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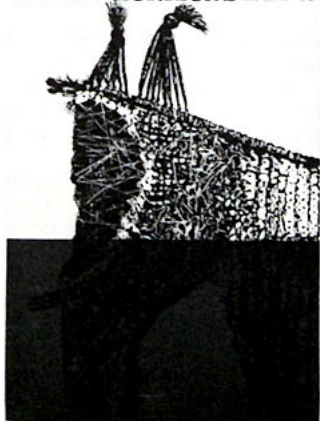
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CRAFT HORIZONS



COVER: Section of "Dog," a three-dimensional weaving by Dorian Zachai, 49" high, in the exhibition "Woven Forms" at New York's Museum of Contemporary Crafts, March 22-May 12 (story on page 10). Materials are black wool, natural twine, raffia, rayon, and linen—stuffed with wool batting, interwoven with straw, and reinforced with tree limbs. Photo by Ferdinand Boesch.

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THE NEW TAPESTRY

by ROSE SLIVKA

Structured as objects of dimension—possessing form and space with surface and mass interchangeable—the forty-five tapestries by five weavers in the “Woven Forms” exhibition at New York’s Museum of Contemporary Crafts, March 22-May 12, have extended the power of yarn construction for purely aesthetic expression. As such, these strong, free-hanging three-dimensional works emanate a concrete reality as objects of conceptual and imaginative force—with backs and fronts, insides and outsides that are real rather than illusionary (as in tapestry which took its inspiration from painting), completely available to touch and sight—a communicative sculptural presence, a depth of textural adventure, and the self-rejuvenating technological energy of the craft of hand weaving.

The new tapestry makers are new only to the modern western textile culture. Their expression evolves naturally from the varied international and cumulative tradition of fabrics. Yarn and fiber construction to produce ritual objects for religious, mythical, and abstract concepts has been an aesthetic language since prehistoric times and certainly has a continuity in the present among such highly expressive hand weaving cultures as those in Africa and New Guinea, with their face and body masks, fetishes, and sculptured baskets.

These new American weavers have taken the tapestry as their jumping-off place. Up to the recent past, the tapestry, traditionally confined to the wall, followed the lead of painting in the weaver’s search for a visual and emotional language. In our milieu of artistic experimentation in which all materials and techniques are being challenged and reinvestigated, these tapestry makers have found their contemporary reality in the pure object—in formal innovations and spatial exuberance. It is the same spirit that infuses the struggle of painting to leave the flat canvas, and sculpture, the base. The power of the collage—with *real* materials arranged and transformed in a new structural framework, with its dimension of interior and exterior space, and with color and texture as attributes of dimension and construction—affecting as it did all areas of painting and constructed form today (*continued on page 48*)



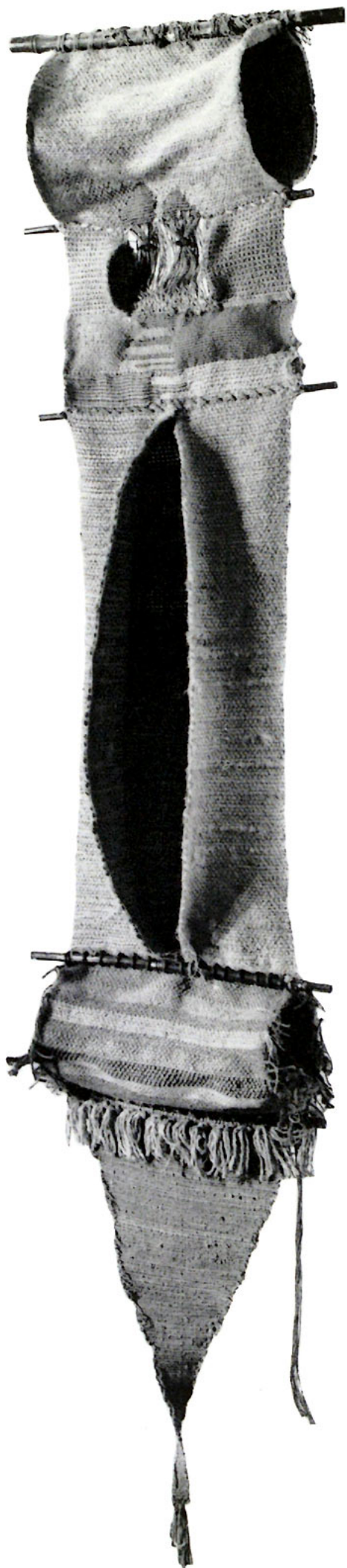


ALICE ADAMS: "My free-hanging figures were made mostly for fun and because I had begun to see the possibility of woven forms other than those of the square or rectangular mural. I wanted somehow to find a form which would personify my feelings about popular patriotism and the military. While working this out in a few small hangings, I came up with a kind of symbolic figure in which band-like projections from the top of the woven shape were folded back into slits in the construction. When the piece was cut from the loom, the warp left hanging along the curved edges was then knotted and looped or twisted and braided together. The surface went its own way with sisal rope giving the weave substantial scale.

"There has been an enlargement in our concept of the function of the warp. If it begins as a sheet of threads stretched on the loom, it need not retain this character in the finished work. Probably for the purposes of the artist, all rigid distinctions between warp and weft will disappear."

