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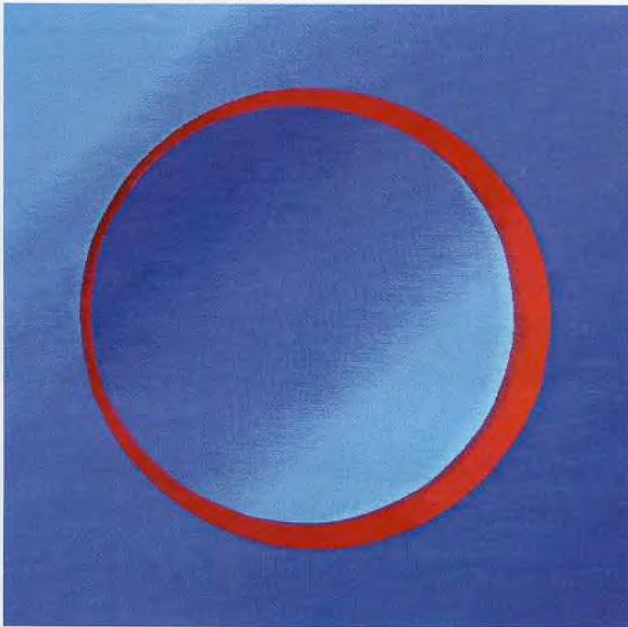


ISSN 1038-846X

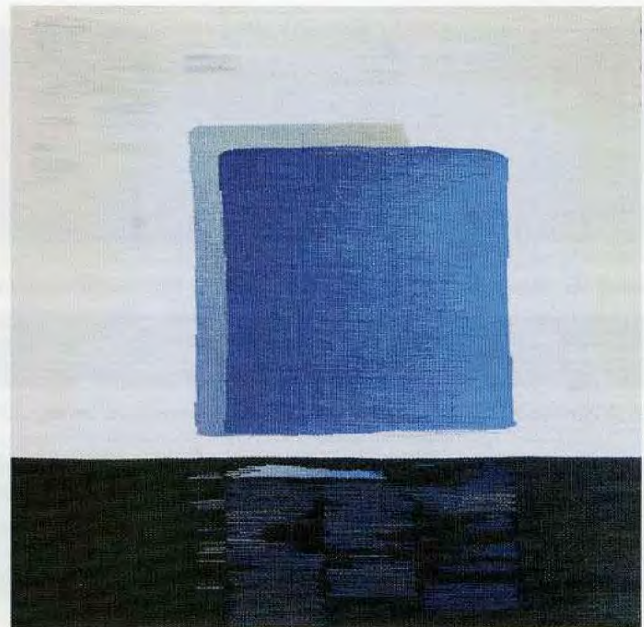


CERAMICS BY KEN MIHARA, ASHWINI BHAT
AND HELEN YAU; WOOD BY NEIL TURNER
GLASS BY KAYO YOKOYAMA AND JASON SIMS
TEXTILES BY HILLU LIEBELT

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'Red Circle', 2011, silk, rayon, cotton, bamboo fibre, 120 x 120 x 3 cm



