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

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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. "Twilling 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."

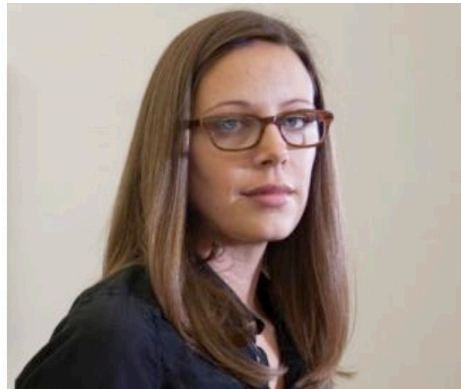


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At the moment, Laskey's studio is in the garage of her apartment in Glen Park, a neighborhood that has housed some artists of renowned dedication, like Bruce Conner. Her day job at California College of the Arts' Oakland library is one source of inspiration 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."