



Fiber Art Now

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FIBER
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50 YEARS OF ARTISTS

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TOURS & TRAVEL & CALLS FOR ENTRY
COMPILED BY CATE PRATO



ON THE COVER: Libby Williamson, **Burn Cycles**; 2019; silk, cotton, burlap, cheesecloth, zipper, measuring tape, sheers, tulle, felt, upholstery fabric, hemp rope, embroidery threads, repurposed scarves, yarn; free motion machine stitching, appliqué, hand painting and dyeing, hand stitching; 100 x 40 in.

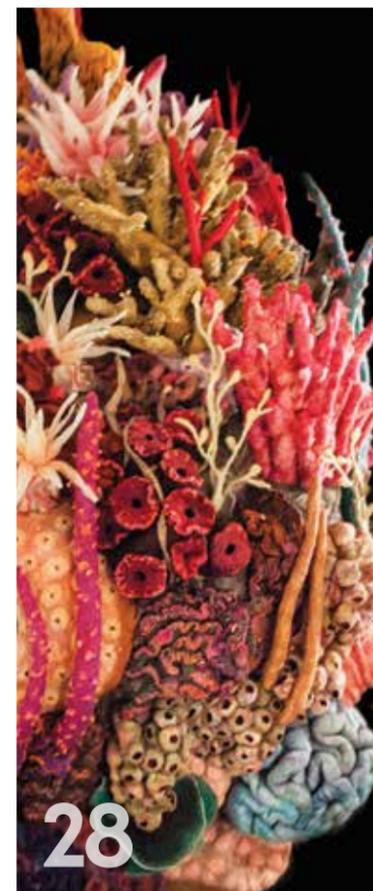
THIS PAGE: Helen Wilde, **Bawa**, (detail); 2019; organza, embroidery silk, hand dyed yarn, bamboo cotton yarn, porcelain mix ceramic; stumpwork, French knots, bullion and running stitches; 21 x 21 x 2 in. See full image on page 13.



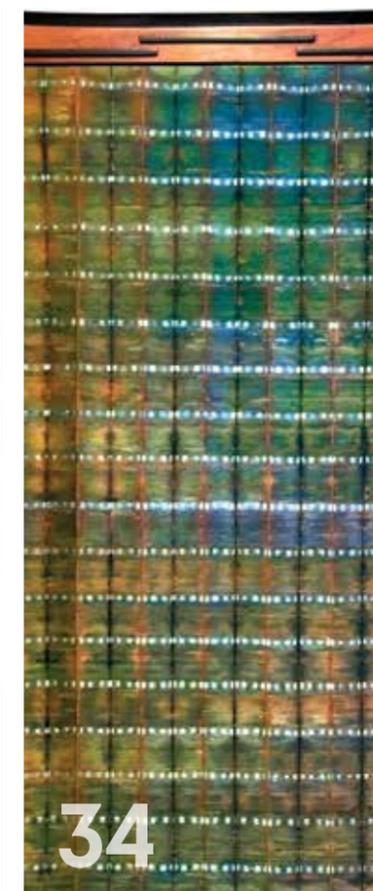
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22



28



34

16 THE TAPESTRIES OF JON ERIC RIIS AN UNFOLDING PATH BY PATRICIA MALARCHER

Jon Eric Riis's simple over-under gestures of construction have shown in museums and galleries throughout the world. His lustrous materials and meticulous execution of patterns and imagery produce sumptuous surfaces that combine provocation and visual splendor. Over several years, Riis has created a series of continuing tapestries punctuated with exploratory departures. He is currently using silk and metallic threads with Swarovski crystal beads for embellishment.

22 PHILADELPHIA STORIES THREE ARTISTS INFLUENCED BY THE CITY BY BRUCE HOFFMAN

Philadelphia is a city of heated sports fans, the cheese steak, and the Rocky statue proudly standing on the front grounds of one of the world's finest art museums. It also has a long history with commercial textile production due to the mills that lined the rivers in the early 19th century. Artists Adela Akers, Yvonne Bobrowicz, and Nancy Koenigsberg each have strong connections to Philadelphia.

28 NETHERLANDS FELT ARTISTS BY TRUDI VAN DYKE

New methods and subject matter exploration are the driving forces behind the traction that felt is receiving in the fine craft world. We visited the Netherlands to explore the work of felt artists Ellen Bakker, Zsófia Marx, and Saar Snoek, each of whom have insights and inspirations to share. These three artists have mastered innovative techniques for transforming this ancient fiber into contemporary works of art.

