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Tauba Auerbach discusses her new work and exhibition at the ICA, London

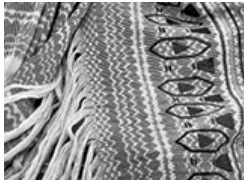
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Tauba Auerbach

04.28.14



View of "Tauba Auerbach: The New Ambidextrous Universe," 2014. Photo: Paul Knight.

Tauba Auerbach is a New York-based artist whose debut solo exhibition in the UK will be at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London from April 16 to June 15, 2014. The show extends her interests in chirality and topology and takes up Martin Gardner's book *The New Ambidextrous Universe: Symmetry and Asymmetry from Mirror Reflection to Superstrings* (2005) as a source for both the work on view and the exhibition's title.

ONE OF THE CONCEPTS that confounded me in Gardner's *The New Ambidextrous Universe* is how, on a molecular level, asymmetry is a distinguishing feature of life. An asymmetric carbon compound, for instance, can be assembled from its constituent atoms in two ways which are mirror images of each other. Nearly all of the asymmetric compounds in living things appear as just one of their two mirror-image configurations, while the exact same compounds in nonliving material are made up of fifty percent of each configuration. How baffling is it that these materials are essentially the same, but the living matter is chiral and the nonliving matter is not?

Louis Pasteur—who passed polarized light through racemic and tartaric acids—discovered this fact. Light is polarized by passing it through a grating, the structure of which is present in a slatted wall I had built to separate the exhibition space from a neighboring corridor. You could also imagine that a grating or comb-like structure would have sliced the wood sculptures on the floor into their strips.

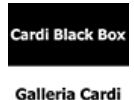
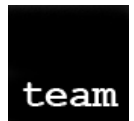
To make these pieces, I drew an irregular line on my computer tablet, which I copied, pasted, and water-jet cut across a four-by-eight-foot sheet of plywood. I laid the strips on the floor in reverse order, which yielded a rough mirror reflection of the original piece. The grain looks sort of continuous but jagged, and the overall shape of the wood is distorted by twice the amplitude of the original undulations in the wavy line.

In order to create the mirror image of an asymmetrical, physical 3-D object (like this piece of wood with its asymmetrical grain), one would have flip it over in four-dimensional space. To think about that more easily, you can go a dimension down and imagine a 2-D asymmetrical shape lying on a table. In order to turn it into its mirror image, you would have to pick it up off the 2-D table and flip it over in 3-D space. These wood pieces take a stab at circumventing the impossibility of turning a 3-D object into its mirror image without passing it through 4-D space. My hope is that there is something ghostly about this puddle of wood on the floor, like it left our universe, went into another space, and came back.

I've been thinking so much about four and more dimensions, and I guess that working in 3-D gets me a little closer to that than working flat, so I produced mainly sculptures for this show. Most of my paintings for the last few years have been weavings, so I've been doing a lot of textile research too. There is a sculpture based on the structure of a knit stitch and one on a hook and eye clasp. They each have different symmetry relationships that cause them to interlock.

In the show there is also one photograph, *Prism Scan II (Cross Polarized Mesosiderite)*. This is an image from a book titled *Color Atlas of Meteorites in Thin Section*, of a piece of meteorite that was photographed with polarized light—such as Pasteur used—which I scanned through a piece of corrugated

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glass. The halftone of the source image is spread out and compressed periodically according to waves in the glass, and the orientation of the image flips backward and forward in each period of the wave.

I keep trying to train myself to be more ambidextrous. I am right-handed, and I've been using my computer's mouse with my left hand. I've brushed my teeth with my left hand for the last few years. Sometimes I do a meditation on symmetry, and all kinds of other little things. There is an option on the iPhone where you can invert the colors, and though it's not really a left/right reversal, it falls into in the same category of "exercise" for me: to use a familiar object in a flipped way. All of this has made me realize how handed the world is, how nonambidextrous it is—the more I try to engage with the world in a symmetrical way, the more I run up against its asymmetry.

— *As told to* [Lauren O'Neill-Butler](#)

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