



ANNETTE CORDS

Shape/Shifters

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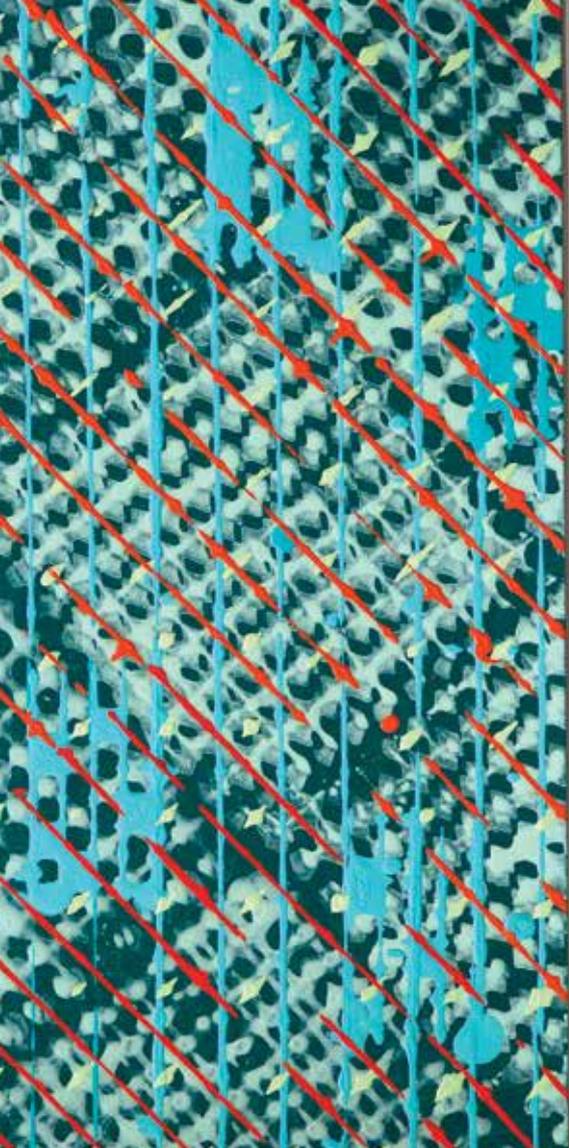
Shape/Shifters

January 7 – February 28, 2020

curated by Jill Conner

Project: ARTspace

99 Madison Avenue
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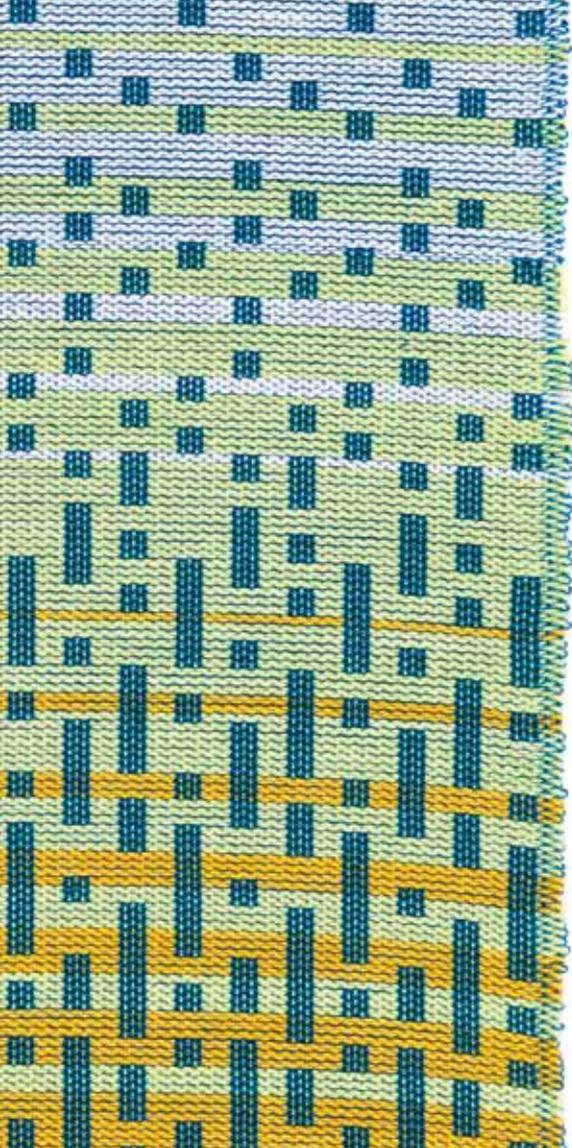
SHAPE/SHIFTERS—GESTURES IN FORM