34 CALIFORNIA FIBERS 50 YEARS STRONG BY JANET MENDELSON

At a time when some deem membership organizations of any nature passé, California Fibers is going strong. The acclaimed contemporary artists in this group are too busy creating and exhibiting to give much thought to celebrating its 50th year. Their goal is to exhibit and promote their work. Members' practices involve weaving, basketry, sculpture, quilting, embroidery, felting, surface design, knitting, crochet, wearables, and mixed media.

PHILADELPHIA STORIES

THREE ARTISTS INFLUENCED BY THE CITY

BY BRUCE HOFFMAN

JOE AND MARK BOBROWICZ COLLECTION OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

JOE AND MARK BOBROWICZ



OPPOSITE PAGE:
Yvonne Bobrowicz,
Cosmic Series Como;
1989, modified 2017;
monofilament, gold leaf;
97 x 72 x 24 in.

THIS PAGE
ABOVE: Yvonne Bobrowicz,
Opposites Attract; 1984;
single-ply light-absorbing
natural linen, clean
translucent monofilament;
knotted; 88 x 3 x 16 in.
RIGHT: Yvonne Bobrowicz,
Cosmic Series Comet;
2020; clear monofilament,
gold leaf; site specific
commission.



JOE AND MARK BOBROWICZ

In an interview for *Vanity Fair* in 1925, W.C. Fields jokingly suggested that his epitaph would read, “All things considered, I’d rather be living in Philadelphia.” Philadelphia, a city of heated sports fans, the cheese steak, and the Rocky statue proudly standing on the front grounds of one of the world’s finest art museums. Love it or hate it, Rocky does bring the general public to the doors of the museum. A museum that proudly boasts a fine collection of contemporary studio crafts, including textiles and fiber works, now referred to as “alternative materials,” an iteration allowing studio textiles to finally take a seat at the grown-up’s table. Like the Rocky statue, “alternative materials” are the curiosity that brings the public to at least peek into the door of the craft galleries exhibiting contemporary textiles.

