



# Threads

New Work by Janice Lessman-Moss  
& Rowland Ricketts

  
**KENT STATE**  
UNIVERSITY



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October 13 - November 18, 2016





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## Contents

- 5 Forward  
by Anderson Turner
- 7 Janice Lessman-Moss: Wizard of Weaving  
by Bruce Metcalf
- 19 Vanitas in Blue:  
Rowland Ricketts 3/29/15-1/5/16 Series  
by Bhakti Ziek



A photograph of a textile studio. Long wooden shelves line the wall, filled with numerous spools of thread in various colors including white, blue, green, yellow, and red. The spools are arranged in rows, creating a sense of depth and organization. The lighting is soft and even, highlighting the textures of the thread.

**Textile Art at Kent State University  
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artistic research which is highlighted  
by the many successes of current  
students and alumnae.**

**An derson Turner**

# Forward

Presenting work that reveals distinctive artistic research is at the core of what we do in the School of Art Collection and Galleries at Kent State University. How we look at, make, and understand art fosters our search for interesting exhibitions and creative programming that augments the breadth and depth of practice in our school.

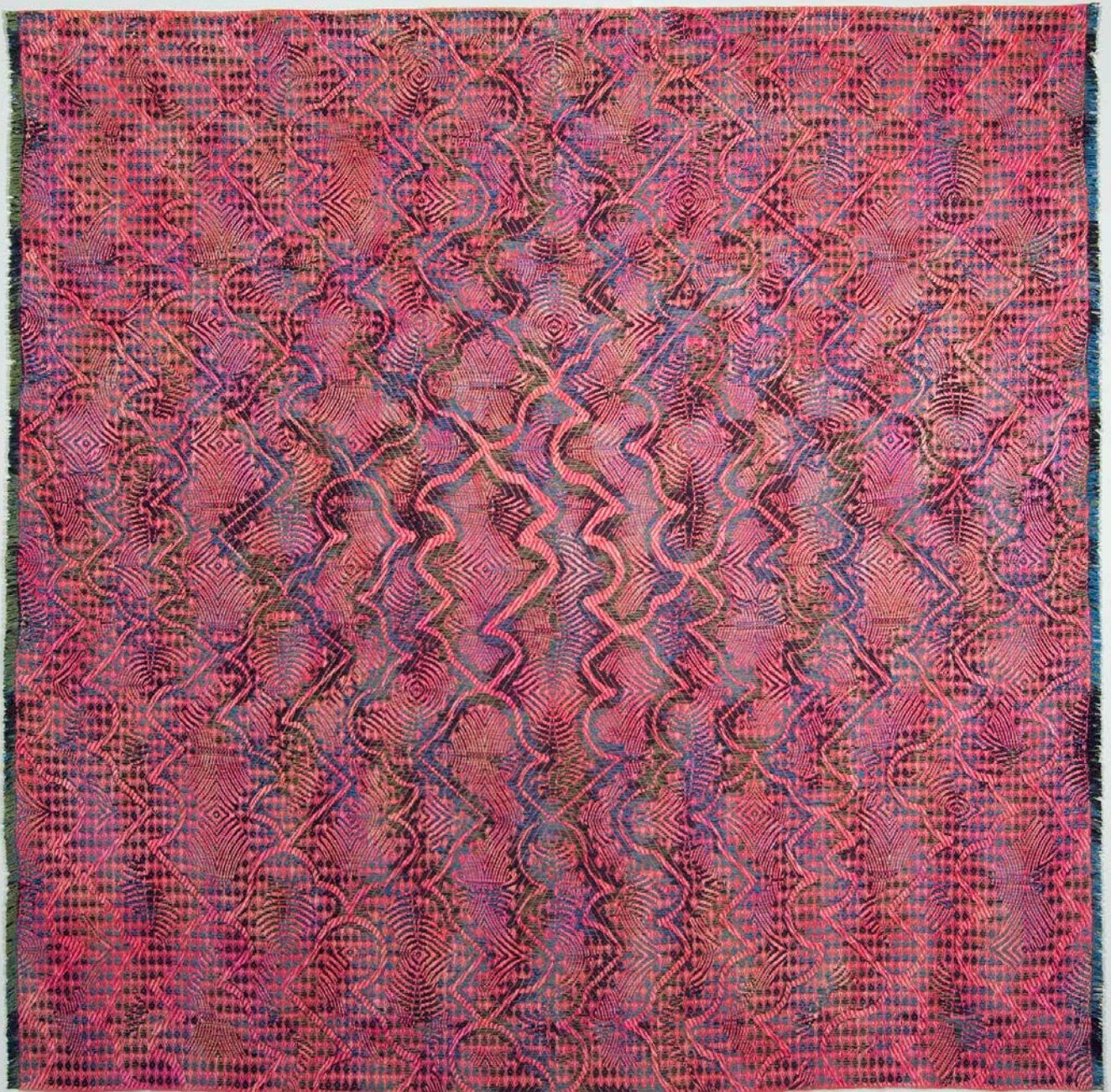
*Threads: New Work* by Janice Lessman-Moss and Rowland Ricketts features the work of two innovative artists working with the language of textiles today; united by their interest in expanding the roots of rich traditions in the field. Although Lessman-Moss focuses on permutations of weave structures made accessible by digital technology, Ricketts mines the depth of indigo blue as a source for conceptual and technical explorations. The two are also connected by their dedication to education, which has provided fertile opportunities for them to perpetuate their passion for the field.

I am excited to be able to bring this show to the Center for the Visual Arts Gallery at Kent State University. *Threads: New Work* by Janice Lessman-Moss and Rowland Ricketts, the second of our inaugural season shows, reinforces the gallery's mission to feature works by artists that serve to highlight programs in our school while exposing the university and Kent community to the scope of contemporary discourse and research in the visual arts.

