

Doerte Weber : Topographies of Texture, Experiments in Nature

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As we walk into the HEB Gallery of the Rockport Center for the Arts, standing at the threshold, a long, light and fragile-looking woven fabric in shades of blue stands to our left, folded up against the wall. It extends into a canopy of sorts delicately hanging from the ceiling, moving ever so gently to the air waves of the gallery's AC. Its transparent lamination gives it the weightless feel of water and air. Its blues remind those who know the Corpus Christi bay of the different colors the water takes on throughout the day, from grey expanse to faraway deep muted navy. Titled "Shifting horizons," it evokes how, as Weber notes, "when the fog lifts sometimes, you don't know where the water starts and the sky begins."

This blue canopy is not alone. On the opposite wall, another titled "Drought" showcases pale yet arresting beige, muted browns and yellows with hints of Texas sage green. Being enveloped by these two distinctive features of the Gulf Coast is a reminder of our entanglement with nature and an apt summary of the pressing ecological issues coastal cities like Rockport and Corpus Christi have been facing.

Renowned San Antonio textile & fiber artist Doerte Weber presents an overview of her conceptual, playful, at times whimsy, and always poetic engagement with the environment and the crisis and precarity we live with. Weber's work emerges out of her encounter and meditation on "place." Two years in the making, this solo show, curated by artist Catey Arnold, includes her 2022 *Fragmentation* series of vertical textured evocations of nature, her 2023 *Circular distortion* series on the "cyclical nature of ecological challenges," along with the two canopies, beach accessories, and vinyl "portraits" she imagined for the Rockport Center. Together, they map the shapes, features, and arrangements of the natural world shaping our lives.

One might say that her work is driven by an unrelenting ethics of togetherness, asking to imagine the familiar differently, "resist the disaster," and repair the world. That is maybe why Weber's collaboration with Arnold proved so generative: they both sought

to create a space where visitors would want to stay longer, “gently held by the work.” The lines of Weber’s woven pieces direct us through spaces and landscapes into a contemplative yet dynamic and ever-changing experience.

The exhibit stages what makes the Texas coast—its natural beauty involves both the relaxation of beach time and environmental devastation. Next to beach towels, old-fashioned sling chairs, balls, one piece attracts our eye: “Waves” made of repurposed, cut, and woven strips of vinyl whose ripples and distortions strikingly mimic our experience of the Gulf. Weber says she wanted to “leave spaces in the structure of weaving to illustrate nature hanging on by a thread.” While the *Distortion* pieces evoke strange and striking deep sea creatures, the *Fragmentation* abstract vertical panels tell stories of ocean warming, urbanization, pollution, water shortage, and drought. Their dense materiality contrasts with the light, gauzy, and soft canopy panels.

Weaving is a way to bring a world to life, not illustrate it. That is why texture is always in conversation with color and abstraction. Flashes of brightness interrupt more muted blues, greens, and browns: the pink peeking through « Waves” in echo to Claude Monet’s impressionist landscapes; the bright neon blue of woven plastic; orange vinyl strips; the “Glitter in the Round”’s silver and blue shimmer glitter echoing the Corpus Christi bay early in the morning. Weber says she waits for the colors to speak to her so that, when she begins on her loom, they come to life: “This is movement.”

Weber’s creative process is an ecological practice, both deeply embedded in place and attentive to the materials that make our daily lives. Weaving allows her to remake and reimagine what we might otherwise forget about. She uses the recycled and often unusual material she has collected or scavenged, rescuing the waste of our society that becomes trash. Made from blue plastic newspaper bags, “Split Open’s” geometric threads are one striking example of beauty made from waste. The vinyls were rescued from the Rockport Center for the Arts. After she had transformed them, keeping imperfections visible, she “felt they had to come back to their roots because they belonged here.”

Abolishing the division between high and low, the natural and the artificial, she adds to her recycled materials globally-sourced and more expensive fabrics, like the land canopy’s specially-ordered Japanese silk paper: Weber explains that, “as someone who grew up on a farm,” she knows land is precious. We need to take care of it.” Luxurious materials are designed to remind us land is our most valuable possession. But this does not mean she is “self-important or precious about the work.”

Above all, Weber invites us to reflect on the interconnectedness of the natural world that sustains us and that we have a duty to care for. If rest can be resistance, art can provide a container pointing to the future. Her fearless experiments in weaving—where “warp and weft run in separate direction but remain intertwined”—illustrate how, she says, “we have the potential to make something good from every negative thing; and new life can come out of it.”