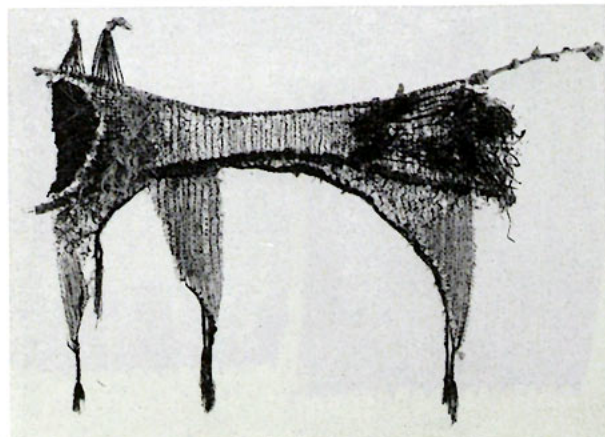
Alice Adams' free hanging tapestry entitled "Yankee Doodle," 63" x 34", of sisal hemp, jute, twine, wool, wood dowels, and wire—in colors of red, orange, blue, and tan.

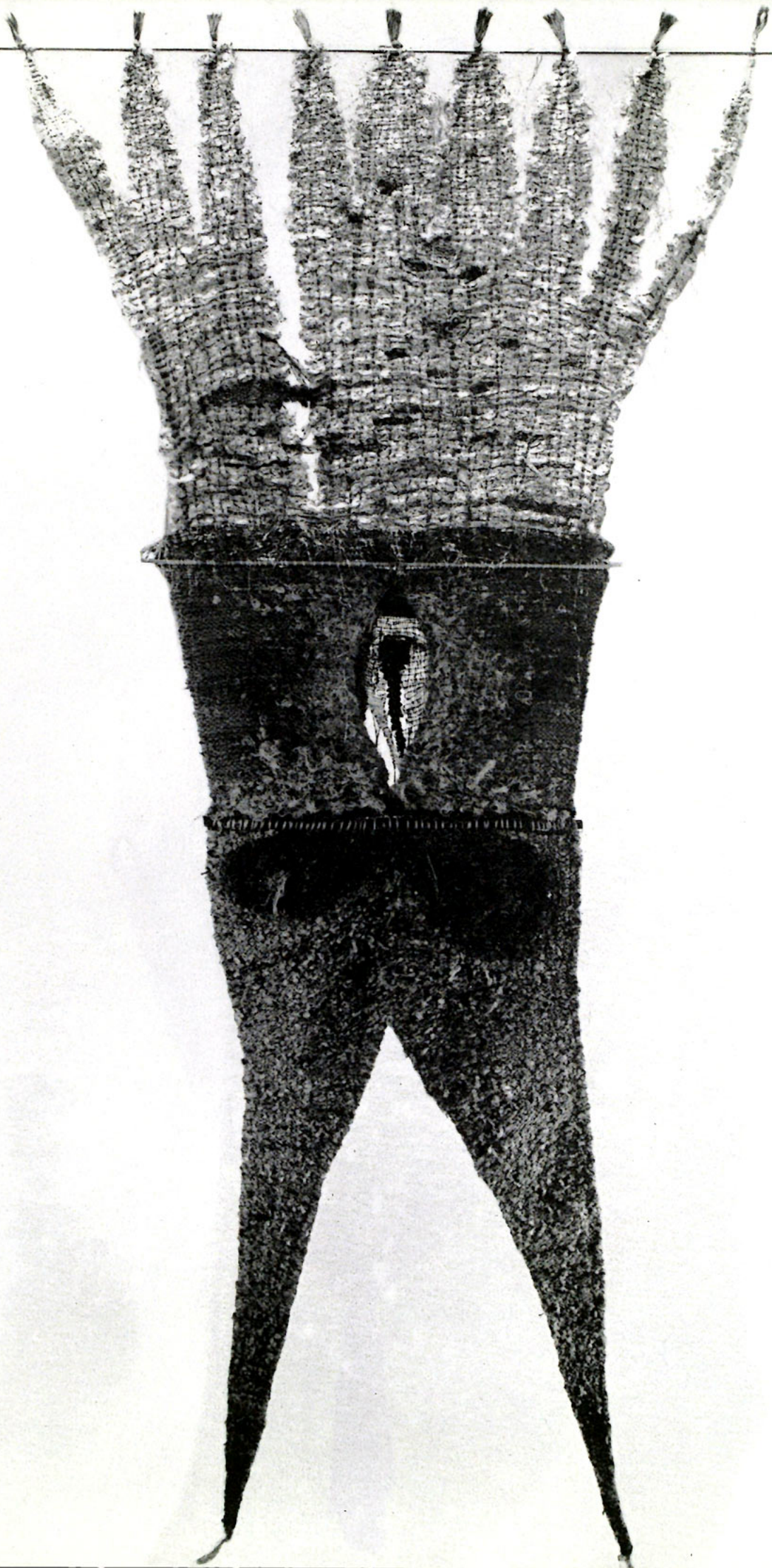


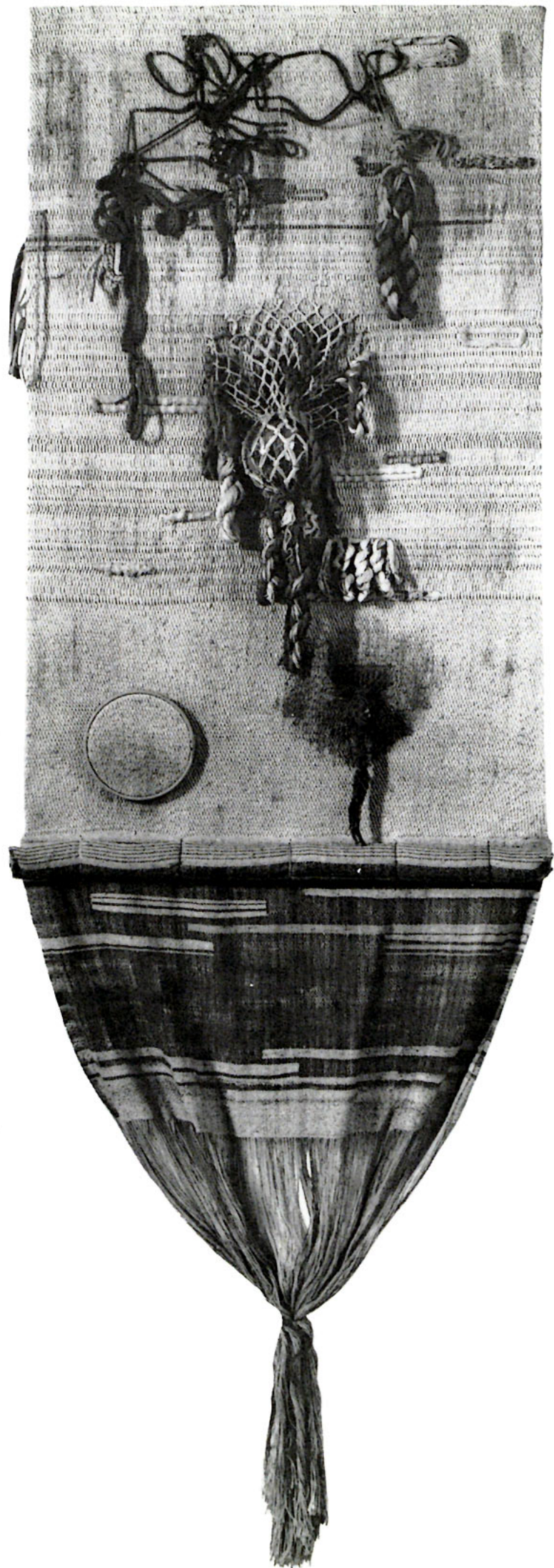


DORIAN ZACHAI: "I consider techniques to be 'tricks' that are absolutely necessary to learn, but once learned, better forgotten. No technique or material is a solution or end in itself. What is vital is to live a concept, and this concept must overpower the materials, the techniques, and the composer. The composer, in turn, must have the strength and conviction to dominate and lead the loom-monster and not allow himself to be led by it. The loom fights and demands its own expression; between us, there is no peace. I pretty much bully the loom with brute force to keep control, and even so, I very often lose. This is my only 'technique.' Oh, of course, I use double and Finn weaves, but I also use my fingers, hands, eyes, heart, and