

Reviewed by
Elin Noble

Bhakti Ziek: Continuum
Chandler Art Center

The immediate impression upon entering the weaver Bhakti Ziek's exhibition is one of encountering work filled with intricate patterns and intriguing light, beckoning the viewer toward a closer investigation of its imagery. The exhibition is ambitious, consisting of 18 pieces, 16 of which were woven since March 2010.

Ziek masterfully combines hand weaving (she still throws the shuttle) with the computerized thread controlled (TL-1) jacquard-type loom. She arrives at the imagery for each work through a complex process that combines photography, writing, drawing, and computer-generated shapes. The Photoshop program allows her to layer imagery the way the mind sifts through memory and experiences. In this way, Ziek reflects on her life through numbers, words, colors, descriptions, and metaphors.

Each work in the exhibition, except two from 2008 and 2009, presents a continuum from March to December 2010. Bhakti Ziek writes in the exhibition statement: "I began my current series thinking about language and how we name and differentiate experience to make sense of life...each piece brings insights that inform the next work. The making of the work and its revelations are very private; when the finished work enters the public domain, it takes on its own life."

House was woven shortly after Ziek moved to Vermont in 2008. It features the old

Victorian house she shares with her artist husband. The house is presented as if in a winter landscape. The house itself, the grounds, and the surrounding trees are all white, punctuated by black windows and doors. It appears that the imagery is derived from a black-and-white negative. The sky is a deep blue, the roof a strong red. Superimposed onto the image are swirling fragments of sentences in red, blue, black, and white, referencing hopes and dreams, anxiety, and excitement.

Intertwined and *Code* depict close-up views of trees and branches as seen from the windows inside the house. *Intertwined* depicts a dense thicket of white and black branches reaching in a vertical thrust against a deep blue sky, interwoven with horizontal red lines of (illegible) handwriting.

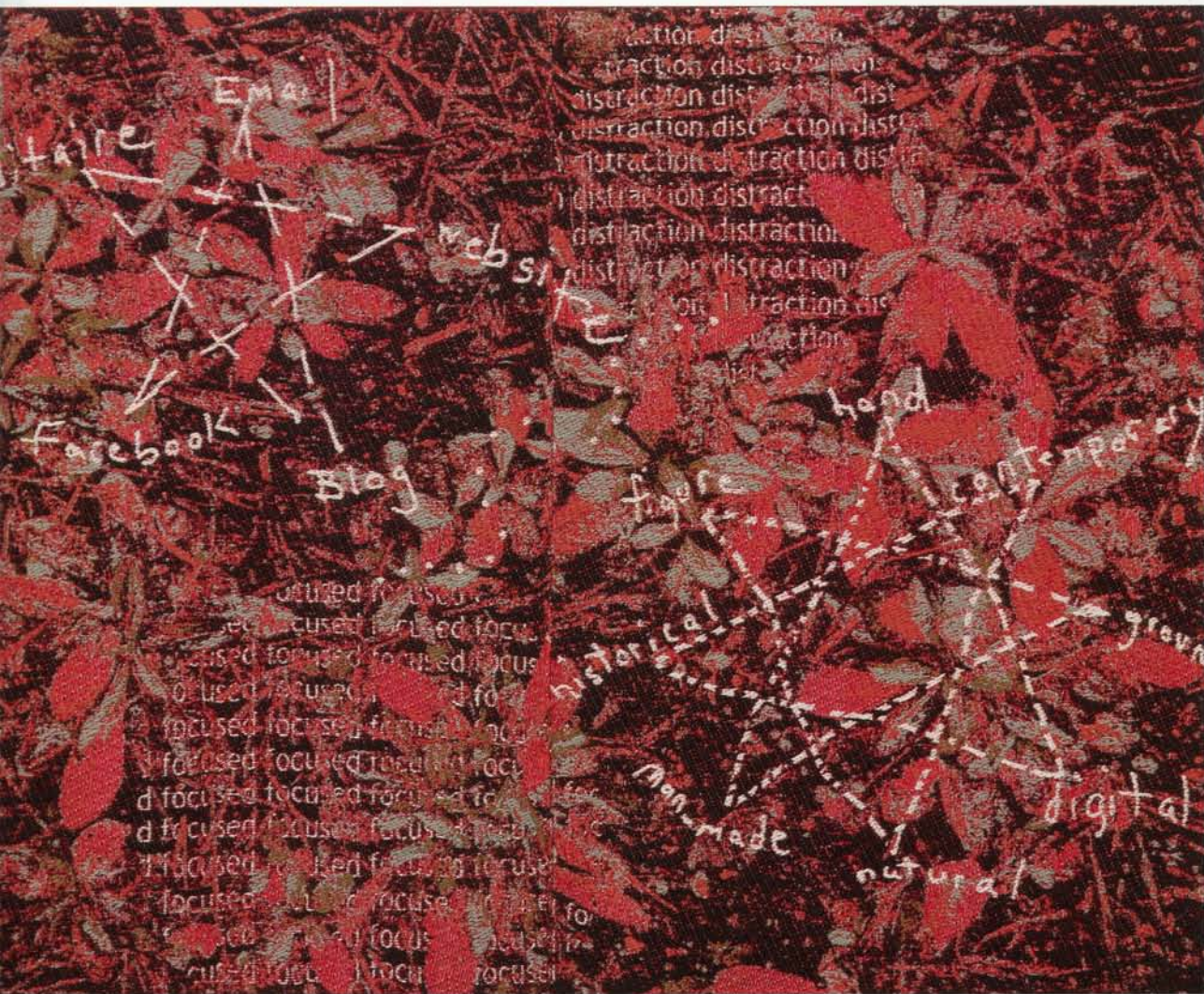
Code is the more severe work, sparse in its imagery of a horizontal broken branch that has re-grown. The branch plays off horizontal computer code writing, and horizontal and vertical floating blocks of grey and red. The only counter movement are two large, transparent grey flowers that the branch seems to be reaching for.

