

# Woven Stories:

## Four Contemporary Weavers



Chris Ofilly 'The Caged Bird's Song'

Weaving (including tapestry weaving) is one of the earliest textile techniques. The fibre used would historically include silk, cotton, wool, linen, hemp or rags although today's weavers also use and recycle materials such as plastic and wire. Whatever the yarn being used, they're laced together on a loom to form cloth. This is commonly seen in garments, but weavings can also be art. As mentioned, Anni Albers was an early pioneer and Sheila Hicks made fantastically explorative pieces. Although the weaving work was done for them, Grayson Perry and Chris Ofili have both used tapestry as a medium. For *'The Vanity of Small Differences'*, Perry chose the digitised loom. For *'The Caged Bird's Song'* (shown at the National Gallery in 2017) Ofili opted for hand weaving in partnership with Dovecote Studios in Edinburgh.

## Her Quiet Materials

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And there are artists out there who like to unravel woven cloth to create their art. Akio Ezuka is a fine example of this, as seen in the *Entangled* exhibition at the Turner Contemporary in 2017.

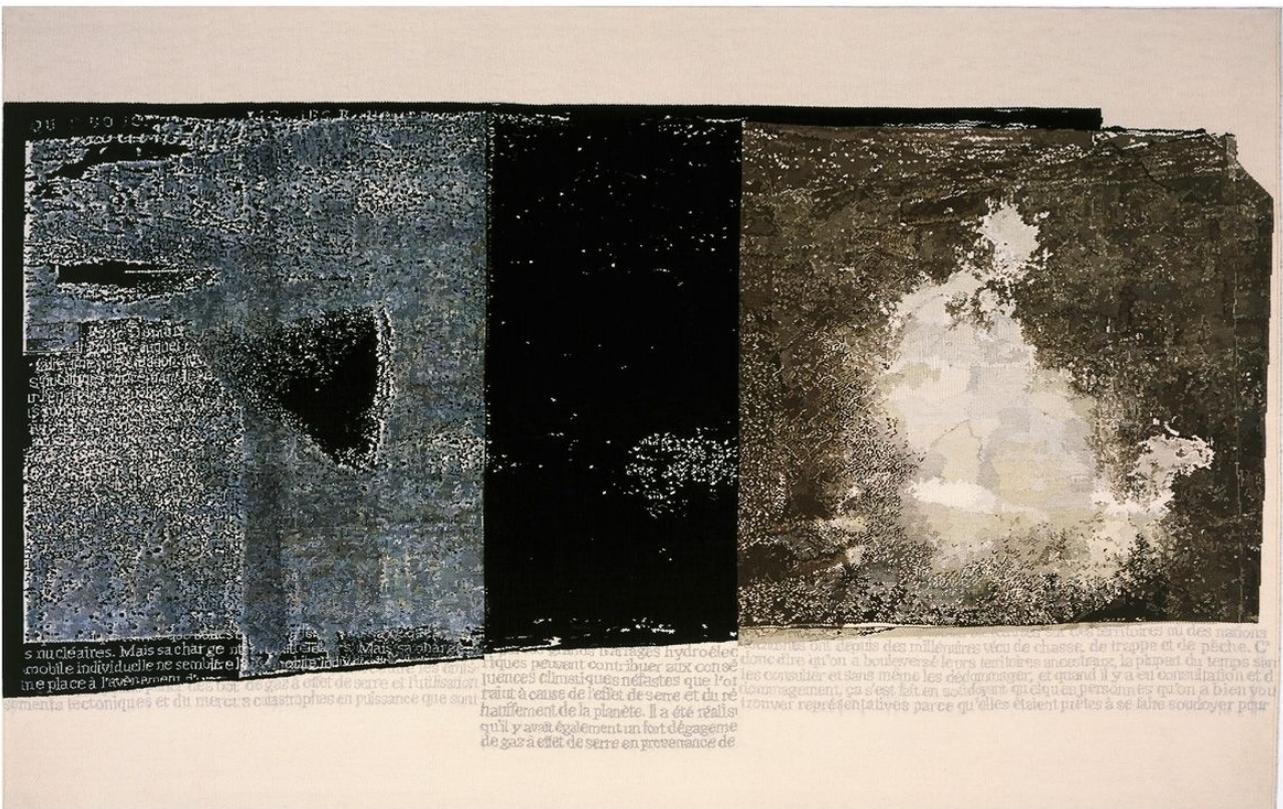


Akio Ezuka 'Loosening Fabric'

