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Department of Design for Body and Environment

Woven Landscapes
Textile Art as Deep Mapping

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I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

Signed: 

Programme / department: TSD, Design for Body and Environment

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Introduction

"In the end it is a primal idea, that landscape is nothing more than an extension of weaving that's only a mantle covering the earth" (de Amaral, 2021).

The past two years have seen a huge change in life as we know it due to the coronavirus. Restrictions and confinement have led to reconnection to immediate surroundings with nature being a source of comfort for many. It has been my experience that re-engagement with the local environment has led to a heightened appreciation for green space and a more intense curiosity for local cultural issues and historical facts. The creative result of an interdisciplinary exploration of a place in this way, developing like field work for a project, could be called a Deep Map. The term Deep Mapping has been used to describe this process, 'a detailed, multimedia depiction of a place and all that exists within it' (Bodenhamer, Corrigan, Harris, 2015, p.3) and usually these deep maps are in the form of a written piece of work or a performance, site-specific or visual art work (Biggs, 2014). Speaking on the meaning of Deep Mapping, Iain Biggs, educator, artist and researcher, claims;

> there is no single definition of 'deep mapping', but rather that it is a hybridisation of creative practice drawn on the humanities, and/or social and environmental sciences, regularly interbreeding with memorial cartography, geo-poetics, archaeology, psychogeography, site writing, and more... (2014, n.p.)

Textiles too have the ability to give a meaningful narrative of place. Often the most fascinating artefacts in museum collections are textiles as they can relate a huge amount of information regarding cultural and economic history (Karl, 2019). From early Egyptian textile fragments, circa 400 AD, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, to an 11th century imported silk head covering as part of the collection in the National Museum of Ireland, we are able to learn about ancient weaving techniques and fibres, religious traditions, wealth, trade and much more (V&A, 2022)(NMI, 2019). After WWII, the Fibre Art Movement took place along with Abstract Expressionism and in the 1950's textiles were recognised as the new medium for artistic expression,

combining the aesthetics of Western art with skill of ancient crafts (Miller Goin, 1998, p.58). In the decades since then, textile artists experimented and pushed boundaries creating abstract forms and three dimensional work, entering the space of sculpture, and conceptual contemporary art (Silka, 2106).

This research paper will explore textile art as a form of deep mapping through the work of three very different artists. It will show that the highly original work of each of these artists, with their knowledge, passion and engagement of their individual places, while they exhibit in fine art museums and galleries, can be considered as forms of deep mapping. Drawing from a wide range of primary and secondary sources, from books, design magazines, exhibition catalogues, and in particular, recorded interviews, both in print and on video online, from all three artists, has been particularly helpful to this research. Guy DeBord's theory of Psychogeography, Yi Fu Tuan's theory of Topophilia, and references to writings from anthropologist Tim Ingold and geographer Edward Relph amongst others, all assist the analysis and descriptions of the three artist's perceptions of space and place. Visual analysis of artwork has been done through the three artists' own websites and those of the galleries and museums where they have exhibited. This research project is divided into three chapters. The first chapter discusses the abstract art of Helen Mirra and her intense connection with place. Chapter two talks about Olga De Amaral, the internationally recognised artist from Columbia whose body of work spans over six decades. Finally, the third chapter describes the work of a young Argentinian artist, Alexandra Kehayoglou whose passion for preservation propels her work.

Chapter 1

Walking and Weaving

"Hiking is walking, walking is art and science, one foot before the other"
(Cormack 2012, cited in Mirra, 1999, p.11)

In this chapter I will discuss the walking/weaving art of Helen Mirra, how psychogeography and emotional reading of place play a role in her work, and how she, in her restrained minimalist approach, weaves together moments of personal experience, a history of place and her concern for the natural environment. From Mirra's broad range of works in sound, film, photography and textiles over a wide selection of subjects, I will draw particular attention to the textile works from the exhibition *Walking, Weaving*, 2017, (Kunst Merano, Italy), which combines a collection of thoughtful responses to place. The relationship between all the understated pieces in her exhibitions provide a deep mapping of place, instigating thought beyond the art.

In 2017 when artist Helen Mirra was asked by Zoë Dankert of *Metropolis M* magazine in an interview what the attraction to walking was for her, she replied "it is an unskilled activity, and a modest activity, and a free activity and an always available activity, and an equipment-free activity, and an active activity" (Mirra, 2017 cited in Dankert, 2017, n.p). According to Mirra, it was due to a crisis that the act of walking became an essential component of her work (Mirra 2019, n.p.). She arrived to take up a residency in Basel, Switzerland in 2008 where she planned to work in a studio space and spend some time walking in the mountains in her spare time. However the studio space never materialised and she was given an office to work in. She thought of this situation as a crisis, that she could not create and develop her sculpture practice in an office. Devastated, she took to the mountains every day for the year of the residency instead (Mirra 2019, n.p.). Nevertheless, it wasn't long before Mirra felt at home, considering herself a part of the landscape, a natural material just like the vegetation and the animals. In addition a quote she came across in a nineteenth- century social services book, "the pull of the sea or the push of the land", no doubt a career guidance of sorts, enabled her to make a decision for her artistic direction, understanding that the push of the land, with its "movement, geography, beauty and ambiguity" were of importance

