

SPOTLIGHT: ALESSANDRO TEOLDI

The artist on the need to recreate feelings of domesticity and the power of tactile materials.



In one way or another, Alessandro Teoldi is often trying to recreate a sense of home. The Italian-born, Brooklyn-based artist has traveled extensively yet always seeks intimacy in his work. Teoldi spoke with Platform from his studio about everything from why he started working with airline blankets to his collaboration with Valentino's storied couture house to the author he can't stop reading.

Platform:

Your works on Platform in particular are formed from different airline blankets that have been stitched together. How did that idea for using those materials like that come to you?

Alessandro:

I started working with airplane blankets maybe three or four years ago. I am originally from Italy, and I came here 10 years ago. When I first moved here, I started to collect these blankets because my work was initially a lot about this idea of home and movement that is both physical and psychological. I was traveling a lot, and all of the materials that you encounter during travel have always been very fascinating to me. I started to collect them and started to bring them to my studio. I didn't really know what

to do with them for a while. Eventually, three or four years ago, I decided to incorporate them in the work. I was making a lot of collages at that time, and it just felt natural to start using those blankets.

Platform:

Is there something about textiles in particular that you're drawn to for use in your work?

Alessandro:

Well, I don't think it's really about textiles, in general. I think that with the blanket work, it's more about the object itself. It was not really an attraction to fabric; I was more drawn to the concept of a blanket as an object that we decide to have in a place like an airplane. At that point, I was reading about psychoanalytic theory and the idea of a transitional object was very interesting to me. When the young child begins to separate the "me" from the "not-me" and evolves from complete dependence to a stage of relative independence, they use transitional objects. Also, I found it interesting to think that we recreate this domesticity, or this idea of the mass domestic environment in a place like an airplane. I was fascinated by that, this need to have a piece of cloth to feel

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more protected. It related to all the things I'm drawn to like the idea of protection, of traveling, or recreating a domestic space. I think all of those things were part of the work at the beginning.

Platform:

What draws you to those themes surrounding and related to intimacy?

Alessandro:

I think it's about being away from home, or from what I think of as home. It has to do with my personal experience a lot, and the fact that I left home a while ago. Since then, there has always been this need to recreate a domestic space in my work, or to recreate what I left behind – a home away from home.

Platform:

One really exciting thing that's happened relatively recently was your collaboration with Valentino, which used your work in the Fall 2021 haute couture show. How were you approached about that project and what was that process like for you?

Alessandro:

It was interesting and really nice. [Valentino creative director] Pierpaolo Piccioli contacted me because he was putting together a group of artists to collaborate with him for his couture show. We got along well and had very interesting conversations. For me, it was very cool to just see the work slowly transform into a more three-dimensional form. And the idea that we had with Pierpaolo was exactly that: to find a way to move the work from a bi-dimensional realm to something that is more sculptural and more 3D. Also, couture is such an amazing thing. The tailors are proper artists, and there's such a deep love for the material and for the action of sewing. There's something about the tradition of sewing that is just unbelievable and it was a great opportunity to put the two things together.

Platform:

When you're working, is there a specific catalyst for you to create something new?

Alessandro:

It really depends on where I'm at. I love paintings. I love drawing. I studied photography for a long time. Usually, the first inspiration comes from something that I really love, like a drawing that I see, or a painting, or the colors in a painting or in a photograph, or the formal aspect of a photograph. I think that those are usually the starting points that I use to begin drawing and sketching the fabric pieces. It might sound a bit cliché, but lately, I've been thinking a lot more about what's going on in my life and the way I document my life, and how things that happen in my daily life can really be the starting point for a real process, and how I bring those things to the studio and they start to become the inspiration for a piece.

Platform:

Your studio sounds like such an incredible space. When it comes to making your own work, what kind of environment do you like to create for yourself? Do you ever go outside of your studio to work elsewhere?

Alessandro:

Yeah, I love my studio very much and most days come here with Arturo, my one-year-old puppy. I would say that most of it, especially the fabric pieces, in my studio. I like to have a pretty quiet work environment. The space is quite small and gets really, really messy when I work with fabric. There's a first stage where I draw and sketch a lot. Those sketches usually come from pictures that I take or images of things that I like. The process is usually photographs, drawings and then fabric. The actual assemblage of the fabric pieces is quite messy and it works very

similarly to a paper collage in a way. So I cut a lot of pieces of fabric and I place them on the wall and I move them around a lot before I decide that that's the final composition.

Platform:

You mentioned your photography, your drawing, your work with fabric. Outside of those work-related things, what are hobbies or other things that you're really passionate about exploring?

Alessandro:

I like materials a lot. Another part of my work lately has been really focusing on building materials. I've been going upstate to this friend's house to experiment with a lot of very basic building materials, such as concrete and plaster, so that's been something very exciting that I've been doing lately. I love to eat good food and to read. And I think that all of those things come back into the work somehow.

Platform:

Do you have any particular texts or books that have stuck out to you recently?

Alessandro:

I love this Italian author, Natalia Ginzburg. I've been reading her books for the past six months, so that's one thing. I'm one of those readers where I find one author and I just try to read as much as I can of that person's work. I've also been reading a lot of Italian poetry from the '70s lately. It's all very Italian actually. I'm in a very Italian phase.

Platform:

Are you a person who ever falls down certain rabbit holes if you're researching a specific thing?

Alessandro:

Sure. It's a little bit like that thing that I was telling you about reading. If I find something that I like, I tend to be very obsessive with my explorations. That happens with writers, it happens with other artists, it happens with cooking. It happens in different in all different aspects.

Platform:

You've mentioned food a couple of times. What are some of your favorite things to cook or eat?

Alessandro:

I'm Italian and I think that it's in our blood to have a food obsession [laughs]. And I think that there is also a relationship or a connection to home in a similar way that I was telling you earlier about the work. I see food as something that brings you back to your memories or your childhood or where you come from. And I think that it really is part of every single person's culture and life. I love that food has the power to bring you back in time.

Platform:

Are there any dishes you grew up eating that you still identify with strongly and have a lot of memories attached to?

Alessandro:

Not specific foods, but rather the way food is cooked. There's something about the combination. It's like when you try to remake your mom's stew or something, following exactly her same recipe, but for some reason, it's never really going to be the same. There's something about that, the balance of ingredients, that I think is just amazing. It has to do with our senses, it has to do with the way we taste things and connect those tastes in our brain with our memory. I think that it happens with the fabric pieces and the blankets. The blanket as an object does something similar with the tactile aspect of it. We touch things and suddenly we're brought to something in the past.