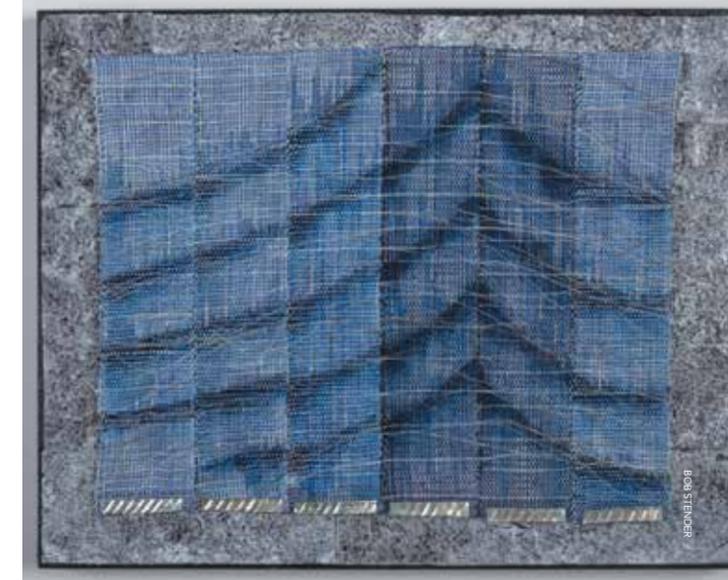
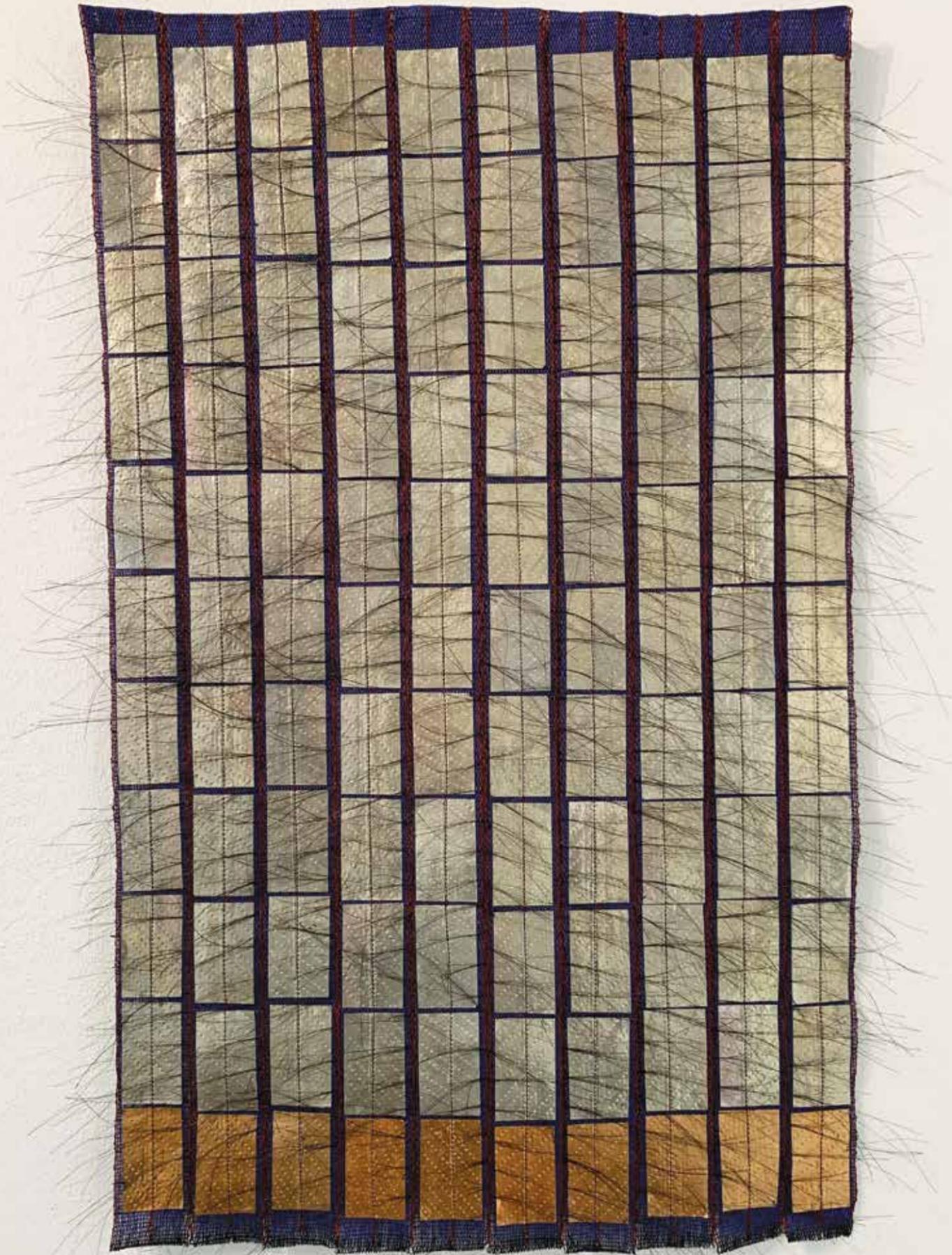
Philadelphia has a long history with commercial textile production. Mills lined the rivers in the early 19th

century, lace being a noted product as were the coveted Germantown yarns used in Navajo blankets. The regional art colleges developed curriculums for textile arts and design, many of which are still in existence today.

There are three artists in particular that have strong connections to Philadelphia. Three women with distinctive careers who, after more than five decades actively working and producing innovative art, are still influencing new generations.

Adela Akers taught for many years at Temple University, Tyler School of Art (renamed Tyler School of Art and Architecture); Yvonne Pacanovsky Bobrowicz was born in the area and taught weaving at Drexel University; and Nancy Koenigsberg was born in Philadelphia and still has many ties to the city.

All three have unique voices. Compulsive and time-consuming, their work to some may seem controlled and deliberate, while to others arbitrary and random. Philadelphia has influenced each of their works in its own way. With grand architecture ranging from the brooding 1900s buildings by Frank Furness (who influenced famed Chicago architect Louis Sullivan) to the modernist flair of the renowned Louis Kahn, Philadelphia streets become magical with changing light. The urban grid,



OPPOSITE PAGE:
Adela Akers, **Meeting**;
2017; linen, horsehair,
acrylic paint, metal
foil; hand woven,
mounted on wood
panel; 14 x 11 in.