and value to her (Mirra, 2020, n.p.). Her own physical engagement with this environment in addition to her movement through walking or hiking transformed her. She decided that if she were to continue as an artist, that it would be through walking. The setback of the studio failure became an opportunity for her to immerse herself in this simple physical activity, moving through spaces, observing, studying and thinking, similar to French poet and critic Charles Baudelaire's (1821-1867) *flâneur,* a character in nineteenth-century city of Paris, who moved casually through the streets and arcades while openly absorbing the surrounding noises and sights and general atmosphere (Seal, 2013, n.p.). In his book, *The Painter of Modern Lif*e *and Other Stories* (1964), Baudelaire wrote about the flâneur, though always male, as being right at home in the crowds of Paris, just as the bird is in the air and the fish are in water (Solnit, 2001, p.199). Mirra acknowledges that she feels most at home while walking in 'unmanaged greenspace' (Mirra, 2015, n.p.) with her preference to be in a forest, immersed in the smells, colours, and the sounds of the various species around her and the diverse landscape beneath her feet (Mirra, 2015, n.p.). Guy DeBord (1931-1994), a Marxist theorist and the leading light of the avant-garde Situationist movement in 1950's Paris (Tate, 2021, n.p.), while attempting to look beyond the structured city life with an almost romantic outlook, coined the phrase 'psychogeography', the emotional effect on the psyche from the surrounding environment or geography (Oxford, 2021, n.p.). Psychogeography is a practice, something to participate in, rather than something to study (Self, 2017, n.p.) and it is still an ongoing exercise practice widely written about since the 1990's by cultural historians and writers such as Iain Sinclair, Will Self and Rebecca Solnit. Although DeBord's 'psychogeography' is intended to describe the effects of a built environment, there is no reason it can't also be utilized to understand the effects the natural landscape has on emotions and behaviours.

Mirra has in the past described herself as a walking experiment, and walking itself as an 'edge practice' (Mirra, 2015, n.p.) where 'systematic walking' (Cormack, 2014, p 11) is the first stage, and then edges over to the next stage, a sensation that translates into something else, wherever that may go. She counts many artists and writers as inspiration but feels strongly connected to the work of Polish Romanian minimalist and conceptual artist André Cadere (1934 - 1978). She is empathetic towards him and his attitudes towards the politics of space and his engagement with the pedestrian. He was an artist of his time, challenging the institutions of the art world and known to perform on foot around cities with his painted wooden bar sculptures over his shoulder and often

attending, though uninvited, art gallery and museum openings carrying his sculpture (Tate 2021). She also connects herself to the work of conceptual artist Douglas Huebler (1924 -1997) who created the '*hitchhiking project'* in 1970, travelling from place to place on the flip of a coin. Mirra too engaged in this chance coin tossing practice for her project *Walking, Weaving,* 2017, where she refers to Heubler's *Variable Works* (1970), his documentation of the project in photography, drawings and maps.

Dictated by her direct interaction with nature, Mirra travels to various locations for weeks at a time, practicing her art in a variety of processes in relation to that place alone, though always beginning with the walking. 'In my walks, I would fain return to my senses' (Thoreau, 2012). Just like Thoreau she immerses herself, whether in Brittany, in California or in Japan, with her mind-body connection and her deep interest in ecology (Mirra, 2021, n.p). She willingly opens herself up to the environment spiritually and emotionally providing for rich sources of information and inspiration. Though she might wander aimlessly allowing for variety in experience, she adopts a set process from the start of a project. Sometimes she interrupts the walk and takes notes or makes prints and, if this is the case, she will repeat these breaks or stops the same number of times throughout the numerous walks. These stops are described in the titles of the work *Walking Commas*, (Mirra, 2013). More recently however, she takes mental notes to take with her to her studio as the stopping can be disruptive to the walking.

Engaging in Buddhist practices, Mirra works with natural materials, creating assemblages of aesthetically simple works, each with their own narrative but with a common denominator running through them. Low impact, non-polluting methods of working cross over her entire practice. Text also plays a large role in her work, whether her own memory of moments on a walk, a quote from favoured literature or numbered indexing, creating implied new directions to read the work or tie it together e.g. *Grey/G* (Fig. 2) and *Hourly Fieldnotes* (Fig. 2). Hand dyed with natural pigments, narrow 16mm cotton bands with text typed with an old fashioned typewriter, pinned along the walls of gallery space at about chest height, promoting the viewer to keep walking to read the text, as seen in Figure 3. She considers both walking and weaving as Buddhist activities, simple and fundamental to us as humans. Her aversion to electricity makes the choice of using a typewriter a straightforward one. Identifying herself as a weaving experiment, the alert, awake independent walker as the warp and the resting side of her that is interdependent as the weft (Mirra, 2020). The process of weaving developed

around 6000 BC, and the basic techniques have remained the same (Harris, 1993, p.16). The engineering of the hand constructed fabric holds the mark of the maker, as each

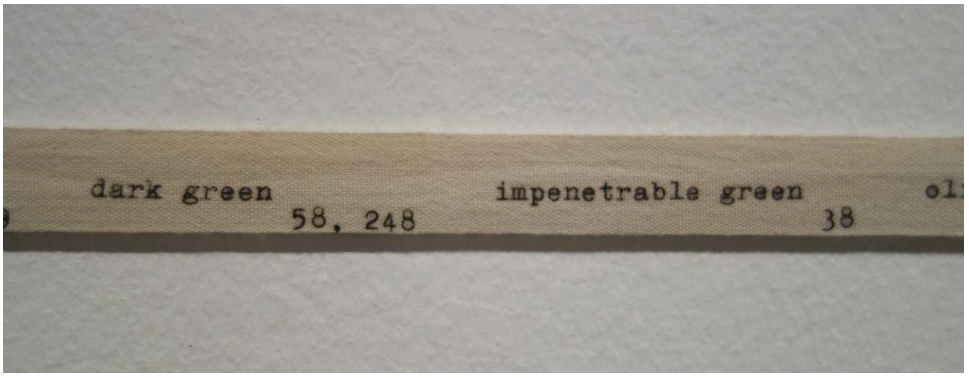

Figure 1. Helen Mirra, *Grey/G* (2021). Ink on cotton, 1.6 x 265 cm. Image taken from Artsy.net.

