INTERVIEW WITH KIRA DOMINGUEZ HULTGREN

"No Dogs Allowed", 95" x 127" x 20", loomed fabric in double-cloth, overshot, and warp-faced plain weave. Nonmetallic conduit and other plastics; wool, silk, cotton, linen, and other yarns; oak trim; leashes. 2021, image courtesy of the artist, copyright Kira Dominguez Hultgren

POSTED BY: MARIA ROSARIA ROSEO

Italiano (Italian)

ROUGH
ISSUE 3/2021

Maria Rosaria Roseo

Kira Dominguez Hultgren, a U.S. based textile artist and educator, studied French postcolonial theory and literature at Princeton University and fine arts in Rio Negro, Argentina and she holds a dual MFA/MA degree in Fine Arts and Visual and Critical Studies from California College of the Arts.

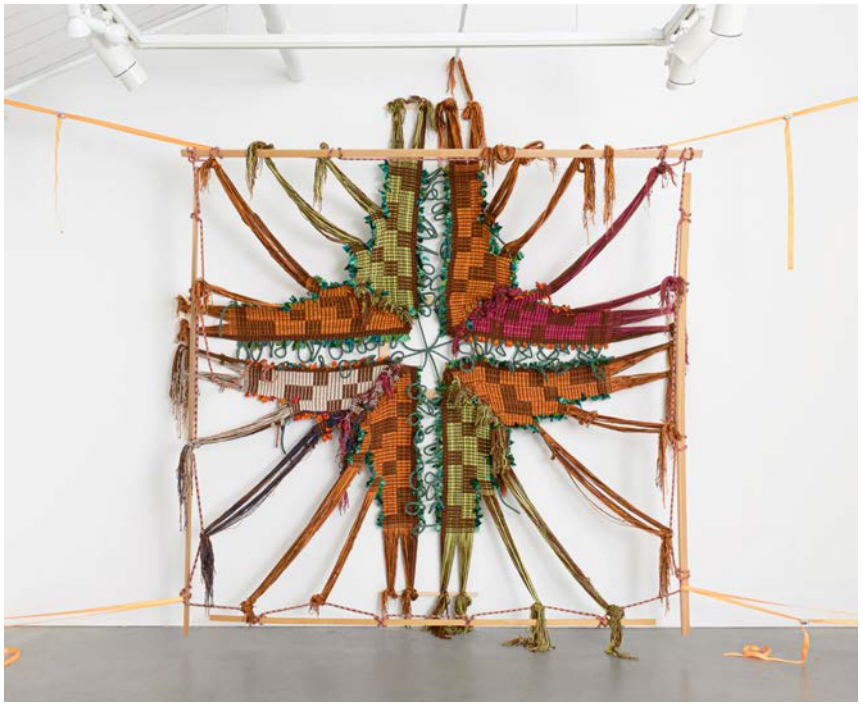
Taking as a starting point the analysis and study of Navajo weaving styles and techniques, the artist reflects on the history of colonialism, on the destructive impact which lead to an inevitable, synthetic assimilation and globalization, erasing borders, peoples and cultural identities.

The focus of Hultgren's artistic research revolves around these themes which are also part of her family history.

Weaving thus becomes a metaphor in which the inevitable intertwining of different materials, the use of threads destined to end up in the background overruled by others, represent the history of many, left unheard, suffocated and substituted by new and rhetorical narratives.

Hultgren uses weaving as a tool for counter-narration, as in her work ***Across***, in which the Hawaiian and Punjabi fabrics used to create the image of the American flag refuse to be made invisible and act from within to reinterpret the object that is the symbol of the American nation.

https://www.kiradominguezhultgren.com/



***"Arose"**, 2019, virgin and less pure wool in homespun marigold and primitive rust; mixed yarn blends from the U.S., U.K., and Canada; Indian cotton; Chinese silk; climbing gym rope from Berkeley Ironworks; found wooden frame bars and stakes; cam straps and d-rings.*
132" x 132" x 26" (variable). Image courtesy of Shaun Roberts Photography, copyright Dominguez Hultgren

Kira, where did your passion for weaving come from?

I have always had an interest in narrative, in constructed storytelling, beginning with stories around the dining room table, listening to my parents try to make sense of their family stories of (im)migration, assimilation, miscegenation, survival, and ongoing embodiment of difference. Although I didn't learn the physical motions of weaving from my family, I did learn the process of pieced together, embroidered, contradictions-held-in-tension, woven, textile stories from parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, brother, and cousins.

