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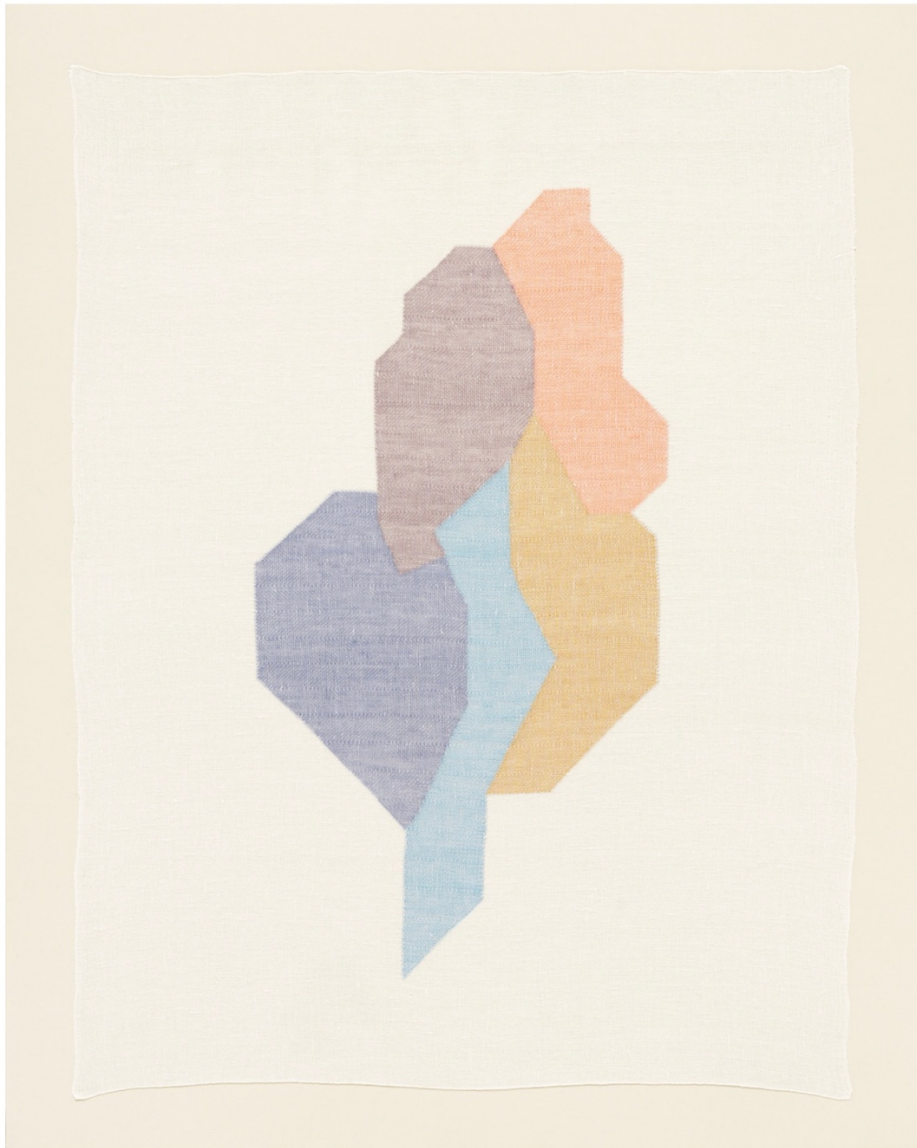
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Sachs, Danica, "Review: Ruth Laskey weaves experimentation into painstakingly produced 'Twill Series,'" *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 11, 2021



Ruth Laskey's "Twill Series (Aggregate 1)," 2021. Hand-woven and hand-dyed linen.
Photo: Ratio 3

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Twill is one of the simplest methods of weaving, its diagonal, gridded pattern formed by passing the weft yarn over and under the warp in an alternating sequence. Widely used in textile production, you've probably seen twill's diagonal lines on your denim jeans. In a quiet exhibition of her minimal artworks, on view at Ratio 3 through Saturday, July 24, San Francisco artist Ruth Laskey presents the results of a productive three years of formal experimentation with weaving in her ongoing body of work, "Twill Series."

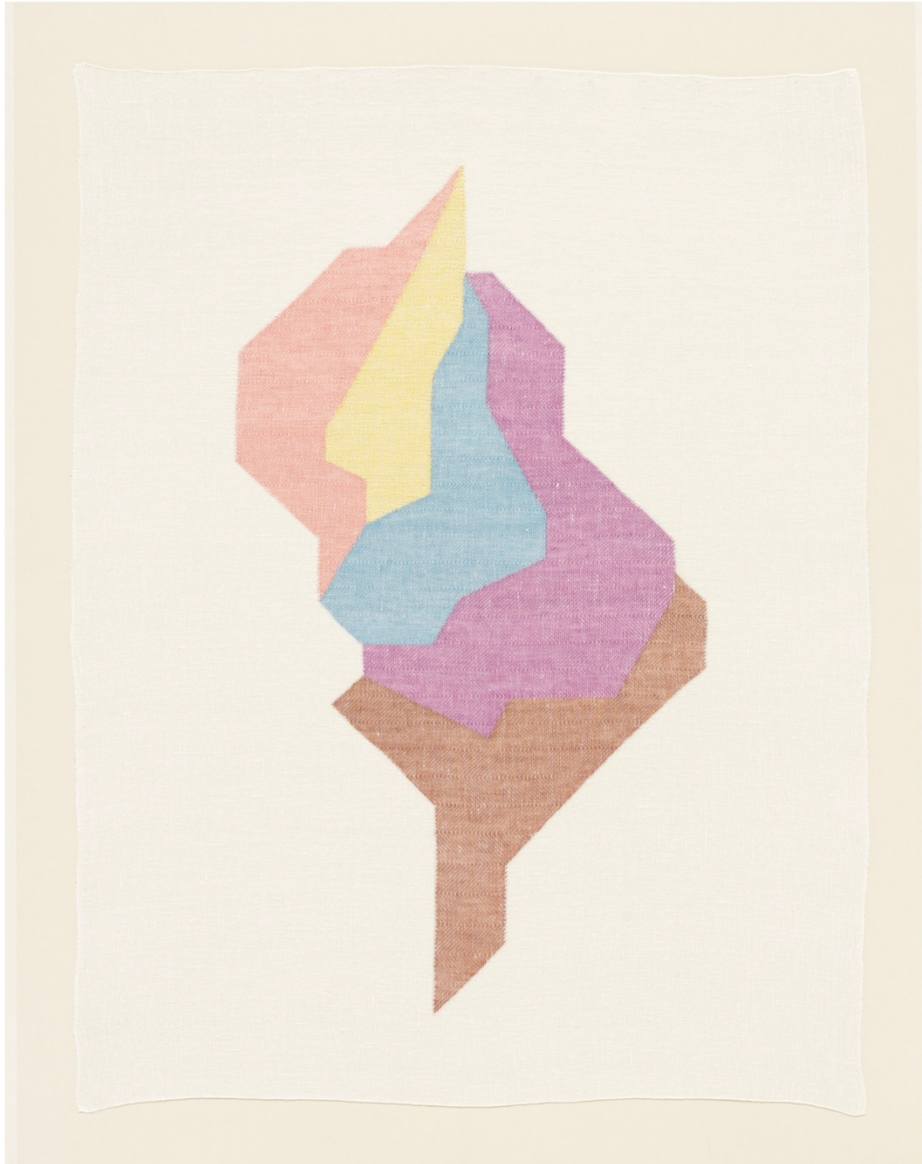
Here, Laskey uses the deceptively simple technique in the creation of artworks that blur distinctions between traditional ways of mark making, like collage, drawing and painting. Divided into three sections chronologically and stylistically, this is an exhibition to move through slowly to closely examine Laskey's process-driven artworks.

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Ruth Laskey's "Twill Series (Aggregate 3)," 2021.

Photo: Ratio 3

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Laskey employs a painstaking method to construct her images: mixing her dyes by hand, painting individual threads, and then weaving the works on a manually operated floor loom. To produce the gridded colored squares that make up her organic and geometric forms, the artist must account for every move of the shuttle across the loom as the threads shift in color. In essence, Laskey paints with thread, each vibrant form emerging from the natural pale linen as she moves down the loom to create her works. The results are presented modestly, with the full linen weaving mounted to a similarly toned, neutral backing board and framed.

In the first section of the exhibition, Laskey's seven compositions are organic fields of color, pressed up against each other in the center of the linen weaving. All titled "Twill Series (Aggregate)" and dated 2021, the glommed-together masses resemble continents or geographic forms rendered in bright pastels. Visually, these works masquerade as torn paper collaged against a cream background, with the clean lines of each color landmass abutting, not bleeding, into the next.

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Ruth Laskey's "Twill Series (Verdigris/Chartreuse)," 2020.

