

Working In Series

by Marcia L. Weiss



Figure 1. Marcia L. Weiss, *Dialogue I*, 2011. Linen, double cloth warp ikat. 28 x 12 inches. Photograph by the artist.



Figure 2. Marcia L. Weiss, *Dialogue IV*, 2011. Linen, double cloth warp ikat. 31 x 12 inches. Photograph by the artist.

In academia, it is common for students to create work in series: work inspired by a singular concept, work that explores a particular idea, work that is aesthetically or technically related. At Jefferson (Philadelphia University + Thomas Jefferson University) in the Textile Design programs, we teach creative process: one that incorporates ideation, exploration/experimentation, sampling, refinement, editing, reflection and repetition. This is an iterative process where each piece leads to the

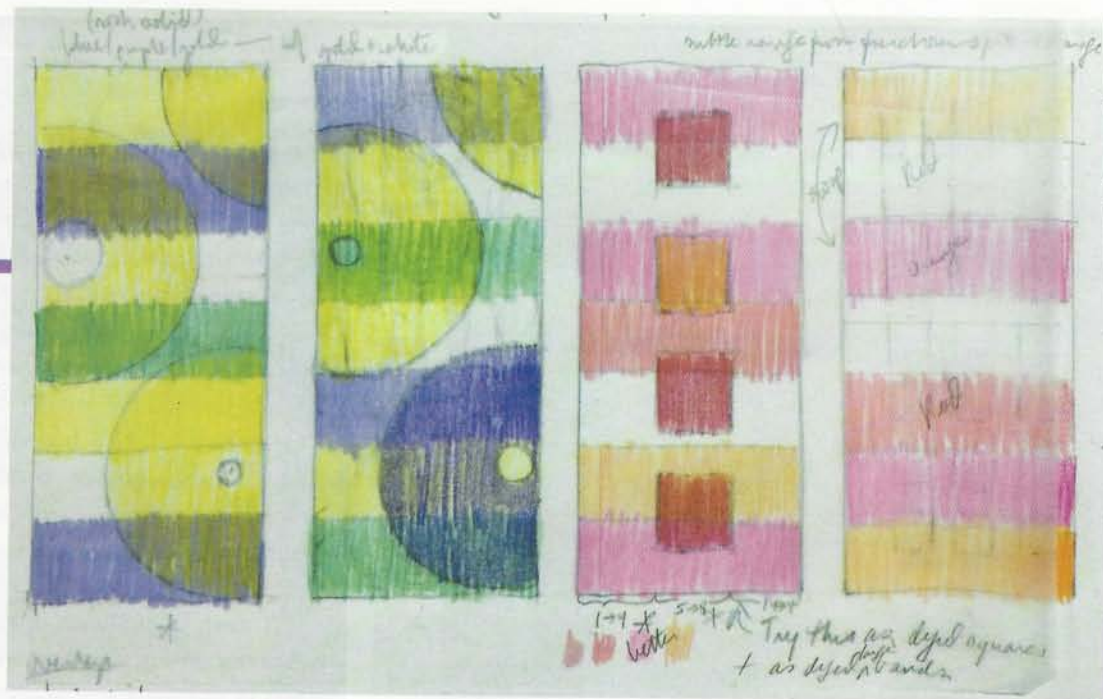


Figure 3. Marcia L. Weiss. Sketchbook page; colored pencil, vellum. Photograph by the artist.

next. For handweavers, there are many benefits of working in series. Generating new ideas, exploring fresh concepts, discovering or rediscovering techniques, and building a collection for exhibition purposes are but a few.

Our students begin the process with identifying a theme for the design or artwork. This inspires a collection or series expressed through woven, knitted, or printed formats. The initial step is gathering imagery for inspiration. I am constantly collecting magazine pages, photographs, interesting swatches, quotes/poems/articles, yarn reelings, and color references. Essentially, whatever I respond to, I place in my sketchbook or around me in the studio. Many do this with Pinterest boards. I encourage you to find the system or process that works for you.

The concept or theme is the visual and conceptual driver of the work. For example, my ikat-woven *Dialogue series* (Figures 1 and 2) was inspired by the techniques of Central Asia and the palette of West African narrow strip weaving. I began by working through a series of quick drawings in my sketchbook (Figure 3), as well as dyeing trials on the linen that I planned to use. These sketches led to the creation of multiple pieces. The warps utilized the same palette in different ikat patterns. Working in a series permits me to explore a concept in-depth. When working on a piece, it invariably sparks additional ideas to pursue. I record these thoughts in my sketchbook: in drawings, collages, notes, and swatches.

There are times when the location of a conference or the theme of an exhibition provides direction for a body of work. This encourages the consideration of different methods of working or extended areas of research. The titles for the juried exhibitions for Convergence® 2018 held a wonderful richness of possibilities: *Great Basin* basketry, *The Playa* mixed media, *Truckee River* yardage, and *City Lights Festive Nights* wearable art exhibit. Each title is an evocative mix of imagery, color, and texture.