I am drawn to those artists who use their art practice to perform and disavow, like my family always has, so many different, and seemingly at-odds cultures. Weaving is about strange combinations. Nothing gets blended or blurred; rather the vertical and horizontal material move in opposite directions, working together but also against one another.

ArteMorbida Textile Arts Magazine is a space dedicated to the varied panorama of contemporary textile arts. The web-site like the magazine is designed and created with the aim of collecting and witnessing the news and the latest trends in the sector, to encourage and facilitate the dissemination of the culture of Fiber Art, stimulating the interest of the public and promoting the recognition of Textiles as an autonomous means in the most vast field of contemporary arts.

TESSUTI D'ARTE

Tessuti d'Arte is the new ArteMorbida section in which, thanks to the valuable and decisive contribution of Carmen Romeo, expert in weaving, tapestryand carpet, essayist, teacher and researcher and Chiara Carta who restores tapestries and historic upholstery, we will publish insights on topics specifically related to weaving, its origins and its development over the centuries, the historical

Each strand holds its own, and yet its positon is contingent on every other strand around it. Weaving is a story held in contradiction, stretched almost to a breaking point, creating space to move through, around, and in the spaces in-between warp and weft.

"Arose-detail", *2019, virgin and less pure wool in homespun marigold and primitive rust; mixed yarn blends from the U.S., U.K., and Canada; Indian cotton; Chinese silk; climbing gym rope from Berkeley Ironworks; found wooden frame bars and stakes; cam straps and d-rings. 132" x 132" x 26" (variable). Image courtesy of Shaun Roberts Photography, copyright Kira Dominguez Hultgren*

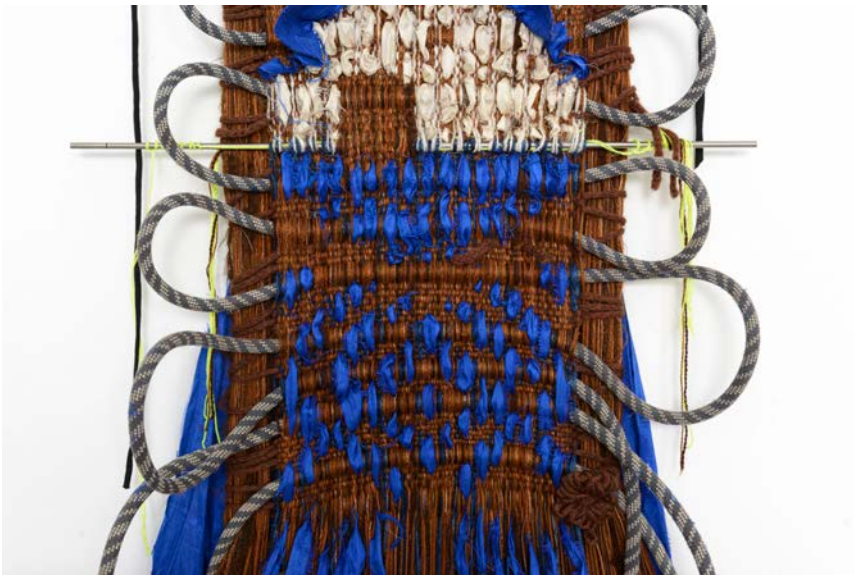
In the context of your personal and professional growth, has there been an event or a person who has played a decisive role in your artistic development?

In the early 2010s, living in Río Negro, Argentina, I fell in with practicing artists – storytellers, sculptors, painters, and many fiber artists. One of these artists, Mary Coronado, a Mapuche-Argentine weaver and activist, mentored me, taught me through a year of weaving together at her loom. Working with Mary, what struck me principally, was the idea that to weave as a tribally-enrolled or unenrolled ethnically indigenous woman, is to perform an identity. She was perceived as "more Mapuche" at her loom, as embodying *Mapuche-ness* regardless of her spoken language (Spanish)

importance and collecting of textile art, and the complex and varied activities of the restoration of historical textile products.

or her familial or cultural upbringing. The Argentine government funded the art collective she helped organize because they were preserving Mapuche identity through teaching and reclaiming Mapuche arts. This tension between performing and preserving a cultural identity is a tension I have lived and will continue to live. As a child of (im)migrant parents, I have seen in one or two generations, cultural touchpoints disappear, reinvent themselves, and doggedly persist. To perform or preserve an identity is not a tension between falsifying and truth-telling, but a both/and strategy to make sense of one's story in a larger web of historical and contemporary non-neutral circumstances.

