeciphered text.

Other paintings notably included some degree of legible imagery. Especially striking were a handful of maximalist recent works incorporating large-scale likenesses of a bespectacled man resembling the artist. All conjured the age-old association of painting with mirroring, with a nod toward Jacques Lacan's account of the Imaginary and the formation of the ego. Yet in each canvas the "reflection" is perturbed. In *Recorda III*, 2017–23, among those easiest to initially mistake for a nonreferential abstraction, the portrait floats within a predominantly blue-green field. The weaving all but disappears around the periphery, covered over by continuous bands of tightly packed crosshatches or obsessive stippling. It nonetheless reasserts itself at the center, scattering or, I am tempted to say, *pixelating* the representation. Here, Rouan's analog technique assumes a decidedly digital air—as if to reveal the internal cuts, knots, and concealed depths of the virtual world.

—Molly Warnock