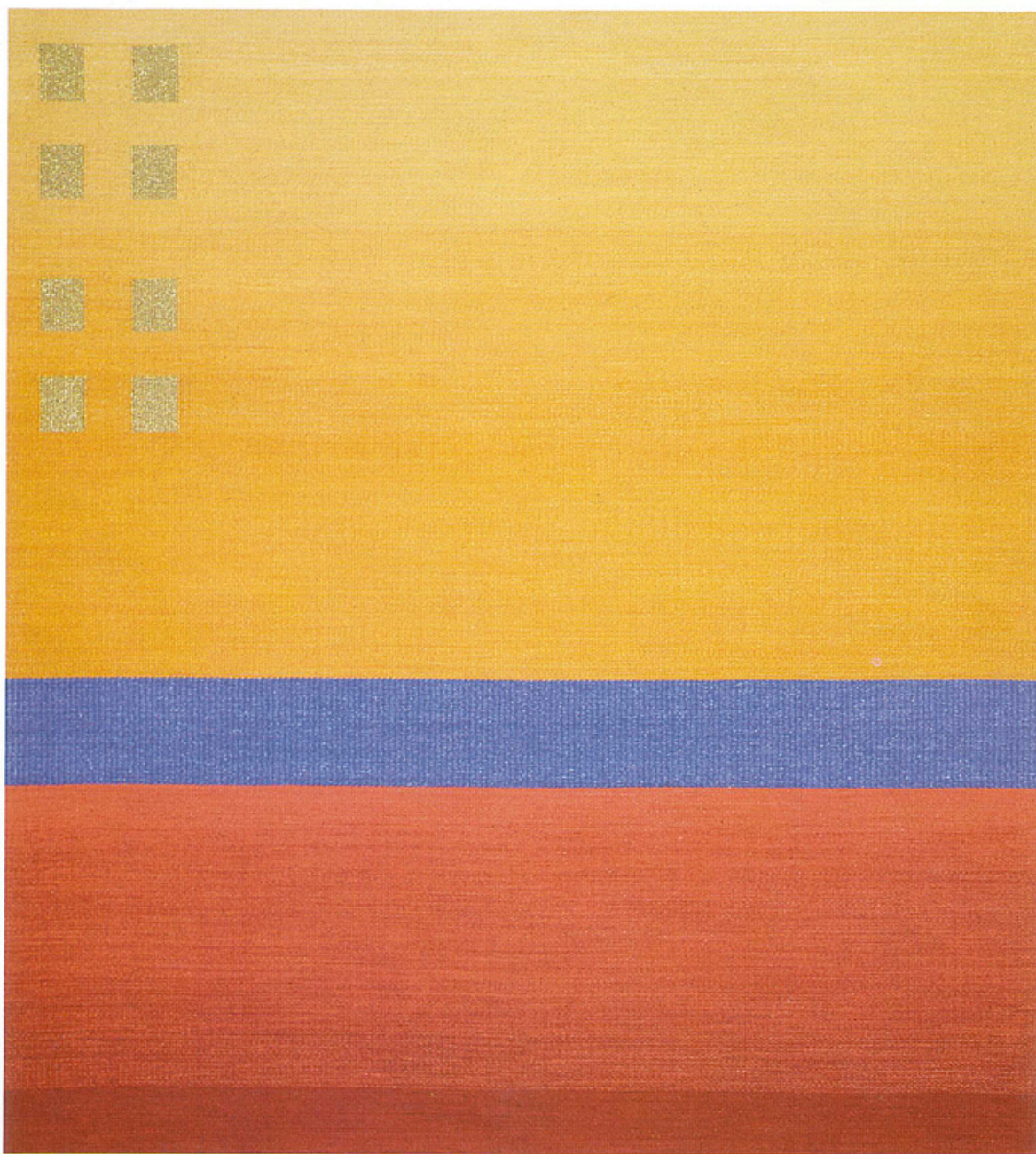


RAINBOWS OF COLOR

*The lustrous tapestries of Rebecca Bluestone
... works of art straight from the heart.*

