

## Warps and Wefts in Time: Ana Esteve Llorens Channels Memory into Cloth

Lindsey Reynolds | Austin 2018

The exhibition catalogue from Ana Esteve Lloren's solo show at Las Cruces, "Correspondence," reads like poetry.

"You are actually inside of the memory in a way. It emanates from you. To meditate on it helps me think."

Compiled from emailed fragments exchanged with a long-time friend — New York-based writer Amira Pierce — over the course of Esteve Lloren's planning for the show, the catalogue exposes the artist's history, motivations, personality and feelings without staunch academicism.

It is overtly affectionate, since the words come from a friend, exalting Esteve Lloren's "gift" for "giving form to feeling" with generous descriptors she would not use herself. The type-set messages are neatly packaged with a set of glossy postcards that showcase detail shots of Esteve Lloren's work, a subliminal urging that the consumer would use them to recommence the act of correspondence — about the show, about memories, about life.

"Correspondence" is Esteve Lloren's newest series of weaving works. Made with a traditional backstrap loom attached to her body, the weavings evoke memories of textiles from her youth in Spain. They are not direct copies. Rather they are distortions of what she remembers that speak to the fragility of memory and the subtractions and additions that alter it over the course of a life.

The clarity of Esteve Lloren's recollections is also warped by the complicated and methodical process of weaving, a technique she originally observed from her grandmother and perfected during a stay at an artists' cooperative in Mexico City. There, women weavers still use backstrap looms extensively. These devices are deceptively simple. After tying on the loom around the waist with a cloth strap, the weaver endlessly loops a wooden shaft around and through a mass of hundreds of threads to produce intricate lines, color blocks and patterns. The resulting pieces are ubiquitous around the Latin world, and touched Esteve Llorens in both Mexico and her native Spain.

Beyond the delicate process of hand-weaving each of the small individual works — which can take up to two weeks to produce — Esteve Llorens authenticates her work by sourcing natural dyes, like deep scarlet red from crushed Cochineal insects and notoriously difficult-to-obtain indigo. A bevy of indigenous plants lend their rich color to the cotton and wool fibers.

Methods of natural dye extraction are a marvel of pre-industrial technology. And yet Esteve Llorens uses some of the most modern of technologies to round out her pieces, adding frames made of precisely cut fiberboard and plexiglass in organic shapes that mimic the stretch and pull of the fabric.

This juxtaposition of techniques owes to the artist's training as an engineer. In "Blinker (4 ½" x 15, 1:1)," for example, recognizably modern fabricated materials including aluminum, mirrors, commercial paint, are the only ones in play. Esteve Llorens often messes with mirrors in her work, because distorting them shows us different ways of seeing ourselves. Here, she arranges mirrors at one-to-one intervals with flat, blank, non-reflecting and uninviting wood. In a tiny space such as Las Cruces, which aside from an art gallery doubles as a retail shop selling clothing, accessories, and media, the effect is intentionally frustrating.

Esteve Llorens says exhibiting in a store elicits special considerations. For one, mirrors are a necessity in commercial spaces. "Blinker" is right across from a clothing rack and situated about a quarter of the way up the wall. You could expect to pick out a dress, turn around and see in the mirror how you would look in the dress. But if you can only see a slice of yourself, at what point do you realize that the mirror isn't a mirror, but an art piece?

Textiles also have reflective surfaces. For Esteve Llorens, they mirror the span of her life, reflect moments that can't be relived and that need to be memorialized with the labor that goes into weaving the cloth. They provide the seed of an idea. She begins with a hazy vision and gets lost in keeping up with numbers of threads she's pulled and in the winding directions of the lines in the patterns. Though she follows a carefully mathematical system, a piece can start out with four straight lines and turn into six squiggly ones. At some point, she lets the process take over and her deft fingers fulfill the task at hand. What results is a culmination of everything she's been taught and everything she's had to learn.

Esteve Llorens recently taught a class at the gallery. Though she's taken her weaving skills far, it was the first time she's attempted to teach them. Instead of starting off participants on the loom, she set them up with strips of cut paper to simplify the daunting job of weaving together all of the individual threads. Then, she let them experiment with the loom, establishing a connection between their bodies and the apparatus. In those few moments, students caught a glimpse of the relationship Esteve Llorens has built with her loom over the years, so intertwined that it functions as an extra appendage.

Amira Pierce, in the catalogue, sums up the relationships at play beautifully, harkening back to the theme of the show: "In our loneliness, there is a correspondence, a knowing that the work we do in our solitude is, in essence, who we are, and also our way of reaching deeper into ourselves and reaching towards each other."

This text was published on the occasion of the exhibition "Correspondence".