The accompanying catalogue provides a record of many of the pieces featured in the exhibition. The visuals are beautifully enhanced by essays written by two renowned artists and writers, Bruce Metcalf and Bhakti Ziek.

Textile Art at Kent State University has a long history of engagement in artistic research which is highlighted by the many successes of current students and alumnae. With their extensive facilities recently relocated to our new Center for the Visual Arts, it will be interesting to see how the program will provide opportunities for new research investigations across disciplines.

-Anderson Turner  
Director, School of Art Collection & Galleries



#435, Dusk Walk, ©6/14, 57x57", silk, linen,  
digital jacquard, hand woven-TC2 loom,  
painted warp, shifted weft ikatd charcoal;  
53 x 80 in.

# Janice Lessman-Moss: Wizard of Weaving

by Bruce Metcalf

When I first met Janice Lessman-Moss in 1981, she was an off-loom girl. The 70s had produced a major movement away from the loom. You had artists plaiting paper, constructing felt, stacking skeins of thread, painting sticks and tying them together. Anything but weaving. As for Lessman-Moss, she was wrapping wooden rods with thread and building them into complex, shallow reliefs.

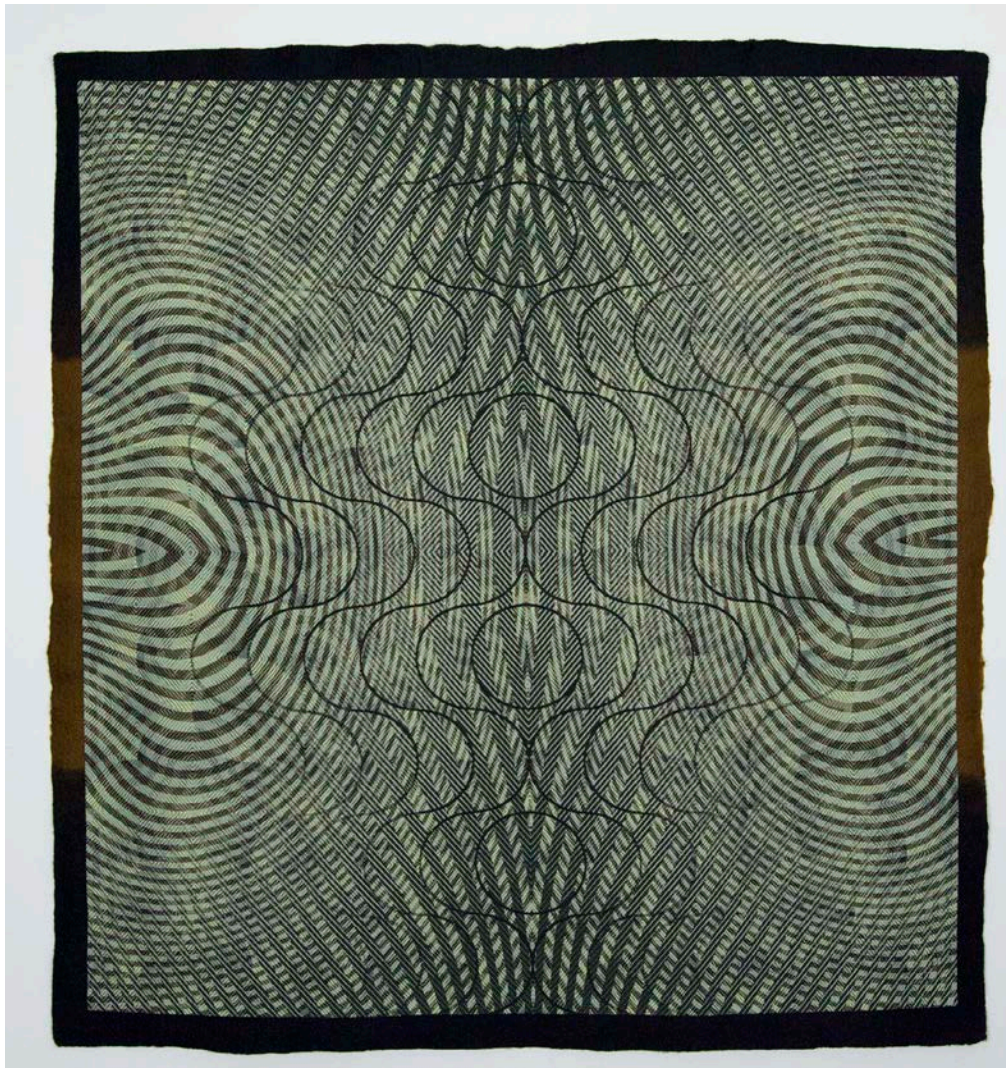
By 1990, she returned to her loom. Her primary interest was in strengthening her teaching, which was centered on weaving techniques. She quickly became enamored with the loom and its many possibilities. There's the underlying grid, of course. There are the inherent decorative qualities of repeated patterns. There's the suggestion of the infinite in the woven surface. And of course, there's color and more color. Lessman-Moss fell back in love with all of it.