Figure 2. Helen Mirra, *Hourly Fieldnotes* (2013) Ink on cotton. Image taken from Mousse Magazine.

Figure 3. Helen Mirra (2012), Taka Ishii Gallery.

strand of fibre is individually chosen, handled and placed through the warp. The subtlest of movements or thread twisting can alter the final piece. It is no surprise that Mirra enjoys the labour of weaving and typing. Like walking, the movements are repetitive and rhythmic, from one side to the other.

Using a single visual reference, Mirra tends towards the smaller elements of a subject or a theme, and visualises the emotion in the form of an abstract landscape. She produced a group of small scale tapestries, sensitively woven in wool, linen and silk, after contemplative walking in Northern California in 2017, e.g. *Walweg* 2017, (fig. 4 and 5). Her art being somewhat performative, she then walks in Merano, where the exhibition, *Walking, Weaving*, for this work is taking place, to start her next project (Rekade, 2017). This method of working, then following the artefacts, and then working again where they are being exhibited links the two spaces or places. The Northern California work is connected to Merano, Merano work with the next exhibition location, and on it goes, a bridge further connecting one deep map to another.

Figure 4. Helen Mirra, (2017), Kunst Merano Arte

Figure 5. Helen Mirra *Walweg (2017)*

Mirroring her walking, her style of tapestry weaving is simple. Along with her much admired Anni Albers, she embraces the challenge of working within the woven

framework (deZegher 2012, p.135), although she is not interested in experimenting with different weave structures and just concentrates on how the interwoven threads react to each other. The rhythm and the structure created are discrete but intensive simultaneously. The long titles of each piece describe the first stage of the Mirra practice, the route of the walks taken, and when they were taken, e.g., '*1-21 May, Overlook – Green Gulch – Redwood Creek – Heather Cutoff – Overlook'* (Fig. 6). The vibrant colour in this tapestry is what one would expect from May inspired walks, a bright green with a light mood, though with a large muted band abruptly placed through the centre, perhaps alluding to Redwood Creek from the title, or even changeable weather or mood. Even the locations are descriptive, with colours in their names and an

Figure 6. Helen Mirra,
1-21 May, Overlook - Green Gulch - Redwood Creek - Heather cutoff - Overlook, (2017)
Linen, silk, wool, 56.5 x 25.4 cm
Peter Freeman Inc

Figure 7. Helen Mirra, *Late May, early June, Trisha Brown Stanley Brouwn* (2017)
Linen, silk, wool, 56.5 x 25.4 cm
Peter Freeman Inc.

image of low-growing flowering heathers comes into play. Another of the tapestries titled *Late May early June, Trisha Brown Stanley Brouwn* 2017, (Fig. 7) indexes a time and a place and also pays an homage to two fellow walking artists who died around this time, adding a more personal sense of loss (Rekade, 2017). The two artists will be associated now with Helen Mirra, with her California walks, the time of year on the title, 'late May, early June', the weather at that time and now, potentially, the place of Merano where their names are part of the work exhibited. By using these lengthy titles in place of the previously used typed bands of cotton, Mirra has altered her means of communication. In 1654, writer Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1701) created the *Carte de Tendre, The Map of Tenderness* to accompany her novel *Clélie* (1654). The *Carte de*

Tendre developed from emotional experiences, relationships and the art of memory, along with topology of the landscape. 'The fictional making of lived space' resulted in a geographical emotional cartography with elements of green space, a river, pathways and buildings providing the reader with sensory experiences, touching, looking, listening. This map is further inscribed with a list of emotions as one moves through the areas, taking the reader on an inner journey, that of feelings, reactions and responses (Bruno, 2002, p. 223-225). The *Map de Tendre* can be compared with the work of Mirra with both evoking emotions and geographical references with elements of text, however, the minimalist style of Mirra and the sensitively subtle gestures of mood has a contemporary edge. The extended titles in this work of Mirra are descriptive and more personal and individual. Each piece from the exhibition or collection can stand on its own, and if they were to be separated and their concept will be read more easily by the viewing public. They are a portion of the collection but will proudly stand alone as a deep mapping of a space or place. However, the collection as a whole is like a calendar, a diary, a map, and a weather report and an appreciation for the natural landscape.

Mirra's intimate portraits of an environment (Rekade 2017) are her deep readings of a place. She makes simple work that makes sense to her. She appreciates a connection between the elements of her art but does not necessarily always understand the relationships, but is just satisfied they are there. Her thoughts and ideas she brings to the fore, hoping the audience will see them the way she does but not as a lesson, but as points to ponder over (Mirra, 2003).

Like Thoreau, "she is a maximalist under the guise of ascetic spareness", (Eleey, 2006, p.149)

Chapter 2

Alchemies, Mists and Woven Walls

Personal connection is the starting point in the creation of an intimate portrait of a place. The relationship one has with a landscape or a region is affected by many different issues from cultural and historical to the love of the topography and architecture. Colombian artist Olga De Amaral's practice over sixty years has become increasingly filled with the soul and spirit of her native country, deep maps capturing elements that speak to her from memory, observation and historical knowledge, made with materials and fibres sourced from and connected to Columbia where she lives. Her work spanning over six decades, De Amaral has become a key figure in post-war Latin American abstract art (Roca, Martín 2014, p.312) and has been compared to painters of abstract expressionism, from Kandinsky (1866 - 1944) to Rothko (1903 - 1970) (Drutt, 2016 p.5). She was a frontrunner in the 1960's and 1970's Fibre Art Movement along with pioneers such as Leonore Tawney and Sheila Hicks (ICA Boston, 2022). Her works, 'suffused with the essence of Columbia' (Met Museum, 2003) are owned by major museums throughout the world and are part of many distinguished private and corporate collections (Drutt, 2016, p.5).