By Nancy Ellis



"Horizon/1," ©1998, 49" × 45", silk, dyes, metallic thread; tapestry and dyeing technique

Everywhere you turn in Rebecca Bluestone's studio, there is color. On the large floor loom is one of her smooth signature tapestries in the making, this one in the shades of a melting sunset. Stacked neatly on shelves lining the walls are skeins of yarn in a rainbow of colors—primarily wool and silk, which can hold the same rich dyes yet give off different hues and values.

Taped to the wall over Bluestone's small desk are sketches of tapestries in progress, patterns marked by colored pencil, with numbers noted from her elaborate metric system of hand-dyed yarns. Outside the windows is a surprisingly rural view of green mountainsides and blue sky, given her location in a central old Santa Fe neighborhood. Also on the property is the adobe house she shares with her husband Robert Bluestone, a noted classical guitarist.

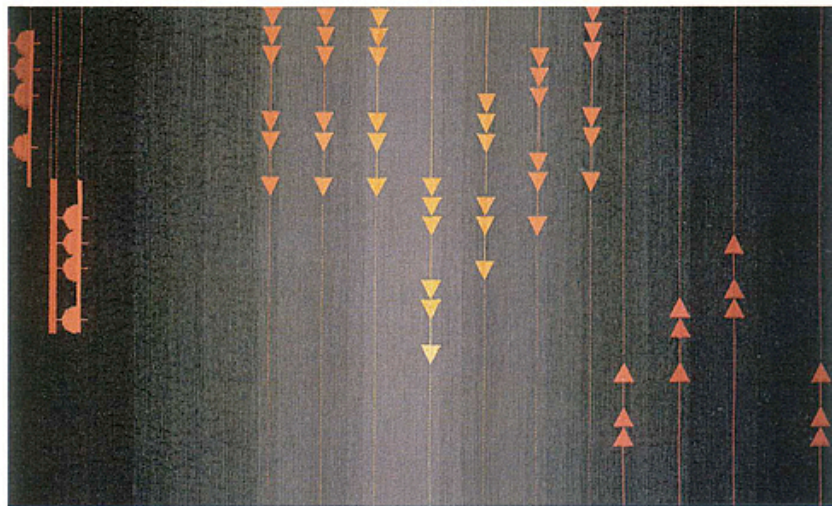
The artist describes herself as "conscientious" and "passionate" about her life's work—weaving—and there can be little doubt that both are accurate. Consider the time that goes into design before the weaving ever begins, and the time-consuming process of hand-dyeing the colors. All this precedes the innumerable hours at the loom. But Bluestone's consistent result is a textile that is a work of art, a feast for the eyes.

It's not surprising, then, that her work was chosen from more than 550 submissions to grace the interior of the new Federal Courthouse in Albuquerque, as part of the national Art & Architecture program. Describing the long interview process involved, Bluestone notes, "I've really enjoyed it so far, working with the architects. The focus of this program is not just artwork placed in buildings, but artwork that actually becomes part of the architecture."

