



*the thread of new mexico*

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOUGLAS KENT HALL

THE ALBUQUERQUE MUSEUM ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

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# EXCERPT FROM EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

## REBECCA BLUESTONE

REBECCA BLUESTONE'S STUDIO, in a cul-de-sac north of the plaza in Santa Fe, is carefully laid out to utilize every inch of space. Close, yet comfortable and functional, it manifests the same distinct balance and organization that configures her work.

In fact, Bluestone's pieces present a deceptive sparseness. To this end, she infuses each tapestry with an architecture as startling as it is elegant. A weaver whose work has been sometimes identified with the austerity that lies at the heart of Zen, she finds her voice in a silence that many of her pieces seem to engender. Juxtaposed to this presence, her pieces boast an intense surface that creates exceptional depth and sculptural texture. Her rich yet subtle palette achieves depth from the texture of silk yarn and gains a further emphasis from solid blocks of metallic thread. In Bluestone's hand, which embodies a kind of legerdemain, both materials stand with the wool to exploit light and provide the illusion of a third dimension.

Many of her pieces appear to serve as direct commentary on form. But this is not the



BORN: 1953; Tulsa, Oklahoma.

EDUCATION: B.A., Oklahoma State University, Stillwater. Studied weaving with Ramona Sakiestewa and Nancy Lubin.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS: *Art Zone*, Jewish Community Center, Denver, 1991; *Beaux Arts Societe*, Boise Art Museum, Idaho, 1992; *Materials Hard and Soft*, Denton, Texas, 1993; *New Mexico '93*, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, 1993. SELECTED COLLECTIONS: U.S. Embassy, Jakarta, Indonesia; Lovelace Medical Center, Albuquerque.

SELECTED AWARDS: *Art Zone*, Denver: 2nd place, 1991.

RESIDENCE: Santa Fe, New Mexico.

result on her part of any art for art's sake precept. Her weaving seems basic and geometric and mathematical. Not that most weaving, because of its very nature, is not to some extent about these issues, but Bluestone makes a point of them. She reinforces the point by her incredible technique, her choice of yarns, the understated quality of her color, and her ability to embody each work with astonishing light. Her tapestry production as a whole contains few elaborations of surface—only those that reflect certain unique fibers in conjunction: wool, silk, metallics. Underscoring the characteristic simplicity of her work is the subject matter that informs the titles of her pieces—the I Ching, mathematics, music, and the other influences that lie behind her imagery.

When Bluestone speaks of her youth, of growing up in rural Oklahoma, I realize that much of what drives her design is landscape (evidenced in some of her titles, such as *Four Corners* and *Horizon*), the residual memory of a vast landscape, with a constant horizon, meaningful emptiness, and the pure shifting color of wideness and space.

"A lot of people come to weaving because of the technical aspects of it," she said in her studio one morning. "They like weaving in and of itself—separated in a certain way from what it can be artistically. So they are very into the looms and tools and the materials and technique. And it can be very technical.



"I see weaving as a set of materials and techniques that I can then do something with artistically. It is beyond me why fibers and dyes are seen differently than oils and canvas. I approach it from that point of view.

"I don't have illustrative skills. I am totally abstract. I was told in school that I didn't have artistic talent because I couldn't draw something that looked like what it was. I got out of college with a diploma; but in retrospect I realize that I was just lost. I was positioning myself to express a lot of things that I had always wanted to express and I had to find a way to do that. So I was waitressing. I was living alone and totally self-supporting."

She reached a point at which she had had enough. "I told myself, I don't care if I starve to death, I'm not waiting on another table. I had always had in the back of my mind that I wanted to learn how to weave and I don't know where that came from. I hadn't had any exposure to it." Often with weavers I had heard this sentiment, some atavistic or underlying factor had drawn them to the loom.

"A few months later a friend of mine who was a potter called up and said, 'I have this friend who is looking for someone to help in her weaving studio.' She wanted to hire me for packing and shipping. I said, 'I will do that if you will teach me how to weave.' And I sat down at the loom and it was like I had come home."

And yet, she adhered to weaving not as a commitment but as a tool to take her further. "Part of my mission with weaving is to embrace tradition but at the same time to release that tradition and let the materials and technique stand on their own and be used as an artistic form."