After studying architectural drafting in the 1950's in Columbia, De Amaral applied to study architecture at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, a profession that females would not have been considered for in her homeland in the 1950's (Miller Goin, 1998, p.56). However, in Cranbrook she dropped architecture for weaving, where she fell in love immediately as she discovered the possibilities working with a warp and a weft (De Amaral, 2021, n.p.). Studying under Finish-American designer Marianne Strengell (1909-1908), who encouraged the use of indigenous materials while also urging experimentation, De Amaral became obsessed with the properties of materials and their transformation into cloth (Miller Goin, 1998 p.56) (Art of the Americas, 2022, n.p.). Strengell did not promote traditional pictorial tapestry weaving but rather wanted her students to discover the properties of fibres, their colours and textures through investigation. Strengell was also known for her pragmatic ways, teaching her students to look at interior space and architectural settings while designing functional textiles, and doing so in a cost effective way (Cooper Hewitt, 2022, n.p.). De Amaral only

studied in Cranbrook for one year but Strengell's influence on her was huge. She took on the experimentation with her native materials, horse hair, linen, coarse wool, and in later years, plastic, which was a radical new material in the 1960's. Wrapping, braiding, coiling and weaving, working in grids and patterns impulsively without plan or concept she began to develop her own artistic language (Adamson, 2021, n.p.). The process led her along, "whispering to her" solving her ideas through a dialogue that was taking place between her and her work (de Amaral, 2021, n.p.). In *Making,* 2013, Tim Ingold refers to this conversation between a maker and their materials through their tools, where through transduction, feelings flow and they become intertwined, 'the potter's feelings flow in correspondence with the clay' (Ingold, p.102 -108).

Hailing from a family of engineers and informed with her own experience in architectural studies, de Amaral, with a love of basic geometry, pushed the boundaries of conventional textiles (de Amaral, 2021, n.p.) (Bellas Artes, 2015). She produced a series of *Woven Walls* made from wrapped spirals of woven wool and horsehair, tapestries that are very large in scale, that 'both create and divide spaces'. These *Woven Walls* e.g. *Woven Wall Homestead* (Fig. 8) and *Woven Wall 82* (Fig. 9), launched her onto the international stage through an exhibition in New York in the late 1960's (Walker, 2021). Later, in 1969 during a visit to Peru, de Amaral witnessed a Quechua woman weaving silently in the shadowy light of her simple home. The woman was skillfully weaving 'as easily as she was breathing' and de Amaral felt a connection to her, a natural closeness that felt almost genetic (de Amaral, 2014, p.318). It seems as though it was here that she realised this was always the plan for her, and the draw she felt towards weaving was natural. It was part of her cultural tradition and the rich history of pre-Columbian art (Constantine, 1992, n.p.). Weaving was 'the highest medium of artistic expression' of the ancient Andeans (Constantine, 1992, n.p.) and with evidence of only the simplest of tools used, the level of their intelligence and mathematical skills was extremely high (de Amaral, 2014, p.318) (Bennett W, 1954, p.12). Anni Albers (1899 - 1994), textile designer and weaver, and among the pioneers of 20th century modernism, was also highly impressed by the ancient Andean textiles (Albers Foundation, 2022). As a student in the Bauhaus in 1920's Germany she was exposed to the complexity of these weavings through her tutor Gunta Stölzl (1887-1983). They had many collections of these ancient textiles available for observation in German Museums and Albers later, as a tutor and writer, encouraged all textile workers to study their visual and structural language (Gardner Troy, 2018).

Figure 8. Olga De Amaral, *Woven Wall Homestead* (1969)
Wool, 210 cm x 137 cm
Lisson Gallery

Figure 9. Olga de Amaral, *Woven Wall 82,* (1972), (detail insert)
Wool and Horsehair
300 x 100 cm
Bonhams

De Amaral was introduced to the use of gold in art through Austrian-British ceramicist Lucie Rie (1902-1995) (Walker, Mott, 2021, n.p.). In the style of Japanese *kintsugi,* or golden repair, Rie used gold leaf to repair her thin walled vessels (Miller Goin,1998, p.60) and thereby making the work more beautiful. Colour, discovered by de Amaral when she started weaving first, was 'like a language that lives in her', as she mixes colours as a painter does (de Amaral, 2021). The colour of the Columbian vegetation, the mountains and the savannah, sombre colours as she describes herself, were the ones of the fibres she used (de Amaral, 2021 n.p.). She understood how her work was limited to these colours and their combined constructed values (de Amaral, 2014, p.319). She experimented by applying gold leaf to her woven structures as a new colour, both by combining it with the dyed natural fibres, e.g. *Crags and Gold 2* (Fig. 10) and on others work, abundantly applying it over almost entire surfaces, fabricating shimmering cascades like the waterfalls in the mountains, e.g. *Alchemy 99* (Fig. 11). De Amaral remembers attending the simple stone Catholic church as a child and how once through the entrance was 'transported into a different space, into something magnificent' where light was bouncing off the brilliant gold ornaments in the candlelight (Moyer, 1998). Her self-described 'Paintings in Space' (de Amaral cited by Bella Artes Gallery, 2017, n.p.) transformed the possibilities of the gold leaf, the reflective quality creating a magical atmosphere, mesmerising like that in a 6th century

Figure 10.