THIS PAGE
ABOVE: Adela Akers
in her studio looking at
strips for a new piece.
RIGHT: Adela Akers,
Silver Blue; 2018;
linen, horsehair,
metal foil; hand
woven; 30 x 21 in.

making. As a student at The Cranbrook Academy of Art (1949) she was encouraged to challenge traditional rules. There she met her artist husband, Joseph (1951), and upon graduation moved to Center City, Philadelphia. While employed at the University of Pennsylvania, Joseph met Kahn who subsequently hired Bobrowicz to weave fabric for curtains and room dividers for a private home he was designing. Through this connection, Bobrowicz began teaching the history of textiles and weaving at Drexel University while also exploring Carl Jung's four phases of psychic individualism.

Bobrowicz met and studied with Anni Albers and became inspired and influenced by the architect and Kahn collaborator Anne Tyng. Tyng's work was emboldened by the power of the triangle, an almost metaphysical belief that all was in flux, a continuum. With these influences, along with the fortunate introduction to newly developed industrial plastics and encouraged by a young gallery director Helen English Drutt, Bobrowicz became increasingly bold and experimental. Her work not only grew away from the loom, it rose from the floor and hung down from the ceiling with hand knotted monofilament which she incorporated with bits of linen tipped with gold. Bobrowicz is still exploring the endless possibilities these materials offer her. At 92 years of age, she just completed a 10-foot high commission about which she stated, while laughing, she'd like to make 10 more.

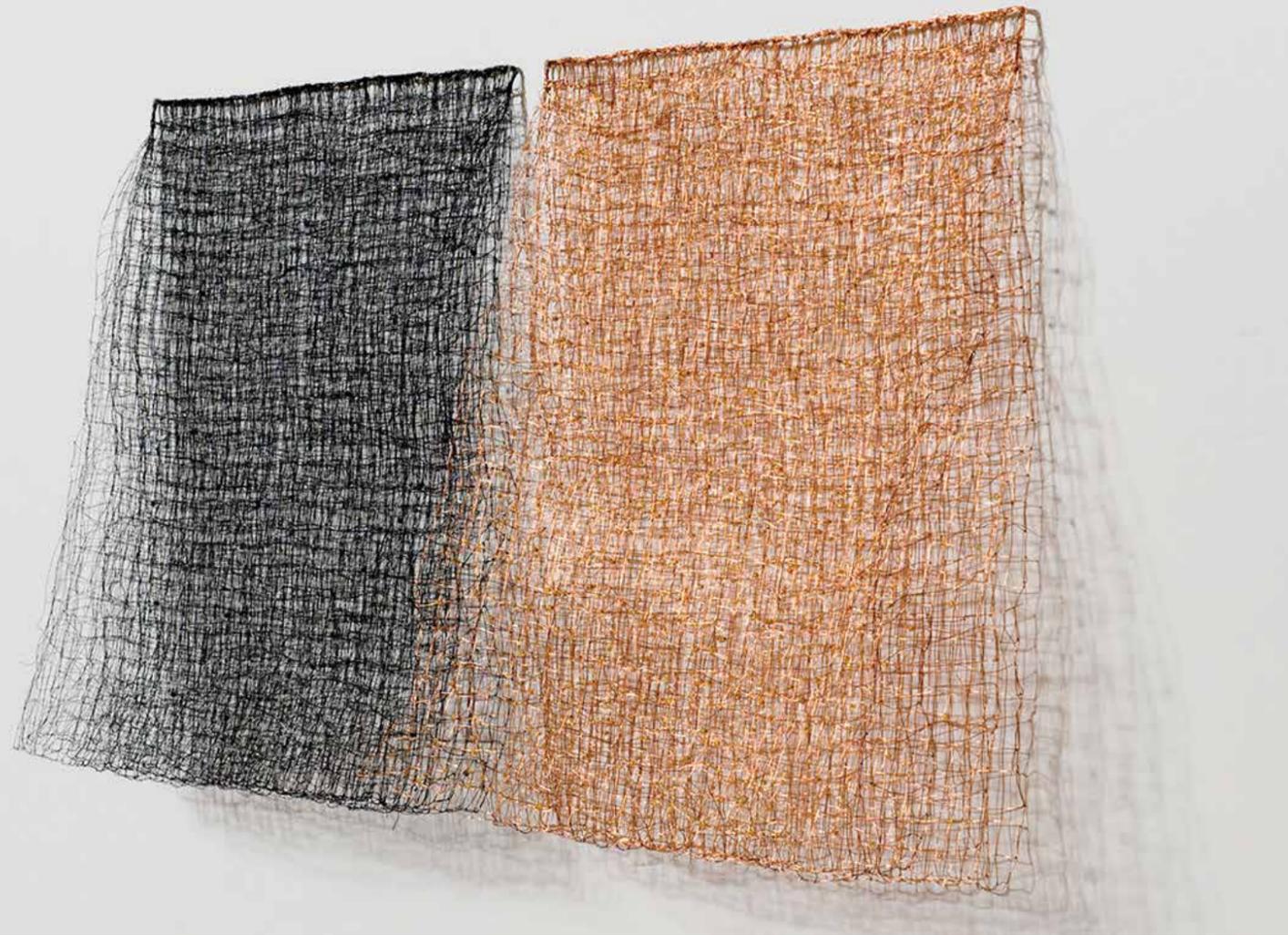
Adela Akers came to Philadelphia to teach after completing advanced studies at Cranbrook Academy of Art (1960). Her education began at the University of Havana, where she studied to be a pharmacist, later coming to the United States and studying at the Chicago Art Institute (1957). She took a keen interest in the history of textiles and was drawn to Peruvian techniques and pattern making which still influences her work today. Additionally, science and mathematical sequences have guided her material choices and her drive to experiment with materials and process. Combining natural materials while using hand weaving, she controls texture and tension with precision. Akers uses long, single strands of horsehair as a way of drawing elegant floating

