

# RESILIENCE: APPALACHIA'S JOURNEY TO HOPE AND RESTORATION

By

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## ABSTRACT

Resilience comes from many sources for everyone. It is usually described as an ability to withstand and overcome difficult challenges and come back stronger. In September 2024, many of my Appalachian communities faced Hurricane Helene, a life altering event that no one could have anticipated being as severe as it was. The cataclysmic effects of this natural disaster will be felt by my Appalachian home for decades. Through textile techniques, I explore my own connections to the desolation and tell the stories of others who found themselves touched by Helene's destruction. These events, the lessons learned, and spiritual fortitude formed by them bless me and my community with a deeper understanding and appreciation of our world. I invite you to embark on a journey through resilience as expressed in my artworks, where each piece serves as a testament to endurance, growth, and transformation.

# RESILIENCE: APPALACHIA'S JOURNEY TO HOPE AND RESTORATION

A Thesis

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By

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## INTRODUCTION

### Why resilience?

Resilience is a common and necessary skill for all of humanity. People require some degree of resilience to face, learn from, and conquer challenges that occur in their life.

When considering a specific topic on which to research, resilience was the obvious one for me because it has the ability to breakdown barriers among people and help them see the good and beneficial parts of their neighbors who may hold different social, cultural, political, and/or religious beliefs. It unifies humanity in a way few other things can when coupled with an external and uncontrollable force acting on a region and people. The force that I examine most heavily in my research is Hurricane Helene and the environmental, economic, social, political, and personal impacts of this weather event on the East Tennessee Appalachian region. While hurricanes are an ever-present threat throughout coastal communities due to their proximity to the ocean and lack of elevation, Appalachia is typically spared their most destructive elements, as the mountains provide a hedge against the storm's organization. In the case of Helene, that protection failed, and the elevation of the mountains instead intensified the storm's destructive capacity.

Although community resilience in the face of environmental tragedy brings about regional unity, the personal experience of resilience becomes a deeper and more permeating event reaching every niche of your life, soul, and mind. On a personal level, resilience is transformative in the most unexpected ways. It allows the individual to gain wisdom, learn to handle tribulation, and find hope in even the direst circumstances.

According to scientists Debbie Kralik, Antonia van Loon, and Kate Visentin, resilience is commonly thought of as, “a process of reflection, learning and action focused toward overcoming adversity” and “a dynamic process whereby people rebound from crisis and adversity and move on with their lives” (199,188). Several factors contribute to the personal need to find a way through trials to a space of resilience. Some of the most impactful factors include hope, connection, and, for religious individuals, faith (Gall, 521; Kralik et al., 189). A key component of the gap between the troubling event and fully formed resilience is the ability of the individual to adapt to a new, shifting, and changing reality. Fighting these changes is the natural inclination and response to the threat of loss. New and permanent environmental destruction and loss of health usually come on suddenly and unexpectedly because so many of us take our home and health for granted until it no longer supports the life we want to live (Gall, 519; Kralik et al., 198). While acting on resistance to any threat is natural, it is not helpful and has been found to be detrimental if practiced in the long term. Individuals who partake in a process of releasing control of their reality to allow room for the tribulation and their life to continue as one, find a much greater sense of satisfaction and hope in daily struggles.

Those who rely on religious connections find hope, peace, and healing in surrender to God and/or a force greater than oneself that works for good for the individual. Hope and faith together share a strong correlation to profoundly positive outcomes in the healing process. Faith is far more than an idea or concept. It is an active and self-renewing belief in a person or being that is external to oneself. In its simplest form, “faith is... [the] act of the whole person to enter fully into life” (Gall, 526). One researcher noted in a presentation to

a group of chaplains that “if faith was a drug, all doctors would prescribe it” (Gall, 526). My own experience with faith, hope, and connection through illness and other similar tribulations reflects the findings of these researchers and scientists. In my two plus decades of existence, enduring new medical diagnoses, numerous heart surgeries, and destructive environmental threats have taught me that the entry to resilience is an open door to a beautiful journey through endurance, growth, and transformation. As with anything human focused, resilience is a process where the journey is the true destination. The end result is beneficial, but if the process is skipped or disregarded as unimportant what will the individual have really gained. These challenging events, the lessons learned, and spiritual fortitude formed by them bless me with a deeper understanding and appreciation of the world around me that I translate into textile artworks.