I probably last had a go at weaving whilst still at school and it's not a process I can see myself engaging with in the future. Whilst I have the patience to hand stitch for hours or rub pigment in to cloth, for some reason, I don't seem to have the kind of patience required to be a weaver! But, I do love what's possible and have chosen four artists whose work appeals to me in different ways.

**MARCEL MAROIS** ([www.marcelmarois.com](http://www.marcelmarois.com))

I first discovered the work of Marcel Marois in an 'Art Textiles of the World' book, featuring the work of Canadian artists. I love it on every level; the texture, the abstract forms and particularly, the play of light and dark. In exploring different approaches to creating relief with the woven surface, Marois realised that the optical qualities of the grain of weaving had similarities to photographic grain. Weaving also offered him the ability of choosing the colour component of each woven stitch, leading him to reconstruct photographic blur and abstraction. For me, the results are abstract, simple, monumental and beautiful, even though their source is "rooted in the environmental and social impact of abusive commercial exploitation of the natural environment".



Marcel Marois 'Mirrors'

A photograph is often the starting point for Marois, which he alters "through a succession of manual and reprographic interventions.., just a trace of the disaster remains, a metaphor of the forgetfulness and the erasing of historical facts from our collective imagination". These transformations mean that blacks get denser, the greys are broken down and the actual image obliterated to the point of near disappearance. More and more, his work is losing its connection to the original image.

He says “creating tapestry today based on the environmental dramas that feed media frenzy seem to me a way of evoking the instability of an existence in perpetual transformation and paradoxically, of recording the ephemeral through the permanence of weaving”.



Marcel Marois 'Averse Chromatique'

**JO BARKER** ([www.jobarkertapestry.co.uk](http://www.jobarkertapestry.co.uk))

I saw Jo Barker's work on a visit to 'Collect' and discovered her to be a master of colour, combining combinations that are both exhilarating and challenging. Her work is underpinned by drawing, painting and collage and although I'm no expert on tapestry weaving, I could grasp her brilliant technical ability from the flowing, painterly marks to the tiny details and blending of colour. Her website is word-light but image full, so do take a look.



Jo Barker 'Flow'



Jo Barker 'Resonance'

### **FIONA RUTHERFORD** ([www.rutherfordtextileart.com](http://www.rutherfordtextileart.com))

Fiona Rutherford uses the historical Gobelins technique of tapestry weaving using mainly cotton and linen yarns at an upright frame loom. She loves the emotional impact of colour and creates energy through a vivid but limited colour palate. Weaving and storytelling fascinate her as they bring together the past and the present to create something new and still unfolding. Rutherford's work is highly narrative and references people, music words and events in her life. These are woven into the fabric of her tapestries. The imagery is a careful balance of patterns, symbols and mark making.