Photo: Ratio 3

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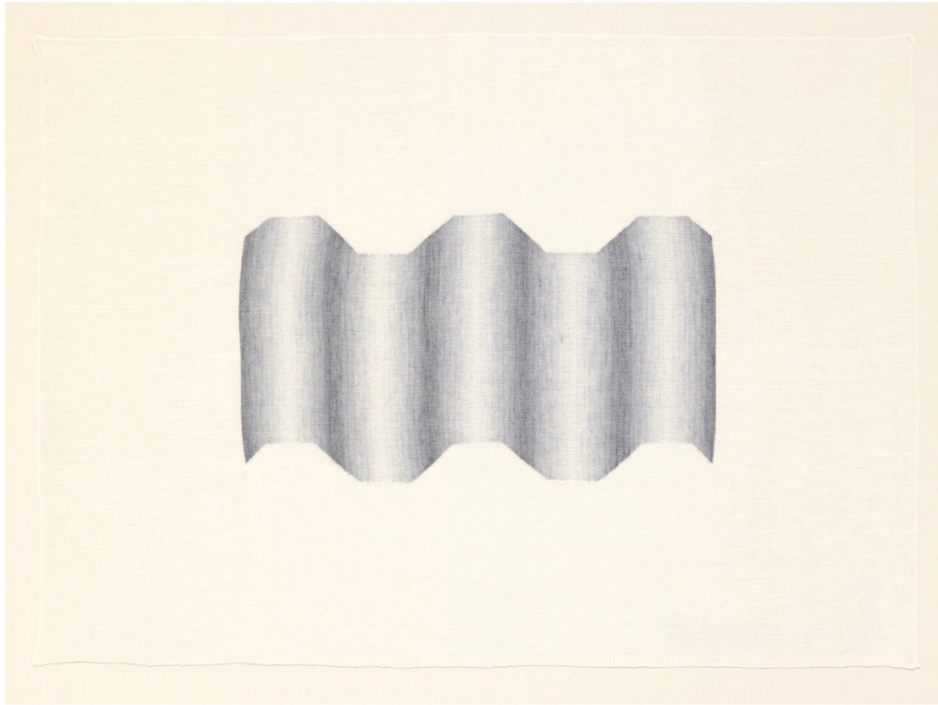
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If we read these first works like collages, then Laskey's weavings in the final gallery, all dated 2019, can more accurately be described as drawings. Here, energetic lines move around the picture plane, punctuated by geometric shapes on the end points.

The artworks in the second gallery are the strongest in the exhibition. In the nine pieces here, Laskey's forms are geometric shapes resembling vessels or urns. Coming up close to look at one of these works, like 2020's "Twill Series (Verdigris/Chartreuse)," you can see the blue-green dyed threads gradually get darker moving from top to bottom. Here is the artist at her most meticulous, carefully planning the movement of the shuttle on the loom to produce the gradient effect.



Ruth Laskey's "Twill Series (Blue Gray)," 2010.

Photo: Ratio 3

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Laskey's earlier similar artworks with color gradients, like 2010's "Twill Series (Blue Gray)," have softer lines and play with optics and perception along the lines of artists such as Robert Irwin. These newer works, however, with their harder edges and more recognizable forms, have the immediacy of Richard Tuttle's painted shaped canvases, merging medium with substrate, figure with ground.

Variouly stripping media of the inherent dimensionality of paint on canvas, or even graphite on paper, Laskey's creations, as shown in these works, are anything but flat. The gradations in color, fastidiously applied by hand to the individual threads and deftly entwined at the loom, add depth and volume to these geometric forms and lines in her compositions.

"Ruth Laskey": Viewings by appointment noon-5 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays. Through July 24.
Ratio 3, 2831A Mission St., S.F. 415-821-3371. ratio3.org

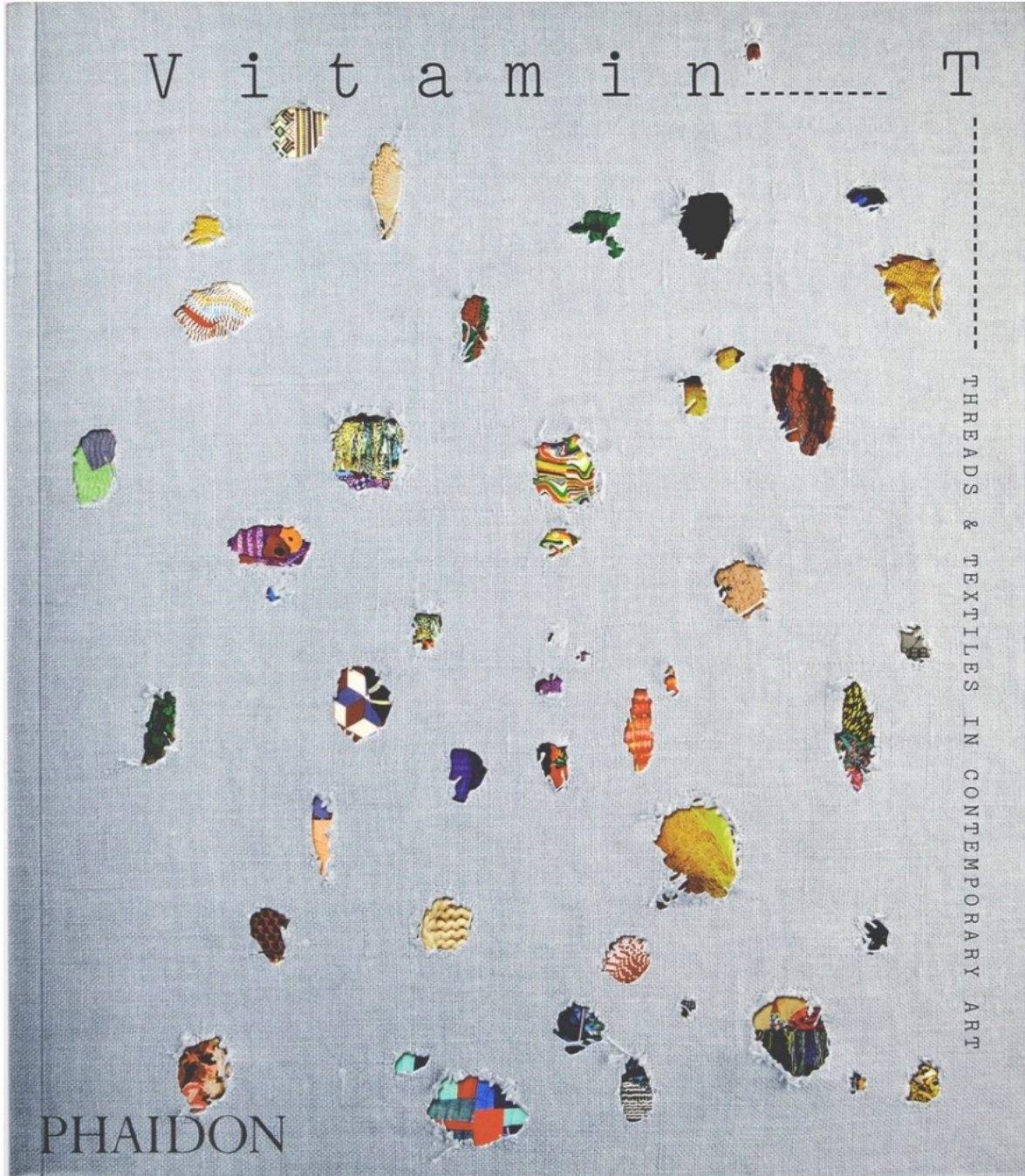
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Phaidon Editors and Jenelle Porter, *Vitamin T: Threads and Textiles in Contemporary Art*, New York: Phaidon, 2019



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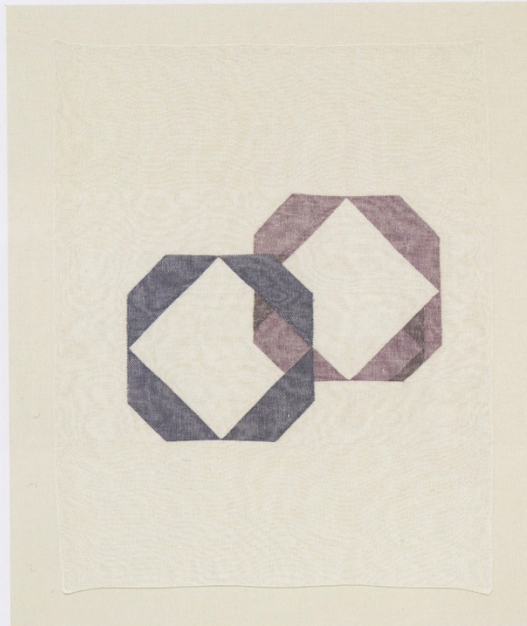
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Ruth Laskey is seeking beauty, not perfection. Using a four-harness loom, she makes textiles that have an exacting production, the outcome of which is humble, beautiful and physically rooted in mathematical processes. Using handwoven and hand-dyed linen, her material is soft and the geometric shapes that she weaves are not as hard-edged as the likes of Ellsworth Kelly and other such predecessors who explored colour and form – elements that are fundamental to Laskey's weaving. Raw, undyed woven threads surround her geometric formations, which appear as though suspended. Although working with textiles, Laskey thinks like a painter and learned weaving to make a ground for applying paint. She reminds us that painting begins not with the sweep of a brush but with the stretching of canvas, and while she no longer applies paint to material, each thread she uses is dyed by hand.---Laskey's main body of work is the 'Twill Series' (2005–ongoing), which uses the diagonal axis of the weave as it crisscrosses the warp and weft. Her twill lines take various permutations that follow specific rules imposed by the artist. Subsections of the 'Twill Series' are comprised of up to six or seven individual works; each follows a given protocol. For example, interlocking and symmetrical colours feature in 'Twill Series (Mint Green/Grecian Sea)' and 'Twill Series (Peach/Raspberry)' (both 2015), their titles arising from the names of the dyes used. Indeed, the ambiguity of the sub-groups is deliberate; another includes 'Twill Series (Blackened Pagoda/Olive Drab/Sage Green)' and 'Twill Series (Strong Navy/Blackened Oxblood Red/Blackened Bubble Gum Roll)' (both 2011), identifiable by their overlapping shapes and the impression of cast 'shadows'.---If we were to define what threads 'are' and 'do', they are linear pliable materials with a plasticity that can be organized as exercises in line and colour, figure and ground, and structure and surface. Based on weaving structures, patterns on the loom transmit coded information. Weaving is generated through lines of code; a language built up line by line, it is the earliest form of computational fabrication. Essentially, Laskey generates patterned shapes through an arithmetical structure. By looking closely at the weave, we can see what came first and how the pattern proceeded. Thus information that reveals the production of the work is inherent, even stored, in the medium. Moreover, Laskey is physically very present in the work – their structure and inherent temporality trace her motions much in the same way that Jackson Pollock's drips marked the bodily movement of his Action Painting. As a process that Laskey continues to explore, weaving is a form of language that results in technology that is tender, while remaining a rigorous meditation on beauty, especially as it innately inscribes the woven structure of linen.---Kathleen Madden

