

Hillu Liebelt – A Tapestry Weaver with a difference

Claude Delmas

Trained in design in her native Germany, Hillu Liebelt left her village in 1980 to settle in Britain with her German born husband, a writer and broadcaster. The cultural richness of the V&A's and the British Museum's collections fed her interest in textiles which she can trace back to a toy rigid heddle loom. The wealth of literature on textiles available in bookstores answered her curiosity and deepened her knowledge. She began to weave in 1982 thanks to the courses run by Nancy Lee Child of the Handweavers' Studio in Walthamstow, whose store, with its amazing colours and yarns, has remained an inspiration over the years. Soon attracted to tapestry, she took further classes with Sue Lawty and William Jefferies. In 1990 she joined the London Guild and then embarked on a gruelling two years of work for the Association of Guilds' Certificate of Achievement (in which she gained a distinction). A few years later, she became a mentor for that Certificate, and began to teach tapestry on a regular basis.

Whilst Hillu's early pieces were flat rectangular weavings in the classic Gobelin tradition – such as her 'London Cab', she has not remained still but has moved, through a realistic phase of three-dimensional pieces with wrapped wires – her innovative 'On Wings' era which threatened to typecast her work for good – to a non figurative use of colours and shapes entirely her own. Weaving in wires enables her to bend the flat woven pieces once off the loom, using cotton, silk and rayon in preference to wool. In a further stage, small separately woven panels are stretched over specially made rigid wire frameworks on two or more planes. A most ambitious and spectacular piece consists of wire hexagons on two planes, obliquely linked by woven and unwoven threads, the glow of the yarns combining with the shine of the gold. In the tapestries incorporating brass foil, cut to desired shapes, the weaving wonderfully echoes the patinations of the metal.

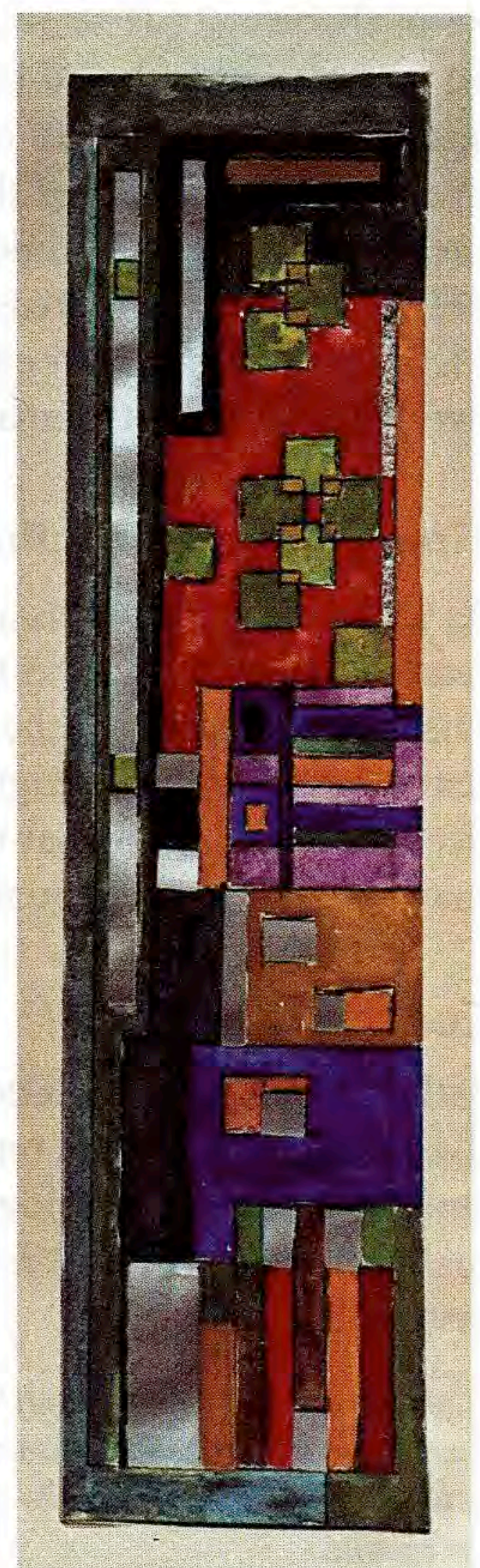
Recently her work has changed once again to centre on a series of 'Shields' for a solo exhibition in Frankfurt next December. Woven flat, on her wide vertical loom, these abstract weavings, predominantly worked in rayon filament intended to give a metallic sheen, have wrapped curved wires incorporated, others are subsequently to be stretched on bowed sheets of shiny aluminium. The inspiration is from shields for dance and ceremony, masquerades and battle from all over the world. But if the purpose of a shield is to shield, is there perhaps a more personal touch in Hillu's use of such protection?

Hillu Liebelt is a member of the London Guild and has exhibited at all the events of the Association since 1991. From 1996 onwards she was a member of the New Fibre Art Group and took part in most of their regular exhibitions. Earlier this year she joined the European Textile Network (ETN). She has had shows all over Britain and in Europe, especially Germany, including one person shows. Her solo exhibition 'Shields' opens at the Galerie Schamretta in Frankfurt on 9 December 2001.

Detail of 'Cucullus'.



Design for shield 'Im Spätrot'





Hillu at her loom

Right: 'Rainshield', 116 x 82 x 10cm

'Im Spätrot' in the process of being woven,
31 x 125 x 5cm