#433, Local Journey: Dawn, Day, Dusk, ©1/14, triptych, 34.5"x53", linen, paper core, digital jacquard, hand woven on the TC2 loom, painted warp, shifted ikat weft

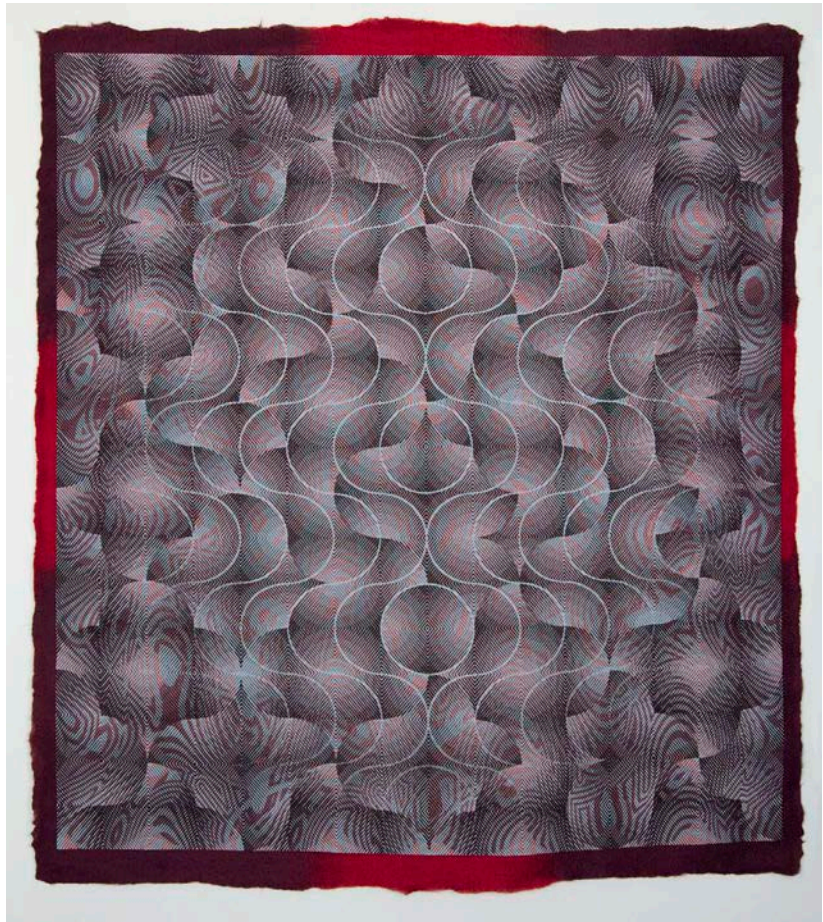
Before too long, she got interested in computer-controlled looms. The computer, especially when allied with new looms that can control every single thread separately, opens up the possibility for complexity that would be nearly impossible with a hand-operated loom. Only Jacquard looms and tapestry can approach the complexity that the computer-controlled loom can offer. Over the years, Lessman-Moss has become a pioneer in the use of computers and looms.

The lazy way to do digital weaving is to scan a photograph or a drawing into a machine, let some program work its magic, and email the file off to a Jacquard loom. Easy and impressive. But woven photographs do not exploit the full potential of the digitally-controlled loom. It is that potential that Lessman-Moss explores.



#447, ©8/15, 73x69", cotton,  
wool, digital jacquard, power  
loom woven, hand made felt

#445, ©7/15, 73x67", cotton,  
wool, digital jacquard, power  
loom woven, hand made felt



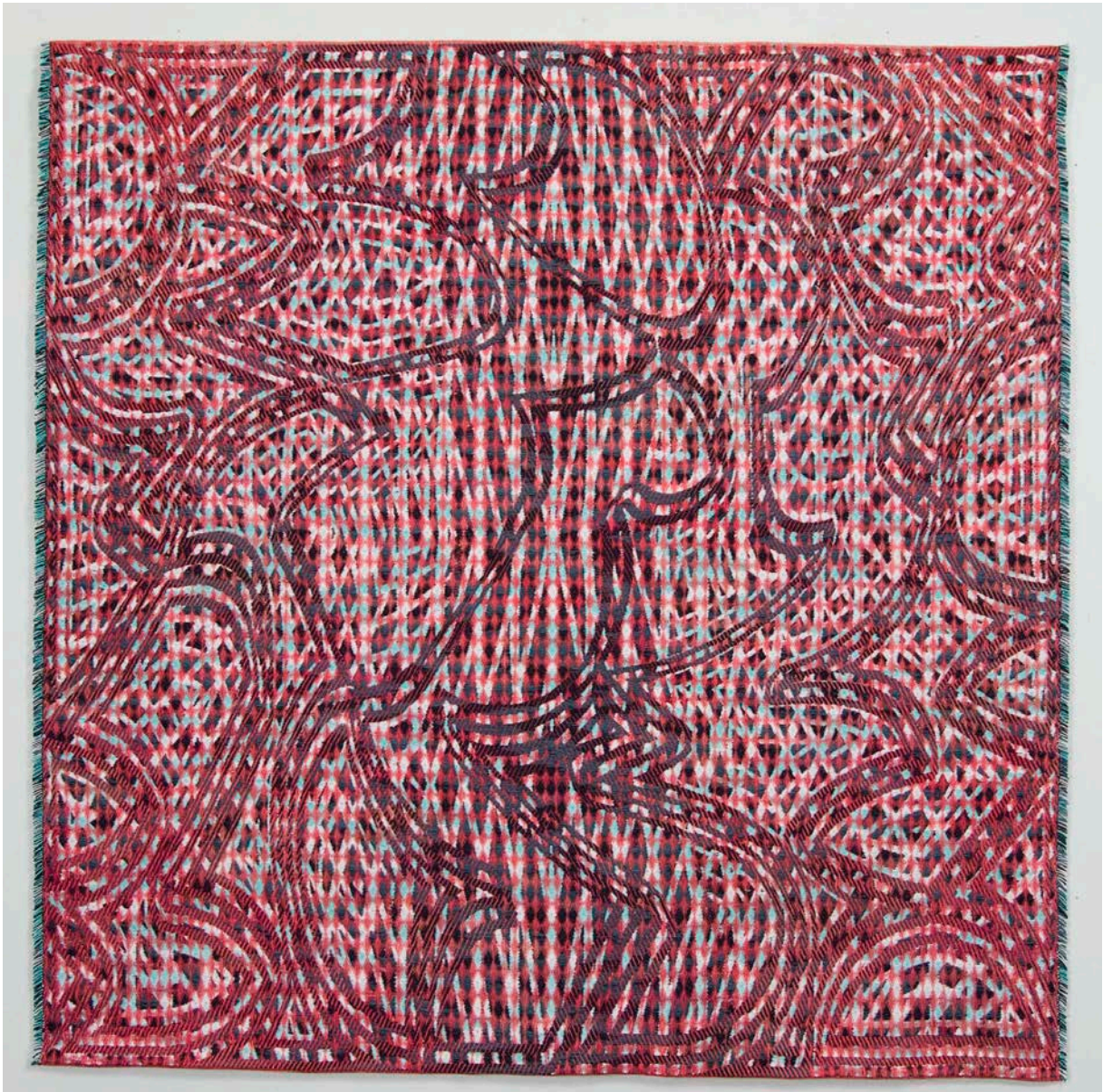
She will start with a pattern, which is developed using only generative tools in the computer program. Then she'll add another pattern, and another. In the end, she might have four (or more) simultaneous patterns that fade into and out of each other. Some patterns are traditional weaving designs, like a twill or a lozenge repeat. Others are her inventions: rambling lines that might resemble diagrams of molding, weather maps, vortices, or even parts of the body. Then, on the computer, she layers pattern upon pattern, arriving at a dizzying complexity.