RUTH LASKEY Born 1975, San Luis Obispo, California. Lives and works in San Francisco. SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS: 2018 – 'Ruth Laskey/Josh Brand', Adrian Rosenfeld Gallery, San Francisco; 2016 – 'Quadrants', CAPITAL, San Francisco; 2014 – Ratio 3, San Francisco; 2010 – Ratio 3, San Francisco; 2009 – 'Six Weavings', Galerie Cinzia Friedlaender, Berlin; 2008 – Song Song, Vienna; '7 Weavings', Ratio 3, San Francisco. SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS: 2018 – 'Way Bay', Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, California; 2017 – 'A Line Can Go Anywhere', James Cohan Gallery, New York; 2014 – 'Fiber: Sculpture 1960–Present', Institute of Contemporary Art Boston and touring to Hexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio and Des Moines Art Center, Iowa; 2013 – 'Threaded Stories', Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; 2012 – 'Stand Still Like the Hummingbird', David Zwirner, New York; 2011 – '2010 SECA Art Award', San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; 'A Terrible Beauty is Born', 11th Lyon Biennale; 2010 – 'Abstract', Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College, Portland, Oregon.

Ruth Laskey



Twill Series (Strong Navy/Blackened Oxblood Red/Blackened Bubble Gum Roll)---
2011---Handwoven and hand-dyed linen---68.6 x 55.9 cm---27 x 22 in



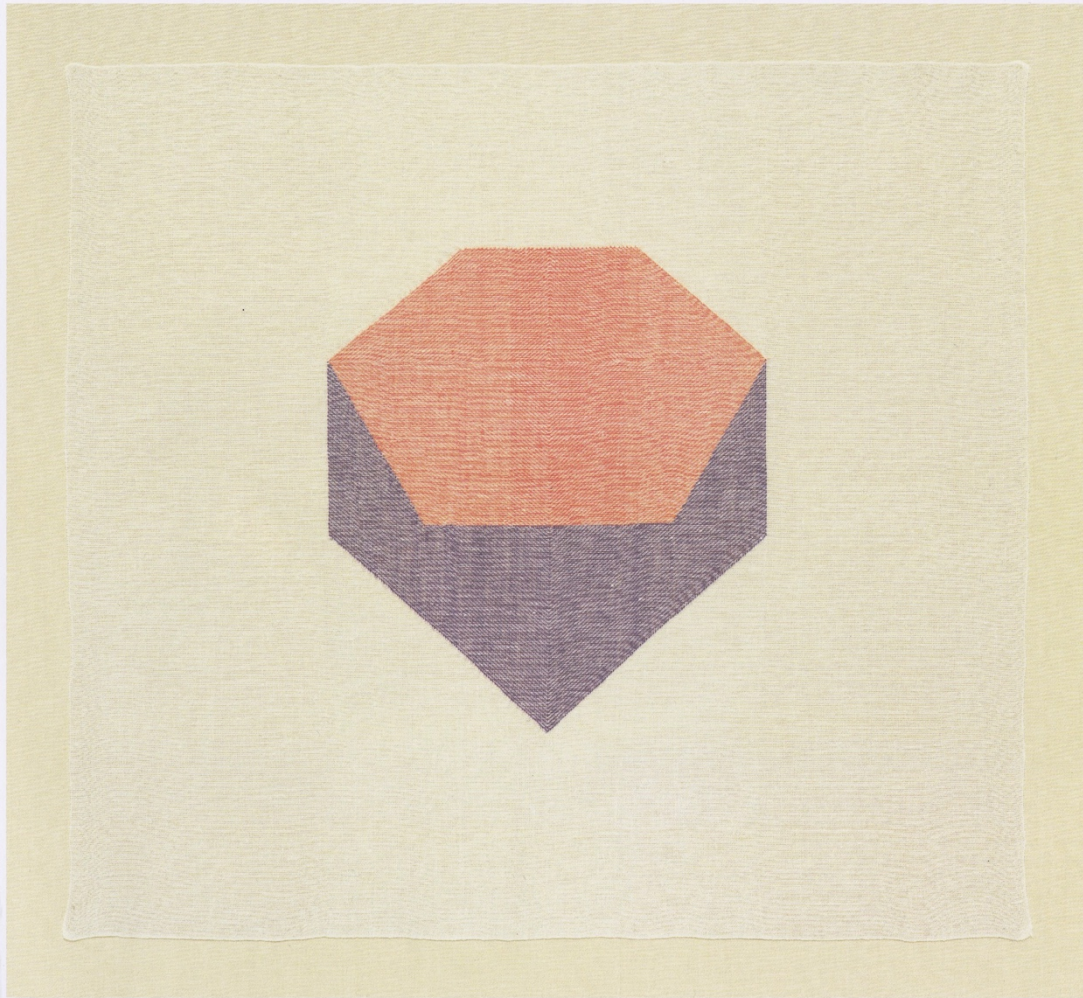
Twill Series (Mint Green/Grecian Sea)---2015---Handwoven and
hand-dyed linen---85.1 x 77.5 x 3.8 cm---33 1/2 x 30 1/2 x 1 1/2 in

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Twill Series (Peach/Raspberry)---2015---Handwoven and hand-dyed linen---77.5 x 85.1 x 3.8 cm---30 1/2 x 33 1/2 x 1 1/2 in



RUTH LASKEY

04.01.16

These are Ruth Laskey's first prints since she became an artist. Considering that she's known for creating small linen weavings, the change in size, materials, and process represents a departure for her. She came to the studio thoroughly prepared and yet very open to the innovation that might take place. One of the surprises she found was how fast a single print can be produced after intense preparation. Laskey is an artist who likes making an object and its component parts slowly over time. In this medium, collaboration was a catalyst for something new.

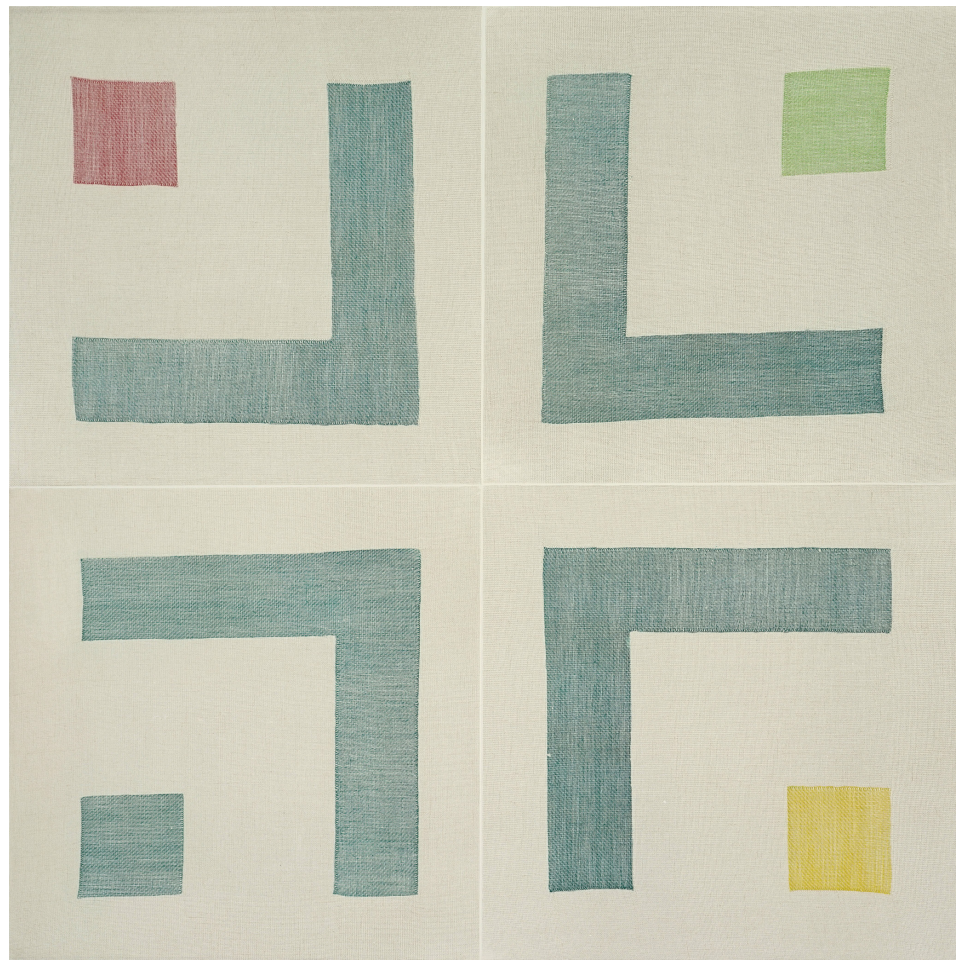
- Kenneth Caldwell

Paulson Bott Press: Did you know that you wanted go to in this general direction when you got here?

Ruth Laskey: We had done tests ahead of time with the woven material, so we knew that's where we wanted to go with it, to print the texture. We made a plate from the weaving itself because we liked the results of the texture coming through. I knew I wanted to weave something that we could print with. It didn't make sense for it to be a one-to-one thing, to just print a woven image. I wanted to do something I couldn't do in weaving. So the solution was to come up with kind of a modular weaving that we could play around with.