liver. Anyone can use Finn weave or any other technique; that is not the important part. A life feeds the work. The work consumes and demands more. It is impossible to relax."

Three hangings by Dorian Zachai. Left: "Complacent Man," 63" x 11", of orange and green wool, rayon, nylon, and cotton, with wire and bamboo reinforcements, constructed with flat, double, and triple weaves. Below: "Dog," 49" x 70", double woven in variety of materials. Section appears on cover, complete description on page 3. Right: "Woman Emancipated," 92" x 40", of lavender, blue, green, and red wool, cotton, rayon, with aluminum foil, gold and silver metallic threads, wire reinforcements; plain weave.







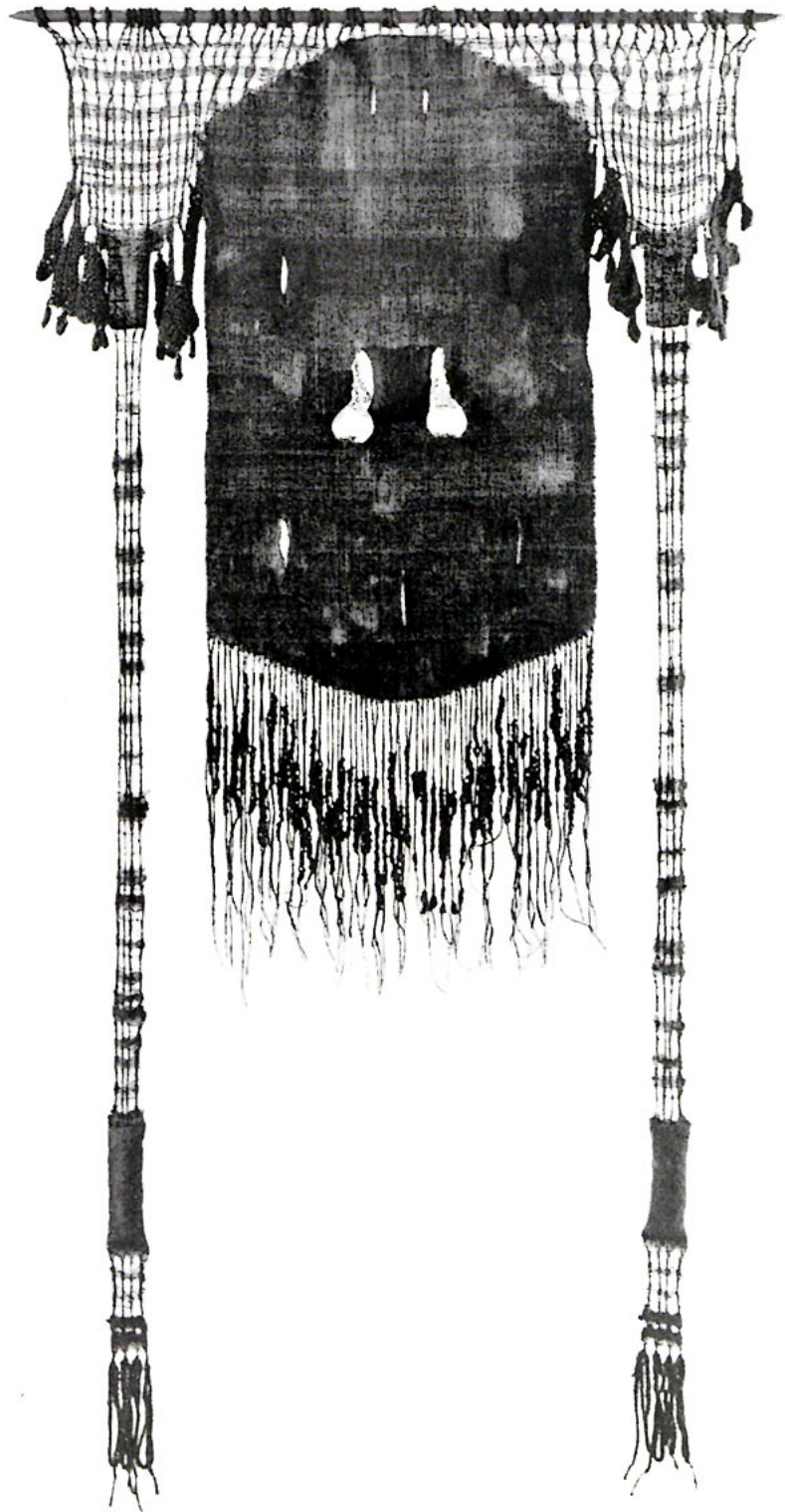
CLAIRE ZEISLER: "I am interested in investigating and experimenting with old techniques, using them in new and personal ways to create textiles which are not only aesthetically pleasing because of design and color, but also contain elements of tactile and visual surprise, pleasure, excitement.