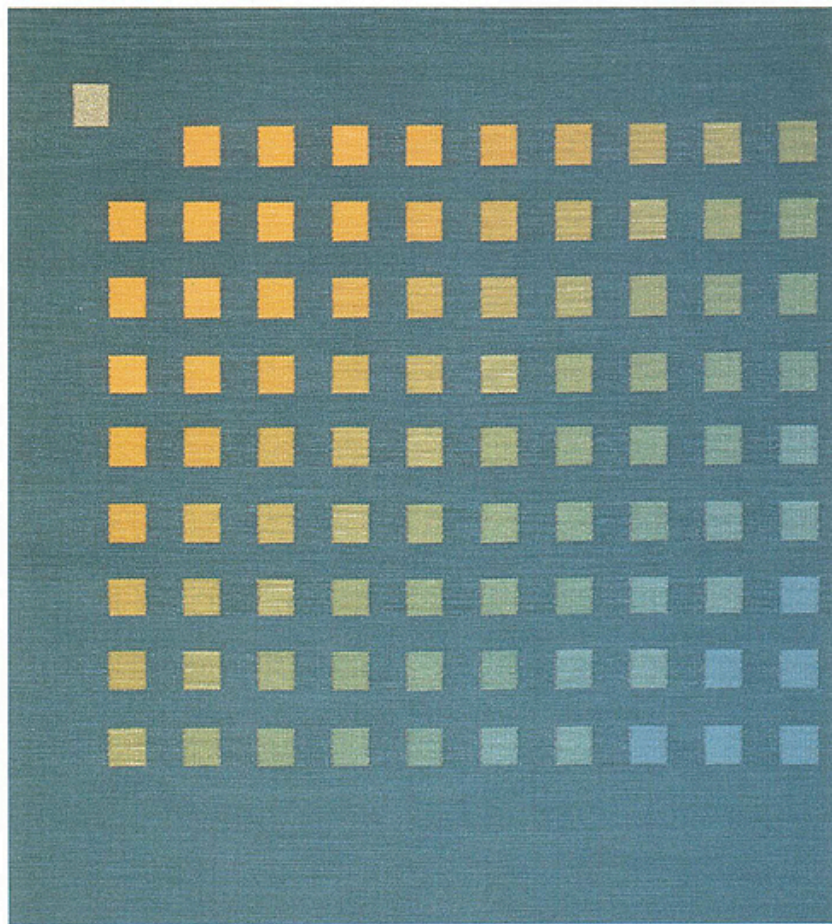
The courthouse commission involves three textiles, each four feet by twelve feet. "I like working in multiples," she maintains. "Most of my work now is in series, and can be shown together or as individual pieces." Bluestone has always enjoyed doing commissions, "because I like to work with a site that includes other people's energy."

She employs a combination of silk and wool in her tapestries, and often includes metallic yarns as well. Her surfaces are highly refined in texture. "Finger-manipulated techniques can only be done by hand," she points out, "and that makes for a very different feel." Tapestry is a weft-faced style of weaving, where all the design is on the weft side. It is made for the wall, she observes, and not intended to be functional.

To watch Bluestone in action, you would think she grew up with a loom. But in reality, this native of Tulsa had graduated from