***"Horizon Lines"**, 2020, discontinuous embedded substitutional warp-faced double weave with found wood and metal loom bars left in place; silk from artist's grandmother's and artist's own childhood Punjabi suits; backstrap in cotton jersey sourced from India and Joann's fabrics; climbing rope (Berkeley Iron Works); hand/machine spun yarns in wool, alpaca, silk, acrylic, and other novelty fibers, 86" x 42" x 7". Image courtesy of Shaun Roberts Photography, copyright Kira Dominguez Hultgren*



***"Horizon Lines – detail"**, 2020, discontinuous embedded substitutional warp-faced double weave with found wood and metal loom bars left in place; silk from artist's grandmother's and artist's own childhood Punjabi suits; backstrap in cotton jersey sourced from India and Joann's fabrics; climbing rope (Berkeley Iron Works); hand/machine spun yarns in wool, alpaca, silk, acrylic, and other novelty fibers, 86" x 42" x 7". Image courtesy of Shaun Roberts Photography, copyright Kira Dominguez Hultgren*

***"At Least Both Your Parents are Brown"**, 2020, brown yarn, brown silk, brown leather, brown fleece, brown felt, brown belts, brown fabric, brown wood, 84" x 68" x 6", image courtesy of Shaun Roberts Photography, copyright Kira Dominguez Hultgren*

***"At Least Both Your Parents are Brown – detail"**, 2020, brown yarn, brown silk, brown leather, brown fleece, brown felt, brown belts, brown fabric, brown wood, 84" x 68" x 6", image courtesy of Shaun Roberts Photography, copyright Kira Dominguez Hultgren*

Your historical and anthropological research has led you to delve into the history of weaving and the work of many textile artists including Olga de Amaral, Nadia Myre, Luz Jiménez, to name but a few. In what way is their work a source of inspiration for you?

Olga de Amaral's (b. 1932) work is a study in contradictions.

Contemporary with other fiber feminists of the 1960s, having participated in the 1969 seminal group show ***Wall Hangings*** at the MOMA, De Amaral has risen to international attention as a textile artist to be reckoned with only in the last few decades. While her medium was seemingly similar to other 1960s artists, her use of fiber was anything but. De Amaral was decidedly ambivalent in her use of textiles and more specifically pre-Columbian weaving, sculpture, and painting processes. It is only now that we even have language to come to terms with De Amaral's gestures through various media. How do we make art in multicultural, transitional, transnational landscapes caught in a web of colonial violence, yet threaded through with persistent, iridescent human and environmental hope? Perhaps it means creating through one process only to distance ourselves from it through the next: painting over woven strips; weaving again what was painted; flattening unruly fibers, only to have the finished surface become a riot of tucks, turns, and motion.

Nadia Myre (b. 1974) is a Canadian-Algonquin artist who self-critically examines her own use of indigenous rhetoric and making practices. In one of her most famous works, ***Indian Act*** (2002), Myre beaded over all fifty-six pages of the Canadian Federal Government's Indian Act with the help of 230 other people. Myre was celebrated for activating an indigenous way of knowing in this gesture – both in the act of beading and in the collective making. And yet beading was new to her when she began this project. Is her use of beading an activation of indigenous knowledge then since she is Algonquin or a distortion of it? Myre asks these questions in a self-critical exhibition in 2016, ***Decolonial Skill Share or Doing it Wrong?*** She reproduces a so-called Indian Canoe Work Basket based on instructions from a European women's journal from 1861. Throughout the exhibition, Myre performs what she calls a skill-share of Indigenous making practice through satirical material, technique, and history.

Luz Jiménez (1897-1965) was a Mexican artist, model, storyteller, and weaver. Although, she is best known as the symbol of Mexican indigeneity in the paintings and photographs of Jean Charlot, Diego Rivera, Fernando Leal, Tina Modotti, and others of the Mexican modernist school. In a 2000 exhibition co-sponsored by the Instituto Nacional de

Bellas Artes (Mexico) and the Mexic-Arte Museum (US), the significance of Luz Jiménez on Mexican art was given international attention. Yet, despite this exhibition, her work as an artist remains unacknowledged. She continues to be seen as the "muse and model" for other artists, as stated in the 2000 exhibition title. Instead, how does Jiménez leverage this platform of model and muse, to create her own art practice of performing and preserving Mexican-Nahua indigeneity through weaving, as well as written and embodied storytelling? I am drawn to someone like Jiménez who lived in this tension, who played with her audience's perceptions of her, and in that play, perhaps found the ways she wanted to tie her story, her people, her history in Milpa Alta, D.F., Mexico to the larger and enduring history of the revolution and Mexican modernist art.

