Whole Brain Weaving

by Cameron Taylor-Brown

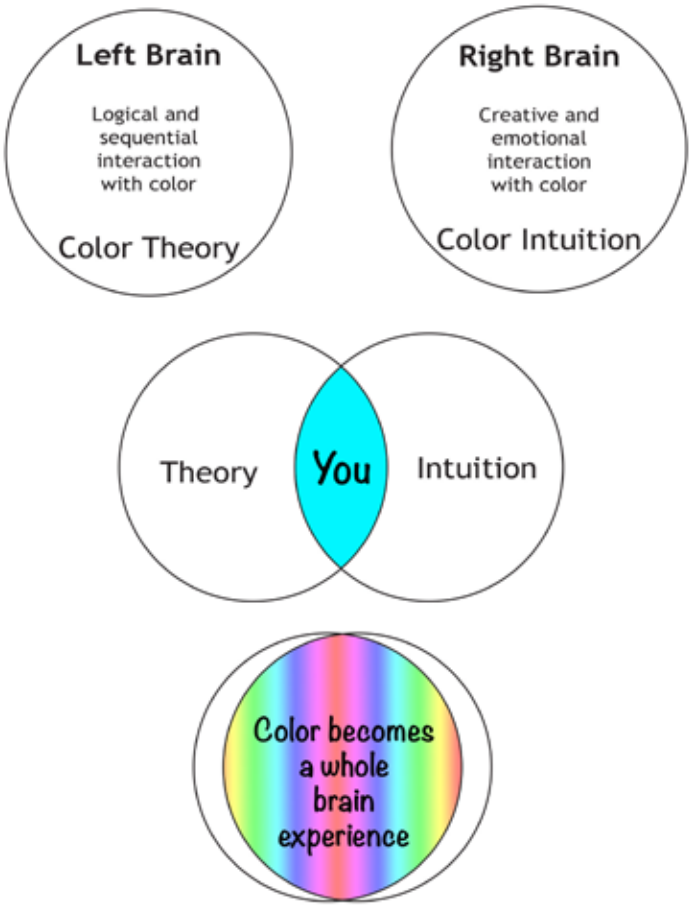
When I discovered weaving, one of my earliest influences was Anni Albers, an amazing artist, designer, weaver, writer and educator who embodied the concept of whole brain weaving. She first learned to weave at the Bauhaus, an influential and innovative design school in Germany.

Albers developed a deep understanding for the materials and structures of woven cloth and integrated this knowledge into creative, original and profoundly thoughtful woven works.
What do I mean when I call Albers a whole brain weaver? I mean that she merged creativity with technique, expressing both the art and the craft of weaving, and in the process became "a weaver who changed art, and an artist who changed weaving."

How might whole brain weaving be explained using the language of right brain and left brain?
Right brain weavers are considered to be creative, emotional, visual, and imaginative. They use texture and color with wild abandon, but often shy away from the technical aspects of their craft. They think they'll never understand all those complicated weave structures. Left brain weavers are identified as analytical, logical, sequential and rational. They are great at reading weave drafts but often think they are "not good with color" and "not creative."

Just to get it out there, the whole idea of "left brain versus right brain" lacks credence amongst neuroscientists - but for us laypeople, left vs. right is a useful construct to understand the different ways we approach weaving. And indeed, for those of us who teach, it's essential to identify where a student feels most comfortable, and transition them to a more holistic view of themselves and their craft. I refer to this as "whole brain learning" and it is fundamental to weaving – and to living life!

For a practical example of a whole brain approach to weaving, let's take a look at how I teach color. Color is a language and can be understood by first breaking color apart and examining each piece separately – hue, value, intensity, fiber, yarn size and weave structure - and then putting all these pieces back together into a weaving project. Very left brained and logical. But color is also emotional and personal – we tend to select colors we love and put them into our weaving, sometimes successfully… and sometimes not. But when colors aren't quite what is envisioned we do not despair - because this is where having both left and right brain fluency comes in handy!

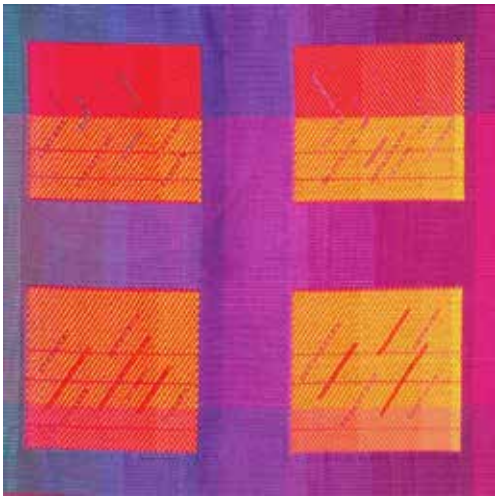


Color variables in weaving
hue, value, intensity,
fiber, scale,
weave structure

If you adore your warp colors but can't find a weft color that makes your heart sing, switch on over to a left-brain check list and proceed through it a step at a time until you find your bliss.

Once you know the basics of color theory in weaving, you can zero in on a particular warp color, and shift away from it with your weft color - one variable at a time. For example, shift hue, and keep all other variables (value, intensity, fiber, yarn size and weave structure) the same. Heart not singing yet? Try shifting only value. Still not singing? Change something else. Sometimes the yarn colors might be perfect, but the weave needs to change – plain weave creates mud but twill creates perfection. Give yourself permission to go through your checklist and try various options until your heart says you've landed on the perfect choice. This is whole brain weaving in action.

As you become comfortable with the ideas embodied in left and right brain weaving, you'll integrate both approaches into your own work, and create beautiful cloth that is uniquely your own. And when this happens, congratulations, you will be a Whole Brain Weaver!



Cameron Taylor-Brown has immersed herself in the worlds of fiber, education and commerce since the 1970s. She recently founded ARTSgarage, a textile resource center in Los Angeles.

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To learn more about Cameron, including her work as a fiber artist, textile designer, teacher, and exhibition curator, go to the following:

http://camerontaylor-brown.com