## Why use the TC2?

The use of technology is a major thrust in the development of this body of work. The imagery is designed through photomanipulation and weave structure design in *Photoshop* and weaving software such as *WeaveIt Pro*. The TC2 hand jacquard loom (see Appendix A) allows me to translate this imagery into a woven work of art. The Thread Controller 2 (TC2) is a jacquard loom that offers a wide breadth of artistic and conceptual opportunities. Unlike a traditional floor loom, it allows for designs to be woven without repeat, providing greater artistic freedom in weaving. Part of my draw to this technology is the challenges of file design and the opportunities it offers. The TC2 allows for conceptual design and implementation in ways that cannot be achieved with other loom technologies available at East Carolina University (ECU). Although there is a myriad of different textile processes, I

could have approached my research though, I chose the TC2 for its ability to marry the history of weaving through the use of antique overshot weaving drafts to the future of our ever technologically advancing society. I believe it is vital to have a depth of understanding in both arenas in order to keep your artistic practice connected to its history while maintaining its future relevancy.

## EXHIBITION GUIDE

The color scheme set across the exhibition guides the viewer from the stark reality of Helene's destructive force to the bright hope for the region's future resilience and restoration. The natural toned greens, browns, and rusts in the first seven pieces (*Broken and Strong* (Plate 1), the *Jonesborough, TN Campground* triptic (Plate 2), and the *Telford, TN* triptic (Plate 3)) elucidate the immediate connection the people were forced into with the land and the painful reality that they had to endure where the only thing that mattered to them was the most basic necessities of life, which were in many cases very challenging to receive, after the flood.

As the viewer moves from the harshness of the immediate aftermath, the emotion starts to bleed into the artwork that so many people in and from Appalachia felt as the true depth of the destruction and loss of life became painfully clear. The abstract qualities of the next works in the exhibition (*Harvesting Resilience* (Plate 4) and *All That's Left Behind* (Plate 5)) imbue the beginnings of the emotional impact the flood would have on all Appalachians through the clear photographic qualities of the composition overlaid by minimal visual abstraction. The series *Aftermath* (Plate 6-8) leaves many of the obvious photographic elements behind leaning fully into visual abstraction to emote the pure feelings of the moment as the people move from desolation to consumption, by fire in some cases, and to slow rebirth of the people and land when the first spring came. This triptic allows the viewer to project their own experience and search for their own meaning in the midst of Appalachia's journey to hope and restoration.

The tryptic *Processing... (Connection, Peace, Hope)* (Plate 9-11), *Whispering Pine* (Plate 12), and *Crocus* (Plate 13) bring us back to abstract compositions with a clear photographic anchor and a color scheme that emulates the warm glow of light and hope at the end of long suffering. *Processing... (Connection, peace, hope)* walks the viewer through the later stages of processing grief. In finding connection with others and with the land, the people impacted can find peace in the restoration process. As restorative efforts take hold in these communities, the people gain hope that having a normal life is possible again and some shed tears of joy for the success of everyone's efforts. In Appalachia, religion is woven into every fiber of existence especially in the most rural communities. *Whispering Pine* is a visual reminder that although you cannot see God, He is working for your good and over time the impacts of His work will be felt and seen. We walk through life hand in hand with God through the fruitful and lean times, and there are seasons to all of our lives where we must lean on others for support. As the months wore on after the flood and the splintered piles of people's lives were cleaned up and thrown away, one of the primary focal points of restoration was rebuilding the bridges that had been washed out around or washed away entirely to reconnect people who had been cut off from the rest of the world. In many Appalachian towns, the first sign of hope was a stable and permanent bridge to the next town over. Nature also has its harbingers of hope after a long rough winter and the first one that showed itself in my hometown was the crocuses in everyone's flower beds. As a fingerprint of human existence and natural resilience, the crocus blossoms always peaked through the snow or frost on the coldest mountain mornings before spring bloomed forth in

all of its glory. My hope and joy for a good growing season and year leapt forth at the sight of the crocuses quickly followed by all the other flowers in the landscape.