'Blue on White', 2012, silk, cotton, aluminium, 60 x 60 x 3 cm

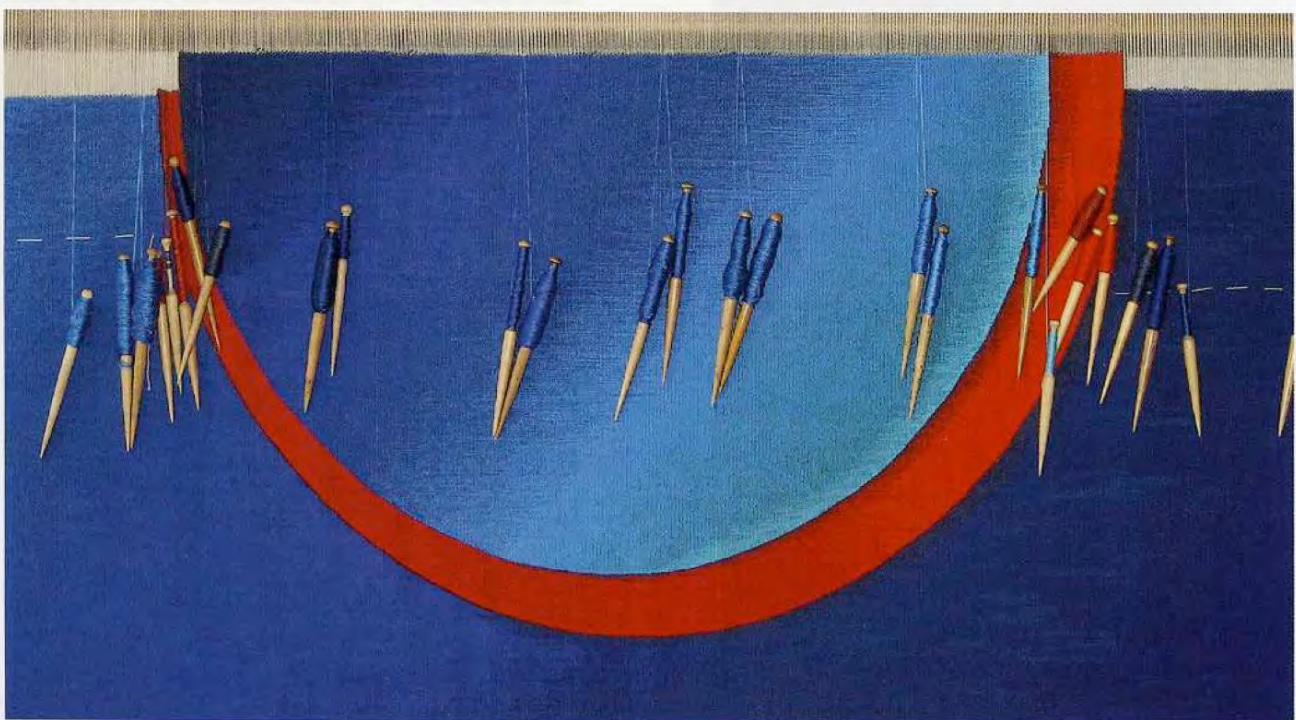
STORIES FROM THE LOOM

The quietude and intensity in Hillu Liebelt's tapestries and textile objects stem from her profound concern with materials, including recycled travertine, bamboo fibre, cocoons, weaving yarns and aluminium rods. Text by Ian Wilson.

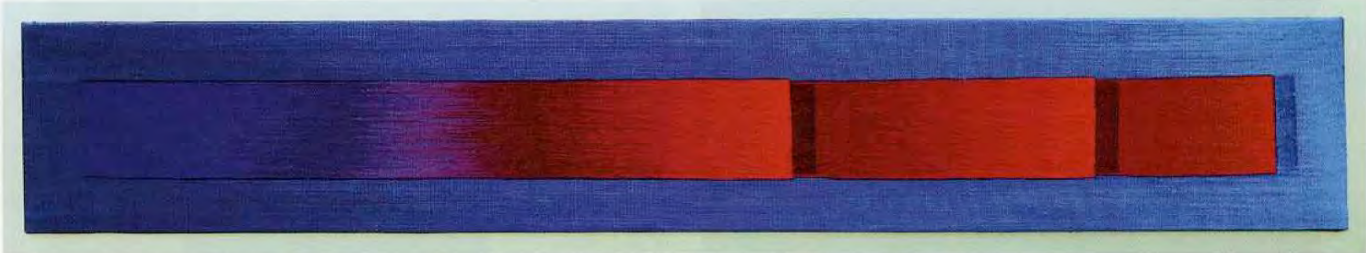
"WITTY" might not be the adjective most usually applied to the "Acknowledgements" section in a publication, but weaver Hillu Liebelt, by pairing the list of those being thanked with a photograph of herself, dressed in black and bowing low, has succeeded in suffusing this penultimate page of the catalogue accompanying her touring exhibition with a gentle humour, both visual and verbal. "Still Moments: Tapestries & Textile Objects" – the most recent exposition of the work of this German-born, London-based artist – opened at two galleries in Kyoto, Japan in October, 2012 before moving to the Bankfield Museum in Halifax, Yorkshire, in Novem-

ber, 2012 and concludes its tour at the Stroud International Textiles Festival in Gloucestershire in April – May, 2013.

