



Erika Hewston received her B.F.A. in textiles and materials studies, with a concentration in weaving, and a B.S.B.A. in business management from Kutztown University of Pennsylvania in 2018. She was awarded Kutztown University's Pawling Award for "excellence in crafts" and she received the American Tapestry Alliance's Emerge Award in 2018.

Image above: "Detail of Butterscotch," 2019, yarn, fabric, string, 12 x 24 x 3 inches, image courtesy of artist.

The Freedman Gallery at Albright College, named after former Albright trustee and alumna Doris Chanin Freedman, is located on the ground floor of the Center for the Arts. Since its inception, the gallery focuses primarily on contemporary, living, American artists and hosts approximately 10-12 exhibitions each year rotating in the Main Gallery, Project Space and Foyer Gallery. Freedman Gallery is located at 13th & Bern Streets, Reading, PA 19612. Gallery hours are Tuesday-Friday 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sunday 1-4 p.m. The gallery is closed on Mondays, holidays, breaks and summer. (See Albright.edu/calendar). During the COVID-19 pandemic, please call (610) 921-7541 or (610) 921-7715 to confirm gallery hours of operation.

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Contemporary Weavings by Erika Hewston
Exhibited in the Project Space, Freedman Gallery, Albright College, Reading, Pa.
October 15 – November 24, 2020.

Installation curated by David M. Tanner. Essay written by Honor Wilkinson, curator of collections and exhibitions, Freedman Gallery.

This project was supported by funding from annual donors to Albright College's Center for the Arts and the Freedman Gallery.



Cover image: "Installation No. 1," 2018, yarn, fabric, felt, string, rope, 46 x 35 x 5 inches, image courtesy of artist.



CONTEMPORARY WEAVINGS BY ERIKA HEWSTON

OCTOBER 15 – NOVEMBER 24, 2020



CONTEMPORARY WEAVINGS BY ERIKA HEWSTON

by Honor Wilkinson, curator of collections and exhibitions for the Freedman Gallery

Erika Hewston (b. 1994) is a textile artist who creates hand-woven, three-dimensional tapestries with materials ranging from yarn, fabric and ribbon, to rope, tulle and newspaper. While Hewston refers to her weavings as tapestries — traditionally understood to be flat weavings with non-repetitive or figural patterns — her manipulation of the fiber's three-dimensional surface creates bulging protrusions and free-hanging fringe, coalescing into textural topographies that engage the viewer's visual and tactile senses.¹ Historically, weaving was valued for its structure, order and neatness, which are products of the loom — a tool and temporary support that stabilizes the gridded warp/weft weaving pattern. Hewston's weaving practice, however, uses the loom to create a sense of wildness, with strings, yarn, ribbons and strips of ripped fabric hanging loosely from the tightly woven segments. Her tapestries are not flat or pictorial; they are abstractions that continually refer back to the materials of which they are made, celebrating the distinct textural and formal characteristics of each filament.

Hewston's abstract compositions and her accentuation of medium align with the Fiber Arts tradition that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. "Fiber artists," as they were termed in this era, are characterized by "the desire to magnify scale and formal structure to enhance the visual interest of the abstract surface ... and the wish to utilize materials outside the utilitarian imperatives of the textile industry," writes curator Elissa Auther.² Fiber artists of the period strayed from the conventional understanding of textiles as functional objects and used traditional methods like coiling, wrapping, braiding and knotting to create abstract artwork designed to be viewed.³ An example of this can be seen in the work of leading fiber artist, Neda Al-Hilali (b. 1938), whose large-scale work "Marduke" is in the Freedman Art Gallery collection. It was during this time that textile and fiber artwork began to be discussed as contemporary art rather than traditional craft.⁴

In the early stages of her career, Hewston's embrace of the malleable medium, her skill in composition, and her utilization of gravitational force have created a sculptural body of work. The integral roles of gravity and color as tools and concepts are apparent in both the tapestries' suggestion of nature and the tapestries' exploration of artistic mediums.

Her compositional choices transform many of her weavings into biomorphic forms (e.g., "Quarantine," "Indigo Corner" and "Porcupine"), evoking parallels to flowing waterfalls, rugged cliffs, gaping canyons, dripping stalactites, dangling Spanish moss, rough lichen, creeping mold and corroding rust — all forms of nature's power, growth and decay. Her works "Ink," "Colorsplash No. 1" and "Colorsplash No. 2" replicate the physical properties of artistic mediums under the force of gravity. In reference to her work "Inked," she says, "The color drip weaves are inspired by two main things: the way dyes dilute and separate as the dye travels across fibers, and the way large amounts of paint drips down a vertical surface. These weavings go from a saturated bold color to a muted/pale color representing dye properties and the fringe weave portrays the dripping nature of paint."⁵ In the description of the colorsplash weavings, Hewston says that they "explore further the way that paint can be spread on a canvas and then drip down the surface."⁶ Utilizing color to denote matter (e.g., "Colorsplash No. 1" and "Colorsplash No. 2"), artistic medium (e.g., "Graphite" and "Ink") and depth (e.g., "Indigo Corner"), Hewston traverses the boundaries of medium in her endeavor to convey the viscosity of paint and the dilution of ink through the painstaking process of loom weaving.

From the drip of paint, to the drip of stalactites, Hewston's color gradations and juxtapositions, coupled with the tapestries' freedom of form, spark personal associations and prompt, as she intends, "an escape for the viewers."⁷

¹ Michael Clark, "Tapestry," *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms* (2 ed.), Oxford University Press, 2010, accessed 06 Oct 2020, www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199569922.001.0001/acref-9780199569922-e-1653?rskey=2MsaCd&result=1721

² Elissa Auther, "Classification and Its Consequences," in *American Art*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Autumn 2002): 7

³ Auther, "Classification," pp. 2-9

⁴ As an example, in 1969, the Museum of Modern Art in New York curated the exhibition "Wall Hangings," which the press release describes as "[t]he first major exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art devoted to the contemporary weaver whose work places him not in the fabric industry but in the world of art." (The Museum of Modern Art, "Wall Hangings," press release, Feb. 25 1969, accessed 08 Oct. 2020, assets.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_326605.pdf?_ga=2.56158827.1525929965.1602251528-1030049384.1602251528)

⁵ Erika Hewston, "Inked," Erika Hewston Textiles, accessed 07 Oct. 2020, www.erikahewstontextiles.com/product-page/inked

⁶ Hewston, "Colorsplash No. 1," www.erikahewstontextiles.com/product-page/colorsplash-no-1

⁷ Hewston, "Artist Statement," www.erikahewstontextiles.com/artist-statement

Image above: "Quarantine," 2020, yarn, fabric, rope, string, 144 x 84 x 5 inches, image courtesy of artist.