Lessman-Moss will often raise the ante by applying pattern to both weft and warp. She will dye the linen weft in the ikat technique (in which bundles of thread are tied and dyed, unraveled and threaded on the loom) so color seems to fade in and out in an unpredictable pattern. She will also paint the silk warp threads, creating yet another pattern that is not immediately obvious in the completed weaving. In the finished weaving, the painted pattern seems to shimmer, echoing the sheen of the silk itself. Ultimately, there are two kinds of patterns: the designed-in patterns built by the loom, and the added colors of warp and weft. Everything interacts.



#440, Local Journey: Flickering Light, ©10/14, 62x57"  
silk, linen, digital jacquard, hand loom woven TC2,  
painted warp, shifted weft ikat

To look closely at a Lessman-Moss weaving is to play a game of hide-and-seek that has no solution. Humans are hard-wired to recognize patterns; it's built into our perceptual apparatus. So you pick out one pattern, and begin to trace it across the surface of the weaving. But wait! It's interrupted by another pattern, which carries its own color and tempo. That one, in turn, is interrupted by another, and another. Because we can only perceive one (or possibly two) patterns at a time, we are constantly frustrated and intrigued. The game is to see the entirety of one pattern, and then relate it to another. But since there may be six or more patterns, all co-existing on the same woven plane, it's a task that can never be resolved.



#450, Local Journey: Winter Path,  
©11/15, 57.5x57.5", linen, cotton,  
digital jacquard, hand woven TC2  
loom, painted warp shifted weft ikat

You are engaged in a game of following, losing, and re-finding patterns. There's a weird pleasure to it, because you can step back and see a gestalt, a sense that each pattern threads through the entire composition. But exactly how and where remains out of reach. It's thoroughly engaging. Lessman-Moss's compositions suck you in, frustrate, and fascinate all at once.

Other things are going on as well. Any time you overlap one figure on top of another, you suggest space. It works the same way with pattern. And if you have multiple layers of patterns, you imply a fairly deep space, in which some features pop forward and others recede. This is the famous "push-pull," once a major theme of abstract painting.

As a result, one might be tempted to think Lessman-Moss's works are just like paintings. They are not. They are woven structures, and they are built. No painting could be like these objects. The color is not on the surface, but part and parcel of the structure. Furthermore, the logic of the image emerges inevitably from the fact that they are constructed of interlaced thread. The craft and the material are always present, insistently so. A painting is an entirely different animal.

One might also be tempted to think Lessman-Moss's weavings are straightforward formalist art: mere arrangements of color and line and shape. Wrong. Many of the patterns call memories and associations to mind. Some are basic, like the memory of cloth. Others are a bit removed, like their connections to historical forms in the decorative arts. And some are quite abstract, as in the motion of circles and the chakras. But all are present, covertly or otherwise. And they pull the weavings away from "pure" form and color. There are always connections to the world we live in.

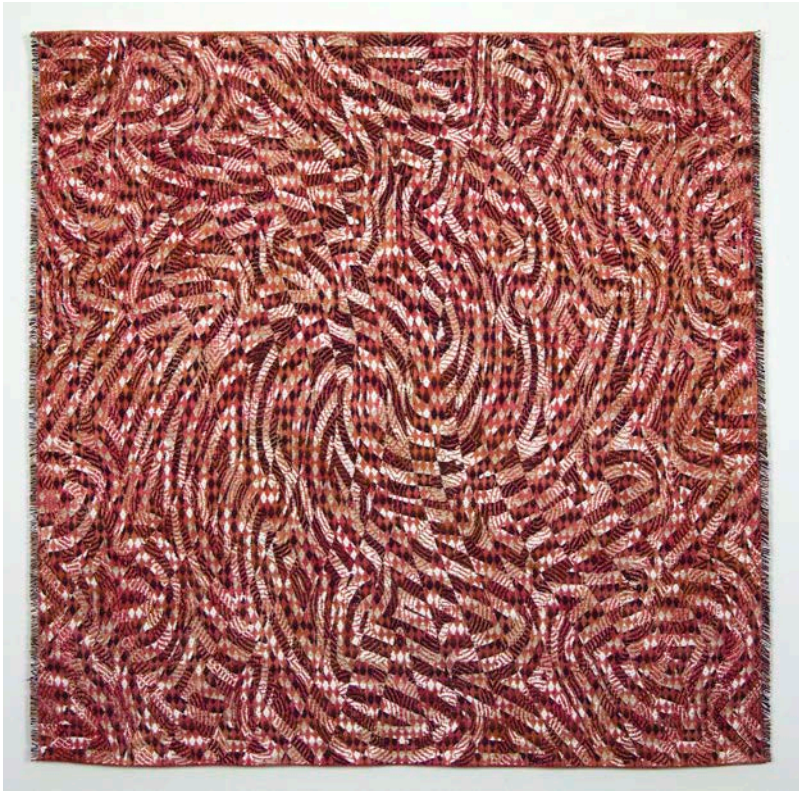
The woven surface is redolent of cloth and the familiar sensation of textile in the hand. The tactility of the weaving is inescapable, even if you can't touch it. That, in turn, pulls you into the realm of things, not ideas. The human body is never far away. These are objects, always objects, living in the physical realm.

