

Know the Weaver # 6

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Bhakti Ziek

Bhakti Ziek is known internationally for work that has ranged from backstrap weaving to digital jacquard. Her extensive exhibition record includes work in the permanent collection of the American Museum of Arts and Design. Her writings on contemporary fiber have been published in many journals, including *American Craft*, *Surface Design Journal*, and *Fiberarts*. She is the co-author of two books, *The Woven Pixel: Designing for Jacquard and Dobby Looms Using Photoshop®*, written with Alice Schlein, and *Weaving on a Backstrap Loom*, with Nona Ziek. A former college professor (Arizona State University, University of Kansas, Philadelphia University), she currently lives in Randolph, Vermont where she has her weaving studio and offers tutorial teaching.

Artist and TC1 owner

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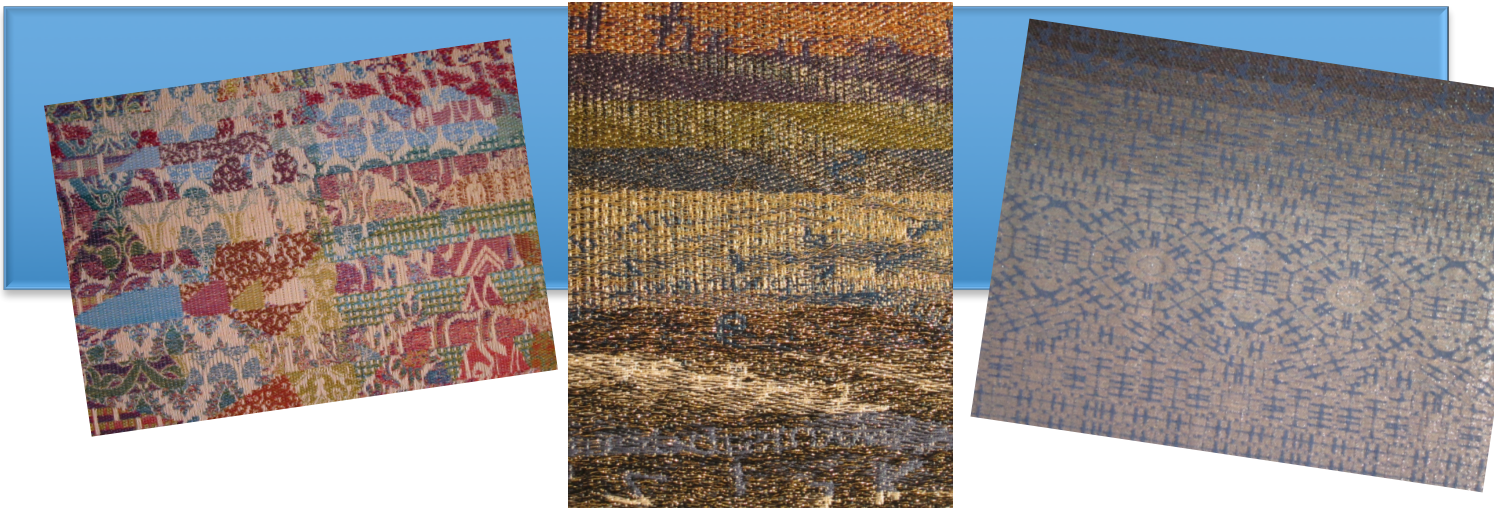
1. It's always interesting to know how the artist's journey with weaving began. What's your story?

After I completed my BA in psychology I wanted to go to a commune. This was 1969, and I thought I needed a skill that would make me a desired member of a commune—so I began to take weaving and pottery classes in New York City. I never got to a commune, but haven't stopped weaving since.

2. You've authored two books (and scores of articles), exhibited your

works/commissions extensively, delivered lectures and demonstrations, held workshops (including many for us at Digital Weaving Norway!) and along the way, traveled across geographies—seems like there's always been a quest to know more, what is it that keeps you going?

I am excited by learning. The image of a lightbulb turning on is an apt image—understanding something does flood my brain with light and joy.



Études - These works were recently on exhibit at The Spotlight Gallery of the Vermont Arts Council.

Weaving is the perfect topic for me because it is so vast, covers the whole world under its umbrella, and reaches from the beginning of the history of mankind to contemporary times. I can read beginning weaving books over and over and still find something new to grasp. Right now I am relearning tapestry (yes, weft-faced discontinuous plain weave using my hands) through an online weaving course (taught by the enthusiastic and wonderfully clear Rebecca Mezoff). I would never have suspected, even a year ago, that I would be doing this, but it is showing me so much more about weaving, and in fact, about weaving on my TC1 looms. I want to do taqueté and samitum on the TC1, and these are both weft-faced structures that look like tapestry on their face, but are quite different on the back. So what I am learning on a simple frame loom is enabling me to do better work on my Thread Controller loom. And I also like the balance between working with my hands designing as I go and working on the computer and then bringing my file to the loom.

3. We truly appreciate the fact that you were one of our very first customers, and over all these years you've produced some magnificent works on your two TC1 looms—what is it that these looms have enabled for you?