Olga de Amaral
Crags and Gold 2 (1985)
Horsehair, fibre, paint,
gold leaf
230 x 220 cm
Richard Saltoun Gallery

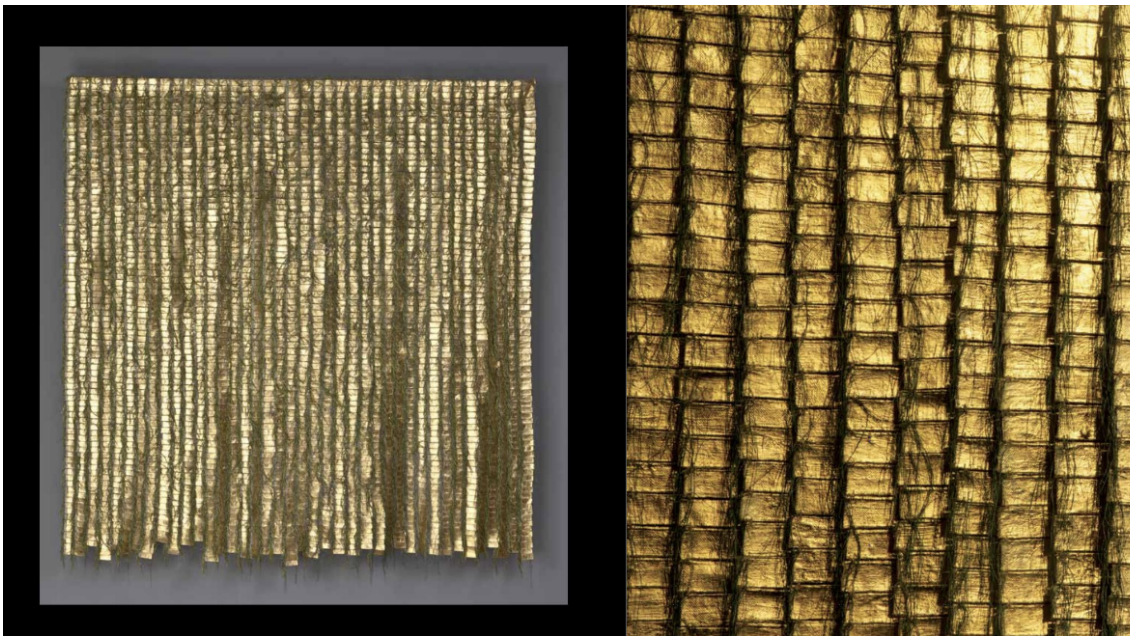

Figure 11. Olga de Amaral, *Alchemy 99* (2007), (detail on right)
Linen, gesso, acrylic, gold leaf, 200 x 200 cm. Gallery Agnès Monplaisir

Byzantine church (Britannica, 2022). She titled a whole series of her works *Alchemies*, in homage to a gold mantle she saw in Peru's Gold Museum (de Amaral, 2014, p.318). The gold brought a new weight to the designs, made them look heavy but flexible at the same time, transforming the space they occupied (de Amaral, 2014, p.318). She was treating the gold leaf as a special colour and not as gold, as an alchemist would think of a material 'known not by what it *is* but by what it *does*, specifically when mixed with other materials, treated in particular ways, or placed in particular situations' (Conneller 2011, cited in Ingold 2013, p.29). Since pre-Columbian times a high value has been attributed to gold with examples of highly decorated jewellery to be seen in the Gold Museum in Bogotá (Jones, 1985, p.47-59) and archaeological findings of hammered breast plates, altar pieces and embroidered decoration on ceremonial clothing (Constantine, 1992, n.p.). Columbia's goldsmithing traditions and gold mining has fueled violence since the times of the Spanish colonists invasion during the 16th and 17th century (Martín, 2014, p.14). The famous legend of *El Dorado*, tells the tale of the gilded tribal chief who came from the mountainous region in what is now Columbia. The Europeans believed there was a source of gold in the mountains and made endless attempts to find it (Dryew, 2022). Similar to De Amaral's connection of her found love of weaving with the ancient cultural traditions of her home, her discovery of the use of

gold was also first encountered elsewhere. It is as though she is bringing the traditions home, or re-awakening them for the contemporary modern world.

De Amaral's earlier works, coiled, wrapped and woven large scale weavings, though abstract, directly referring to the rugged mountainous landscape, evolved into richly embellished reflective architectural structures. The application of gold leaf prompted further practice of applying colour directly to woven pieces. Acrylic paint and gesso are applied to achieve an immediate change to intensify colours and also alter the physical characteristics of the fibres (de Amaral, 2014, p.320). With the mind of an alchemist she works at changing the weight and density of single threads, making new threads from threads, or groups of threads by painting them, a time consuming, painstaking process which can take months at a time. Her most recent series *Brumas*, or *Mists* (2013), while still embracing her architectural geometric style, breaks free from the weaving loom altogether by hanging single painted threads of cotton in layers from a board (Walker, Mott, 2021 n.p.). These new works are not weaving in the traditional sense with a warp and a weft, but perhaps more like a warp cut and left hanging. Within the centre of the hanging threads are carefully painted geometric shapes, perhaps mountains, trees or buildings, emerging from and retreating behind the mist. The angle of the board dictates the drape of the threads and how they are viewed when one walks around them (Walker, Mott, 2021,n.p.). The delicacy of the single threads and the space between them creates a soft change in light, weightless, like the mist slowly shifting on the Andes mountains (see Figure. 12).