Lastly, these are craft. They require a deep knowledge of both technique and material to make. This is craftsmanship, and it does not come cheap. Make no mistake, Lessman-Moss is an expert, a master of her craft. The weavings stand as visible evidence of her tremendous expertise, and one hopes that they motivate others to pursue a similar path. As Lessman-Moss says, "It's important to perpetuate this knowledge," so it can survive into the following generations. I, for one, hope it will.

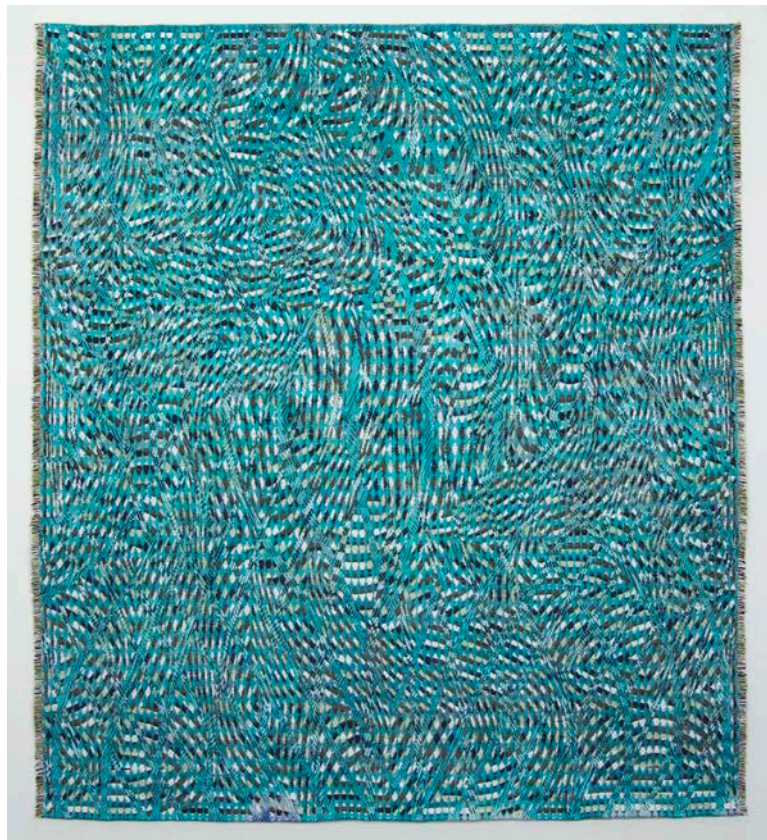
*About the author:*

*Bruce Metcalf is a jeweler and occasional writer  
who lives near Philadelphia.*

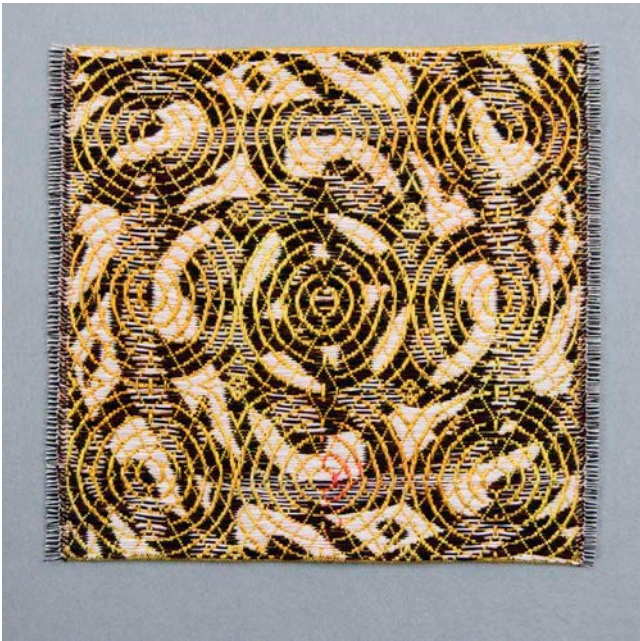
#453, Local Journey: Dry Air,  
©6/16, 57.5x57.5", silk, linen,  
cotton, digital jacquard, hand  
woven TC2 loom, painted  
warp, shifted weft ikat



#452, Local Journey: Humid Air,  
©4/16, 65x57, silk, linen, cotton,  
digital jacquard, hand woven  
TC2 loom, painted warp, shifted  
weft ikat



