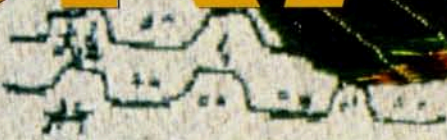


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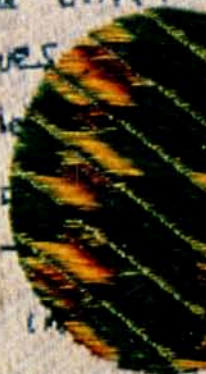


always well-wishes -
for long life & health

Tapestry
in nave
in top
white stone
not image

- sometimes animals within these broken lozenges
even in dense weaving put in the diagonal
forms (that use to be structural!)

not people
d silk
ves



Magic Square:

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

Han Chinese tried to
establish political
control. Went back
to old Chinese ideas -
+ developed a code
of life + system of
beliefs to represent
his empire.

◇ motif



established to represent
of universe.

□ square.

ivers underground -

to 15. In any

5 is sacred

- there were 5 magic mts -
central one was the Emperor's mountain.

a known
image



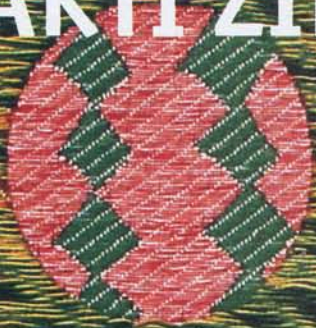
Magic mountains. Mirrors
aren't earned by gold
Circle is magic manta
+ 4 lesser mts -

on posed
on line



Both Sides Now

BHAKTI ZIEK





ABOVE: *Nasca New Mexico*, 1996, side two (left) and side one (right), mixed fibers, woven weft-back Jacquard, 74 by 51 inches.

OPPOSITE PAGE: *History of Fabrics: Barbara's Song*, 1996, detail side one, cotton, woven weft-back Jacquard, 87 by 54 inches.

By RANDY GRAGG

To understand the weavings of Bhakti Ziek, one must “read” them front and back, for each side reveals different images and ideas. Symbolically, her work embodies the paradigms and paradoxes of a complex artist seeking to unify technology with tradition and the personal with the historical. The result is a highly romantic embrace of myth and spirituality, but divined through the tools and visual language of the information age.

Ziek, now 52, came to weaving in an attempt to solve a problem derived in equal measure from personal insecurity and a spiritual search. It was 1968, and she was then Judy Ziek, a recent graduate in psychology from the State University of New York at Stony Brook who wanted to join a commune. Worried that she had no useful skills to contribute, she enrolled in a weaving class at the Craft Students League in New York City. The discipline captivated her from the start, leading her not to the commune, but to Mexico and Guatemala to study weaving for the next five years.

Similar experiences traveling and studying traditional craft have marked the turning points of Ziek’s career since that first sojourn. She returned to the United States in the late 70s and enrolled at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, where she met several kindred souls: the fiber artist Cynthia Schira, who, Ziek says, gave her “permission” to explore more expressionistic forms of weaving; the painter and sculptor Mark Goodwin, whom she married; and a spiritual teacher who gave her the Hindu name “Bhakti,” which means “devotion.”

Soon after graduation, Ziek and Goodwin traveled to India and Nepal, where they studied tanka painting and acupuncture and continued their spiritual search. This experience, she recalls, convinced her that instead of adopting another culture’s religious framework she had to construct her

own—a concept that also came to influence her art making. Tanka painting, a folk expression of personal religious devotion, offered a model that led to what she regards as her first mature weaving. Called *Chakras*, 1985, and based on a personal interpretation of yoga’s chakra points, the piece presents vaguely figural forms in constellations of runes created through what she calls a form of automatic writing.