Fog and the patterns on wind-blown snow, light shining through the leaves of plants and twigs clad in frost are only the briefest selection of the myriad phenomena of the natural world which intrigue and inspire Liebelt. She is also acutely aware of the characterising qualities of the yarns she uses as well as being fascinated by "the tools of my trade". Included within the batterie of her utensils are bobbins fashioned from the prunings of a holly tree in her garden. This is an eminently practical utilization of horticultural trimmings, for the ilex supplies an exceptionally durable



'Red Circle', work in progress



'Chasing the Summer', 2012, silk, rayon, cotton, bamboo fibre, aluminium, 24 x 125 x 3 cm



'English Summer' (detail), 2012, silk, rayon, aluminium, wood, 200 x 40 x 40 cm



'Midnight Blues', 2012, silk, rayon, cotton, aluminium, 19 x 124 x 3 cm



'Long Dream', 2012, rayon, silk, cotton, aluminium, 18 x 124 x 3 cm

wood, often used for the handles of chisels and hammers. Another example of redeployment is the little squares of travertine – originally the surplus of kitchen and bathroom rebuilds in the Liebelts' home – which often feature in her installations. Their tranquil colours and subtle surface textures – which are so thoroughly in accord with her artistic ethos – quash any notions along the lines of “using up the leftovers”. Two small rectangles of the stone are key components of *Wedged*, whose diminutive scale belies the force of its impact. Lodged between this pair of tiles is what appears to be a silk-wrapped twig, but which is actually a “silk rod”, a further instance of recycling, for when silk is spun off cocoons, the machines produce a waste that



'Bobbins', various woods

'Wedged', 2011, travertine, hand-dyed silk rod, 22 x 12 x 2 cm



'Blue on White', work in progress

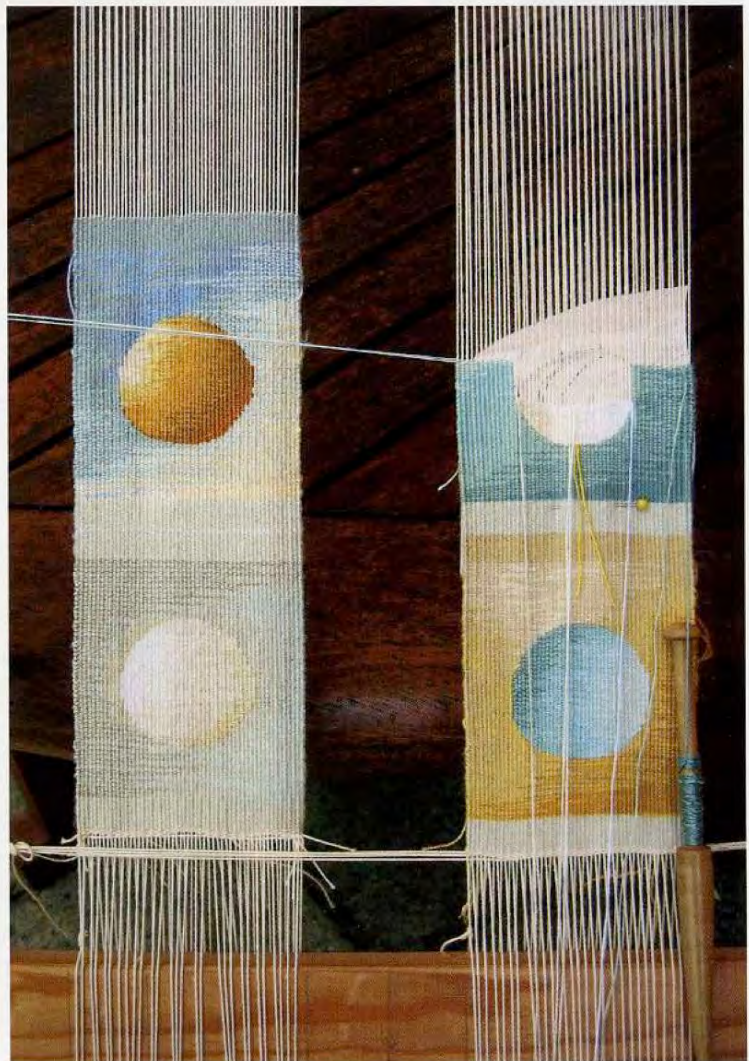
rolls itself up and ends as rods approximately 12 cm long. There is a sense of elegantly effected balance, but also of entrapment and of pressure bearing down upon this slender red intruder. Conversely, however, is the resistance offered and the disjunction effected by this interloping "sprig" whose infringement frustrates the neat alignment of the hard, straight edges.