Q: Which threads are you coloring or dyeing?

RL: It's all linen. So I'm using one type of thread, and then I'm dyeing this thread to



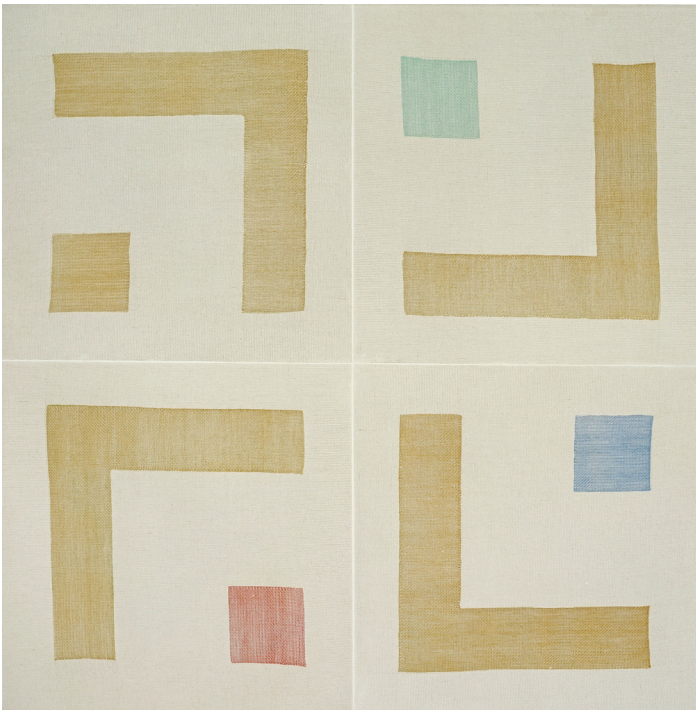
get the color. I'm dyeing the weft. Any part that's colored is in a twill pattern. And then anything that's not colored is in the plain weave pattern. So I'm using two different patterns together.

Q: How do you get such precise edge? Are you diagramming this all out ahead of time?

RL: Yes. The weaving is a grid itself. To create the twill pattern, you're creating a diagonal.

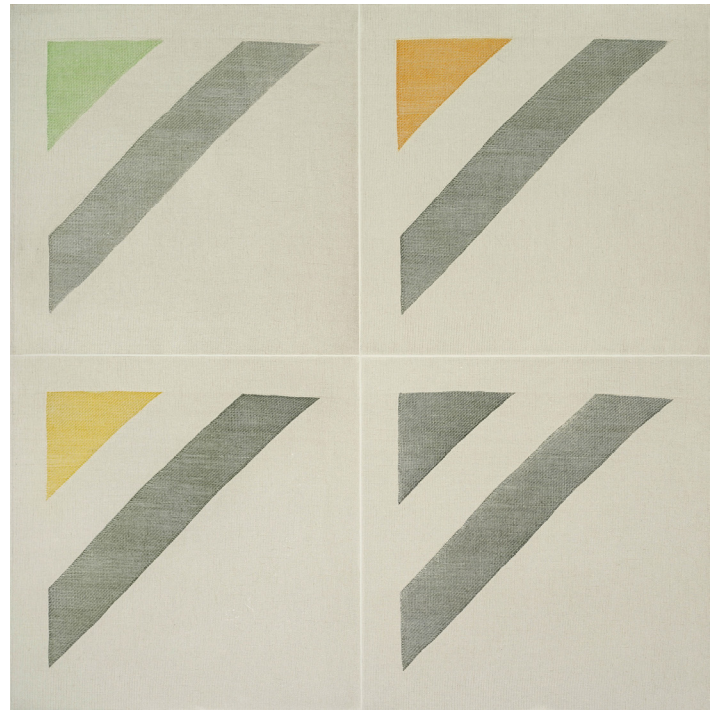
PLAIN WEAVE GRID (EMERALD GREEN/RUBY RED/SPRING GREEN / PRIMROSE YELLOW), 2015

Color softground etching;
29" x 29"; Edition of 35



PLAIN WEAVE GRID (YELLOW OCHRE / VIRIDIAN GREEN / CERULEAN BLUE / VERMILLION RED), 2015

Color softground etching;
29" x 29"; Edition of 35



TWILL WEAVE GRID (OXIDE GREEN / SPRING GREEN / INDIAN YELLOW / PERMANENT YELLOW LAKE), 2015

Color softground etching;
29" x 29"; Edition of 35

These are just points on a grid that create the diagonal. I'm actually using a tapestry technique, but not with a tapestry pattern. I might be using seven different spools of threads at the same time on one line.

Q: Why were you drawn to weaving?

RL: I didn't study it. I was painting, and what I was most interested in was paying attention to the materials. So I was making my own paint and putting these blobs on the paper. It was all about the body of the paint and the feeling of the paint and not really about image. The medium was as strong a component as the image.

I was painting on raw linen so you would see the texture of the weave and that would be part of the painting, too. But I didn't really like using the store-bought linen, because it was such a major part of a painting. I wanted the paint and the ground to have an equal amount of intention.

On a whim, I took a weaving class just to see if I could achieve what I wanted to in that direction. I started by weaving linen squares

that I could paint on. But by learning the techniques of weaving, I realized I could create imagery through the weaving itself.

I was creating a linen square, a section of tapestry, and then painting it. So there were two things going on at once. The paint felt like too much extra. I was putting it on top, and that didn't feel right.

Q: Was it hard to sacrifice the weavings to make the prints?

RL: That was definitely a consideration in terms of what size weaving I wanted to make. Conceptually, I didn't want to just reproduce a weaving, but also it didn't make sense in that way, to make a whole weaving and then destroy it. It made more sense to create these modular pieces. That worked perfectly in terms of what made sense to do on the loom in relationship with what's happening in the print.

Q: How many plates for a single print?

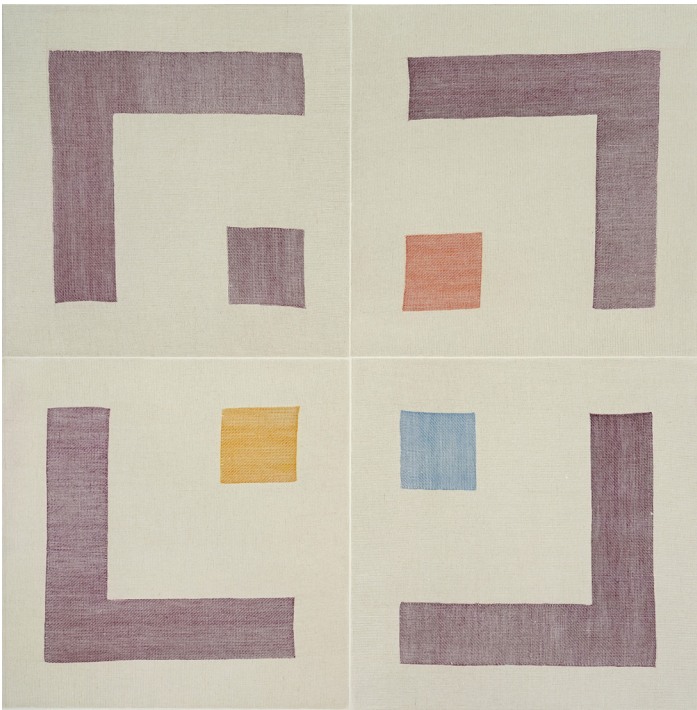
RL: Eight. Four for the background and then four for the colors.

Q: Both weaving and printing take so much patience.

RL: That draws me to it. It's interesting to have this experience within a print studio because when it's right it can happen so fast. Obviously I've been thinking about them for a long time, and the setup takes a while, but getting them to be physically produced was so fast compared to working in my studio.

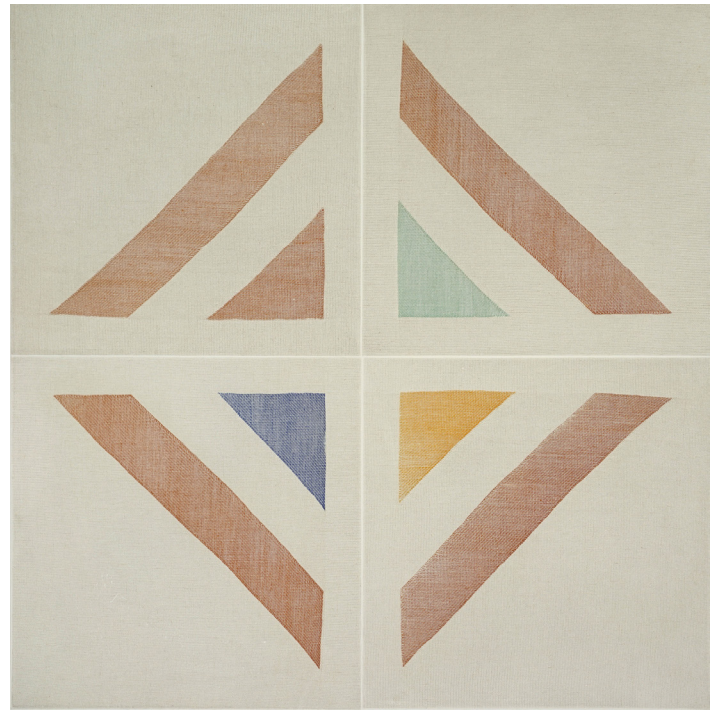
Q: Here you can change your mind about the colors quickly, but not so in the weaving itself.

RL: Yes. It's set. I've been sitting with these for a month or two. That's how it works in my studio. I make the drawings, and then I sit with them for a long time to work up the courage to weave them. So the choices happen pretty quickly and intuitively, but then there's this process that happens where I commit to them. That already happened with these, because I'd been sitting with them for a long time. But when I got here on Monday, I was back to working colors for some of the other arrangements.