Jill Conner

Shape/Shifters by Annette Cords presents a selection of vibrant, new tapestries with an earlier selection of paintings that reconsider the core elements of Josef Albers' seminal text *Interaction of Color*. (1963) Albers' text was ground-breaking because he considered color as a visual detail that was defined by its own movement: something that only becomes apparent when one color is seen next to another.

Throughout *Shape/Shifters* Cords explores the interrelationship that exists between color, perception and movement. When Cords stepped away from painting in 2007, she was intent on discovering more about color itself and the nature of its shifting substance. As conveyed through her paintings, the ongoing intersections of color are central to each piece. The artist's tapestries, moreover, embody the process of communication by showing the connection of distant points along a vast network.

The suggestion of movement surfaces in two tapestries titled *InBetween 1* (2019) and *InBetween 2* (2019) where overlapping threads, seen along the warp and weft, portray fragments of posters, stickers and graffiti tags. Measuring around 40-inch-square, both weavings highlight the horizontal fragments of detail that are then edited into a stuttering, vertical line. The large-scale nature of *Signal* (2017) stands over 8-feet tall and 5-feet wide and contains an extensive volume of gestural forms. The frayed threads that appear in the margins reveal the artist's selection of vibrant colors that appear to culminate into a mostly black-and-white representation.



During this time of unprecedented urban development across New York City, Cords has created a series of responses to a particular pattern of events that critique and highlight the significance of the structural grid. Public scaffolding, for instance, appears at the outset of every urban construction site in order to seal off public access, and remove the site from view. These coarse surfaces are then covered by posters, advertisements, stickers and graffiti that are either removed or covered by new ones. Layers build up over time. As these surfaces become weathered by seasonal exposure, colors and textures change. The rotating museum-without-walls emerges. Looming over this time-based process is the square and its pluralistic complement, the grid.

Shape/Shifters does not maintain a limited focus on the exotic medium of textiles. By aligning traditional weaving with urban street art, the artist firmly connects with the traces of creative rebellion that is inserted into the city's fabric. Graffiti not only disrupts the complacency of architectural form but its representation within the traditional context of the Jacquard tapestry is equally rebellious while testing the limits between image, color and thread.

Three separate groupings of artworks reveal the language that informs Annette Cords' aesthetic. A small wool-and-cotton handweave titled *Sisters 3* (2019) reflects a cubic staggering of blue, green, yellow and orange threads. The blue-green squares suggest gravity while the large 42-inch-square of *Shape/Shifter Background (1)* (2019) serves as a visual context for these floating colors. In the center of this black-and-white background, a black line and graffiti tag breaks the composition into two pieces, as a faint echo to Barnett Newman's 'zip' paintings. On the far right, a small framed painting from 2004 titled *Zoned #77*, reveals an acrylic crosshatch of blue, white and neon orange lines. Two more groupings appear around either side of the other tapestries, *InBetween 1* (2019) and *InBetween 2* (2019). *Shape/Shifters Back-*



ground (2) (2019) juxtaposes *Shape/Shifters Background (3)* (2019) and continues a reflection of the visual language that informs each of Annette Cords' woven forms.

In smaller pieces such as a *Double Fantasy 1* (2011) and *Double Fantasy 3* (2011) the woven patterns, emerging from different arrangements of blue and gray threads, show Cords' interest in portraying a range of colorful intensity all at once. However, the colors that appear at the far margins convey that an array of hues, such as red, are needed to create the impression of an icy, silvery blue. Each of these weavings, moreover, is reversible with a totally different composition on the other side. However, the red-and-blue knotted threads seen throughout *Lingering* (2011) question the role of thread density while its painted complement *Channel* (2009) shows red and orange crosshatching lines that appear to be suspended over a black background.

