

Illumination

Karen Benjamin

I feel that color is the very heart of my weaving and the primary element in my designs. I hand dye all of my yarns and almost always work with three strands of yarn so I can transition from one color to another more evenly. I definitely enjoy getting a sense of illumination in my work with just the use of color.



Connecting Threads, 30" x 40"

For my more formal pieces, and usually for commissions, my designs begin with the color. I have always been fascinated by color gradations and have spent most of my weaving career exploring the possibilities of design limited by the use of color gradations. I choose three colors of dye and then use one color in its pure form and combine the other two in various ways. That is to say using blue and yellow I might mix a color that consists of 80% blue and 20%yellow. I would then mix that color with scarlet in varying amounts from 2% b/y to 80% b/y with the goal of a smooth gradation from one color to the next. This is facilitated by using three strands of the yarn and thus dropping one strand of the previous color and picking up one of the next.

In the design, the purest, warmest color represents the brightest or lightest part and the coolest mix represents the darkest tone in the design. Sometimes I may dye different saturations of the same combinations to get more variation and interest. That is usually determined by the complexity of the design. I seldom use black, but prefer a very saturated deep color in its place.

When deciding which colors to mix, I use the color wheel and like to mix one or two steps from the complement of a given color. For example, if I were mixing green with a red, I wouldn't use a pure red, but use a magenta or red mixed with some yellow. To my eye this gives more beautiful mid tones than when one mixes complementary (i.e. opposites on the color wheel) colors.