PLAIN WEAVE GRID (SOLFERINO VIOLET/ VERMILLION RED / CERULEAN BLUE / INDIAN YELLOW), 2015

Color softground etching;
29" x 29"; Edition of 35



TWILL WEAVE GRID (SANGUINE / VIRIDIAN GREEN / INDIAN YELLOW / COBALT BLUE), 2015

Color softground etching;
29" x 29"; Edition of 35

Now that I've sat with them for three days, they are fine. But when those first came off the press after only a day or two, looking at that color combination, I was like, "Ooh, I don't know about that one."

Q: Can you see how this experience might inform something you'd do next?

RL: I've ended up creating patterns within the image, which is something that I don't do in weaving. One of the characteristics of weaving is patterning. But I create an autonomous shape. This process took me out of that. One of the things that we were talking about is using these prints as possible installations. Perhaps we could tile them to make a larger pattern on the wall? A larger pattern has the potential to get quite large, if a situation arose. It will be interesting to go back to weaving and think about this.

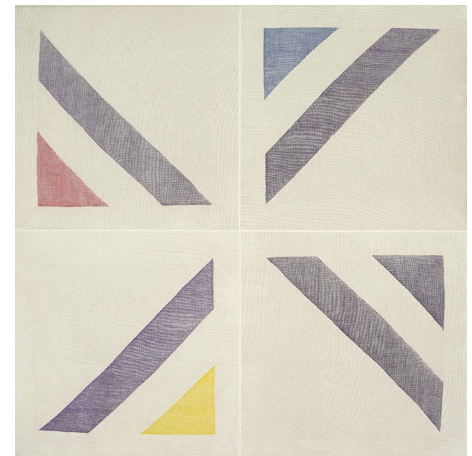
Q: Can you talk about inspirations for your work?

RL: The first person I thought about when we talked about doing prints was Anni

Albers. When I got closer to what I wanted to in terms of doing the modules, I started to think about Frank Lloyd Wright and his textile blocks. I wanted the weaving to be simple enough that the texture was the main component. If it got too intricate or detailed, you might be more focused on the image and not see the texture or pay attention to it. It also had to be something that could be rotated or had a lot of variety in the different combinations.

Q: In choosing this method of practice, was it a conscious response to this overwhelming technological age?

RL: Not consciously, but I love slowness. I'm always drawn to things that are slower. When I was a painter, the process was faster where you would do something and you would just see it, it materialized. As much as I love painting, there was something lacking in that for me. It was too fast.



TWILL WEAVE GRID (PERMANENT VIOLET / RUBY RED / COBALT BLUE / PRIMROSE YELLOW), 2015

Color softground etching;
29" x 29"; Edition of 35



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Ruth Laskey at Paulson Bott Press, 2015



DESIGN: MICHAEL OSBORNE DESIGN

ARTFORUM

Akel, Joseph, "Ruth Laskey & Suzan Frecon," *Artforum*, October 2014



Suzan Frecon, *Impracticable Enceinte (b)*, 2014, watercolor on Indian paper, 9" x 12 3/4".

SAN FRANCISCO

Ruth Laskey and Suzan Frecon

RATIO 3

2831a Mission Street

September 5–October 25, 2014

Located on the bustling Mission Street thoroughfare between to-die-for taquerías and mango-laden fruit stands, this exhibition of works by Ruth Laskey and Suzan Frecon, both known for creations that eschew the bombastic in favor of a cool craftiness, is a meditative world apart. Painstakingly woven over a period

of six months, the seven framed textile pieces from Laskey's "Twill Series," 2005–14, incorporate abstract, geometric forms that recall Navajo graphic motifs and Pomo Indian basket designs. Working on a diaphanous white linen ground, as in *Twill Series (Caribbean Blue/Black)*, 2014, the artist wove a single monochromatic shape, then bordered the form with a black line, but left one side of the blue plane exposed. With their minimal forms, her work undoubtedly hews closer to the likes of Bauhaus innovators Anni Albers and Gunta Stölzl than the samplers of Elaine Reichek.

Though Laskey may have traded in painting for textiles, the seven abstract watercolors by Frecon are a testament to her mastery of the former. Painted on salvaged Indian or Japanese papers, Frecon's compositions of rounded mounds and milky color fields evoke abstracted vistas. In *Indigo Light*, 2014, a hole pierced near the center of the creased paper resembles a horizon line bound by swathes of deep indigo. Nearby, the lozenge-shaped pool of marbled cobalt-blue encircled by a field of brick red in *Impracticable Enceinte (b)*, 2014, calls to mind a cooling oasis amid an arid landscape. With the din of the world beyond the gallery faintly perceptible, Frecon's watercolors remind us that art can offer a sublime refuge.

—Joseph Akel

Spotlight

Ruth Laskey

(MFA Annual 2004) by Evan J. Garza

In recent years, contemporary painting has seen a surge of artists re-evaluating the use of their materials, and in turn re-examining the medium of painting itself—expanding it in the process. Not only does San Francisco’s Ruth Laskey produce her own dye, but she also weaves the fabric on which it’s placed. There is no fiber in her work which is not touched, woven, or augmented by the artist, and she wouldn’t have it any other way.

The daughter of two professors, Laskey earned her undergraduate degree in Art History from UC Santa Cruz and later, after taking summer classes at California College of Arts and Crafts (CCAC), where her father teaches writing, she realized she wanted to pursue a studio program for painting and drawing.

Laskey has hit quite a stride since she was included in the 2004 MFA Annual while in grad school at California College of the Arts in San Francisco, a period in which her work shifted from something closely resembling painting to something much more conceptually and materially rooted in the practice of weaving. That woven patterning in Laskey’s work has also had a dramatic effect on her compositions, wherein the geometric forms in linen are the result of the weaving process itself.

“Out of undergrad,” Laskey tells me, “I started experimenting with materials and feeling like that was a really important part of the process of painting—investigating the materiality of it. The first step was to make my own paints, and once I did that, the whole materialist notion really exploded. By making my own paint, I’m really invested in the materiality of my work.”

Laskey’s practice of careful appreciation for her materials points to a shift in values in emerging contemporary art-making...





Twill Series (Peach)

2010

hand-woven and hand-dyed linen

23.5 x 17.5 inches

Image courtesy of Ratio 3,
San Francisco, CA



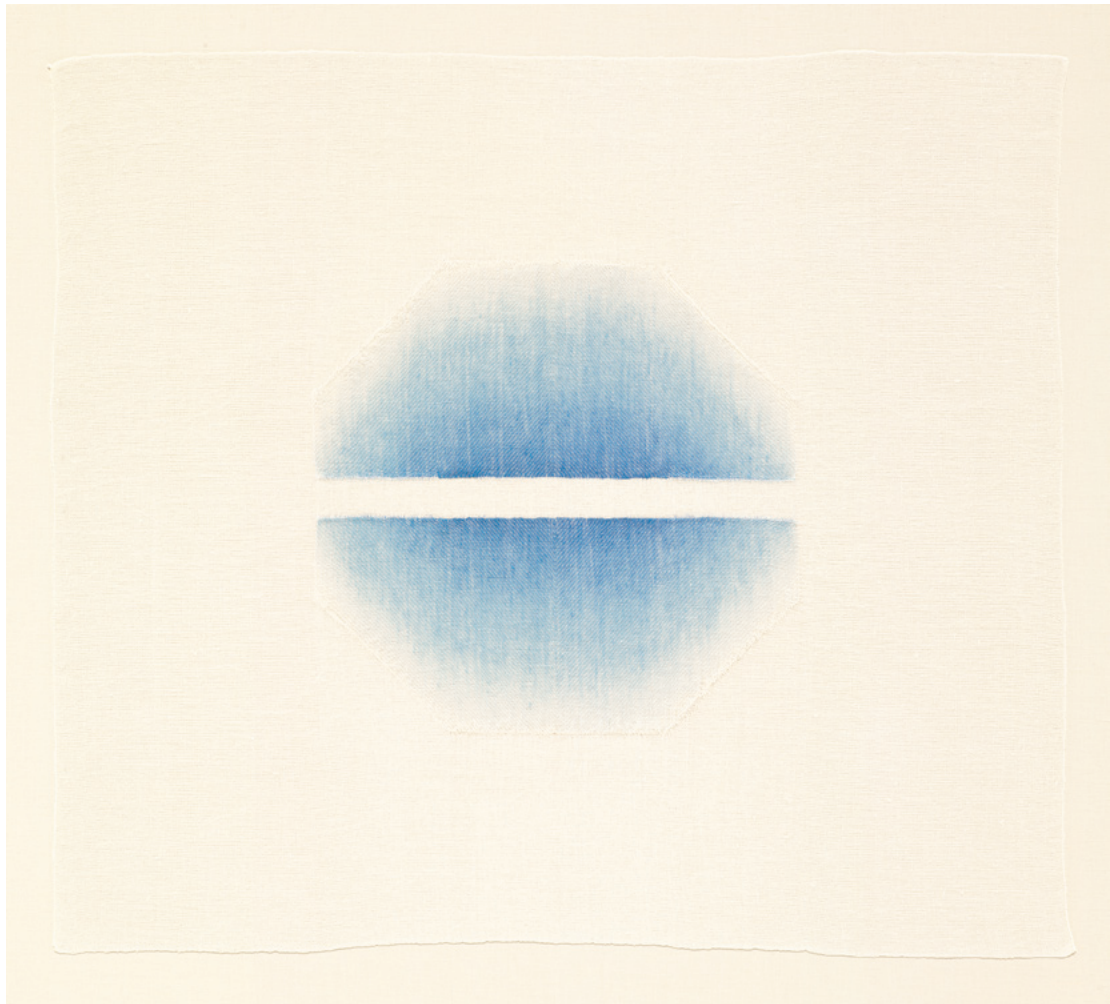
Twill Series (Sky Blue)