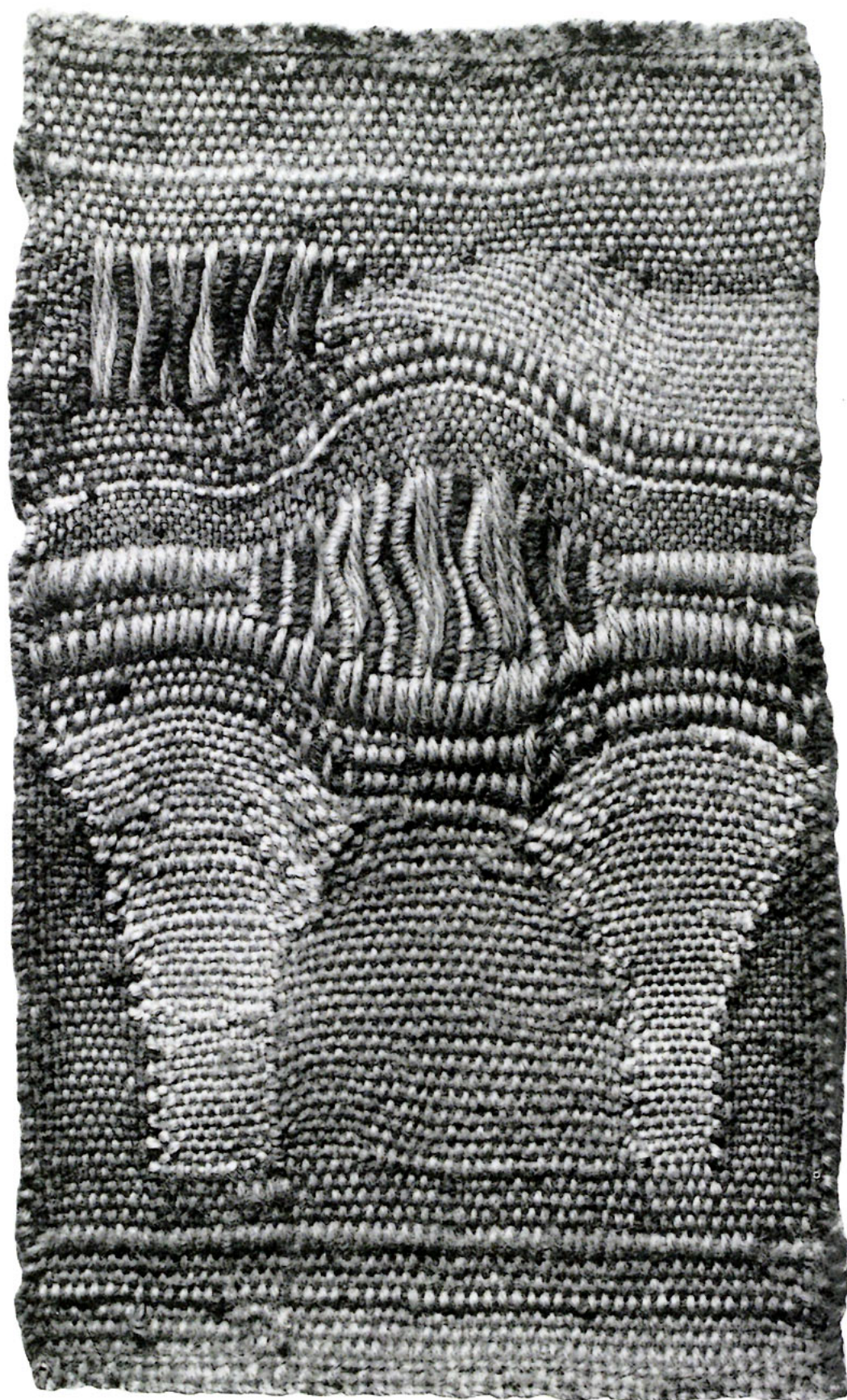
"In view of this I use either double or triple weave. These give me the greatest freedom to express what I wish to say and enhance any hand-loom technique of two or four harnesses with a background layer. Therefore, in addition to leno, laid-in patterns, and tapestry weave, I incorporate pockets and construct my forms in two or three layers.