With colour and space as the two most important elements in her work, De Amaral feels that the inspiration grows within her, and she is constantly inventing as she follows the direction the process takes her (de Amaral, 2019, n.p.). Unaware of the coincidental connections between her unique intricate art and that of the ancient Andean ancestors initially, De Amaral now sees her work as 'distinctly Columbian', having a distinct identity of place, particularly when she sees it situated in a gallery space (de Amaral cited in Miller Goin, 1998, p.61). It could be compared to the ancient Japanese *Fudoki* as referenced in *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives* (Bodenhamer, Corrigan and Harris, 2015), where district and regional reports were made by gazetteers to monarchs from the 8th-10th century on geography, culture, mythology and folklore providing a rich multilayered historical reference, however her work is made in the present time, referring back to ancient times. Her creative practice is a deep map of her beloved

Columbia, including history, archaeology, geographical topography and is loaded full of emotion and identity. ‘She seamlessly weaves architecture, mathematics, landscape, and the sociocultural elements of Colombia to create work transcendent of one specific medium’ (Drutt, 2013).

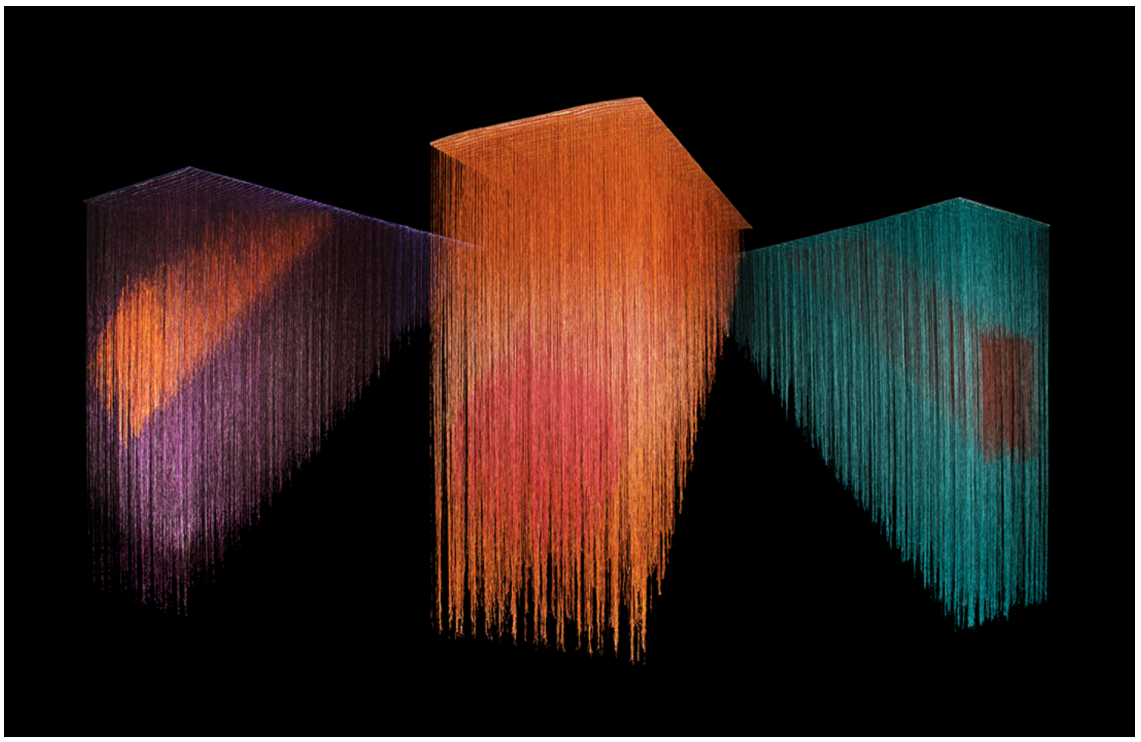

Figure 12. Olga de Amaral, *Mists A, B and C* (2013)
Linen, gesso, acrylic, 190 x 190 cm each
Olga de Amaral.net

Chapter 3

Memories of Forgotten Places

Distinct identity of place refers to a ‘combination of intrinsic characteristics’ (Relph 2021, n.p.), i.e. what qualities or features make one place different from another. According to Relph this identity of a physical environment consists of three things, the topography of a place, what happens in that place and any meaning associated with a place whether social, spiritual or political (Relph, 2021, n.p.). Deep maps can represent these characteristics however, any or all of these things can change due to human intervention or lack of human intervention. Here I will discuss the artwork of artist Alexandra Kehayoglou (b. 1981), listed as one of ‘Six Contemporary Weavers Bringing Innovation into Textile Craft’ in design magazine Dezeen (Frearson, 2018), how she focuses on what she considers the distinct identities of the natural world of Argentina where she grew up, and her quiet protest style of activism driving her art. Of the three artists discussed in this essay, Kehayoglou produces the work most directly translated from the landscape. Where Mirra and de Amaral’s abstracted works are perhaps initially difficult to read and need more time to observe and appreciate, Kehayoglou’s work is the opposite. Large plush carpet tapestries that both lie on the floor, and often mount the walls, replicating textures found in nature, offer immediate impact, sensory observation and an appreciation of nature's beauty. The artist uses her art as a voice to start a conversation, to communicate a call for environmental awareness (Kehayoglou, 2021).