As I considered this article, I asked two very talented artists to share their thoughts on working in series. Cameron Taylor-Brown, artist, educator, consultant,



Cameron Taylor-Brown



Rachel Snack



Figure 4. Rachel Snack, *Sister Blankets Collection, Studies No. 7-15, 2016-2017*. Cotton, linen, bamboo, chenille, wool, alpaca; handwoven on a floor loom, supplemental weft, material-focused texture weavings. Size variable, approximately 10 x 8 inches. Photograph by the artist.

and founder of ARTSgarage, and Rachel Snack, founder of Weaver House Co. and Creative Director of Harrisville Designs reflected on their process.

Do you work in series? If so, why?

Cameron:

I tend to work in series because this approach allows me to explore a concept broadly and deeply. Series provide the mental latitude to fully engage with one piece at a time—with each leading to the next in an iterative manner. And sometimes I revisit a series and create additional work with a fresh eye for new discoveries.

Rachel:

I work in series as a way to tell a story. When viewing several pieces of artwork together, the work begins to create and share a language completely unique to sequential making (Figure 4).

Do you always create work in series, or does your process vary by project/inspiration/goal?

Cameron:

I hesitate to use the word “always,” but I work in series quite frequently. My process varies in that some of my work is surface design/mixed media, while other work is primarily woven—and the design process for weaving requires more pre-planning (Figures 5 and 6).

Rachel:

I often work sequentially in two ways: by conceptual series of work that is built upon over months, sometimes years, or by collections of artwork that are created all within quick succession. Often the collections are created by making several pieces in sequence on the same warp so that the size and shape automatically define a commonality between pieces.

How much planning of your work do you do in a sketchbook or via some other means prior to beginning a project?

Cameron:

I embrace planning (and playing) as a critical part of my process and don't rush it—I enjoy the journey. I usually start with colored sketches, collages, or snips of yarn and fabrics, and then I do small-scale explorations before launching into the larger works.

Rachel:

I like to say my process is supported by intentional material choices and instinctual design decisions. I plan my warp material ahead of time, the starting weave structure (for threading, as the structure often changes as I experiment with treadling sequences) and the size of my piece. Once my warp is on the loom, the weft material and aesthetic design choices are purely intuitive.

How much of your work is responding to materials/materiality?

Cameron:

Quite a bit. The materials are what attracted me to textiles in the first place.



Figure 5. Cameron Taylor-Brown, *Colors of Gujarat: Common Threads #1*, 2016. Cotton yarns, fabrics, bias tape, wood and paint; weaving, photographic transfer, piecework, embroidery. 47 x 26 inches. Photograph by Andrew Neuhart.



Figure 6. Cameron Taylor-Brown, *Colors of Gujarat: Common Threads #2*, 2016. Cotton yarns, fabrics, bias tape, wood and paint; weaving, photographic transfer, piecework, embroidery. 42 x 26 inches. Photograph by Andrew Neuhart.

I love the tactile nature of the medium and enjoy being surrounded by yarns and fabrics—even when I'm working at my computer I can reach out and touch the real goods.

Rachel:

As a textile artist, my work is a response to material and tactile choices. I believe that cloth is a physical memory bearing witness to the hand of the artist, becoming material evidence of touch. Anni Albers said it so poetically, "We touch things to assure ourselves of reality. We touch the objects of our love. We touch the things we form. Our tactile experiences are elemental."

How long does a typical series take? Do you explore an idea for one month, for one year?

Cameron:

I don't have a timeline—sometimes it takes me several months to complete one series; sometimes I circle back after years pass. My series aren't necessarily completed sequentially.

Rachel:

It varies from project to project. I have series that are still ongoing that began in 2012, and others that are completed after one warp. There are "common threads,"

Marcia L. Weiss is an internationally exhibited artist, with works held in private collections in Europe and the United States. Her fiber-based work has been exhibited in solo shows in the USA and France, as well as in juried shows and invitationals. In addition to spending time in her studio, Marcia is the Director of the Fashion & Textiles Futures Center at Jefferson (Philadelphia University + Thomas Jefferson University), where she teaches advanced textile design courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

conceptual beginnings that tie most of my work together from series to series. I view my entire practice as a response to the idea of my identity grounded in material culture and textile language—more specifically, woven language.

When working in series, what is the balance between planned editions (determined in advance of the work) versus each piece responding to the previous?

Cameron:

Most often each piece responds to the previous one—this allows my thinking to remain fluid.

Rachel:

Simply put, I never plan editions. Each piece I make informs the next, recording through rhythm and repetition, informing the dialect between maker and loom.

Is there a large shift from one series to the next? Do you explore different ideas or work in very different aesthetics from one series to the next?

Cameron:

I'd say my aesthetics remain fairly consistent, but my inspiration varies as do the processes.

Rachel:

My ideas may change from one series to the next, but my aesthetic creates a harmony between different works within my entire practice.

Next time that you start a project or find inspiration in the midst of a project, consider working in series. Develop your own process to fully explore ideas and techniques. It may be that you are driven by the tactile nature of textiles, by the amazing range of color possibilities, by the marriage of hand and technology. Find your passion and enjoy the process. Pursue that which engages you in this wonderful community of makers.

