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t remember going to the Museum of Natural History in New York in 1968 to study their models of looms. I wanted to learn how to weave so I could have a skill that would make me a useful member of a commune. It never occurred to me to go to the American Craft Museum. Weaving as art was noticity Intention.

When I actually took lessons, at the Crafts Students League, I was more interested in acquiring the ability to produce different types of cloth than in any aesthetic outcome. I was still thinking about my hypothetical commune and the need to have some practical knowledge. I was thinking artisan. I am quite sure that the last of artist never entered my mind.

About a year and a half later, when none of my friends picked up on my commune dream, I decided to pursue a graduate degree in weaving. I didn't even question if my B.A. in psychology was adequate preparation for graduate work in fiber. I didn't know movement to ask those questions, and I found a school that also didn't ask. So I went to Mexico, and then moved an to Gratemala.

In Gualemaia I was trained by weavers who learn their craft as children. I lived in villages where every woman weaves, just as every woman makes tortillas. Cloth making was a way of life, an important carrier of tradition and information. Their handwoven cloth identified their village, their language, their customs. I never tried to be different in my weaving, to assert my individuality through this process, even when color combinations were both foreign and distasteful to me. I just tried to imitate my leachers, to be as skilled and fluent as these beautiful and generous women. This was well way of life, and this was the way to show respect.

In the late 78's I had the good (or tune to land in Lawrence, Kansas. I discovered a textile plagram at the University, and had a generous mother willing to support a second undergraduate degree. I pursued a B.F.A. in fibers. At first I was mystified that no one seemed interested in my experiences in Guatemala, but then I got absorbed by this new and exciting field of textiles as art and also saw them as two separate worlds. I learned to call myself a where artist instead of a weaver. I learned new processes to fombline with the Guatemaian brocading, and produced abstract images. I felt like I had found my voice.

My tastes are eclectic. I am drawn to stories, to details, to elaborate embellishments. I'm also drawn to stripes and fields of color. My first religious experience with art was in a room full of Rothko's paintings. My heroes include fignes Martin, Sean Scully, and Brice Marden. I was drawn to simple and sublime but within my own work I was intent on complexity, I'I simplified one area, then I would come back to another with a vengeance. I was working Adwards something unclears—something within me_something known, but something unknown. I would watch friends who had it all planned out with great envy. They could do drawings. They could explain every aspect ahead of time; they could draw relationships between traterial and form. I would say that I was in a fog. Clumsky incling forward step by step, fumbling, blindly moving on. While I was making, It always felt good. When I finished, It always felt bad. The whole was wrong—the details were right. The strentific test was my heart. Directed by emotions. Kungry to produce something of beauty.

There was a famous Indian teacher whose method of leaching was through subtraction. Instead of aiming straight and walking towards his object, his was the path of rejection. Not this, not that. Not this, not that. I used to be worried because I didn't know what I want. Today I understand, I know what I want—I just don't know its name, its form, or where it is. If I try something then at least I can look at it—and then I know. And I can say, not this, Every not this gets me closer to the yes. What eyer

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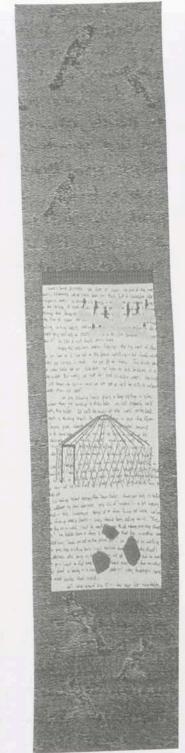
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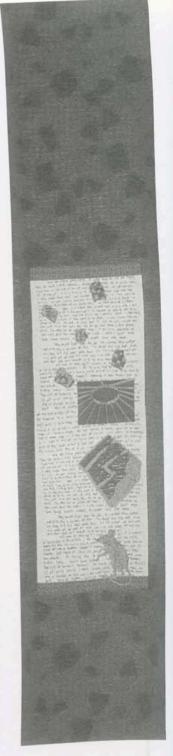
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opposite: Bhakti Ziek
Now Mexico Scrolls 1-4, 1996.
Mixed fibers, woven weft-back jacquard,
74 x 15 each, two-sided.
Woven at Philadelphia College of
Textiles and Science.
Edition 2/2. Lent by the artist.

New Mexico Scroll 1 (detail side A), 1996.

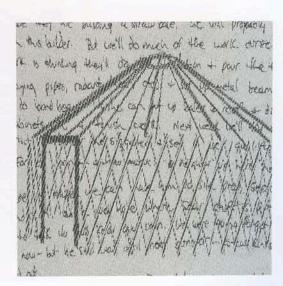
New Mexico Scroll 2 (detail side A), 1996.