"The Woman He Saw in All the Women of Mexico", *2020, warped revolutions in plant and animal fiber with printed imagery from exhibition catalog Luz Jiménez, símbolo de un pueblo milenario 1897-1965 (México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Museo Casa Estudio Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo, Mexic-Arte Museum, 2000), loom bars left in place, installed on swift and sawhorse or other plinth; objetos personales de lana de fieltro y telar, 60" (variable) x 39" x 39. Image courtesy of Andria Lo/Headlands Center for the Arts, Kira Dominguez Hultgren*

I quote from one of your interview: *"Weaving, as it tells, compels some material to sink to the bottom, while other material rises to the surface. Some strands act only as a support, while other strands steals the spotlight. To weave with competing unequal materials is to reflect a lived experience of ongoing U.S. colonialism supported by unequal histories. Some histories go unheard, unseen, while other histories seemingly become the whole story".*

Can we say that this concept is at the heart of your artistic research?

Absolutely! I arrived at this thesis after beginning an ongoing study and re-weaving of commissioned-by-the-Department of the Interior (U.S. federal government), Navajo-woven U.S. flags during the centennial (1876) and bicentennial (1976).

How are weaving and materials a metaphor for the history of American colonialism?

Loom with Textile, titled by the Smithsonian, is a work woven most likely between 1864-1874 by Navajo leader, Juanita (Asdzáá Tl'ógí)*. This piece has hugely influenced both my making practice, and my understanding of what weaving does and can do. My research around this textile/loom begins with the idea that while the Smithsonian labels this work an unfinished U.S. flag blanket, I question if this piece is intentionally left on the loom to show how the symbol of the flag is an ongoing construction tied to a machine, the loom, that operates to bury the nations and people with whom it comes in contact.

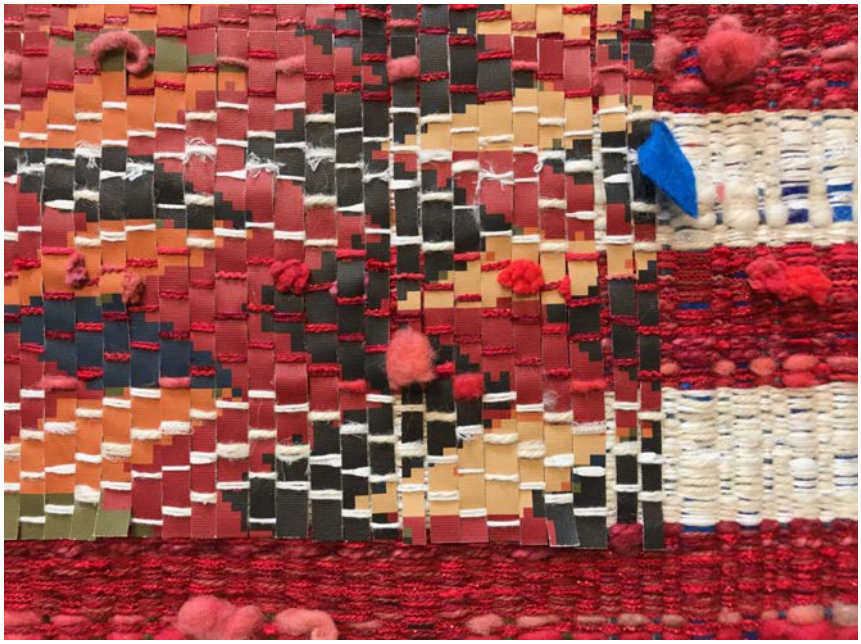
The image of the U.S. flag is built on top of an intersecting, colorful, and yet buried warp. ***Loom with Textile*** is an example of Navajo tapestry weaving, which is a weft-faced weave that conceals the warp. Because of this concealment, most mid-19th century Navajo weaving was done on a natural, undyed wool warp. But Juanita draws attention to what tapestry weaving hides. According to anthropologist Ann Hedlund, there are few Navajo weavings on record with a color warp, and none with a warp blocked into multiple color fields. Yet through the use of a color warp, which Juanita leaves unwoven in the middle of the textile, she is able to embed a visible counter-narrative that runs the entire length of the work.

Materializing my reading of Juanita's piece, I wove ***Across*** (2018). This U.S. flag now weaves together two histories: my own story of (im)migration and the story of Juanita (Asdzáá Tl'ógí)'s 1874 weaving. In ***Across***, the red and white stripes conceal the material within. Yet that covered-over material – Hawaiian and Punjabi fabrics, my hair, images of Juanita's weaving – proliferate above, below, and within those stripes. The material which makes this U.S. flag acts to change it. Like my reading of Juanita's piece, ***Across*** is a woven construction of refusal: materials refuse to be rendered unseen within the symbol of U.S. nation.