Shape/Shifters concludes with a fourth grouping located on the gallery's back wall. *Another Green World* (2011) reflects a network of green, blue and orange circles. *Sisters 1* (2019) and *Sisters 4* (2019) vie for a symmetrical balance in front of *Shape/Shifters Background (4)* (2019.) With a close focus on layering, Annette Cords combines altered photographic reproductions within traditional weaving patterns. Due to the nature of interconnected dyed lines, Cords' representations of urban graffiti fade into different levels of hue, renewing the significance of color and its role in shaping content. Similar to woven patterns, graffiti disappears as soon as it appears, making the act of weaving one of rebellion.

Jill Conner is an art critic based in New York City with a focus on Modern and Contemporary Art. Since 1995 Conner has contributed to publications such as *Afterimage*, *Art in America*, *Artnet*, *Art Papers*, *ArtUS*, *AS I MAG*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Contemporary Magazine*, *Flash Art*, *Interview Magazine*, *Performance Art Journal*, *Reflex*, *Riot Material*, *Whitehot*, and *Whitewall*. She is the Founder of *AS I Artists Studios*.





COMMON THREADS

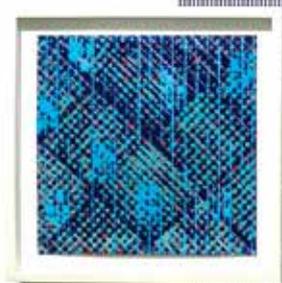
Annette Cords

In one of my early weavings, I worked on an end-on-end warp, alternating black and white threads on the loom. As I passed a green weft yarn over and under the warp, I looked down in surprise. In the gridded matrix of the fabric I was seeing two different greens, a lighter one on top of the black warp threads and a darker one on the white. In school, I had taken a color class based on Josef Albers' *Interaction of Colors*. Through a series of exercises, we made colors alter their appearance by changing the hues surrounding them, and ever since the shapeshifting nature of color has been an important element in my paintings. Looking down on my interlacing warp and weft threads, I was amazed to see the same phenomenon unfold that I previously only considered in relation to painting—simultaneous contrast was optically both intensifying and dulling the green yarn as it passed over the different warp threads.

Josef Albers called color "the most relative medium in art."¹ His method of working with colored paper allowed students to see colors in relationship to each other, never alone but always in context, and thus explore the potential of colors to change their appearance. He treated color as a discrete element, not something that is applied to a surface, but rather a material interacting with its neighbors and environment. A century prior to Albers, the chemist Michel-Eugene Chevreul researched color perception as the director of dyeing at the Gobelins Tapestry Works in Paris. It was the interaction of dyed threads that confounded the weavers—why did the colors of some yarns shift after they had been woven into a tapestry? Working with sheets of painted and dyed paper, Chevreul analyzed the behavior of colors placed next to



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each other and identified several contrasts, including simultaneous contrast, successive contrast, and mixed contrast, all of which affect the optical appearance of colors. He published *The Laws of Contrast of Color* in 1839, and his description of how juxtaposed colors enhance and diminish each other changed the way 19th century painters approached color. Delacroix's color research was inspired by Chevreul's treatise; the Impressionists followed his advice on applying separate but interwoven colored brush strokes; and Seurat paid his respects in a visit when the chemist was 100 years old.

In *On Weaving* Anni Albers writes about the structure of weaving at length before discussing color briefly: "In weaving, ... one system of threads, the warp, crosses another one, the weft, at right angles, and the manner of intersecting forms the different weaves."² This grid of horizontal and vertical lines provides the parameters in which all weaving takes place. It sets up a binary language—the warp is either up or down—that allows for the creation of thousands of weave structures. Within this framework color is introduced as dyed threads, a distinct and separate material, that blends and changes through the viewer's perception. The proximity of the threads produces the color contrasts Chevreul describes and allows for the optical color mixing evident in Seurat's paintings. The physical nature of colored yarns corresponds to the concrete nature of color in Josef Albers approach—color as an active agent within a larger network of surrounding hues. Anni Albers stresses the importance of accepting the limitations and potential of weaving's gridded structure and states that the perpendicular thread-interlacing should not be concealed so a weaving may "resemble a painting."³ The grid is primary: "By giving different colors to the differently functioning threads, the structural character of the weaving will be intensified."⁴