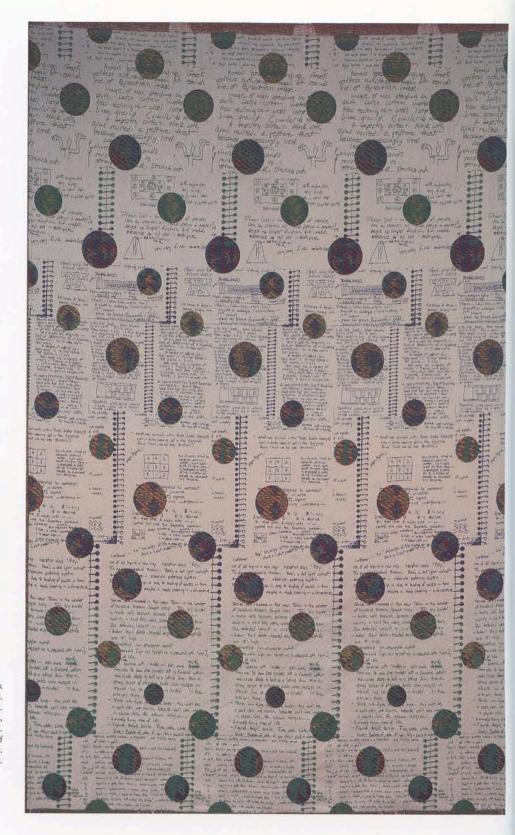
New Mexico Scroll 3 (detail side A), 1996 .

Bhakti Ziek, a nationally known fiber artist, uses both traditional techniques and the latest computerized Jacquard looms to create pieces in which notations of her own daily life are woven into the cloth. This complex interplay between visual and verbal elements results in richly colored, textured, and patterned objects infused with information about how Ziek composes the work, how it relates to the history of textiles, and what it means to be an artist. The most straightforwardly autobiographical piece is Artist's Statement (illustrated on cover), from 1994, the year Ziek began to work on the computerized loom, which allows her to work much faster than on a traditional hand loom. This piece presents a text from a paper that Ziek delivered at a national conference, entitled "Tradition and Transition." The paragraphs of text, describing the artist's personal path to becoming a weaver over a twenty-five year period, are repeated in four vertical strips across the field against a diamond background pattern. Because the source was a carefully composed written text, Ziek used a standard print typeface, in contrast to other works in the exhibition where the words woven into the cloth are drawn from her journals or notebooks and are, therefore, in her own handwriting. Two pieces from 1996 are double-sided: History of Fabrics: Barbara's Song, both an homage to a friend who died of cancer and to the vocation they shared as textile artists; and New Mexico Scrolls 1-4, based on the artist's and her husband's experience building a yurt and living on a remote parcel of land they purchased in the Southwest. —J.T.

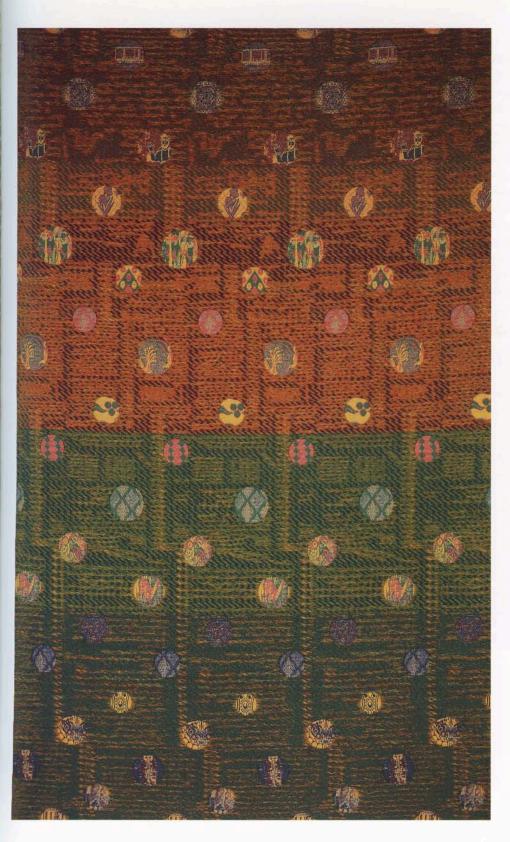








Bhakti Ziek
History of Fabrics: Barbara's Song (side A), 1996.
In memory of Barbara Eckhardt.
Cotton, woven weft-back jacquard,
87 x 52, two-sided.
Woven at Philadelphia College of
Textiles and Science.
Lent by the artist.



Bhakti Ziek
History of Fabrics: Barbara's Song (side B), 1996.
In memory of Barbara Eckhardt.
Cotton, woven weft-back jacquard,
87 x 52, two sided.
Woven at Philadelphia College of
Textiles and Science.
Lent by the artist.

Biographies: Philadelphia Marratives

Donald E. Camp Marilyn Holsing Sarah McEneaney Michael O'Reilly Shashwati Talukdar Bhakti Ziek

Judith Tannenbaum Alex Baker

Institute of Contemporary Art University of Pennsylvania Philadelphia

Exhibition Dates

Institute of Contemporary Art University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia March 19-April 25, 1999

Freedman Gallery Albright College Reading, Pennsylvania November 12-December 17, 1999

This publication was prepared on the occasion of the exhibition "Biographies: Philadelphia Narratives," organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania.

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Joe Mikuliak, 11-13; Gregory Benson, 25.

Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width precedes depth.

cover: Bhakti Ziek
Artist's Statement (detail), 1994.
Cotton, woven double-cloth jacquard,
90 1/2 x 54.
Woven at Philadelphia College of
Textiles and Science.
Lent by the artist.