****To view the work Loom with Textile by Asdzáá Tl'ógí, go to the following link: https://www.si.edu/object/loom-textile:nmnhanthropology_8345504***

Woman He Saw in All the Women of Mexico", *2020, warped revolutions in plant and animal fiber with printed imagery from exhibition catalog Luz Jiménez, símbolo de un pueblo milenario 1897-1965 (México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Museo Casa Estudio Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo, Mexic-Arte Museum, 2000), loom bars left in place, installed on swift and sawhorse or other plinth; objetos personales de lana de fieltro y telar, 60" (variable) x 39" x 39. Image courtesy of Andria Lo/Headlands Center for the Arts, Kira Dominguez Hultgren*

"Across-detail", *2018, handspun and acid dyed wool, acrylic, cotton, metallic thread, novelty yarn, felt, wool rug mill ends, printed cotton fabric, artist's hair, leather, used Punjabi suit from artist's grandmother, detail from "Loom with Textile" (1874) printed on canvas, wood and plastic loom bars, zip ties, tacks. , 92" x 83" x 4", image courtesy of Phillip Maisel Photography, copyright Kira Dominguez Hultgren*



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Can you talk about the role of the loom in your artistic research? Is it simply a tool for creating the work, or is it an integral part of the work itself?

I primarily work on floor looms, backstrap looms, Mapuche looms (vertical post looms), and looms created from tensioning yarn between any two or more fixed points (chairs, bedframes, flag poles, walls, etc.). I use my studio practice to materialize and re-perform my research, whether that be photographic documentation of textile archives or my own family textile archives and history. I weave in response to physical, narrative, and metaphorical weavings.

The loom acts to frame and put tension on this woven fabric. Found wood/framing bars, PVC pipes, metal anchors, zip ties, and cam straps are my primary materials that I use to construct the loom in the gallery. The materials I choose to build a loom for any given piece are usually in negotiation with both what the fabric needs, and what the place where the piece will be installed already holds (what architectural choices are already present in the space around the loom). I hope to question through the loom the physical and cultural architecture within which I and the viewer encounter these woven fabrics. How are these textiles bound in words, spaces, places, and global infrastructures from which they cannot break free?

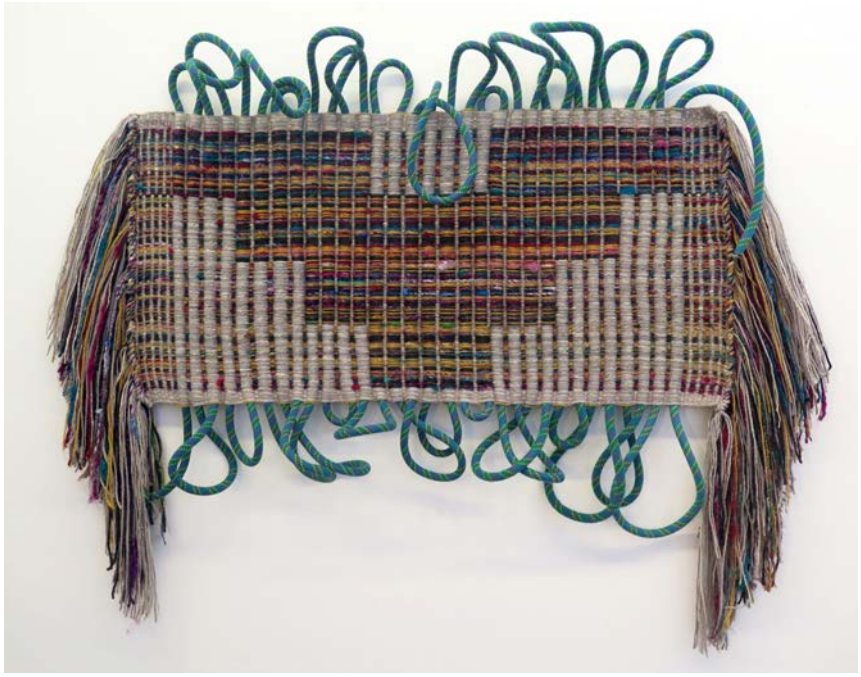
FOTO 19 DominguezHultgren_Across_1

A project of yours that you are particularly attached to?

Just Tell People You're Indian (2017) and *Crossed in Parts* (2018) will always be pivotal pieces for me, since they opened up all the making possibilities I currently find myself exploring – climbing rope, sari silk, being tied-down and set-free, masking and revealing, making in parts and reassembling/re-performing.