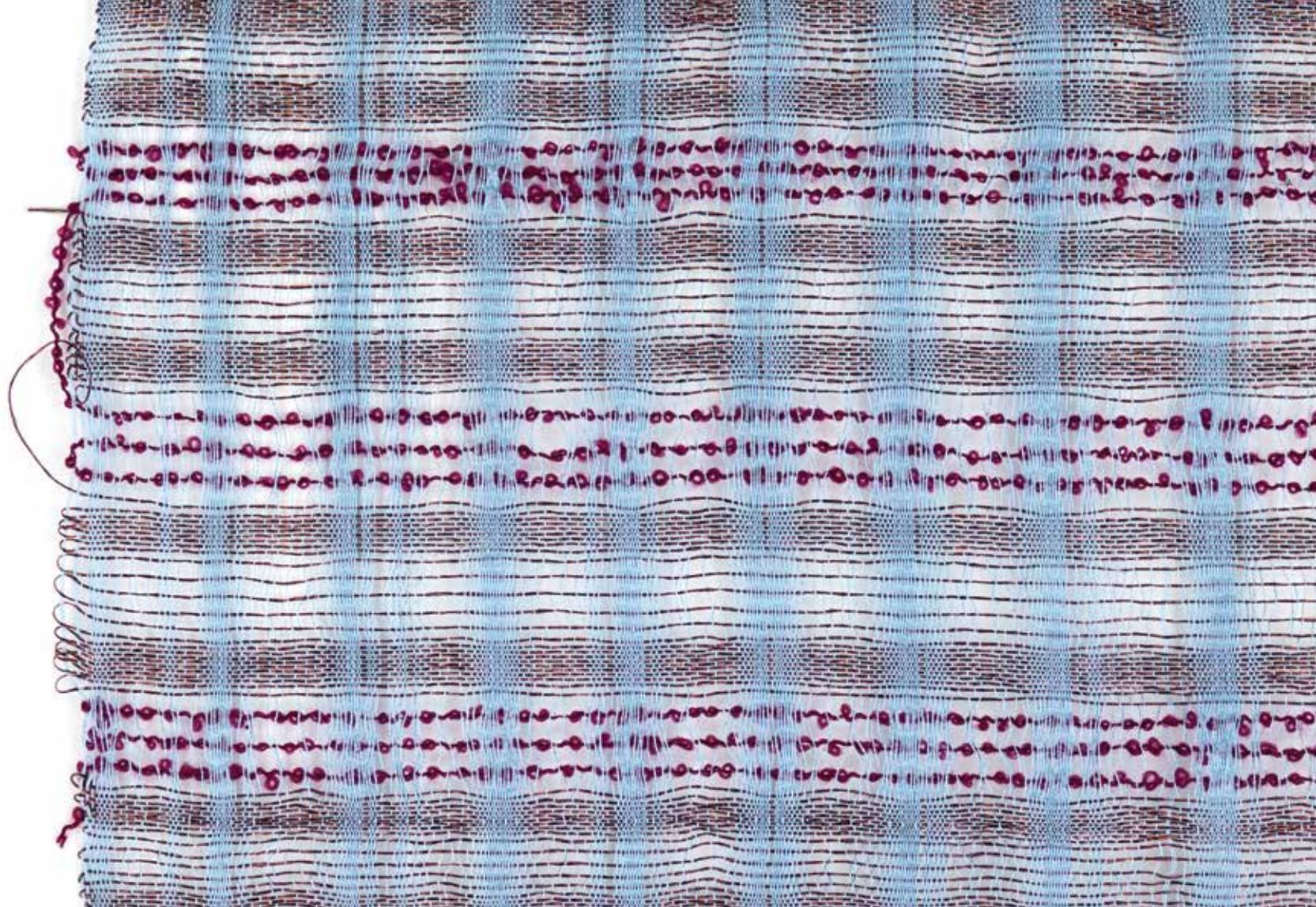
In her essay *Grids* Rosalind Krauss asserts that, "the grid functions to declare the modernity of modern art."⁵ Grids are both spatial and visual structures; their physical