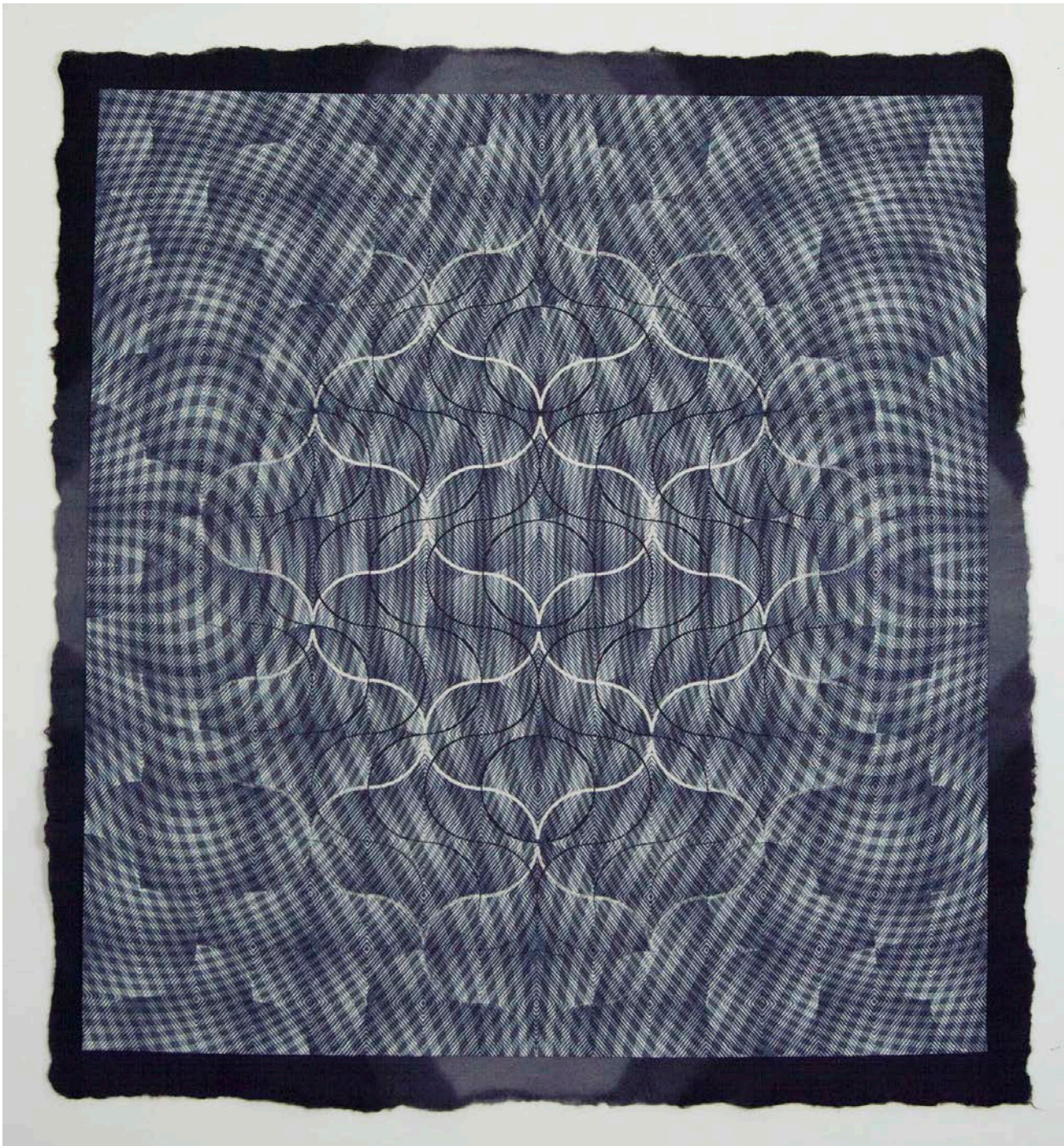




#456, Summer Air II, series of small weavings, silk, linen,  
paper core, digital jacquard, hand woven TC2 loom, painted  
warp

*(left to right, starting top left)*

- a. (blue), ©7/16, 11.5x12.5"
- b. (green), ©7/16, 11.5x12.5"
- c. (yellow), ©7/16, 11.5x12.5"
- d. (red), ©7/16, 11.5x12.5"
- e. (blue with red and black weft), ©8/16, 11.25x12"
- f. (green), ©8/16, 11.25x12"
- g. (yellow), ©8/16, 11.25x12"
- h. (red with green and black weft), ©8/16, 11.25x12"



#448, ©8/15-16, 75x69", cotton, wool, digital jacquard, power loom woven, hand made felt

# Janice Lessman-Moss

Janice Lessman-Moss was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and resides in Kent, Ohio where she is a Professor and Head of the program in Textile Art at Kent State University. She received her BFA from the Tyler School of Art, Temple University in 1979 and her MFA from the University of Michigan in 1981. Since then she has exhibited her weavings widely throughout the United States and internationally, including solo exhibitions at the Galleria Willa in Lodz, Poland, the Museum of Fine Art and Culture in Las Cruces, New Mexico, and at the Kent State University Museum. Other exhibition highlights include: "Neo Geo," at the Akron Art Museum 2015-2016; "Flashback to Now: Celebrating the History and Future of the Ohio Arts Council's Fellowships for Individual Artists," and "Let's Get Digital," both mounted at the Riffe Gallery, Columbus, OH 2015 and 2012; "Fiberarts International 2013 and 2016," Society for Contemporary Craft and Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, Pittsburgh, PA; "New Material World," Sheldon Museum, University of Nebraska, Lincoln; "Rijswijk Textile Biennial 2011," Museum Rijswijk, Netherlands; the second and seventh "Cheongju Juried Craft Exhibition," Korea; and the first, second and third "International TECHstyle Art Biennial," San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles, California, 2010, 2012 and 2014.