Weaving is, of course, about numbers and counting. The work *Counting* is horizontal and weaves together long strands of numbers. The individual series, or fields, of numbers are dark grey, red, or yellow, and seen against a grey, luminous ground.

Punctuating this ground are yellow and red abstracted flowers. The ground is further punctuated by blue dots. Ziek achieves an overall lyrical quality through the rhythmic placement of the flowers in a work that visualizes joyful music.

Commenting on how Ziek occupies her time when not weaving, *Focused Distraction* reminds us of how easily we give ourselves over to diversions. A densely layered work with two star diagrams references the concepts and words





BHAKTI ZIEK *Focused Distraction* Silk, tencel, bamboo, handwoven weft-backed jacquard, 20" x 26", 2010. Photo: Michael F. Sacca.

BELOW LEFT: BHAKTI ZIEK *Continuum* Silk, tencel, bamboo, handwoven lampas jacquard, 13.5" x 47.5", 2010. Photo: Michael F. Sacca.

"solitaire," "website," "facebook," "e-mail," and "blog" in one star, and in the other, "figure," "ground," "man-made," "hand," "digital," "historical," "contemporary," and "natural." Swirling behind them are two large dots of mantra-like repetitions, one with the word "focused," the other with the word "distraction." The diagrams and dots are seen against a red-burgundy ground punctuated by light turquoise and olive green petal-like forms. The work is an intricate blending of diagrams, text, and flowers. It asks, and answers, how one makes unfocused time count.

Looking at *Math* is like looking at a blackboard in a mathematics classroom. Layers of numbers and words have been erased and rewritten. You can almost feel the energy of two people conversing and taking turns with chalk and erasers, working on equations.

In reality, though, the work consists of Ziek's numerical notes for calculating weavings.

In two recent works, the companion pieces *East and West*, Bhakti Ziek arrives at a more direct spiritual statement. Dominated by a vivid azure blue, the two horizontal works give the viewer a sense of being suspended above water. The work calls to mind Monet's water lilies, but rather than water lilies, Ziek depicts only the movement of the water and its reflections. The combined movements and reflections are woven with a silver thread and read as pure reflected light. Viewing the work head on or from the side, close up or from a distance, the effect is still one of brightly reflected sun off the water. As Ziek writes in her artist statement, "If one steps back and takes a broader perspective, then there is only continuity and flow from birth to death."

—Elin Noble, an artist, teacher, and author, lives in New Bedford, Massachusetts.



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c o n t e n t s

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Cover Artwork: LESLEY RICHMOND *Winter Forest* Photo screenprint on silk/cotton fabric, devoré, painted with pigments and metal patina, 48" x 36".

Background Art, p5: TOP DETAIL: BARB HUNT *Rain* Detail.

p14: LESLEY RICHMOND *Painted Forest 1* Photo screenprint on silk/cotton fabric, devoré, painted with pigments and metal patina, 32" x 63". Detail.