structured yet flowing, is scattered with parks and streets that pulsate outward in a Fibonacci sequence.

Each of these three artists has been experimenting with "alternative materials" for more than five decades, accomplished with long exhibition histories and representation in many public and private collections.

Yvonne Bobrowicz's work was recently exhibited in *Weaving Beyond the Bauhaus* at the Chicago Art Institute. The exhibition was a tribute to the 100th anniversary of The Bauhaus School. The Art Institute acquired one of her pivotal pieces for their permanent collection.

With artisan parents, Bobrowicz had an innate understanding of and appreciation for objects, materials, and the art of



OPPOSITE PAGE
TOP: Nancy Koenigsberg, **12 Hours**; 2005; coated copper wire, glass beads; woven; 24 x 49 x 8 in.

BOTTOM: Nancy Koenigsberg, **Red Concentric Boxes**; 1999; coated copper wire; woven; 14 x 12 x 12 in.

THIS PAGE
TOP LEFT: Nancy Koenigsberg, **Morning Light**; 2010; coated copper wire, glass beads; knotting; 79 x 104 x 15 in.

TOP RIGHT: Nancy Koenigsberg, **Solitary Path**; 2019; coated copper wire; woven, knotted; 29 x 29 x 2 in.

AT RIGHT: Nancy Koenigsberg



lines. She also weaves in repurposed rectangular lead strips created from the cork wrappings on wine bottles. Hammered thin, these pewter-like surfaces reflect light off of her weavings. One could compare these patterns to city buildings at sunrise or sunset, windows ablaze with undulating light.

Nancy Koenigsberg has long been fascinated with city light and the architecture and grids associated with urban life. Her memories from an early age are associated with handwork in some capacity. After earning a bachelor's degree from Goucher College, she relocated to New York City where she founded a custom needlepoint design company that specialized in rugs and furniture coverings. Working with grids set the foundation for the design and structure

still evident in her work today. She closed her company in the mid-1970s and enrolled in The New School to study weaving with Gail Wimmer.

With a desire to learn more hand-to-material creating, she practiced off-loom weaving techniques, eventually transitioning into hand knotting, working with wire. She discovered that she was excited by the structural yet flexible properties of wire. Polychrome industrial wire became Koenigsberg's signature material. Each piece of art is predominately monochromatic, inspired by city buildings and interacting light. Additionally, she has looked to the blackness and boldness of works by Richard Serra. She is an artist who is as comfortable creating works for the wall with flat, layered undulating grids as she is with stacked, open-structured freestanding towers or stacked, tumbling cubes. She continues to maintain a studio in New York and is a founding member of the Textile Study Group of New York where she is still an active member.

These are three legendary studio textile artists who have no signs of stopping. Each is driven by the creative process and love of the materials and motivated each day by mentoring and inspiring generations to come.

BRUCE HOFFMAN is the Director of Gravers Lane Gallery located in the historic Chestnut Hill neighborhood of Philadelphia. An advocate for contemporary studio arts, Hoffman was one of the co-founders of FiberPhiladelphia. He has taught Curatorial Studies at Moore College of Art and Design and has been guest curator and lecturer at numerous museums and institutions of the past 35 years. graverslanegallery.com | bhoffman@graverslane.com