Lessman-Moss has been awarded a number of Individual Artist Fellowships from the Ohio Arts Council beginning in 1984, and received an Arts Midwest/National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Crafts. She recently completed a large scale weaving commissioned by the National Polymer Innovation Center at the University of Akron, funded through the Ohio Percent for Arts program, and was a recipient of the Ohio Governor's Award for Individual Artist in 2016.

As a member of the textile community, Lessman-Moss served as External Relations Director for the Textile Society of America from 2006-2010 and is a Founding Member of the Midwest Fiber Art Educators Network (MFAEN.) She has also served as curator for exhibitions of textiles and pattern including: "The Poetics of Pattern," Riffe Gallery, Columbus, Ohio in 2013, and "Binary Fiction: Digital Weaving 2010," which was mounted at the Eisentrager-Howard Gallery, University of Nebraska- Lincoln.

Her art practice revolves around an interest in the interconnection of abstract systems rooted in the common binary language of the computer and the loom. Networks of patterns, composed digitally on the computer screen are informed by the architecture of the weaving process in combination with an intuitive sense of order and improvisation. Based in the geometry of the circle within the square, a relationship is orchestrated between the stability of the horizontal and vertical axes of the grid – the warp and weft threads of the weaving - and the dynamic fluidity of the curve. This dense field of motifs is intended to reflect the essence of competing dynamics in our own world; of circular and linear time, of the finite and infinite; a complex connection rooted in an underlying order.

For more information about Lessman-Moss and her work please visit her website:  
[www.janicelessman-moss.com](http://www.janicelessman-moss.com)



Group 1a, 1/30



Group 1b, 2/30



Group 1c, 3/30



Group 1d, 4/30

3/29/15 – 1/5/16 is a series of 30 weavings, each of which was placed in a box with a slit or hole cut in the top. The boxes were then placed in the greenhouse where I start the seedlings and winnow the harvested indigo on the day that I planted seeds this past growing season. The weavings were left in place until the year's composting was complete. As very long exposures, these weavings capture in their fading the beautiful contradiction of time necessary to create their color and its inevitable demise.

# Vanitas in Blue: Rowland Ricketts' 3/29/15-1/5/16 Series

by Bhakti Ziek

Rowland Ricketts is an artist, a farmer, a parent, a teacher, and an expert on indigo. He is a polymath, with indigo being his underlying unifying subject. The 3/29/15-1/5/16 series exemplifies how his studies of the mythic indigo plant shape his life. These weavings not only yield answers concerning the nature of the blue dye, they exhibit physical evidence of the passage of time; specifically, the time it took Ricketts to plant, grow, harvest and compost a new year of dyestuff. These textiles flaunt their authenticity: there is the cloth, the color, the sun bleached areas and the visual power they emanate. He could have called the series Vanitas in Blue.

The works in 3/29/15-1/5/16 are small. So small that you have to go up to them and look closely; so small that it becomes a personal exchange between you and the art, with no room for anyone else at that moment. Steeped in the craft of making, where the next idea and step in the journey grows out of the actual making of the work, Ricketts says, “through working, doors open up”. While acknowledging a deep gratitude and debt to the traditional indigo craft of Japan, Ricketts has created a series of time-based contemporary work that embodies the full cycle of life. Like a vanitas painting, he has simultaneously captured the full bloom of indigo, along with its fading and destruction. These are poetic visions of a cycle from birth to death.



Group 2a, 5/30



Group 2b, 6/30



Group 2c, 7/30



Group 2d, 8/30



Group 4a, 9/30



Group 4b, 10/30

Ricketts would make a good model for a contemporary superhero in a graphic novel. He has lived the hero's quest: he went to a foreign country (Japan), he apprenticed with a master (actually two—the indigo farmer, Osamu Nii and the indigo dyer, Riichiro Furusho), he married the princess (his wife Chinami, an artist/weaver), and he returned home to rule in peace (he has tenure at the University of Indiana, Bloomington). Today other experts come to Ricketts with their questions about indigo, and he has answers. But it is the questions he asks himself that become the catalyst for his art. 3/29/15-1/5/16 evolved out of a known characteristic of indigo. He says, “Like many others who have worked with indigo, I have given my life to making a dye that I know one day will fade.” So his question formed: in the months it would take him to grow and harvest the year's indigo, could he create faded areas which would convey that passage of time?

Like a careful scientist, Ricketts set up the experiment. He knew light would fade the indigo but there were other variables to consider. If he made a slit or shape in covers and placed it directly onto his dyed cloth, the exposure to the sun would produce a uniform, sharp-edged mark, like a solar print. If he placed the cover too far from the cloth he wouldn't get anything. What he wanted was a mark that captured the movement of the sun as it moves east to west and north to south throughout the year. He was looking for that place where the sun's progression would blur the edges of the decolorization. It took a number of failed attempts before he got the results we see. Ricketts says the pieces in 3/29/15-1/5/16 are actually part of a project that spanned almost two years. The final weavings contain shapes that hover in the cloth, manifesting movement and



Group 4c, 11/30



Group 4d, 12/30

energy, while remaining stationery. They do what he hoped for, and more. Here is the power of art: the visual that is simultaneously concrete and mysterious, known and unknown, producing an “ah” while giving the maker more questions to investigate.

Looking at the works in 3/29/15-1/5/16 is a bit like walking into a dark room and adjusting to the dimness of the light. Wait...look...and more is revealed. The slightly rectangular planes of groups 1, 3 and 6 are actually composed of four quadrants. Half the warp is bleached linen and half is unbleached. The same is true for the weft—so where bleached warps intersect with bleached wefts, Ricketts gets his lightest section, and where unbleached warps interlace with unbleached wefts he gets his darkest quarter, while the two remaining areas are inversed bleached and unbleached threads. These differences are prominent in group 6, where most of the ground is left undyed, but when you notice it in the other groups there is a delightful sense of discovery. Another “ah.”

