Cora Hamilton wove 15 metres in one piece to create a collection in one warp.

Clothing on a roll

TEXT CORA HAMILTON PHOTO BENGT ARNE IGNELL AND CORA HAMILTON

The loom has a lengthy history and has been used to produce the most amazing things. I am fascinated by weaving. With thread, you can build up something from scratch. Little components provide the potential for huge variation within a small surface area. A great deal of calculation is involved. The reward is the feeling of elation you get when all the equations work out and you understand why.

As a designer, I like setting myself challenges, though I do like a project to have a specific framework to which I can keep. In a way, I find it more liberating to work with given limitations.

What I make very often embraces a whole lot of conundrums, to be solved as work progresses. These should not be too easy, and I like to be stimulated by my creative process, in the sense that I want it to contain moments of surprise as well as require concentration. The surprises should not be left completely to chance, but take place under a certain amount of control.

There is some kind of love-hate relationship that gets me to turn back to weave and find in it technicality of the most exciting kind. The complex and problematic versus all the possibilities there are, if patience and the will to think outside of the box are present.

I am drawn to making the simple a bit more difficult and to creating things that do not immediately reveal how they are made. I love the simplest form of weaving, plain weave, and starting from this basis to then experiment with texture and detail.

It does depend totally on what you are doing, and balance is crucial. You have to choose where to load the gunpowder. Like for my graduation work. I did start from plain weave as my ground, so I could keep up a pace and the actual weaving would progress without too much effort. The challenge lay in finding new technical solutions in experimenting with the conditions set by the loom. So the focus was on the technical aspect rather than on the shedding order.

The idea for my graduation project presented itself through a problem that arose while I was doing some weaving. I didn't achieve what I was after, the loom construction prevented me making any major adjustments to my project. So I decided to adapt the loom to be able to produce what I wanted and minimize the set restrictions. The parameters of warp and weft, constituting the project, remained.

The warp beam, which to me is the core of a loom, was divided into 5 sections, which were set on a beam. I made two of these. So from having one beam, one source, with its evenly distributed tensioning, I now had 10 sources and the potential there for free experimentation.

I wanted to create a length which in itself formed a collection of garments. This woven length would be fashioned within the framework of the equipment. All the garments would be connected, literally by thread. In total, the length was 15 metres long, woven in one piece. My intention with the work was to give each garment detailing that to an interested onlooker would not at first be comprehensible, in terms of how the weave was made, and also contribute to the development of the weaving process. Maybe this could be called concept weaving.

IN ORDER TO REALIZE THIS WEAVE, I first built my own warp beam, substituting the old one with my new version. The main purpose in rebuilding was for me to have different degrees of tension in the warp as weaving progressed, a warp that could be viewed as active and inactive. I also wanted to be able to change the position of the warp or weave into it and then wind it back. All without needing to cut anywhere. All the garments had to be formed on the loom and hold together by means of the warp ends.

Of course, this was an extremely stressful process. Dealing with a 20 metre long warp and changing its positioning was not the simplest of matters. Apart from constructing the new beam, I was forced into finding other little inventive solutions with each new stage. But tough as it was, it was also enjoyable.

The 15 metre long cloth was finished the night before the hang. Rolling it out was immensely nerve-wracking and exciting. I had, before starting to weave, made rough sketches of how each garment would look. I had also made pattern pieces and toiles that fit perfectly so the garments would be wearable, not just forms. I had planned and made many decisions about each garment, dictating the way they were woven. I tried as far as possible to determine what kind of detail I was attempting to produce, before weaving began. There is thinking and planning behind each of the garments, but naturally not everything could be worked out in advance. What was woven got rolled up on the cloth beam, so however much I stayed with the construction plan, there was no way of fully knowing what the outcome was until the cloth was rolled out.

I was, and am, ever so satisfied, and feel I did achieve just what I was after, creating something beautiful as well as intriguing to look at.

My graduation project is called Quintessence 1-5, clothing on a roll. This work was awarded the Ann Wall Design Scholarship, for which I am truly grateful. It is quite fantastic to be able to show the cloth again and in such wonderful premises as Svenskt Tenn on Strandvägen in Stockholm.

I hope the cloth will be taken and shown in other places, one of my dreams is that it might go to Japan, from where so much of my inspiration has come. ■

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