Beginning with a personal narrative of trying to answer the question I am often asked, "Where are you from?", a classmate once told me, "Wouldn't it be better to just tell people you're Indian?" They were pointing to a slipperiness I find when talking about my family history. It's more fun to talk about my being Indian (from India) than being Mexican with American Indian (indigenous) ancestry. The former is colorful and exotic, while the latter starts conversations about colonization, genocide, present-day immigrant incarceration, and poverty; and yet both conversations are examples of othering, a people marked by exclusion. In taking the logo for the United Farm Workers labor movement – the Huelga strike symbol – I situate these pieces in Chicano histories and culture. But I wove this symbol in sari silk and climbing gym ropes, inserting alternative and

personal narratives into those histories and into the symbol. What does it mean for me to be Chicana but with an Indian mother and classed with urban privilege of a climbing gym? Do I negate the symbol of a migrant labor movement, or does it open up the symbol to new interpretation, a diasporic rallying cry?



***"Just Tell People You're Indian"**, 2017, warp-faced weaving in sari silk, wool mill ends, nylon and polyester climbing rope from Berkeley Ironworks Climbing Gym, 38" x 46" x 4", image courtesy of the artist, copyright Kira Dominguez Hultgren*

***"Crossed in Parts"**, 2018, warp-faced weaving with supplemental warp floats. Handspun acid-dyed wool, acrylic and industrial wool, indigo-dyed ramie, wool mill ends, novelty yarn, metallic thread, leather, sari silk ribbon, nylon and polyester climbing rope from Berkeley Ironworks Climbing Gym, 92" x 60" x 12", image courtesy of Shaun Roberts Photography, copyright Kira Dominguez Hultgren*

How did it come about and what are the concepts that led you to create "*Chaptcha: Maiden name VhQf3Y*"?

This piece is one in a series of works which intersect two

different fields of conversation: feminist craft and human-computer interaction (HCI). In Europe, young girls learned to read and write through embroidery, stitching letters and phrases into cloth, called ***samplers***. Rozika Parker's *Subversive Stitch* (1984) explores this history as the creation of a European feminine ideal, but also points out how through embroidery, many young girls subverted the codes of femininity imposed onto them. Embroidered samplers still today can shock, trouble, and give us a lens through which we can reread the history of European women.

Human-computer interaction is a multidisciplinary field, coming out of Design. In this piece I am thinking about how CAPTCHA codes (**C**ompletely **A**utomated **P**ublic **T**uring test to tell **C**omputers and **H**umans **A**part) used on websites are framing a conversation about what makes us human, and how we can differentiate that humanness from computers or bots. Are users being trained, like the European girls stitching their samplers, in codes not just of behavior, but of identity? On the one hand, these CAPTCHA codes are slanted, obscured, made-strange, which points to a humanness that is fluid, changing, able to embrace oddity. On the other hand, the code is still written by humans with human biases, used as a security measure to differentiate what is standardized as human.

To bring the conversation full-circle, CAPTCHA codes are often paired with questions on websites about our mother's maiden names. Are we still stuck in a code of femininity that assumes marriage and a husband's identity as both a safety measure and a standardized ideal? Or are we, like the European girls, changing the code?

***"reCAPTCHA, reType, reEnter"**, 2019, digital hand-loomed cotton, sheep and goat wool, linen, silk, and various acrylic blends, 65" × 29" × 1", image courtesy of the artist, copyright Kira Dominguez Hultgren*

***"CAPTCHA: Maiden Name VhQf3Y"**, 2019, Hoop, thread, yarn, needle, net, 30" x 22" x 5" (variable), image courtesy of the artist, copyright Kira Dominguez Hultgren.*

***"CAPTCHA:Please Type the Code"**, 2017, Jacquard woven. Polyurethane tape, cotton, wool, novelty yarn, 28" x 27", image courtesy of Root Division, copyright Kira Dominguez Hultgren*

It has been written that your works are feminist. In what way are they feminist?