Ricketts, the investigator of indigo, runs through many permutations of elements in this deceptively quiet series of works. For groups 1-3, the threads were woven into cloth before being dyed. As the number of times the fabric was immersed in the indigo vat increased from one to many dips, so the blue grows in intensity. There is a figurative rhythm in the series also: horizontal imprints in group 1 become vertical marks in group 3; then group 4 contains both, as well as a circular shape. This group also has a notably different sense of depth and texture, caused by the fact that Ricketts dyed their threads before weaving them into cloth. The bleached shapes become more imbedded in this group than the previous ones.

Group 6, the most emotional of the exhibited series, has its color produced in yet another way: Ricketts placed the cloth in layers and poured the indigo onto the center. Not only does it produce shapes with uneven areas of blue, but, like Rorschach inkblots, their organic forms become easy vehicles for a viewer to imbue with a narrative. The beauty of the exposed ground cloth, with its natural tones, contrasting to the swirling energy of the blue spheres makes each panel a universe to decipher.

Each weaving in 3/29/15-1/5/16 is a holistic expression of the many facets of Ricketts' life. He says his life and his family's life are shaped by the seasons of the indigo growing cycle. In the 280 days that he exposed the cloth to rays of light, he also farmed his indigo so he could continue to make his art. Anyone who has lived in a place with a long tradition of knowledge knows that there is nothing static about the lineage that gets passed from one person to another. Knowledge breathes; it demands the maker be present and pay attention to the existing moment. Ricketts is a current retainer of information that has literally been cultivated for thousands of years, but as he works in the fields, new situations arise that he must trouble-shoot. He has taken this living lineage into his life, kept it alive, added to its scope; and each semester he offers his students the possibility of their becoming another link in the chain.

Ricketts has become the American guru of indigo. People come to him for answers about growing and dyeing with indigo, but in 3/29/15-1/5/16 he responds with subtle compositions that mimic the cycle of living organisms. By using his knowledge of indigo—that he can create color and then remove it—he is also reminding us that our own lives have a rhythm of growth and decay. His modern vanitas remove the human form but place us squarely in the cloth.



Group 5a, 18/30



Group 5b, 19/30



Group 5c, 20/30



Group 5d, 21/30



Group 5e, 22/30



Group 6a, 23/30



Group 6b, 24/30



Group 6c, 25/30



Group 6d, 26/30



Group 6e, 27/30

It is not easy in this era of speed and monetizing nearly everything, to work slowly, quietly, in a non-commercial manner. Ricketts has chosen to follow the dictates of his heart. Indigo led him to a place where tradition is still honored, where the indigo experts understood their place in the universe, learned from elders and shared with the next generation. There is a discipline to this way of life, and a code of honor to be true to the craft of your art. We are lucky that Ricketts is travelling this path. He has returned to America, nourished the indigo, enabling it to grow and thrive and pass from one condition to another. It has become the vital work that defines his life; an ordering of truth that embraces growth and decay, which he shares with us in 3/29/14-1/5/16.

*About the author:*

*Bhakti Ziek is known internationally for work that has ranged from backstrap weaving to digital jacquard. She lives and works in Randolph, Vermont.*



10/30

# Rowland Ricketts

## Bio

Rowland Ricketts utilizes natural dyes and historical processes to create contemporary textiles that span art and design. Trained in indigo farming and dyeing in Japan, Rowland received his MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 2005 and is currently an Associate Professor of Studio Art at Indiana University. His work has been exhibited at the Textile Museum in Washington, DC, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, and the Seattle Asian Art Museum. Rowland is a recipient of a 2012 United States Artists Fellowship and a 2014 Martha Stewart American Made Award.

For more information about Rowland Ricketts and his work, please visit his website:  
<http://www.rickettsindigo.com>

## Statement

The smell of an indigo vat just as it begins fermenting and springs to life is one of ripeness; a moment of rich potentiality when, as a maker, I momentarily stand between the history of the materials and processes that helped me get the indigo thus far and the promise of all the works that the vat is still yet to realize.

I grow and process my own indigo (*Polygonum tinctorium*) using Japanese methods that are centuries old. The leaves are harvested, dried, and composted by hand to make the traditional Japanese indigo dyestuff called sukumo. The sukumo is in turn fermented in wood-ash lye to create a natural indigo vat.

My decision to work this way is one that consciously favors slower, natural processes and materials over more immediate, synthetic options. Today, with petroleum-derived indigo readily and cheaply available, my choice to plant, transplant, weed, harvest, winnow, dry, and compost the indigo by hand is not one of necessity. Instead it is a conscious act of recognition that all the energy extended in the farming and processing of the indigo plants is just as much a part of the final dyestuff as the indigo molecules themselves.

In addition, my own experiences with indigo – first as an apprentice in Japan followed by years of working with and learning from this dye – have made me aware of a connection that leads not just from my teachers to me, but one that reaches back to my teacher's teachers and the people they learned from, back into a past in which the processes I use were developed through the accumulated experiences of all who have ever worked with this unique dye.

I find great value in this connection indigo provides to a greater human tradition. Of equal value to me is the time and energy I invest in the farming, processing, and fermenting of this dye. As a dyer I strive to transfigure all the energy of human endeavor expended on this dye so that its vitality lends its life to and lives on in the dyed cloth.



The right side of the image is a vertical strip of text, which is mostly illegible due to extreme blurring and low resolution. The text appears to be a single column of small, dense characters, possibly a list or a block of prose, but the individual words and sentences cannot be discerned.



The right page contains dense, illegible text, likely a scan of a document or book. The text is arranged in multiple columns and appears to be a continuous flow of information, though the specific content cannot be discerned due to the low resolution and high density of the characters.