Ziek entered Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, in 1987, where a course by Gerhardt Knodel on the history of fabrics was an important influence, along with his advice that she look to her own history for subject matter. At Cranbrook Ziek also conducted her first experiments in two-sided weaving and in the use of computers with the automated AVL loom. A culmination of these discoveries was a woven construction that she titled *Wheel of Life: The Passing on of Knowledge*, and which she presented as her M.F.A. thesis in 1989. Made up of six panels, each 36 by 44 inches, the 18-foot work was suspended in a semicircle from the ceiling, allowing equal viewing of the front and back. It tells the story of how the 6th-century Byzantine Emperor Justinian dispatched two monks to China to capture the secrets of silk. Through Ziek’s sophisticated double-sided brocading, in which an image on one side leaves a ghost on the other, the weaving reads like a film perpetually caught in a fade between two scenes: boldly woven animals on one side become echoes within abstract geometries on the other; an image of a cellist changes into an intricate pattern; zebra stripes metamorphose into the contours of a landscape.

Upon joining the faculty of the Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science in 1990, Ziek was able to take the intricacy and density of the



ABOVE: *New Mexico Scrolls 4-1*, 1996, side A (left) and side B, mixed fibers, woven weft-back Jacquard, each panel 74 by 15 inches. OPPOSITE PAGE: Detail of *New Mexico Scroll 2*, side A.

automated weaving she had begun at Cranbrook to far bolder heights. She began experimenting with the college's industrial Jacquard loom and soon discovered the machine's ability to produce weavings of heightened complexity based on her computer-generated imagery. The Jacquard, she says, offered her a new process, permitting her to concentrate solely on ideas. "It's more like printmaking," she says. "I mark the plate, print, look at what I've created and respond again."

By 1994, she was incorporating simple, scanned alphabets, which soon led to a new spin on Ziek's use of automatic writing in the form of her own letters and stream-of-consciousness ruminations on the art of weaving. Though she is a writer who has published in craft periodicals, in her weaving Ziek uses words as purely visual concepts—woven poetry.

"I want to exploit the beauty of the mark, the texture and the color—like Islamic calligraphy," she says. "I want to create a sense of overhearing someone speak a language you don't understand." Her most recent weavings are impressive for their density of information. *History of Fabrics*, 1996, for instance, is composed of scanned images of Ziek's favorite textile patterns—some of her own among them—incorporated into rondels that float over pages taken from her notebooks. At 150 picks per inch it would take two lifetimes to create such a composition by hand, she says, but with the Jacquard loom only a few hours, once the design had been determined on the computer.