qualities are mapped onto their aesthetic dimensions. Furthermore, the structure predicates the visual. "Grids are not only spatial to start with, they are visual structures that explicitly reject a narrative or sequential reading of any kind."⁶ When Krauss' thoughts on grids are applied to weaving, weaving also declares itself as inherently modern. The weave structures, the 3-dimensional crossings of warp and weft, operate spatially. They construct the physical fabric and create the optics of the surface concurrently and interdependently. Anni Albers emphasizes that the inner structure must be linked to the visible and tactile surface of a weaving, and this interrelatedness of method and appearance makes weaving distinctively medium-specific. "Regardless of scale, small fragment or wall-size piece, a fabric can be great art if it retains directness of communication in its specific medium ... the more clearly the process relates to the form, the stronger the resultant impact will be."⁷

In Krauss' view the physical and the aesthetic are also "coextensive, and, through the abscissas and ordinates of the grid, coordinate."⁸ Moreover, Krauss establishes the grid as essential to understanding color interactions in painting: "An interesting feature of treatises written on physiological optics is that they were illustrated with grids. Because it was a matter of demonstrating the interaction of specific particles throughout a continuous field, that field was analyzed into the modular and repetitive structure of the grid."⁹ The abstract and geometric quality of the grid allows colors to be experienced and examined without distractions and purely perceptually. In Josef Albers' *Homage to the Square* the clarity of the composition gives way to varied optical experiences of the viewer. Chevreul's systematic analysis of interlaced warp and weft threads revealed the color contrasts he then articulated precisely. Both colors and threads coexist in a network



of relationships. As Krauss puts it the grid is, "an emblem of the infrastructure of vision."¹⁰ This interrelatedness of structure and understanding, of form and perception, underscores weavings' ongoing and germane contributions within the larger discourse of art. Anni Albers concludes her book with thoughts on how weaving can serve as an infrastructure of meaning. "Material form becomes meaningful form ... through considered relationships. And this meaningful form can become the carrier of meaning that takes us beyond what we think of as immediate reality."¹¹

Notes:

- 1 Josef Albers, *The Interaction of Color* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 1
- 2 Anni Albers, *On Weaving* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 1
- 3 *Ibid.*, 24
- 4 *Ibid.*, 58
- 5 Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October Vol. 9* (Summer, 1979), 50
- 6 *Ibid.*, 55
- 7 Anni Albers, *On Weaving* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 50
- 8 Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October Vol. 9* (Summer, 1979), 52
- 9 *Ibid.*, 57
- 10 *Ibid.*, 57
- 11 Anni Albers, *On Weaving* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 62





More Information:

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Text: Jill Conner

Photography: Ken Cushman

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Images front to back:

- 1 Sisters 3, Handwoven, wool & cotton, 19 x 13.75 i inches, 2019 (cover)
- 2 Zoned #77, Pigment & acrylic on paper, 10 x 10 inches, 2004
- 3 Sisters 3, Handwoven, wool & cotton, 19 x 13.75 inches, 2019
- 4 Installation with Shape/Shifter Background (1), Archival inkjet print, 42 x 42 inches, 2019
- 5 InBetween 1, Handwoven Jacquard tapestry, wool, cotton, metallic thread & paper, 44.5 x 40 inches, 2019
- 6 Double Fantasy 1, Handwoven, linen & cotton, 13.25 x 9.5 inches, 2011
- 7 Zoned #101, Pigment & acrylic on paper, 10 x 10 inches, 2007
- 8 Installation with Shape/Shifter Background (3), Archival inkjet print, 42 x 42 inches, 2019
- 9 Double Fantasy 2, Handwoven, linen, cotton & metallic thread, 14 x 10 inches, 2011
- 10 Channel, Pigment & acrylic on paper, 15 x 15 inches, 2009
- 11 Lingering, Handwoven, cotton, wool & metallic thread, 11.25 x 14 inches, 2011
- 12 InBetween 2, Handwoven Jacquard tapestry, wool & cotton, 38.5 x 40.5 inches, 2019
- 13 Sisters 2, Handwoven, wool & cotton, 17 x 13.25 inches, 2019
- 14 Installation with Shape/Shifter Background (2), Archival inkjet print, 42 x 42 inches, 2019