2010

hand-woven and hand-dyed linen

21 x 24 inches

Image courtesy of Ratio 3,
San Francisco, CA

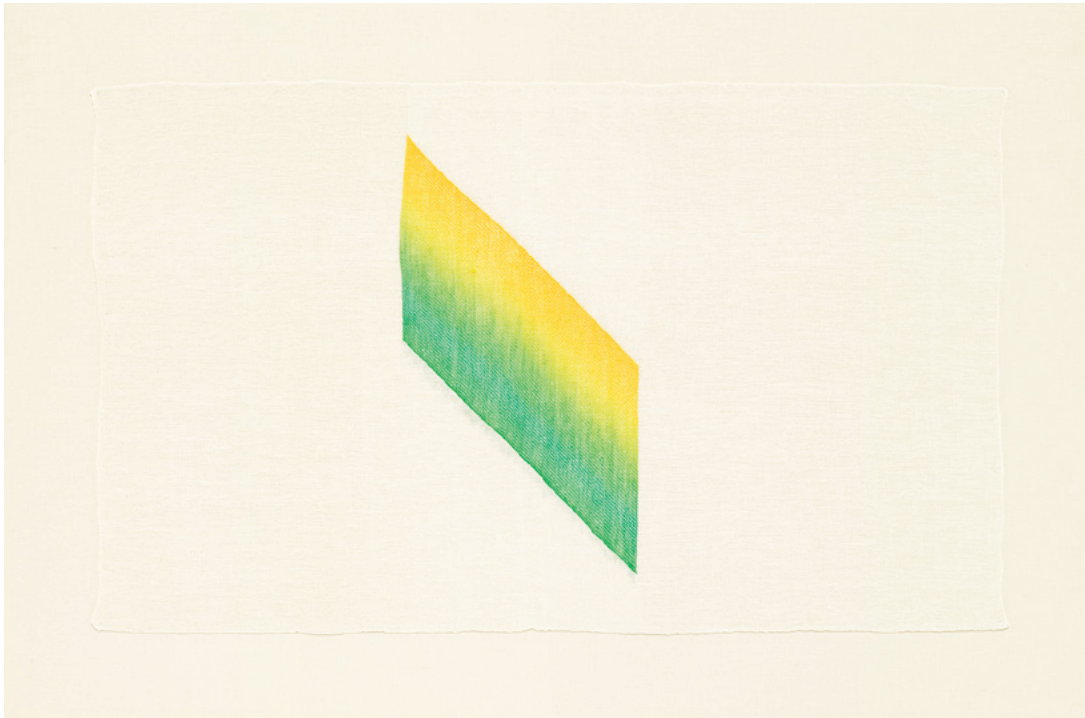


While working at CCAC in 2001, Laskey took a weaving class, and while it seemed like a strange direction to her at the time, her work would never be the same. After creating her own linen textiles on a loom, she began painting on the material, composing organic forms on the surface of the unprimed linen. Laskey, however, was interested in much more than just surface qualities, and by the time she started her master's program, she would nearly abandon painting altogether.

"My work changed quite a bit," she says, "mainly that big leap [from painting to weaving]. Before, the work was about making organic shapes. And so, between the two years of grad school, I made that big leap and said, 'Ok, I'm not going to use the paint anymore, I'll just do the weaving,' and that's when the geometric [forms began]."

Laskey's compositions are marked by their inherent ties to the act of weaving, with colorful geo-

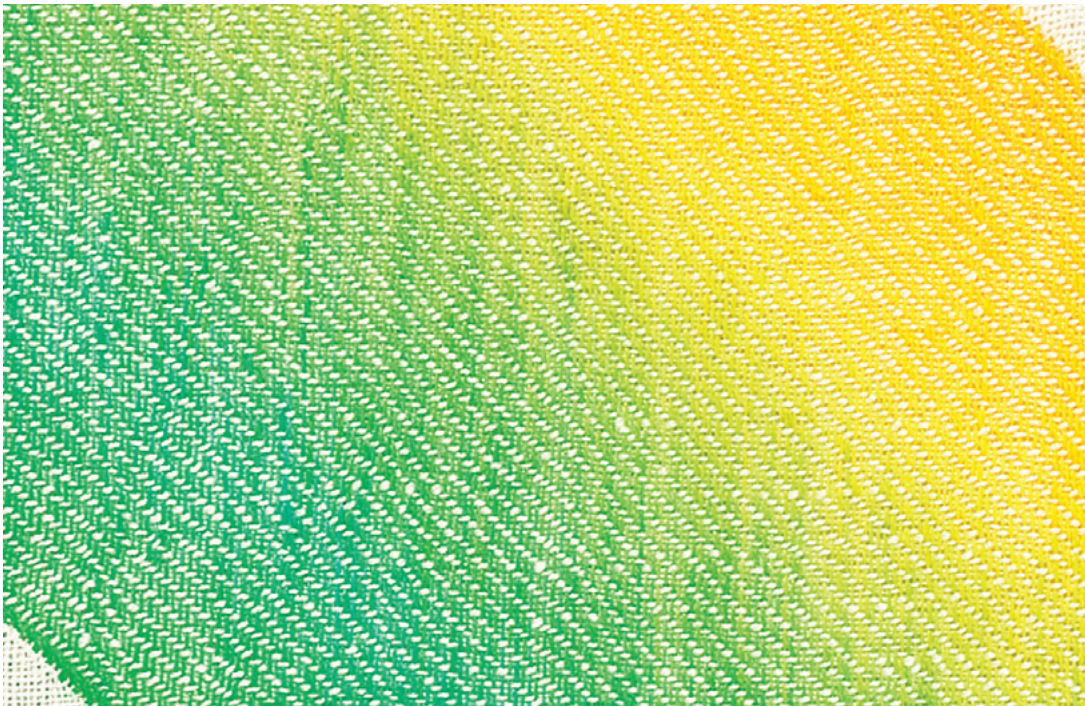




Twill Series (Yellow Green)
2009
hand-woven linen
21 x 24 inches
Image courtesy of Ratio 3,
San Francisco, CA



*Twill Series (Cayman
Isle Green)*
2010
hand-woven and hand-
dyed linen
18 x 27 inches
Image courtesy of Ratio 3,
San Francisco, CA



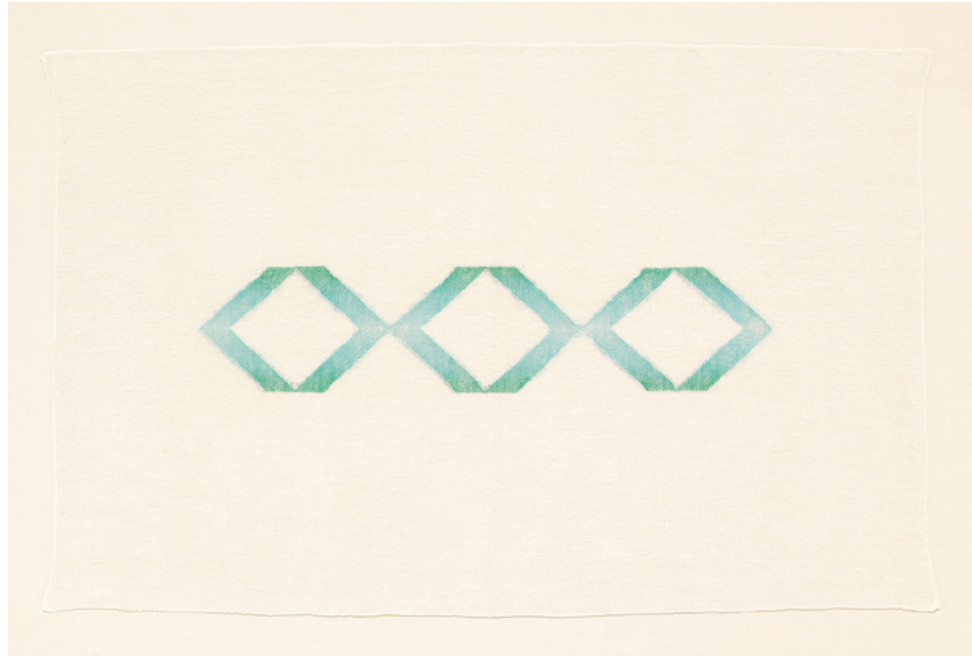
“By making my own paint, I’m really invested in the materiality of my work.”

metric figures cast in white linen fields of negative space. What is most remarkable about Laskey’s practice is her ability to draw by creating woven patterns. Her imagery is rooted in the structure that the loom creates by its nature, with elegant gradations in color and form carefully planned in advance of the weaving by dyeing threads of linen. The result is as subtle as it is meticulous.

This shift—“from painting to no painting” as she puts it—has produced some of the most celebrated work in Laskey’s career. She was recently awarded a prestigious SECA Art Award through the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) and the Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art (SECA), a biennial prize given to a small handful of Bay Area artists whose work will be featured jointly at SFMOMA.

“[The SECA Art Award] is really exciting for me because I grew up here,” she says, “and SFMOMA is where I really learned about art. So, it’s exciting for me to now be featured in that institution.”

Art historically, there is a great appreciation for artists who create their own materials, but the artist to whom Laskey may have the strongest ties—from the incorporation of geometric forms to the use of the loom—is Anni Albers. Perhaps the best known tex-



tile artist of the last century, Albers was a student of the Bauhaus, where the collective manifesto was ‘starting from zero’—purported in large part by her future husband Josef Albers—and the concept of starting from scratch has everything to do with Laskey’s work.