Kehayoglou grew up in the suburbs of Buenos Aires beside a river where from an early age she felt a connection with her natural surroundings (Kehayoglou 2021). Fond memories of childhood art classes and good art instruction in school led to six years of fine art study in Argentina (Kehayoglou, 2021). Not entirely satisfied with painting and photography as practices after college and with carpet manufacturing as the family business, working with textiles was a natural progression in her career, particularly with the basic materials that she uses all within easy reach (NGV, 2017). Using disused stock from existing resources fit in with her desire to work sustainably and not to be wasteful. Inspiration initially from the impressionist painters of the 19th century, and in more recent years from American modernist painter Georgia O’Keeffe (1887 - 1986), are

evident in her style of hyper realistic textured lands, using multiple shades of the same colour , e.g. *Stele (*2015), (Fig. 13) (Kehayoglou, 2021).

Figure 13. Alexandra Kehayoglou, *Stele*, (2015), wool, 390 x 230 cm, Alexandra Kehayoglou.com

Carpet making is for her a production of new space, 'reproducing land, producing a new world' (NGV, 2017). Hand tufting limited colour palettes of discarded yarns in a studio beside the family's factory, she recreates depictions of actual places, expanse areas of green space, particularly those that may be in danger due to industry or other form of ecocide (Sierzputowski, 2018). Like Mirra, she too studies the places intensely, making field trips, walking over the land. She also uses drone footage in order to get a perspective from above which is very evident in her work (Treggiden, 2018, p.65). These creations are topophilic responses, they are the artistic reaction to the beauty of places that she knows and loves. Geographer Edward Relph's (b. 1944) essay *Topophilia and Topophils* (2015) describes how emotions are affected by aesthetically pleasing experiences. *Topophilia*, meaning "a love of place", is Chinese-American geographer Yi-fu Tuan's (b. 1930) term for a sense of delight with place, visually or with other sensory receptors (Relph, 2015). Kehayoglou's affective bond with her native land may have a closer relationship to Gaston Bachelard's (1884-1962) description of topophilia as 'felicitous space', somewhere that makes her happy, that is highly valued by her, and is to be protected and defended (Bachelard, 2014 p.44). She shares this space with her audience by inviting them to experience the lush eco diversive carpets

through interactive installations and exhibitions believing that the physical connection of skin with the textile can help relate to the outside world (Kehayoglou, 2021). In 2015 fashion designer Dries Van Noten commissioned a 144 square metre carpet for the catwalk of his Paris Spring/Summer 2015 fashion show, with the theme *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Rapoport 2015). Using John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* (1851-2) as inspiration (Kehayoglou, 2021) the catwalk was coated in wool, based on the same concepts of Kehayoglou's other work, with soft botanical tufted surfaces in various shades of green. After parading up and down on the uneven handmade runway the models sat and lay down on this functional, comfortable surface in front of the audience at the end of the show (Rapaport, 2015), (Fig. 14 & 15), relaxing just like Monet's *Madame Monet and a Friend in the Garden* (1872). This was great exposure for the relatively new artist and the 'magic carpet' went on to be exhibited in Berlin and Hong Kong (Keyahologou, 2021).

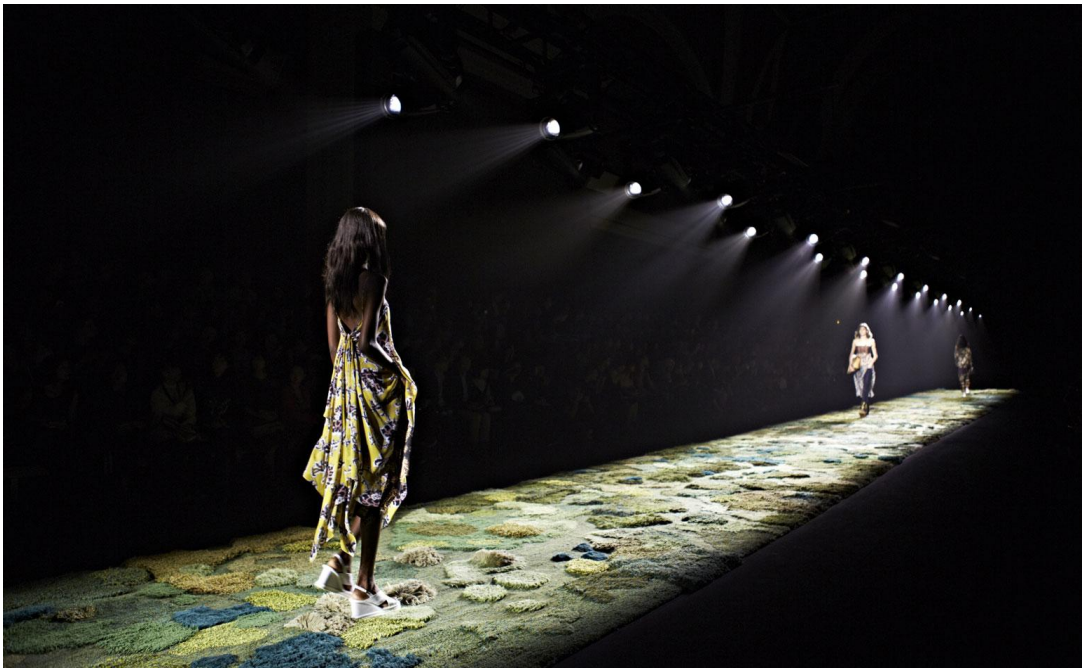

Figure 14. Alexandra Kehayoglou, Catwalk Carpet for Dries Van Noten, (2015)
144 metre square, Wallpaper.co