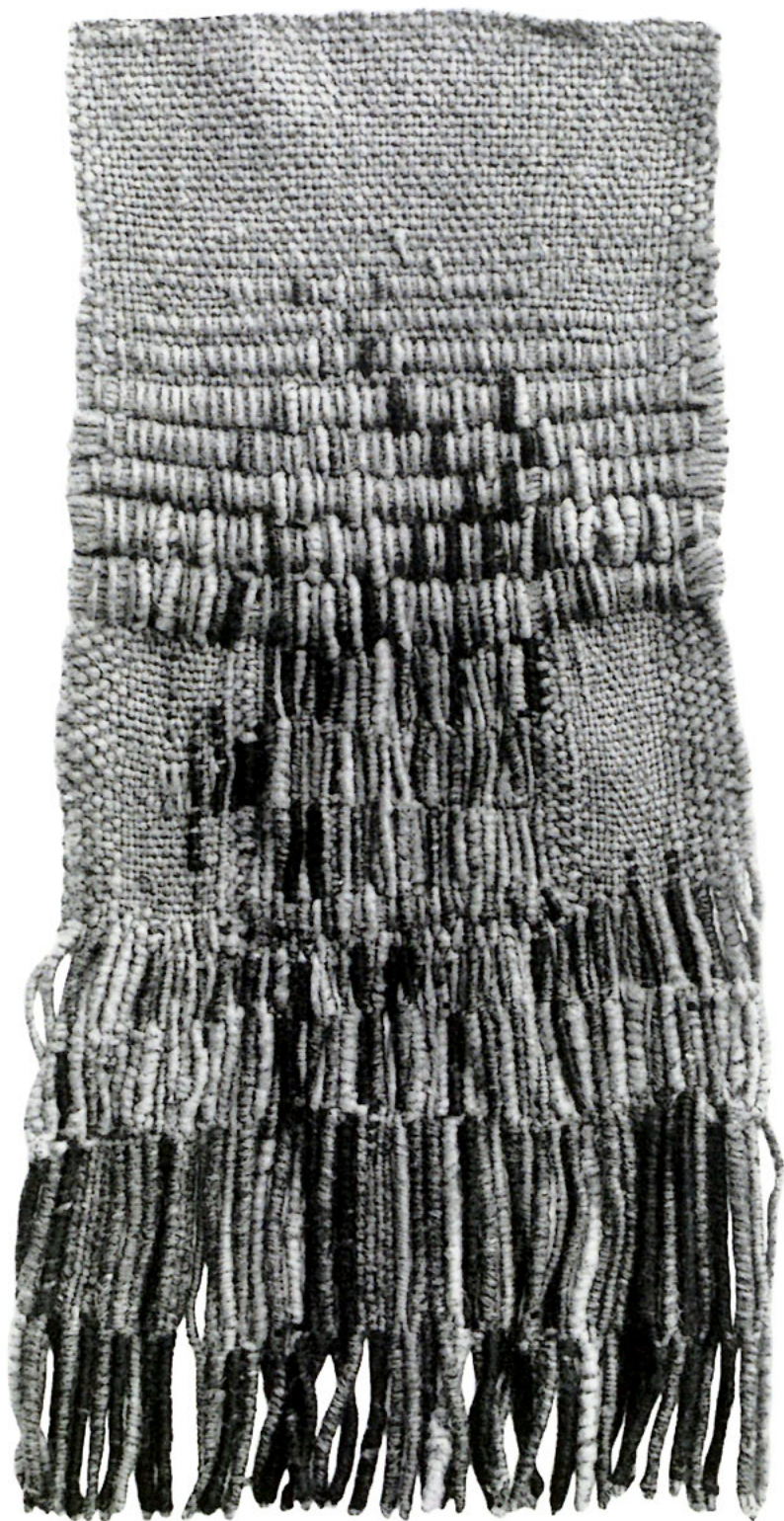
"I warp my loom accordingly, being careful as well to warp it for a weft face fabric, as I have found tapestry technique most suitable for my needs to create effects of pure color. I use silk almost exclusively for the warp, because of its strength and beauty, and as a rule only one color.

"Each piece in the 'Woven Forms' exhibition represents a problem I wanted to solve, not in weaving alone, but in the exploitation of end threads and hanging. I have tried to keep all the elements spontaneous by letting 'what happens, happen' within the framework of the particular problem."

Two hangings by Claire Zeisler employing double weave and stuffing techniques, as well as painting on the warp. Right: Hanging, 54" long, with warp of black silk—painted white in areas, weft of black silk and wool. Lace weave is also used. Opposite: Hanging, 59" long, of natural silk with warp painted red in areas. Two red glass Christmas balls are crocheted on, and an embroiderer's hoop attached.







SHEILA HICKS: "For some time I have been interested in ancient Andean weavings and am trying new themes different from those.

"Of all materials I choose wool. Of all equipment I choose the simplest. For a place to work I choose the sun.