Silent Dialogue was woven off the loom, and this material-led construction, was initiated by 12 aluminium staffs, each a metre high. The weaving was effected like a figure "8" between two rods, and Liebelt was fascinated as the wholly unintentional twisting of the tower manifested itself with a striking angularity. There is a richness of



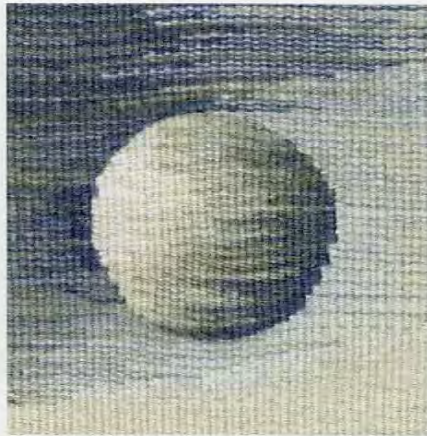
'Winter Sun' series, 2011, rayon, cotton, each panel 8 x 8 cm

'WinterSun', work in progress

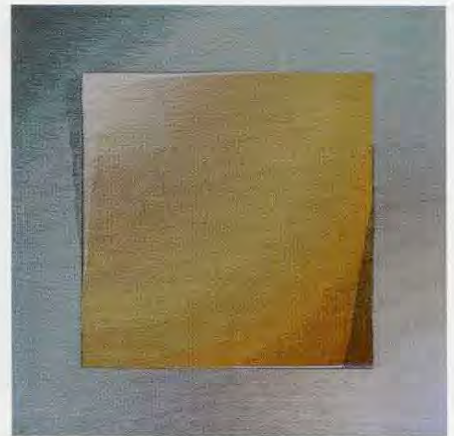




'Winter Sun XX', 2011, rayon, cotton, 8 x 8 cm



'Winter Sun XXII', 2011, rayon, cotton, 8 x 8 cm



'Into the Unknown', 2011, rayon, cotton, 60 x 60 cm



'Hidden World I', 2011, rayon, cotton, 8 x 8 cm



'Hidden World II', 2011, rayon, cotton, 8 x 8 cm



'Hidden World III', 2011, rayon, cotton, 8 x 8 cm

quiet shades in evidence here, and a delicate tonal play between the off-white paper yarn, the gold of the silk, the grey horsehair and the stripey viscoed-sized rayon.

Turning the focus to loom-woven artefacts, there are currently 30 members comprising the ongoing "Winter Sun" series, and 24 of these were arranged in two parallel rows of 12 when shown in Japan, a grouping which had the feeling of an installation. As is often the case with visual multiples concerned with varied renditions of the same object, the viewer's involvement includes a curious sense of losing oneself in examining those small differences which seem to become increasingly significant the longer one is prepared to devote to the task.