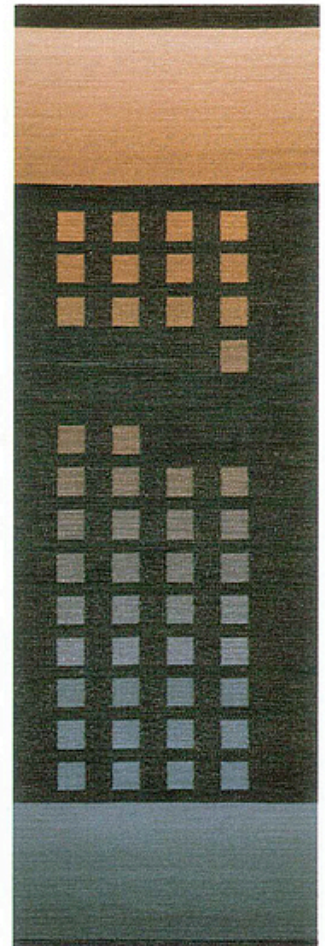
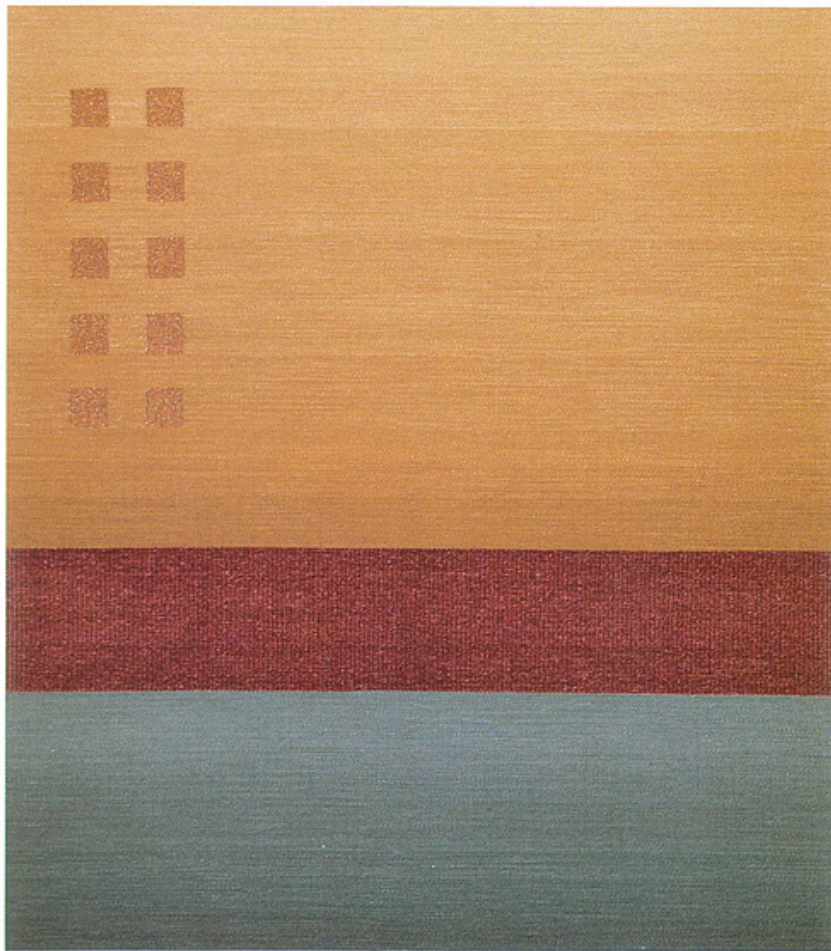


"New Music/II," ©1997, 40" × 66", wool, silk, dyes on cotton warp; tapestry, embroidery, and dyeing technique



"Four Corners/28," ©1998, 49" × 45", silk, dyes, metallic thread; tapestry and dyeing technique

PHOTOS BY JAMES HART



Above left: "Horizon/3," ©1998, 50" × 44", silk, dyes, metallic thread; tapestry and dyeing technique
 Above right: "Four Corners/29," ©1998, 70" × 24", silk and dyes; tapestry and dyeing technique

Oklahoma State University, migrated to the east coast and worked for five years at a variety of jobs before she discovered weaving. "I studied a lot of art history in college, and was always very interested in art, but I had been told early on that I had no artistic abilities because I had no illustrative talent," she recalls. While living in Maine, she accepted a position packing and shipping for a weaver who was selling wearables on a national level. "The first time I sat down at her loom, I realized that this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