The fiber feminists of the 1950s and 60s in the U.S. – Anni Albers, Sheila Hicks, Lenore Tawney, Lia Cook, Magdalena Abakanowicz among so many others – created space for all of us who find ourselves making textiles within a

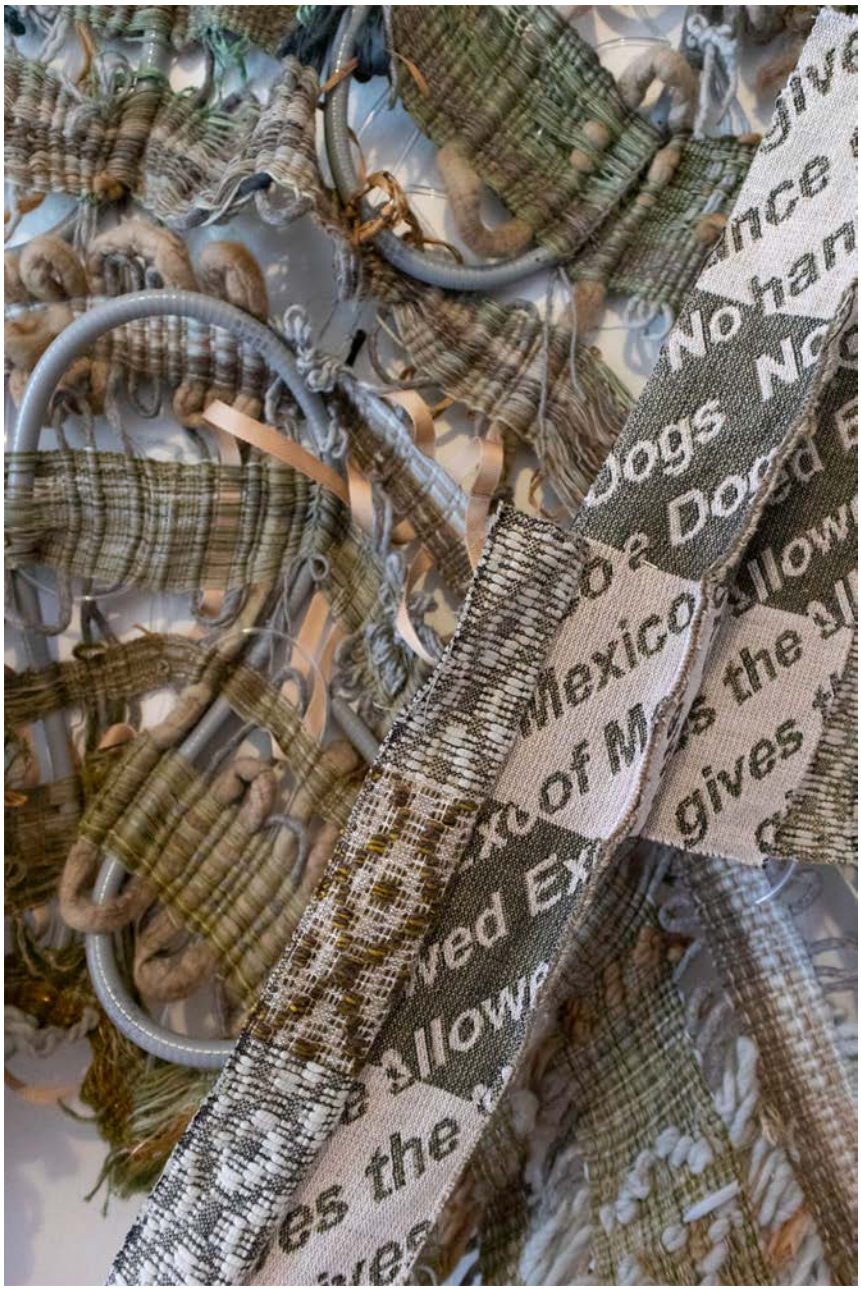
contemporary art conversation. And these feminists didn't just create this space metaphorically. They made fiber sculpture and wall hangings so large that curators and institutions would have to plan a whole show, the entire space, to accommodate these works. But more than that, feminism began conversations around privilege, around how institutional structures make access and legibility easier for men and harder for women. Based on this early feminist work, critical studies and the civil rights movements around race, ethnicity, class, ability, gender, and sexuality found traction. Today, we can have conversations across intersectional feminisms – woven conversations between race and feminism, gender and ethnicity, and so forth – that maximize inclusive dialogues. I don't think any of my work happens without the early feminists changing the possibilities, starting the conversation that I can enter into today. Like them, I too am making work at a supersized scale, both to formally tie my work to theirs, but also to metaphorically create the same kind of shock-value, to change and move conversations around material culture and decolonized, diasporic identities.

What projects are you currently working on?

I just finished a site-inspired work titled, ***No Dogs Allowed***. Beginning with the histories of Governors Island in the New York Harbor, I followed the materials, woven structure, and final installation through Dutch windmills, U.S. Revolutionary coverlet patterns from Mary Meigs Atwater's ***Shuttle-craft Courses in Weaving*** (1922), current signage from downtown doorways and landing pages ("giving the dogs of Mexico a second chance" and "no dogs allowed, except service dogs"), the colors and flows of the New York Harbor waterways, Delaware Tribe of Indians/Lenape bead and fringe work (band weaving often seen as shoulder straps on bandolier bags), Miriam Schapiro's ***Mexican Memory*** (1981), and the fans in the Brooklyn-Battery tunnel ventilation building.