There is no fixed sequence of ordering of the component parts of *Winter Sun*, but especially when hung in a grid

format, the permutations of the colours of the orbs against those of their backgrounds allow the viewer to share the maker's exploring and relishing of the limitless possibilities within these exercises. The American pianist, Rosalyn Tureck, in the album notes accompanying her recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* speaks of 'the elements of constancy and diversity' within the 'integrated ... edifice',¹ and these words hold an unexpected but insightful applicability to this suite of tapestries.

It is another geometrical shape, the square, which plays a significant role in *Blue on White*. In the lower section the artist has employed the inlay or supplementary weft technique in which, weaving from one side to the other, she adds an extra thread of blue in the same shed as the weaving. (The "shed" is the opening between the back and front threads into which the weft goes.) The transparency effect thus created brings further complexity to a tapestry which demonstrates how rich a mixture Liebelt achieves by using subtle alterations within the dominant colours. There is, too, a sense of a lighter-coloured shadow behind the central blue square, and this alludes to an important theme in her work. Liebelt often makes models from paper or polyester felt in order to study the nature of the shadows which these forms cast, and this is taken further in the weaving *Into the Unknown*. Here Liebelt is also examining the question of shadows, but in a weaving where the "flat" surface of the image possesses a persuasive dimensionality.

Liebelt's palette embraces, in addition to the colours discussed above, an intensity and vibrancy as embodied in *Red Circle* where, interestingly, the richest shades of red come from bamboo fibre. Within the orderly geometry of its design, is encapsulated and condensed the tumult and disorder of the Arab Spring which was occurring while Liebelt was at the loom.

'Leaving', 2011, silk cocoons, stainless steel wire and travertine stone. Installation at Gallery Yuragi, Kyoto, Japan, October, 2012





'Silent Dialogue', 2011, silk, viscoed-sized rayon, paper yarn, horsehair, wool, aluminium, 100 x 25 x 19 cm



'Between the Lines', 2011, silk, rayon, cotton, 100 x 100 x 3 cm

The installation 'Leaving' commemorates another kind of violence, the upheaval of the tsunami and earthquake that struck Japan in 2011. Mounted on six small acrylic tables of varying heights ("like terraces"), more than 600 lengths of stainless steel wire – embedded in individual travertine bases – are each topped with a white silk cocoon. The shadows which are cast and the trembling of the hollow husks in responding to the slightest current of air, or puff of human breath, mean that this is an installation imbued with change and movement. And there is, too, the fact that these fragile cocoons which were spun by the larvae of moths as a protection for the pupae, carry the poignancy of vulnerability when one thinks of the havoc wreaked by the terrible, destructive power of the natural forces.



Hillu Liebelt

Based on the photograph of a rock on the Greek island of Patmos, *Between the Lines* was purposely woven on its side and rotated 90° clockwise on completion – because many of the lines in the design are verticals, a fact to which the title carries a possible allusion. This horizontal weaving avoids the kind of slits which one finds in flat weave kelims.² It is the shading of colours that makes *Between the Lines* such a tour de force. The eye becomes fascinated at the changes undergone, for example, by a chalky white as, almost translucently, it washes over and affects a field of beige, which emerges from this encounter to go on and, in its turn, blend

Hillu Liebelt's London studio with her Swedish made "Glimakra" loom

and contrast with other colours. This tapestry might well be termed "painterly" but, and importantly so, Hillu Liebelt never intends her oeuvre to be a celebration of any medium other than its own: these are works that quietly, but passionately, extend and expand the ancient craft of the weaver.

Ian Wilson

FOOTNOTES

1. Rosalyn Tureck, *Bach: the Goldberg Variations*, album notes accompanying the 1998 recording for Deutsche Grammophon, p 6.
2. "[In kelim weaving] At the points where the different coloured weft threads meet there are various ways of joining them by interlinkage, or otherwise a slit is left." Janet Harvey, *Traditional Textiles of Central Asia* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996) p 69.

Incidentally, the famous 15th century Devonshire Hunting Tapestries in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, were also woven on the side.

