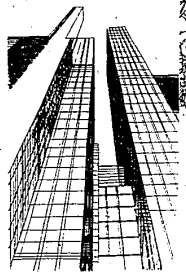


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Artist moves beyond looms

Story: GEORGIA KUX
Photos: STEPHEN CANTRELL

Robert L. Kidd's new fiber wall reliefs appear to be celebrating a special kind of freedom, that of seamy off-spring released in part from the parent loom and having a high time of it all.

In the five large works on view at Kidd's gallery in Birmingham, the loom's enriching influence is felt. It holds a loose rein, however, and fabric and fiber explore new dimensions. They follow and bristle, form lyrical lines, and, on occasion, display the trappings of a super sampler.

"This is my attempt to do more work off the loom than on it," Kidd said.

The master weaver and designer said he has long been interested in off-loom structures because the technique allows unlimited freedom. Kidd takes full advantage of this freedom, reveling in it, building fabric upon fabric with glue and stitching, incorporating flat or tubular woven pieces with forms stuffed with Dacron or foam rubber.

HE HAS BROUGHT RIVAL TEXTURES to peaceful coexistence. A birdseye pattern, for example, becomes a good neighbor to a crisp, diagonal cording; paper, woven into a cane pattern, is placed nearby a nubby weave, smooth fabrics undulate like hills against thick forests of wrapped fibers. These fibers are loops of knobby Mexican cotton burs exuberantly from their fringed, folded or tucked ties that bind.

They appear in all of the reliefs. In one pale work they are sparsely dotted, like moon rocks. In others, they get downright riotous, writhing and threatening the overall balance of the structure. Kidd's strong design discipline keeps them at bay, though, and visual synecdoche is brought about by the resulting tensions.

Kidd said he intended no particular imagery in these works, that the image itself is in the eye of the viewer. Nonetheless his sculptural approach makes some of his pieces topographically. A curving mound of lemon yellow fabric becomes a mountain. Nearby valleys are pleated or have long tunnels of tubular pink and yellow weave.

In a landscape of neutral tones, sand to earthy brown, the rounded shapes become anthropomorphic and lie together like seductive limbs.

INTERESTING COLOR COMBINATIONS do their bit to keep the reliefs lively. Kidd lobs a sliver of gaudy chartreuse against a field of shocking pink, folds a scrumptious pumpkin orange against a sooty black, or brings about shadowy nuances by casting together ivories and beiges and wheat tones.

He loves surprises, too. One is to tuck a smidgen of color or a dab of fringe beneath a deep roll of fabric. You have to peek to find them. He flirts with gravity by bringing great tendrils of brown vinyl-coated paper, several inches from their frame. They sprout precariously yet sure of themselves.

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