

Loom to Shutter: Dancing Between Mediums

by Naomi L. Ben-Shahar

I have long been interested in the history of women photographers and how their work was often experimental and body-oriented. I learned to weave as a child, and throughout my life I've had a recurring dream that I am a professional dancer performing on a stage. Studying historical photographs of dancers and crafting small weaves in response enabled me to engage in experimental play that felt reassuringly grounding—in my own history and the history of other women photographers—yet generative and new. During a time of pandemic constraints, I imagined that I was weaving new stories with my yarns, and I became increasingly interested in connectivity, the material interplay between photography and craft, expanding possibilities for each media and posing questions about technology, intimacy, environmentalism and feminist identity.

I combined the weaves and paintings with my analog photographs of desert dunes that resembled the curvature of women's bodies to make a series I titled "Cosmology Collages." It corresponded to my exploratory state of mind at the time. Each of these collages included three elements: a real 3D object (a weave), a 2D photograph representing a 3D place (a dune photo), and a 2D painting of a historical photograph (my interpretation of somebody else's representation of a dancer). In this work, I was creating a new vocabulary for myself, with various media conversing with each other almost like musicians in an orchestra. As I worked with the three elements in each work, I questioned modes of representation and consciousness. I have always been curious about the idea of healing through craft, as well as the belief in telepathic healing with the use of photographic images.

The "Cosmology Collages" evolved into my current work, which centers around weaving and photography. The work offers an examination of each medium's relationship to other ways of making, arguing that different approaches (i.e., art/craft), strategies (abstract/representational), and materialities (tactile fiber/flattened print) can and should engage in dialogue and

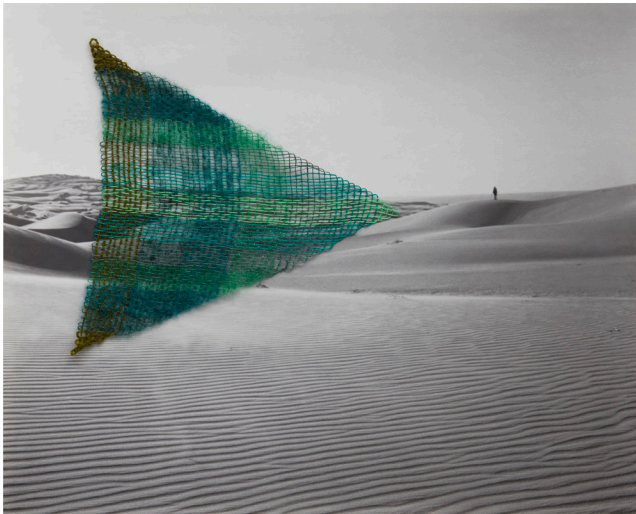


Top: **Naomi L. Ben-Shahar** with *Primal Radiant Force*, 2024. Photo: Alan Wiener.

Bottom: **Naomi L. Ben-Shahar**, *We Are the Event Horizon of Existence Itself*, 2024. Gold-toned silver gelatin print mounted on aluminum with weaving mounted on wooden loom, 5 feet, 1 inch in diameter x 2 inches. Photo: Alan Wiener.



Naomi L. Ben-Shahar, *Primal Radiant Force*, 2024. Silver gelatin print and weaving mounted on wooden loom, 6 feet, 6 inches x 5 feet, 9 inches. Photo: Alan Wiener.



Naomi L. Ben-Shahar, *Healing Fields in Space-Time Curvature (Space Lattice IX)*, 2024. Weaving mounted on silver gelatin print, 20 x 30 inches. Photo: Alan Wiener.



Naomi L. Ben-Shahar, *Healing Fields in Space-Time Curvature (Space Lattice IV)*, 2024. Silver gelatin print and weaving, 20 x 30 inches. Photo: Alan Wiener.



create a fertile, mutually-beneficial coexistence that elevates the sum of its parts.