"The work of artists must simultaneously present pure aesthetic pleasure, a self-evident construction, and a sublime significance, that is, a subject. This is pure art."—Appollinaire."

By Sheila Hicks, two wool panels based on the wrapping technique: (left) in colors of blue, brown, purple, and black, 17" x 9"; (opposite page) in monochromatic shades of orange, 9" x 5½"—courtesy Museum of Modern Art, N.Y.

LENORE TAWNEY: "The work takes its form through its own inner necessity.

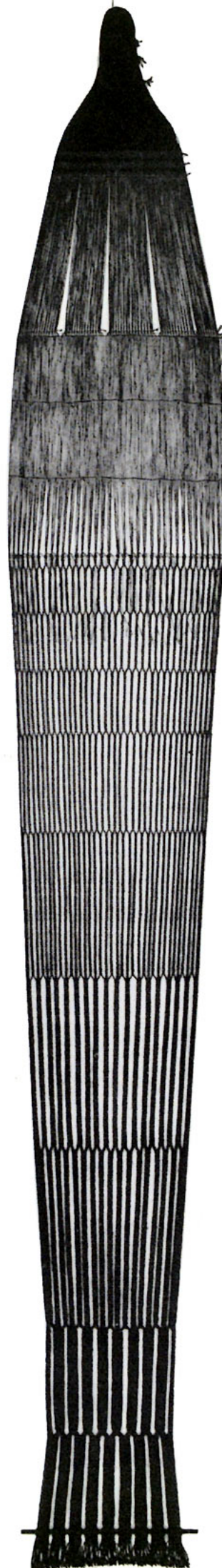
"The material is linen—natural and black; red, blue, and natural; or purple.

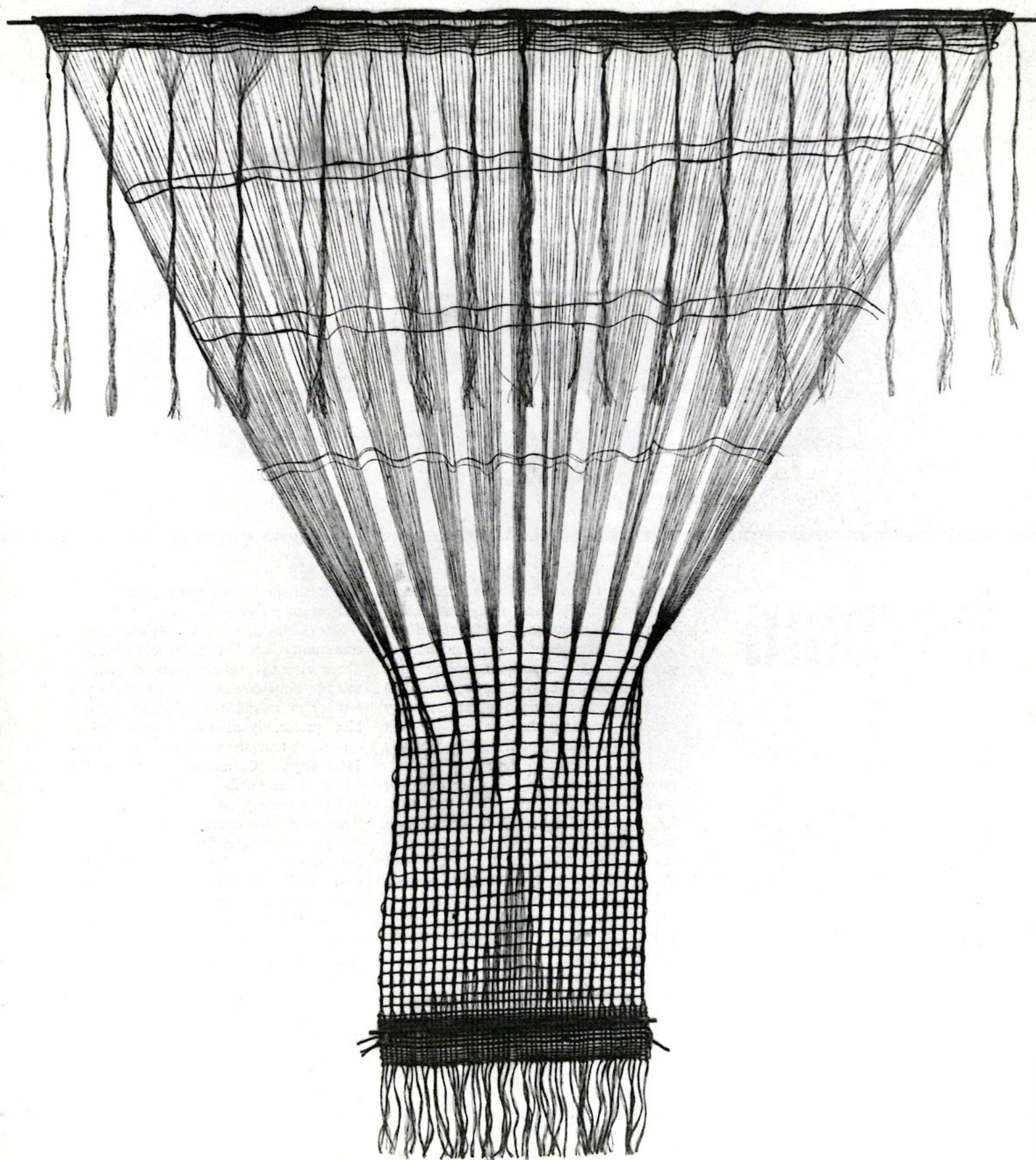
"The techniques are bound weaving, twining, knotting, braiding, twisting.