The drive behind Kehayoglou's practice though, is her passionate need to preserve and protect. She sees herself as an activist bridging the forgotten lands with those who have forgotten them (Kehayoglou, 2018). "Artistic Activism is a dynamic practice combining the creative power of the arts to move us emotionally with the strategic planning of activism necessary to bring about social change"
(Duncombe, Lambert, 2021). Over 10 years Kehayoglou's dedication to this activism is

Figure 15. Alexandra Kehayoglou, Catwalk Carpet for Dries Van Noten, (2015)
144 metre square, Wallpaper.co

made through her documentation of spaces and places, increasingly focusing on areas and ecosystems that are unstable or already destroyed, 'fading lands and ecocides'(Kehayoglou 2021). Some of these works are the evidence of what was once there, reproductions of the natural grasslands now a series of 'vanishing landscapes' (Kehayoglou 2021). In Figure 14, *Santa Cruz River*, 2017, a huge interactive carpet tapestry, depicts part of the Santa Cruz free flowing river in Patagonia and the unspoiled land surrounding it. It was made by Kehayoglou just as politically controversial negotiations were ongoing, proposing two hydroelectricity dams along the river that had potentially irrevocable consequences for the natural ecosystem. Unfortunately for the natural landscape, these dams are actually in the building phase right now and the carpet tapestry, a woven ecological concern, is now a memoir of a landscape that once existed. Environmental activism through art is often in the form of site specific sculpture and photography, like that of British artists Richard Long (b.1945) and Andy Goldsworthy (b. 1956) and in recent years with greater threats of climate change and environmental destruction there has been an enormous surge of creative activism on ecological themes over all fields of work from fine art to online media (McPhee, 2018). Some artists consider activism as their mission in life, and their dedication is unstoppable (Forman 2015). Zaria Forman, another environmental activist, or 'artivist' like Kehayoglou, understands that her work has the power to inspire an audience to act against climate

change. She chooses to do that through her large-scale pastel drawings capturing melting ice and rising seas, glaciers and polar regions with almost photographic detail, hoping to transport her audience to the ice as most of them will never witness it in person (Forman, 2018). She is immortalising the landscape through her art and not simply by stating climate change statistics (Forman, 2015). Like Kehayoglou, she too conveys the beauty of what is to be protected or preserved as opposed to the devastation (Forman, 2015).

Figure 16. Alexandra Kehayoglou, *Santa Cruz River*, (2016-2017)
Textile tapestry (handtuft system), wool, 980 cm x 420 cm
National Gallery of Victoria

Witnessing the loss of the creek at the mouth of the river Raggio was the motivation behind another large-scale project, *No Longer Creek* (2016) (Lesser 2016). The river Raggio, one of the few unpolluted rivers left in her hometown near Buenos Aires, was to change forever due to the construction of a shopping centre. A personal project in many ways, she set about to reproduce the natural state of the creek before the building work and construction began. Firstly, she was creating from memory, drawing on her past experience of the place with unpolluted clear waters, where birds and animals once were seen in abundance, a little oasis at the edge of the town (NGV, 2017). Secondly, this was home, where her grandparents settled from war torn Greece in the

1920's and set up their carpet manufacturing business from nothing but a hand loom (Designerbox, 2019). Thirdly, she was proudly continuing in the family tradition of carpet making. Combining her art work with the skill and craft that has been a part of her family for two generations makes them a part of her success and involved in her campaign. Lastly, this sustainable work made from surplus materials is calling attention to the disconnect between people and nature. Skillfully made in soft blues and greens *No Longer Creek* is a beautiful, (see FIG. 17), but blunt reminder of the conflict between industry and mother earth. Exhibited in the highly acclaimed Design Miami/Basel 2016 amongst the most influential and contemporary designers in the world, the enormous interactive piece (820cm x 460 cm), while enjoyed by the exhibition attendees, highlighted the instability of our landscape due to human activity (Design Miami, 2017) (Lesser 2016).

Kehayoglou's work is 'about the environment, and is self-consciously environmental', important elements in these times to attract interest and focus attention on the plight of her cause (Kusserow, 2019). Her carpet tapestries are evocative deep maps, depicting the beauty of the blooming landscape with her personal experience of the place, whether it is from memory or direct observation and always motivated by her passion for preservation.

Figure 17. Alexandra Kehayoglou, with her work *No Longer Creek* (2016), Textile tapestry (handtuft system), 820 cm x 460 cm

Conclusion

Whether a place is temporarily adopted, like that of Merano, Italy, by Mirra, or home, like the misty mountains in de Amaral's Columbia or the forgotten grasslands of Kehayoglou's Argentina, readings of interactions with the natural landscape, elements of historical or cultural reference, and personal connection are all evident in the work of these artists. Mirra's small scale abstract tapestries woven in a thoughtful rhythmic process, mirroring her walking practice, are her intimate readings of place. Her extended descriptive titles and strips of typed script along gallery walls prompt a deeper inspection and further thought. Intricate architectural structures and the use of gold leaf are de Amaral's response to the colour and movement in the historically rich Andes mountains, and the slow changes she has made in her work over the decades have increasingly connected to her heritage. Kehayogolou's literal luxurious landscape carpets of treasured places are designed to be enjoyed first as a holistic experience, and then as a vehicle to elicit a response to the devastation of our ecosystems.

Combining an appreciation of textile art and a new understanding of deep mapping was the premise of this paper. Textiles by their nature carry complex meaning, and these artists with their techniques and skills, weave together their emotional connection with place, socio-cultural and historical elements, and concern for the environment. Their works, representative or realistic, minimalist or abstract, allow insight into their personal place identities and are indeed forms of deep mapping.

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