Rather than cutting this history in half, the semi-circle composition reflects the motion of weaving. At each border of the warp and weft, the yarn turns 180 degrees to head back the other way. Its path is revolving, reversing, traversing, trans-versing. What materials get stuck between these

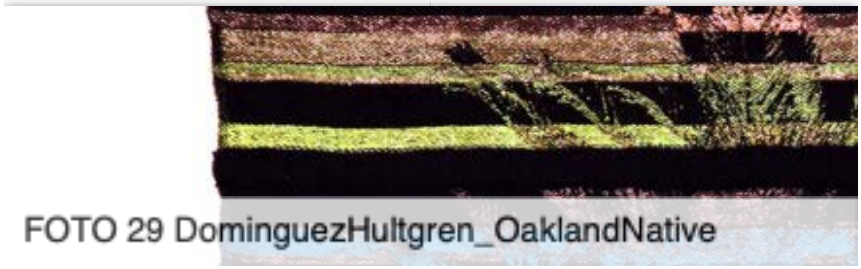
borders? What gets left out? What is permitted entry? What is slipping through? What gets rejected, pushed out, cut off? And what is embraced by the materials and structure around it?

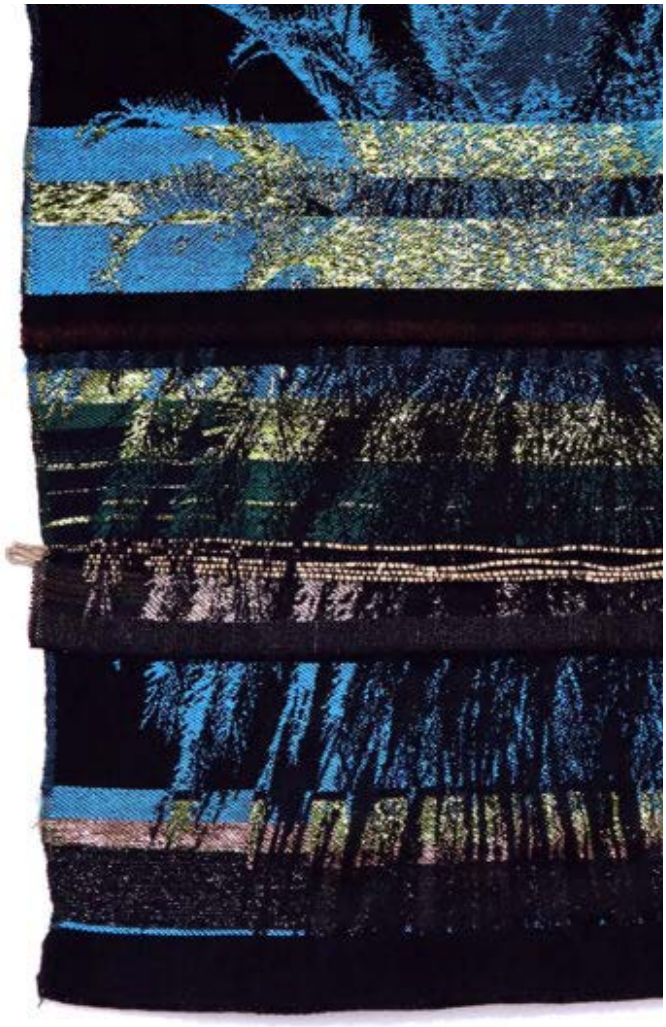


***"No Dogs Allowed-detail"**, 95" x 127" x 20", loomed fabric in double-cloth, overshot, and warp-faced plain weave. Nonmetallic conduit and other plastics; wool, silk, cotton, linen, and other yarns; oak trim; leashes. 2021, image courtesy of the artist, copyright Kira Dominguez Hultgren*

This piece actually begins with my dad, his family, the so-called "Mexican problem" in the U.S. (1910) and the printed signage and messaging on private and government buildings throughout the Southwest that read: "No Dogs or Mexicans Allowed." These signs didn't have to come down until The Civil Rights Act of 1964/68. But the legislation and messaging concerning dreamers, immigration, and detention centers/refugee incarceration at the U.S./Mexico border means that in the U.S., in my family, taking down these signs is still ongoing.

Working through **Cynthia E. Orozco**'s *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (2009), I want to continue to explore this history of Civil Rights in this U.S. and its impact on my family.





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