"All the pieces are constructed as expanding, contracting, aspiring forms—sometimes expanding at the edges while contracting in the center. Some, like 'Dark River,' expand while dividing and separating, then gather in.

"When I looked at my 'River,' it looked to me like the river. The changing ways, the current, the surface. I knew what it was going to be, and I think I knew it was the river. I had it inside, and I think that when it is there on the inside it seeps through to your mind. It is an inner landscape that I am doing."

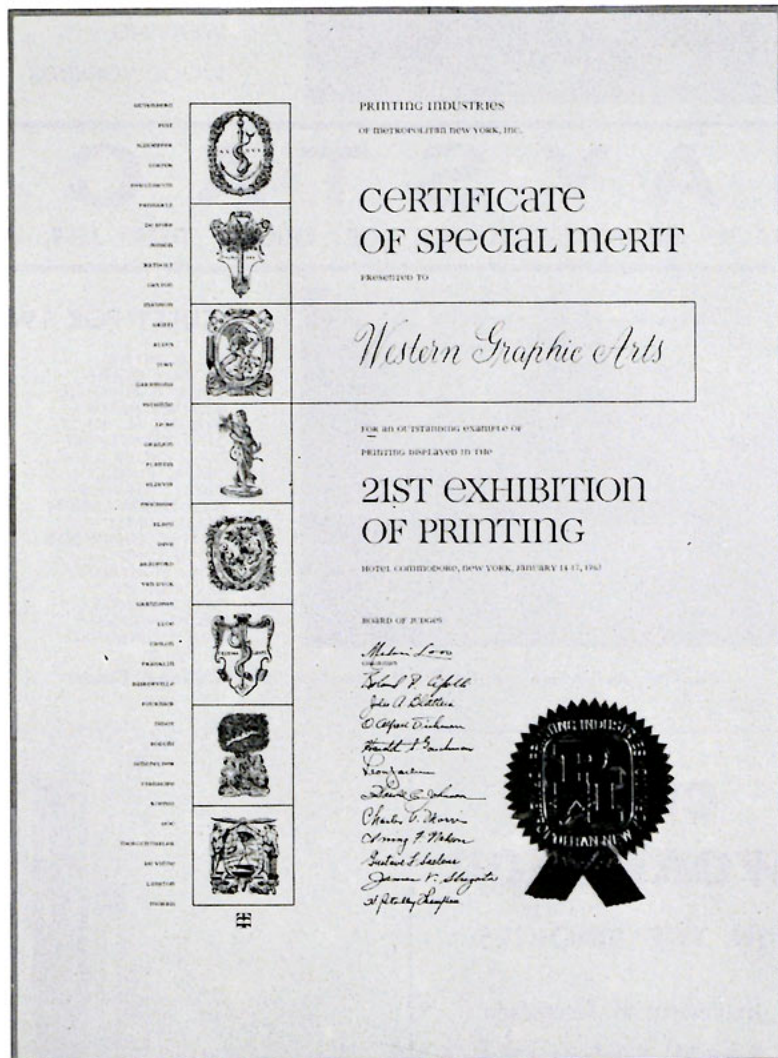
Two "woven forms" by Lenore Tawney. "Dark River" (right), 13'6" x 20", begins with a gathering of black linen at the top, progresses into an ever-widening pattern of solid rep weave, punctuated by simple, large slit shapes. Just above the center, it begins to diminish again, to a knotted fringe at the base. "Lekythos" (opposite page), 35" x 27", is of woven and twined linen in shades of purple. Brass rods are employed as reinforcements.





EXHIBIT

A



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THE NEW TAPESTRY

(continued from page 10)

(including sculpture and the whole art of assemblage), has no less triggered a creative and aesthetic excitement on the part of the tapestry makers. They collage their forms in a combination of yarns, fibers, and other materials in both woven and non-woven techniques (knotting, wrapping, using yarn as free-hanging elements, and incorporating actual objects into the weave), working both on and off the loom to achieve a new synthesis of form and concept. Dorian Zachai uses aluminum foil, tree limbs, bark in her weaving; Alice Adams uses dowels, wire, and even a cleaning brush; Claire Zeisler uses an embroidery hoop, Christmas balls, and paints her warp.

They are making fresh inroads into the inside-outside idea, equalizing warp and weft, back and front—everything is exposed. Space is incorporated into mass and vice-versa in a sculptural equality; free or hanging yarn is as important as weave in an interplay of tactile-visual experience.

The tapestry makers are a marvelously learned crew. They have studied and mastered as many of the ancient Peruvian tapestry techniques as are known today, and on this ancient technology they draw freely to express their own ideas. Techniques used on primitive lap and waist looms of the Incas have been adapted with striking originality, particularly in the wrapped warp pieces of Sheila Hicks, and in the twined and twisted warp hangings of the incomparable Lenore Tawney. The latter's incorporation of feathers, as a provocative contrast of materials and texture, was a device developed to a fine art by the ancient Peruvian weavers.

The textile culture of the U.S.A. is the most far reaching and varied of the crafts today. Its vocabulary and material reality cover the whole range of creative and functional expression—from industry to the fine arts (that is, with the yarn-constructed form as pure object, object as reality, and reality as idea).