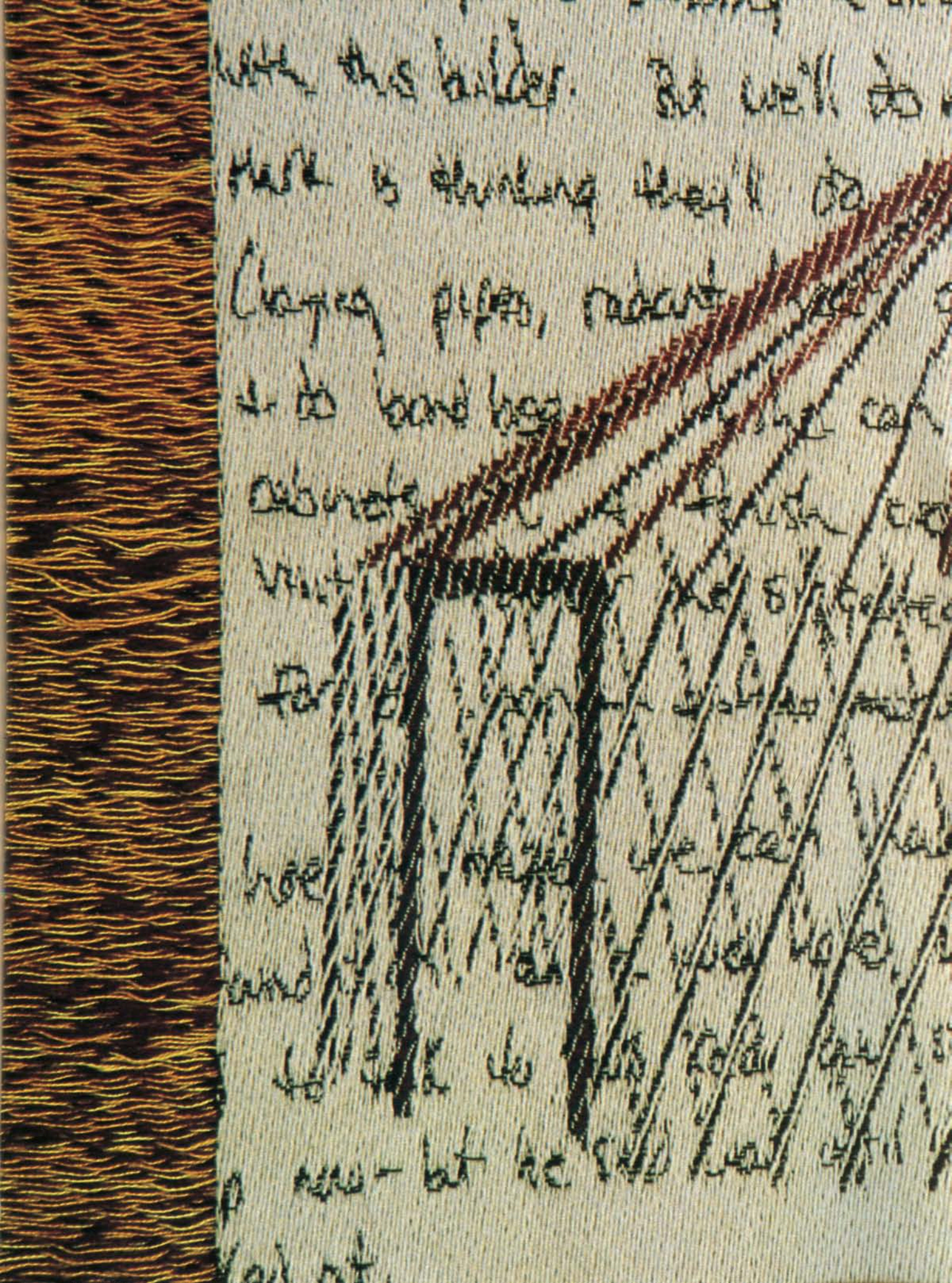
In 1997, Ziek held a residency at the Fondazione Arte della Seta Lisio in Florence, one of Italy's most respected weaving schools. Though the school is adjacent to the Rubelli mill, a leading silk manufacturer, they had never collaborated. Drawing on her teaching background and experience with the Jacquard loom, Ziek initiated the first project between the two institutions. One result was *Florence Cross Sections*, a kaleidoscope of

Renaissance and information-age innovation that she designed at the Fondazione and produced at Rubelli. The work is woven in sumptuous silk at 200 picks to the inch, its imagery a collage of, among other things, a street grid of Florence, drawings based on a Renaissance fresco and a motif she had found in a 15th-century fabric from Lucca.

Ziek has continued to explore the spiritual impulses that led her to Guatemala and India, and to weaving, in the first place. In 1995, she and Goodwin purchased 53 acres in New Mexico, where they now spend Ziek's teaching breaks living in a yurt with no electricity or running water. She weaves on a traditional eight-harness loom there but turned to the Jacquard at the Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science to execute a series of scrolls inspired by the New Mexico experience. These weavings are laced with her most autobiographical imagery: maps of the New Mexico property, the yurt's frame under construction, an *American Gothic*-style portrait of herself and Goodwin, and digitalized fragments of letters she'd written to friends and then borrowed back.

Ziek describes the work as "of the moment and not that serious," yet her embrace of this new world is opening vistas. "I have this insatiable curiosity for the 'What else?' I may not know, but what drives me is the need to try." In May Bhakti Ziek began a one-year sabbatical during which she and Goodwin will build a more permanent residence on their New Mexico land. Solar power cells, she hopes, will enable her to use the computer. But as testimony to this artist's restless explorations of self within tradition and technology, she says the handloom is beckoning with the possibilities of doing what the Jacquard cannot. ■

Randy Gragg is art and architecture critic for The Oregonian, which is published in Portland.



Cover: *History of Fabrics: Barbara's Song*, 1996, detail side two, cotton, woven weft-back Jacquard, 87 by 54 inches, by Bhakti Ziek. Photograph by Tracey Howard. Story on page 60.

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