I always say that everything I can do at a floor loom I can do on the TC1—and more. Unlike industrial jacquard looms, which usually have 1000 yards or more of the same warp put on their beams, I usually put on short warps of less than 20 yards.

Sometimes I mix fiber types in the warp, paint the warp or use resist dyed or discharged threads. Because each thread is individually controlled, I do not have to have a repeat in my imagery, and can use any combination of structures (on the industrial looms with a repeat, I always had to make sure the structures divided evenly into the repeat, thus limiting my choices). Best of all the TC1 has given me the ability to make work in the historical structures that I love—lampas, samitum, taqueté. On a shaft loom I could use these structures, but I had to hand pick the imagery—something I do not have the patience to do anymore. But now I can take any image I want (and I love making collages of photos that I take, my handwriting, and other symbols) and turning them into a loom-ready file and going to my TC1 looms. I throw every pick in the cloth, and make the decision of what weft to use, pick by pick—and I really can't describe the thrill I experience watching my images manifest through the interlacement of threads at the loom.

4. You've mastered both the traditional as well as the new-age technology when it comes to weaving—how do you implement the two approaches in your works?

I sort of answered this above when I mentioned doing tapestry and jacquard at the same time. What I know is that no matter what technology you are using, at the point of intersection of a warp thread and a weft thread there are always only two choices—the warp is over the weft or the warp is under the weft. So really all weaving is the same.



Nomad – "...I wove this in the six panel weaving Nomad, and superimposed some of the paths I travelled. This series grew into a mapping of the world as I know it. This led me to weave East-West. I identify blue sky days as good days. This evolved into My Roof, which has the names of towns in the USA where I have lived placed in relations to a USA map. My Roof honors the fact that wherever we are, the sky is the same — a continuous ceiling." - Bhakti

Usually I ask myself which technology is the appropriate one for my idea. I do not want to handpick my artist's statement on a shaft loom (traditional), but I have woven it as a jacquard double cloth, and often put my own handwritten words into work done on the TC1 (new-age technology), but I definitely want to use a shaft-loom or frame loom for my tapestry work where I only need the two sheds of plain weave.

I learned backstrap weaving in Guatemala in the early 70s, and I joke that when the electricity grid goes out, I can still pick up sticks and weave. But I always add, as long as I can plug the loom in, the Thread Controller is my loom of choice. The truth is, it is good to know the full spectrum of weave possibilities and I have been lucky to try them all.

5. We're sure it's almost impossible to choose one, so we'll ask you to mention a few of your works that were most special to you and why?

Of course, I am always interested in my most recent work because it has held the hope, and the disappointment, and points the way to the next work.

I recently completed a seven panel weaving, Sisyphus. I thought each panel would hold a different weave structure, but satin damask fulfilled the need of each panel. I used metallic wefts combined with silk and other yarn, and I wove on both my TC1s—so three of the panels have 30 ends per inch and four have 60 ends per inch (a finer warp). I didn't know how the whole piece would look until I hung them in a show, and doing this work was as much about trust and hope as about perseverance. Like many of my pieces, there are symbols and letters and in-jokes about weaving, as well as the obvious meditation on pattern and color and change.



Bhakti Ziek with her seven-panel weaving Sisyphus (Picture on the left). Each panel is 28"w x 88.5"h; cotton, silk, metallic yarn; satin damask handwoven on TC1 looms, 2015.



Continuum by Bhakti Ziek, 2010, 13.5" h x 47.5" w, silk, tencel, bamboo, lampas jacquard handwoven on a TC1 loom

Another series that I loved was the continuum series that I wove when I first got to Vermont. (Picture above). The weaving that carries the same name as the series, *Continuum*, is also about transition and change. It just came home after travelling in an exhibition for a few years, and I was so happy to open the box and see it again.

Another weaving that I like very much is *Rain* (Picture on the right). It is a good example of some of the variations I mentioned in your question 3. The warp is composed of different weights of cotton, silk and rayon. I braided the warp, then dyed it with natural indigo. When the braids were undone, the interior resisted the dye and gives a mottled effect that is appropriate for the subject of rain. I used weft-backed structures to develop the image into a weave, and used metallic yarn to form the letters.



Rain by Bhakti Ziek, 2013, 64.5" h x 81" w, silk, cotton, rayon, metallic yarn, indigo dye, braided-resist dyed warp, weft-backed jacquard handwoven on a TC1 loom.



And I don't think I can leave this without mentioning the commission I did for Princeton University that was installed a year ago in the Community Hall of Whitman Residential College. *Stardust* (Picture on the left) is composed of six panels, each 16 feet high by 28 inches wide. It is the largest weaving I have ever done, and one of the most satisfying. I used letters and numbers to represent knowledge—everything we know and everything we will know is communicated to others through letters and numbers. Transition is also a theme, and I used the color transformation in each panel to represent the changes that college students go through from entering the university to exiting and beginning their independent adult lives. The building is open to the public so if you are visiting Princeton be sure and see my weaving.