It embraces the entire gamut of possibilities—from machine or engineer or chemist-designed-and-made, to textile designer-conceived and machine-made, to studio weaver-designed on the hand loom and machine-produced, to studio weaver-designed and hand-loomed. Today the weaver has an enormous range of choices. She need not necessarily be a weaver of cloth for protective functions. The power loom produces woven cloth for all functional purposes. Since to loom cloth by hand does not necessarily improve the functional aspects of the fabric, but rather expresses the creative-humanistic urge, the new tapestry and object makers have been freed to use their craft for precisely this basic human drive—to enlarge emotional and conceptual experience—find new insights, new realities, new and more beauty.

The five weavers represented in this exhibition and on these pages, by outstanding examples of their work and personal statements of credo, are as follows: Alice Adams of New York City, received her BFA in 1953 from Columbia University and studied tapestry design and weaving in Aubusson, France. Sheila Hicks of New York and Mexico City studied weaving with

Anni Albers and the native Indian weavers of Mexico. Lenore Tawney of New York City studied drawing and sculpture with Alexander Archipenko at the Chicago Art Institute of Design and tapestry techniques with Martta Taipale of Finland. Dorian Zachai of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, studied art and design at Cooper Union and the Art Students League of New York; weaving at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine, School for American Craftsmen, Rochester, New York, and the California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland. Claire Zeisler of Chicago studied sculpture with Alexander Archipenko at the Chicago Art Institute of Design; weaving and theory of the loom in private classes. ■

PLASTICS IN PERSPECTIVE

(continued from page 43)

by recourse to existing technical information or by controlled experiments of my own. As my knowledge grew, I assayed more complicated projects, which uncovered more technical problems, and so the circle grows.

Do you work on paper or directly in the material?

Both, simultaneously. Not necessarily making designs prior to beginning a project, but making sketches, notes, and annotations all during the process. On commissions I never do renderings, as I consider that inadequate as an indication of the appearance of the finished piece. Instead, I use schematic cartoons and full-scale technique samples which function as a means of study for me as well as a format for presentation.

Do you feel that your work has a relation to sculpture?

Increasingly so. Not only am I dealing with the problem more within the confines of a so-called flat panel which frequently becomes a bas-relief because the surface texture is so deep, but I am often commissioned to do things that are entirely sculptural, such as lighting fixtures and fountains.

When did you become interested in plastics?

I had been given a kind of open scholarship to attend a design school of my choice. I found when looking at available information that most schools placed more emphasis on the superficial aspects of design than on process. I decided I would rather go to a technical school where I could learn in depth about a material, about its nature, and about the process through which it becomes an object. I felt this would have direct bearing on what I would do in designing.

At that time, in the forties, there were very few technical schools; I found none in glass, for example. Plastics was a very new field here, and Walter Landor, who was at the California College of Arts and Crafts from England, sent me a brochure about a school that had just been organized in Los Angeles called The Plastics Industries Technical Institute. It offered a comprehensive, complicated, accelerated course. I went there for a year and a half, becoming very interested in the technical aspects of the material. When I graduated, I worked in mold designing for a couple of years.

Did you find that students studying at a technical school were interested in considering the material beyond the program presented to them.

On the contrary. As far as the Plastics Institute was concerned, there was only one other person in my class who was interested in design as such. Almost everyone worked only on the mechanical and chemical aspects of the material. And even though this led to direct involvement with production, manufacturing processes, and testing of plastics, we still were not exploring the material, as we were working within the rigid pre-limitation set by the prevalent concept in the industry.

How did you start working in plastics as an art material?

I had not been particularly interested in acrylics when I was studying. In 1943 I began to teach a class in plastics to occupational therapists. They brought me examples of what was currently being done with acrylics in the hospitals, and I was appalled by the lack of imagination, and stimulated by the possibilities.

Normally, the true nature of a material as an art and craft medium emerges after many centuries and through many hands. And so a sense of fitness in the use of a material and a design tradition evolves. Most plastics were developed as substitutes for other materials, and frequently a rigid imposition of design standards from the original materials were carried over as well. This seemed to me to be the cycle which had to be broken, and I started to do wild experiments.

What were these wild experiments?

At that time acrylic materials were chiefly used to simulate glass, with the added decorative feature of being heat formable into "gorgeous" baroque curves. Any deviation from this approach was considered an error in concept. So experiments of overheating to force bubbling within the plastic, of laminating pieces together with the induced bubbles in the solvent and bits and pieces of gold leaf and colored threads were considered pretty far out. The pioneers in exploration were, among others, Gabo, Pevsner, and Jan de Swart [see CRAFT HORIZONS January/February 1959].

Can we explore further your feelings about the great potential in developing methods of using plastics?

There are a number of artists who use plastics in addition to other more conventional materials, not in its essential self, but as a vehicle for carrying other content. Which is all right, but rather sells the material short, I think.

There are not too many I know of who are working in plastics exclusively, and I think that there has been a timorousness about using the medium, partly for lack of technical information and lack of technical assistance. One must work directly in the material to get a quality which is at all organic. There can be a tendency otherwise to work with it superficially and rigidly, since it is so obliging and will look like something no matter what is done with it. Also, the word plastics has an onus for many people. They have an idea that somehow the material does not merit working with. Actually, it is an extremely responsive material and has as wide a possible variation of results as any medium I know. ■

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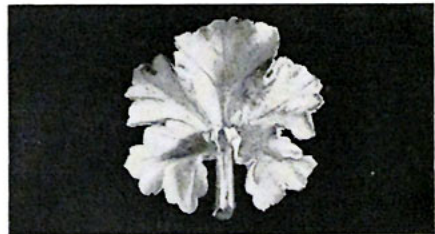
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