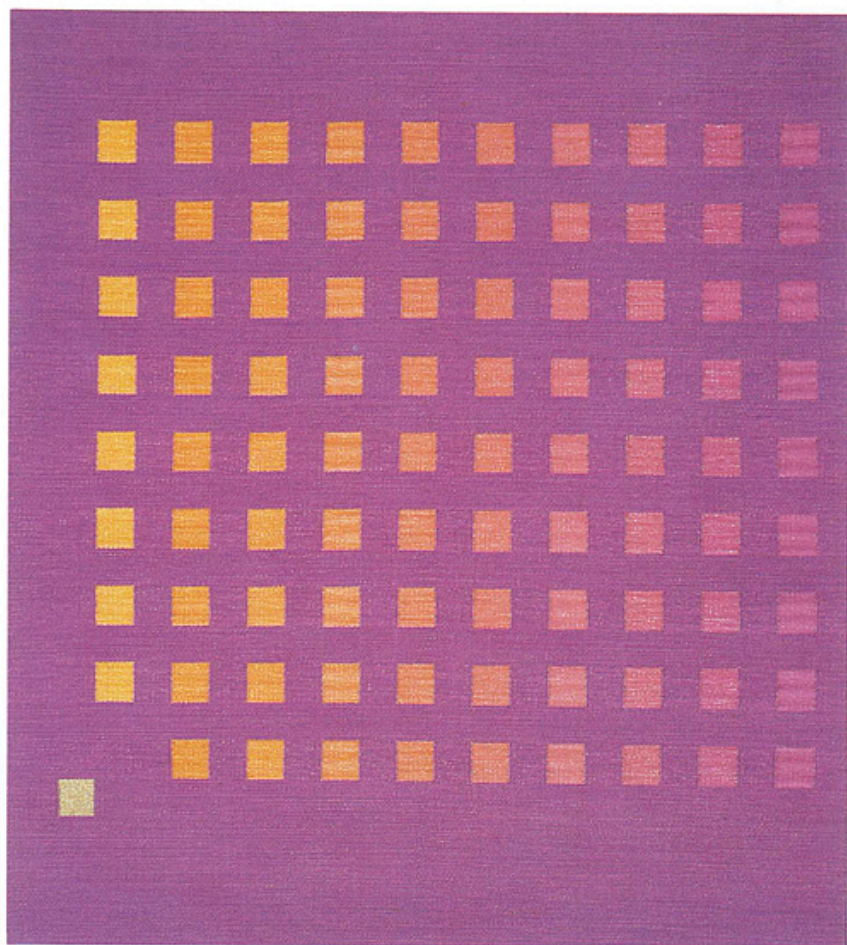
Bluestone found the repetitive nature of weaving—both the process and the materials—opened up a floodgate of creative expression to a flow that has never ceased.

With an appetite for learning everything she could, she apprenticed for several years to the weaver who had hired her, and then, in 1986, came to New Mexico to take a workshop from contemporary Hopi weaver Ramona Sakiestewa. By the end of the Santa Fe workshop, she had met her future husband and had been offered a job by Sakiestewa, then emerging as an artist of national prominence. "I never went back," she smiles.

Over the next eight years, she continued to work with Sakiestewa, who encouraged Bluestone in her own work, which, while also tapestry, was very different in appearance. Visually enriched by New Mexico's highly colored and textured landscape, she

has continued to design on a very intuitive level, with "total control over color" in her museum-quality fabrics. "I couldn't begin to get the colors I want without doing the dyeing myself." The dyes are commercial, and come mainly from Europe.

Bluestone's American-made Cranbrook loom takes up much of her small studio. It is a horizontal floor loom that she sits at, "which is more comfortable and flexible" than a loom at which one must stand. With an office in the back of the house, she tries to keep the business part of her work as separate as possible. "The less I think about the marketplace, and follow a sense of what I want to do, the more satisfying and reassuring the creative process is."



PHOTOS BY HERBERT LOTZ

"Four Corners/22," ©1997, 50" × 45", silk, dyes on cotton warp; tapestry and dyeing technique

With her extensive experience and meticulous manner, Bluestone is a natural teacher, often sought out to conduct workshops in New Mexico as well as elsewhere around the country. She is always eager to share. "A lot of weavers are very proprietary about their techniques," she comments, "but the technique is not the work; it's just a tool. What really matters is what kind of energy you put into your art."

Bluestone's energy is readily apparent in her person, and the immediate appeal of her lustrous, luminous tapestries is clearly a communication coming straight from the heart.

Tapestries by Rebecca Bluestone are shown at LewAllen Contemporary, located at 129 West Palace Avenue. Hours: 9:30-5:30 Monday-Saturday and noon-5:00 Sunday (during August). (505) 988-8997, Fax (505) 989-8702.

