

cover

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ZOLLANVARI: 75 YEARS



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NEW OUTLOOKS FOR 2022

RUG STAR X MARY ZIO • KIPS BAY DALLAS
CREATIVE TONIC • TISSAGE REBRAND
TRISH ANDERSEN • EDELGRUND • LAPCHI

revel

Dare



dive

Artist Polly Barton's recent ikat textile exhibition 'Dare, Revel, Dive' in Santa Fe had visitors enthralled. **Denna Jones** talks to the silk weaver and discovers the background and inspiration behind these beautiful creations

All photos: Wendy McEahern

01 *Prey*, Polly Barton, 2017

02 *Surfacing*, Polly Barton, 2021

03 *Kaiwase Blue*, Polly Barton, 2021

04 *Fierce Solace*, Polly Barton, 2021

All images courtesy of Chiaroscuro Santa Fe

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Barton rubs, drips, and oozes her fluid media to achieve the desired look which ultimately becomes a bridge between painting and weaving



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You cannot travel the path until you become the path' is a Buddhist belief that expresses the more than forty-year artistic journey of New Mexico-based fibre artist Polly Barton. She didn't know her path when she graduated with a degree in History of Art from Barnard College in New York City, but she replied to an ad on the notice board in the college's recruitment office and became an assistant to abstract expressionist painter Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011). 'The irony is I didn't know that much about her because at that time [1970s] the art history teaching timeline stopped around the 50s and 60s.' Frankenthaler created the initial path for Barton's journey to paint with weave. Barton only worked for Frankenthaler for one year, but her influence was 'huge', she says.

In 1978 Barton went to Japan as an exchange student. She visited a weaving studio 'filled with incredible colours of dyed silk'. She returned to Japan in 1981 to study weaving at the Oomoto School of Traditional Arts. She discovered weaving was her calling. She learned silk weaving from the man who warped the looms of 'living national treasure' Fukumi Shimura. 'As I learned to weave and discovered the art of ikat, I felt very much that seeing how Frankenthaler impregnated her canvases with pigment gave me "permission" to build up my layers of colour.' Barton credits her love of colour creation to Frankenthaler, but her adherence to the nature of materials is thanks to Shimura's nature-based trinity of plants (colour), animals (thread), and minerals (mordent). Barton's 'a-ha' moment occurred as she gazed out the window of a Japanese train. I remember thinking, 'I want to paint in silk and do it on a loom.' She began weaving with *tsumigi* (a 2-ply silk yarn



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spun with intentional nubs and unevenness) and a 'slubby' 1-ply weft.

Barton's 2021 solo exhibition 'Dare, Revel, Dive' at Chiaroscuro Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico was five years in the making. The title groups three bodies of work: four ikat banners with warp designs (Dare), pastel fields on paper (Revel), and linen paper she handweaves and augments with mixed media (Dive). Dare began in 2016 as a continuous set of vertical silk threads under tension on the loom. Each warp section has a distinct design impregnated with dyes and stains such as soy milk and sumi ink. She rubs, drips, and oozes her fluid media to achieve the desired look which ultimately becomes a bridge between painting and weaving.

Barton's path led her to the southwestern state of New Mexico in 1992 where she is still based. 'My identity as a weaver strengthened after moving here,' she says. 'I realise how much interest I have in taking various fibre textures and colours and working with different media.' The poetry form known as pantoum is an idea informing Barton's plans for new weaves. The second and fourth lines of the first quatrain (stanza) of a pantoum are reintroduced into the second quatrain as the first and third lines while the second and fourth are new lines. This 'interwoven' pattern continues throughout the poem. Barton is pursuing how she can adapt

pantoum to weave by exploring the tactile textures of pottery by Akiko Hirai and concepts gleaned from a workshop she attended taught by Nigerian-born, New Mexico-based indigo dye master Gasali Adeyemo.

'Blank canvas paralysis' often grips artists at the start of a painting. 'The blank canvas is hard,' Barton confirms. She avoids the situation by recognising her hand-painted warp is 'very much a part' of her design and art. She sketches an idea and creates colour groups, or she says, 'I just have no idea and let [the process] flow.' She weaves her silk ikats on tsumugi silk kimono looms. In the 1990s she tried her hand at rug weaving on a 'walking loom' used to weave the local Rio Grande style of rugs, but she 'didn't take to it' because 'it was too controlled' and she 'couldn't achieve a painterly quality'. Barton is revisiting the idea of creating a rug, but as a collaboration with a weaver who will interpret one of her Revel pastel fields on paper.

Barton's father was Dean of the Episcopal St John the Divine in New York City. 'One of his passions was interfaith,' she recalls, an ecumenical, embracing belief that helps us understand the roots of Barton's artistic journey and the path she continues to travel, create and become.

www.pollybarton.com

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