“As a very young painter, my motivation was not feeling invested in the materials. I couldn’t just pick up a tube of paint off a shelf and go about it that way. I wanted to get to the fundamentals of things. I think there’s something happening currently—and I don’t know if it’s something that I’m connected to or not—but the whole D.I.Y. movement, with a lot of people doing things on their own and starting from scratch.”



"For weaving, [Anni Albers] is number one for me in the way she thought about things, and the work as well," she says. "I don't usually look at too many weaving artists. I'm definitely more concerned with painting and drawing. "[Anni Albers] is definitely someone I'm thinking about. If anyone has really dealt with process and materiality a lot, it's her."

With that said, Laskey has certainly carved out a place for herself within contemporary practices. At a time when major international artists have perfected the 'studio staff,' with figures like Jeff Koons and Julie Mehretu making work with the help of dozens of assistants, Laskey's practice of careful appreciation for her materials points to a shift in values in emerging contemporary art-making where conceptual framework and technique go hand in hand.

"It's all based on my thinking about giving the loom its own expression," Laskey explains, "and thinking about what forms can come out of the patterning. Then thinking about how I can push that in various directions... I'm interested in seeing where it takes me, and following the process along that journey—seeing how far the loom will take me." ■

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*Twill Series (Black Cherry/
Amethyst/Fire Red)*

2007

hand-woven linen

19.75 x 18.25 inches

Image courtesy of Ratio 3,
San Francisco, CA

>

*Twill Series (Deep Orange/
Dark Brown/Purple)*

2007

hand-woven linen

19.75 x 18.25 inches

Image courtesy of Ratio 3,
San Francisco, CA



C culture

String Theory

Delicate weavings reveal a painter's approach to tapestry **BY ELIZABETH KHURI CHANDLER**

Ruth Laskey tucks her long, brown hair behind her ears and settles in front of her floor loom, much like a pianist about to strike ivory keys. Leaning in close to count the threads, she places her feet against the pedals and passes the shuttle through the web of alabaster strings.

The 35-year-old California College of the Arts graduate first began weaving in 2001 because she wanted to paint on handmade canvases. She purchased a 1970s loom off Craigslist, then jettisoned oils entirely—choosing to make weaving the medium instead. “With painting, I felt very disconnected from my work because I was buying the paint, buying the canvas, spending five hours making a painting, and then I was done. It didn’t feel complete,” she says. >>

At her Glen Park studio, Laskey sits in front of work from her Twill series.



In order to create the woven part, or weft, the wooden shuttle is fed through vertical threads called the warp. Laskey colors her threads by dipping them in a dye bath and names the final piece after the manufacturer's paint color. ABOVE At work at her 1970s loom. BELOW An assortment from Laskey's shuttle collection.

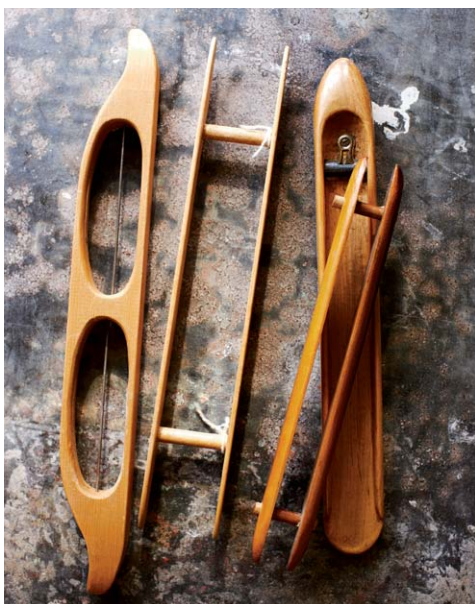
From a distance, her technique does look like brushstroke. Geometric patterns, series of squares, one flickering diagonal—color in these tapestries whispers with deliberate tempering. She hand-dyes her threads to generate gradations of tone. In one series, Laskey uses a third thread to represent the overlap of two hues on the grid. “I’ve always been more focused on the materials,” she says. “The weaving becomes a fluctuation. It’s what’s going on between the hard-edged and the curvy.” Critics have called the interplay, as seen in her Twill series, anachronistic and quiet; a fusion of design and process.

San Francisco art dealer and collector Sabrina Buell was intrigued by Laskey before she purchased a piece in 2008. “She is able to remove her hand from the gesture, and they [the art] are both personal and formal at the same time, which I find compelling,” says Buell.

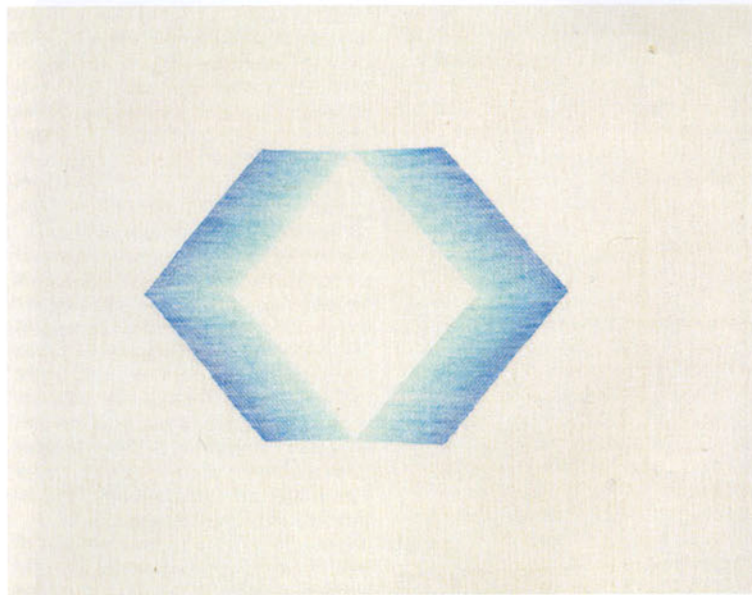
Most recently, the artist was named a recipient of the Biennial SECA (Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Artists) Art Award from SFMOMA. The honor is bestowed upon four independent artists who have not yet received widespread recognition. Nearly 30 finalists host

curators and patrons from the 50-year-old society at their ateliers—in Laskey’s case, her Glen Park garage, in front of the home where she grew up and now lives with her husband, sculptor Jonathan Runcio—to view their methods in action. Along with the award and a modest cash prize, Laskey will receive some well-deserved attention as part of a fall showcase at the museum. “We were impressed by the meditative quality and precision underlying her working method and how, with each investigation of color, line and gradation, she continues to push her materials in new directions,” says Tanya Zimbaro, co-curator of the prize.

For Laskey, process reigns supreme: She flicks on experimental jazz on her stereo, creates a version on graph paper and weaves each tapestry for a month until satisfied. In a way, her care mirrors one of her idols: Canadian “stripe” painter Agnes Martin. “She used to make them very slowly,” Laskey explains. “It was about the way the mark went across the painting rather than trying to make the mark mean something.” Then she pauses for a second. “It’s all about getting to the essence.” *Ruth Laskey is represented by Ratio 3 in San Francisco; ruthlaskey.com.* •



Ruth Laskey



Ruth Laskey
Twill Series (Peacock Blue)
(detail)
2009
Handwoven linen
76x67 cm

Galerie Cinzia Friedlaender, Berlin, Germany

The six colour studies and six small weavings that made up Ruth Laskey's concise exhibition at Galerie Cinzia Friedlaender looked like a neat fusion of Josef Albers' experiments with what he called 'perceptive painting' and Anni Albers' weavings from the Bauhaus workshop. The studies (each titled *Study for Twill Series*) are precise works on graph paper that map out a design for the production of the weavings, using squares filled in with very subtle watercolour fades. In the weavings themselves, all of which belong to the 'Twill Series' (2009), lozenges of a single bright colour woven into the structure of the fabric define a central white geometric shape that seems to hover on the surface of the fine white woven linen. Their delicately fading hues give them a spectral lucidity when seen from a distance – an etherealness at odds with the mathematical precision and laboriousness of their production, which becomes obvious when seen close up.

Laskey arrived at this practice of hand-weaving through a growing dissatisfaction with the given materials of painting. She first started making her own paints from scratch, and then started weaving her own canvases on a loom. Eventually she gave up painting on the canvases altogether, and began painting *into* them instead – that is, she began to paint the individual threads that are woven into the structure of the

canvas, calculating to the millimetre the colour fade, and using these threads to weave the image directly into the structure of the canvas. The results are complex both in design and effect: the diagonal twill of the weave structures the surface of the canvas and seems to work in opposition to the fine colour calibration.

In *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths* (1986), Rosalind Krauss calls the grid 'an image of the woven infrastructure of the canvas', and discusses the way, through its power, 'the image of the pictorial surface can be seen to be born out of the organization of pictorial matter'. By going right back to the canvas' woven infrastructure, Laskey examines this question of pictorial origins in the most literal of terms. But her embrace of the illusionistic qualities of colour, and her tactic of using this obsolete domesticated technique (the pleasingly irregular squares of the weavings look like fine antique linen napkins), removes the works from the realms of avant-garde dilemma, making claims instead for the values of a more intimate practice. In the end, these works have more in common with Tomma Abts' quietly self-contained, autonomous abstractions than with Modernism's masters. Though their technique raises the question of feminist practices, their drive towards essentialism has more to do with fellow Californian Robert Irwin's experiments with light and colour than Rosemarie Trockel's politics. They are private enquiries and vivid exercises in the fertile conjunction of production and perception.