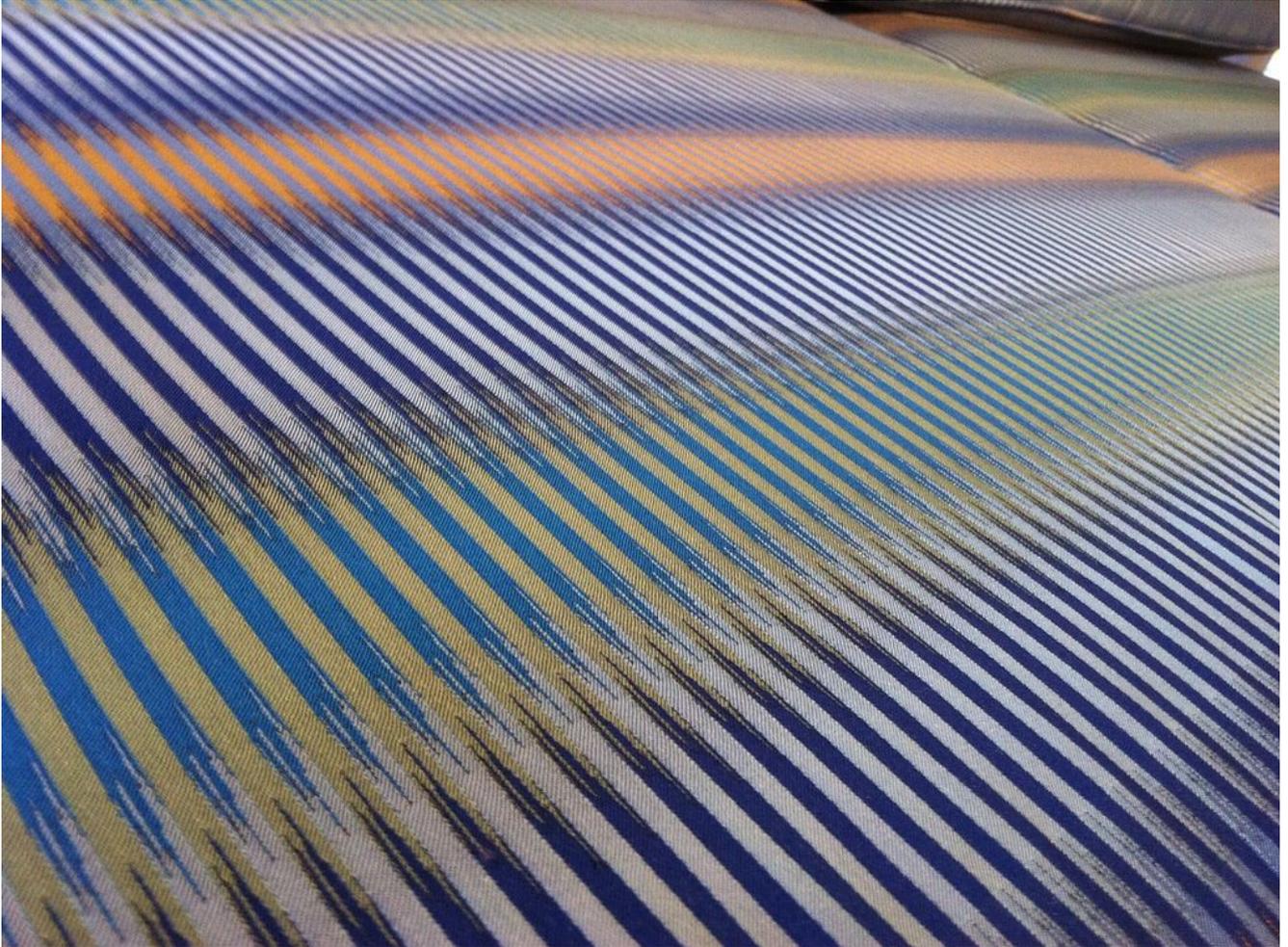


Fiona Rutherford 'Scarborough Fair'

Japanese art and textiles have been a major influence on her work over the past decade and in particular the visual aesthetics of space. Woven strips, based on the obi or kimono sash, became a vehicle for randomly connected imagery suggesting the border of a larger unseen design. These strips could be hung vertically or horizontally in different locations to create a completely different visual effect. I love the combination of simplicity and complexity in Rutherford's work and the graphic quality that makes them leap out to you.

### **PTOLEMY MANN** ([www.ptolemymann.com](http://www.ptolemymann.com))

Mann has been creating colourful and innovative work since 1997. Her methods of hand dyeing and hand weaving produce architectural and geometric art along with commercial items including furnishing fabrics, rugs, bed linen, cushions and throws. I find a great deal in common with the Bauhaus movement in her use of colour and design, but brought into the here and now. Mann has a deep appreciation of colour and an interest in architecture, and these are effectively combined in her aspiration "*to achieve minimalism in colour*". I would say she's achieved it.



Ptolemy Mann, detail of woven cloth