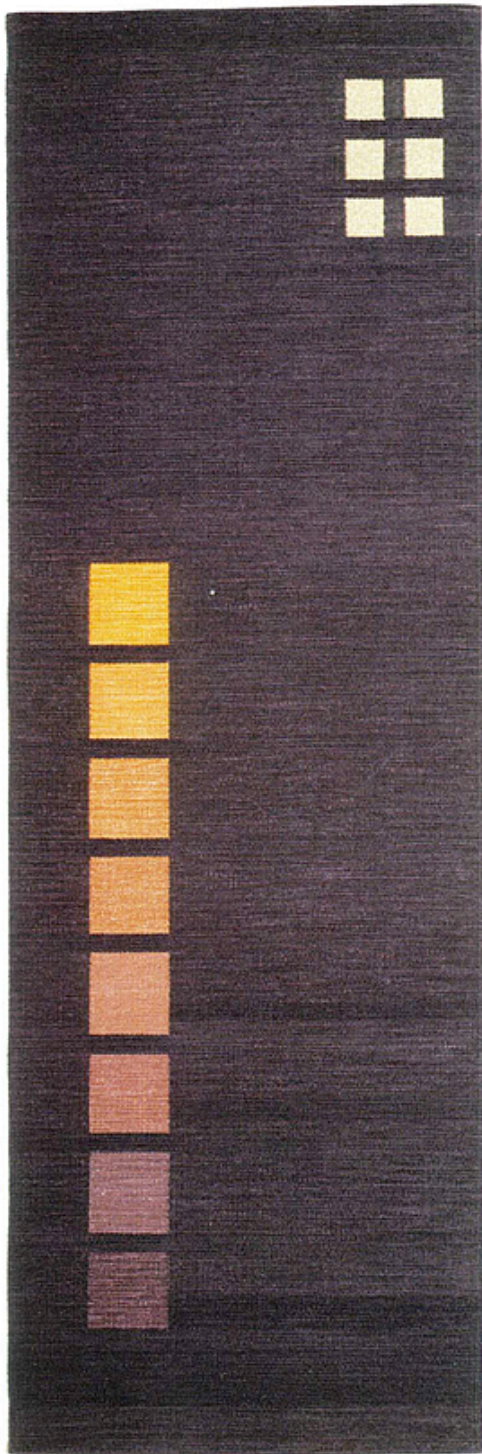
To this end, she responded to the mention many reviewers have made of her technical expertise: "I do have this physical relationship with the technique. Something about the process opens up my creativity. My body loves doing it. And I like the product."

I mentioned that when I examine her work what I think about is light, the quality of light, its intensity, and its variety. She replied, "In a way, all I am working with is light—the colors of light. We only see it because of light. You can manipulate light and bring out the color."

She achieves her desired colors by doing her own dyeing. "My dye is very precise, mathematical. And I need ten days to dye and get all these colors. It is unlimited how many colors there are in the universe. Color is like a mathematical equation. It has this aspect of infinity to it."

Although one would never think it from looking at her finished tapestries, she enjoys experimentation. "I am always working with color, seeing how I can manipulate the way the light interacts with color, to see if it can express the effects I am trying to get.

Rebecca Bluestone  
untitled/31, 1999  
Silk, dyes, metallic  
thread, cotton warp  
70 x 24 inches  
Loan courtesy  
of the artist



Photograph by Herb Lotz



On yet another level she wants to push beyond technique. "For me the process of being an artist is to be aware of everything I am sensing with all of my senses as much of the time as possible. I see myself as a gatherer of information that I somehow distill into something else. Because visual art is nonverbal, I am trying to find a place that epitomizes the nonverbal. In weaving there is this idea of what I call contemplative repetition. Once you are familiar with what you are doing, it is very contemplative, very repetitive, and it immediately puts you into the right side of your brain, the creative part of your brain. Although I have these drawings in my studio, once I sit down at the loom I already know how the piece is going to go together, colorwise and designwise, and I just weave.

"I use the idea of repetition a lot in my work. It is very non-intellectual for me. What tends to happen is I'll do a body of work and then I'll look back and say, 'Oh, that's what I'm doing.' I have realized that I am working with this idea of contemplative repetition. Why is this of such interest to me? Why do I feel this need to put that out there?" She shrugs then goes on to answer herself. "I realized that in all of our religious practices, our spiritual practices, every culture uses some kind of repetition to get to that contemplative place. Something about it gets us to a place where we can transcend the physical plane which is what I'm always trying to find. It is a discipline, my own kind of meditation, a way of keeping myself open. The less I think about what I am doing and the more I trust my own intuition the more successful the work is."

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