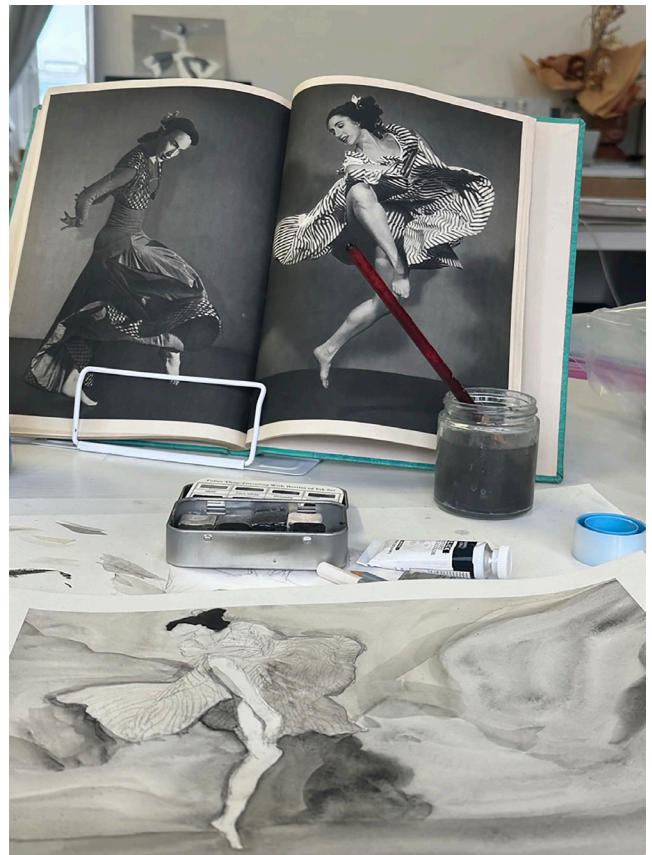
In my most recent work I bridge the gap between handmade weaving and analog photography by putting the two in a visual interplay with each other. In the large construction pieces “We Are the Event Horizon of Existence Itself” and “Primal Radiant Force,” I combine large-format black and white photographs printed on gelatin silver paper with slow, meditative handmade weaves that I create from natural fiber threads woven around the loom in a continuous, circular manner.

The photos were taken in the oldest desert in the world, the Namib desert in Namibia, where I traveled with a view camera and recorded the shifting dune landscape over three seasons. The desert images are quiet and elicit a spiritual and ancient presence, while also reminding us of the harshness of an arid environment in a world of changing climate conditions. In these large photo constructions, there is a negotiation between the handmade and the technological, the loom and the screen. Just as spider webs have been known to possess healing properties, the textile web when paired with the desert photos suggest a salve, a spark of connection and perhaps even mutual aid from unexpected combinations.

Naomi L. Ben-Shahar, *Divine Children of the Cosmos*, 2024. Woven cotton, wool and linen with silver gelatin print on archival board, 36 x 20 inches. Photo: Alan Wiener.



Naomi L. Ben-Shahar's studio, 2024. Photo by the artist.



Naomi L. Ben-Shahar's studio, 2024. Photo by the artist.

In the smaller collages in my series titled “Healing Fields in Space-Time Curvature,” I combine the photographs of the curved barren landscape with smaller weaves, which function visually as healing energy fields, textile clothing or bandages meant to mend the arid, fractured landscape.

In my work, the handmade, tactile craft abuts and interacts with the technological. In those interstices I find the possibility for hope, healing and connectivity.

—Naomi L. Ben-Shahar (she/her) is a multidisciplinary artist based in New York. Her work was shown at the New Museum, White Columns, Printed Matter, St. John's University and various galleries in New York; at FA Projects, London; Torch gallery, Amsterdam; Art Process, Paris, and Edith Russ Site for Media Arts, Germany.

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Naomi L. Ben-Shahar, *Cosmology Collage (with Desperate Heart - Kick)*, 2022. Woven Navajo churro wool, kid silk, alpaca silk, cotton with oil on paper and silver gelatin contact print, 22.5 x 29 inches. Photo: Alan Wiener.