Kirsty Bell

SFBG

SAN FRANCISCO BAY GUARDIAN

Huston, Johnny Ray, "GOLDIES 2010: Ruth Laskey," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, November 2010

GOLDIES 2010: Ruth Laskey

A deft use of weft and warp to create color forms in which minimalism and materiality intersect

11.02.10 - 9:20 pm | Johnny Ray Huston

One thing that Bay Area art has no shortage of is color. Whether it be Albers-informed theory, Op-influenced repetitious patterns, Mission muralismo, or mural-like Mission School paintings, in general, local color has been primary, if not outright garish. Ruth Laskey's palette stands apart — confident enough to be low-key or even muted in comparison. "Color is kind of it for me," Laskey says, in the middle of a sleepy afternoon at a Mission cafe. "It's where a piece gets its emotion."

You could say that there's a quality of quiet intensity to Laskey's work, and the artist herself is soft-spoken. She's also strong, clear, and candid in terms of viewpoint. "My relationship to color is not very systematic," she says, when the topic of Albers references in relation to her work is broached. "It's more intuitive. I already see things from a painter's perspective. When you're a painter making color, there's an evolution that happens."

In Laskey's case, this evolution is ongoing — and it isn't taking place within traditional painting. Both "7 Weavings," her first solo exhibition at Ratio 3 in 2008, and a self-titled show at the same space this year are taken from her larger "Twill Series," a growing group of "investigations" that she began in 2005, years after taking a weaving class in between undergraduate and graduate studies at California College of the Arts. "Twill is basic, the first pattern weave you learn," she says. "The loom I've been using from the beginning is basic. I was thinking about my understanding of weaving, and I was interested in how twill creates shape on its own. It kind of clicked one day that I could use twill, but insert the thread in the same way I would with tapestry."

That moment kick started Laskey's unique use of dye and weft and warp to create color forms in which minimalism and materiality intersect. Her "Twill Series" has generated a cover story critical appraisal in *Artforum* and many responses locally — in some ways, the discourse about her growing body of work (including my own 2008 piece for this publication, which focused on geometric elements) reveals as much about the writers as it does about the art itself, which invites contemplation and allows open interpretation. It's a mistake to assume this openness is cool detachment, though. "It's fabric," she says. "It's inherently warm."

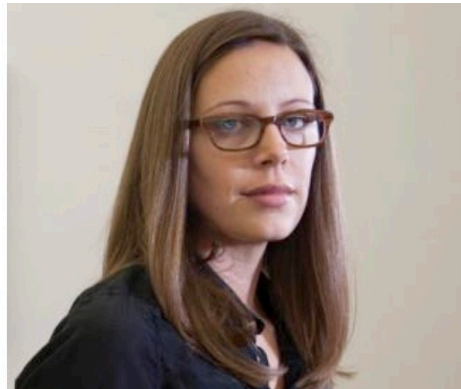


PHOTO BY SAUL BROMBERGER AND SANDRA HOOVER

At the moment, Laskey's studio is in the garage of her apartment in Glen Park, a neighborhood that has housed some artists of renowned dedication, like Bruce Conner. Her day job at California College of the Arts' Oakland library is one source of inspiration and perspective. Music could be another. When I ask her what sounds might make apt accompaniment for an audiovisual presentation of her art, her choice is Sun Ra. Thinking of her work as what Ra would call an "art form of dimensions tomorrow" adds another a playful element to its fabric. She uses blankness around an image as he uses the silence that surrounds sound. Space is the place.

As for Laskey's "Twill Series," at the moment it's hard to gauge how large it will grow, but there is no doubt her deployment of dye and geometric shape is subtly shifting. "It's an issue that artists have to deal with all the time," she reflects. "I might still be interested in what the work is doing, but is it still engaging for everyone else? There's always that tiny figure on your shoulder saying, 'Maybe you need to move on.' But I feel like it's taking me on this journey. It might be a really slow journey. It might have small steps. But I'm enjoying that. For me, it's fruitful."

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RUTH LASKEY builds her pictures one thread at a time. With a minimum of means—three or four colors of thread—she weaves geometric shapes into a ground of half-bleached linen: a chain of blue trapezoids (*Twill Series [Ice Blue]*, 2007); two differently hued triangles that intersect to form a third (*Twill Series [Deep Orange/Dark Brown/Purple]*, 2007); or green diamonds that overlap (*Twill Series [Khaki Green/Resin Green]*, 2006). The works are not so much explorations as contemplations of color and form, and while they allude to Josef Albers's studies of color interaction, they are too artfully contrived, too singular, to be exercises.

Laskey has only a small body of work; her labor-intensive process—of blending the dyes, then painting the colored threads before weaving the works on a simple loom—precludes any rapid output, to say nothing of rash decisions or expressionist gestures. For her first major one-person exhibition, to open next month at Ratio 3 in San Francisco, the thirty-two-year-old artist will show only seven recent works from her “Twill” series, along with a few studies on graph paper. But, as her work implores, there is no rush.

Unlike the vast majority of the work indebted to crafts that is now enjoying yet another gallery renaissance, Laskey's tapestries are neither ironic nor celebratory. They do not offer institutional critique as do, say, the embroidered samplers of Elaine Reichek, nor do they aim for feminist revisionism, or even sincerity. Laskey sidesteps both parody and commemoration with a deliberate effort. Anachronistic and quiet, her works speak to the often-disavowed possibility of autonomy in art—never daring actually to claim such autonomy, but heralding it nonetheless; they are a form of commitment.

As weft and warp intersect at right angles, Laskey's works internalize the modernist grid. No longer mere support for the artwork, the grid has become the structure of the artwork itself. Her twill pieces are formed through a reductive process that merges figure with ground, integrates shape and field, and fuses design and process. If painting, even at the pinnacle of Greenbergian flatness, still insists on a base

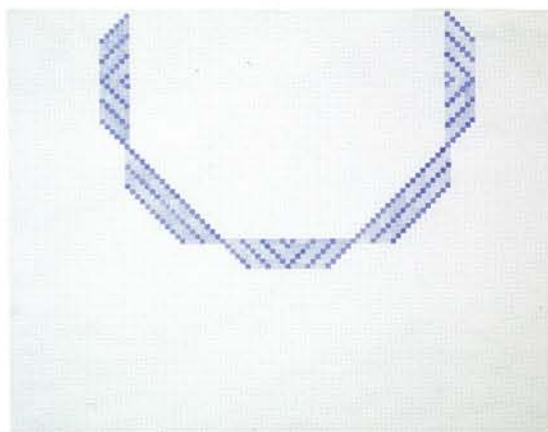
to which color is applied (“the stretched or tacked up canvas already exists as a picture,” Greenberg wrote, “though not necessarily as

a successful one”), these tapestries are not fields for projection, but rather instances of the figure being embedded in the ground itself. Yet the incorrigible flatness of Laskey's work is called to task by the process of twilling, in which the shuttle with the weft thread is passed over one but under two or more threads of the warp, giving the cloth a marked diagonal rib. Not only does the fabric itself reveal depth when examined in close-up, however, but the diamond shapes of *Twill Series (Camel/Golden Brown)*, 2006, for example, themselves shuffle between two- and three-dimensional forms, as the diamonds become pyramids, only to dissolve back into diamonds.

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OPENINGS

Rachel Churner on Ruth Laskey



Opposite page: Ruth Laskey, *Twill Series (Deep Orange/Dark Brown/Purple)*, 2007, handwoven linen, 19 3/4 x 18 1/4". This page: Ruth Laskey, *Study for Twill Series (Ice Blue)*, 2007, watercolor on paper, 8 1/2 x 11".

Laskey trained as a painter at California College of the Arts (formerly California College of Arts and Crafts; that pesky “Crafts” was dropped in 2003), where she received an MFA in 2005. She began mixing her own paints, then started to weave her own canvas and to paint on top of it. Organic forms with scatological references were painted in thick smears of brown, yellow, and pink alongside colored woven patches. Freed from the constraints of the readymade, she has now abandoned painting and bound herself to the strictures of the loom, to the saturation capacity of thread, to the diagonals of twill. She spends her prodigious labor on such an economy of materials in order to control the work's production from its most basic components. This is no small matter, and it complicates Laskey's insistence that Minimalism be seen as her guiding force. Though morphologically related to the precision and regularity of Minimalism's constructive methods—Donald Judd's “one thing after another”—Laskey's work has little of the obsessive repetition at that movement's core. Because she does not permit, let alone rely on, outside production, the “idea” escapes its fate of becoming (per Sol LeWitt's dictum) “a machine that makes the art.”

Even within the self-imposed limitations of the loom, Laskey stubbornly refuses to grant her design prominence over the form or the

materials themselves. The drawings on graph paper that accompany the tapestries may be models for her production, but they do not take precedence over the material process of the works' creation. And while beautiful in their precision—no coloring outside the lines here—these studies do little to convey the complexity of her working practice. Indeed, the diagrams she makes of the weaving plan itself—which shafts to lift, which color to introduce at which string—serve as much more intriguing and exacting documents of her artistic process.

As tapestry, Laskey's work is implicated in the line of “women's work,” both in and out of the art world. Hailing Bauhaus weavers like Anni Albers and Gunta Stölzl, her work retains the feminine implications of delicate handicraft, even as

she refuses to engage explicitly in a feminist critique of modernist painting. Laskey neither denies nor confirms a gendered status of painting, or of weaving, and it is

through this refusal that she strives to neutralize the loaded terms *art* and *craft*.

“The uncompromising radicalism . . . , the very features defamed as formalism” in the works of the most important artists of the age, Adorno once wrote, “give them a terrifying power, absent from helpless poems to the victims of our time.” Out of place and past its time, Laskey's formalist reengagement with color, form, and materiality is a recalcitrant rejoinder to contemporary art. The voice of her shuttle is not just that of the silenced woman, as in Sophocles' description of Philomela's plight; it is also that of a modernism rendered obsolete. □

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