Finally, the last work in the exhibition, *Crisis* (Plate 14), visualizes the destructive events happening at the federal level in the United States that worsened the suffering of the Appalachian people who could not receive help in a timely manner to aid their survival in the short and long term. The lack of governmental support meant that people worked with their neighbors to find relief and facilitate survival wherever possible often working more efficiently and providing faster help in the immediate aftermath of the flood because federal agencies were not prepared to deal with the combination of the destruction and the terrain of the region like the locals are.

## ARTWORK CONCEPTS

### Broken and Strong

Hurricane Helene hit my beautiful Appalachian Mountain communities with an unexpected ferocity. The pain of watching this happen to everyone and everything I know and love without the ability to be there helping in the mountains has been one of the most heartbreaking events I have ever experienced. It has affected me deeper than I expected and forever reshaped my view of natural disasters. When a hurricane happens in a place I do not call home, I feel sadness for those who have lost everything and pray that they will get back on their feet soon, but having a hurricane hit everyone and everything I know, love, and hold dear is something different entirely. I always knew that these disasters were difficult for the people experiencing them, but I could not have imagined just how difficult it really is until I was directly affected.

Throughout the aftermath of Helene, I have been traversing the grief that exists within me for my people. I knew from the moment I saw the first disaster reports that I would make art about it at some point. Watching the first videos and seeing the first images of Appalachia on the night of Friday, September 27<sup>th</sup>, shattered my heart and made me yearn to be home to a degree that I had never experienced. As reports flowed in on Saturday that yearning only grew louder. Every new report of another place I had strong ties to that sustained damage or was destroyed pierced my heart anew. From each new break, poured a love, yearning, and agony for the suffering Appalachia was going through.

The sculpture *Broken and Strong* illustrates my pierced heart for my people and the strands of fiber flowing from it describe the torrent of water, grief, and destruction everyone from or living in Appalachia is going through. Although we are broken, pierced, and weeping, we are mountain strong and will rise from this disaster as a phoenix rises from the ashes. There are few forces as strong willed, stubborn, and creative as Appalachian Mountain folk are. We must be to make our homes in the mountains. It is the fight to carve out an existence in those mountain ranges that makes the challenges all worth it when we succeed.

Jonesborough, TN Campground (1 month later, 1 year later, restoration and hope)  
and Telford, TN (1 month later, 1 year later, restoration and hope)

It would be another month after the hurricane hit before I was able to view the flood damage in East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia for myself. The week of Thanksgiving I made the journey and was stunned beyond words from the strength and ferocity of the waters. It's one thing to see it in photographs, but there's only so much that a photograph can capture. To see your hometown facing destruction of an unthinkable magnitude does not really hit until you can see it for yourself at scale and walk and drive through the spaces that were impacted. Walk and drive I did when I was home that Thanksgiving in 2024. I spent a Friday afternoon traversing the East Tennessee region all along the Nolichucky River with my parents as my guides. At every stop, I documented the experience through photography and in some cases conversation with locals that were rebuilding. Along our journey there were numerous places of high impact for me personally either because they

were landmarks for me, as in the case of the Jonesborough KOA, or they showed the ferocity of the gushing water that destroyed the area, as in the case of the Telford, TN images.

Throughout the time prior to my visit back to my childhood home in Telford, TN, I kept abreast of the latest news and developments coming out of the hurricane effected areas in the tri-state region. The news reports from Facebook friends and hometown sources consisted of people just trying to survive at the most basic levels. Whole communities remained without potable water for weeks without any end in sight, worked without any source of electricity or cellular service, and relied on those outside of the effected area to reach them before they ran out of water and food and succumbed to their isolation. Many people could not be reached for days on end because so many trees, power lines, bridges, and homes prevented movement, even on foot in some cases, on the roads. All the comforts of modern society were stripped away from these communities within 24 hours, and so many families were instantly thrust back into the type of life that their grandparents lived high in those mountains in the early to mid 1900's if they were lucky enough to survive the flood waters.

## Harvesting Resilience

Individual stories of resilience and strength in the face of desolation highlight, in some of the best ways, the spirit of Appalachia and the people who live there. So much of East Tennessee, the part of Appalachia where I was born and raised, is built around small family farms and businesses the further you go into the rural communities. In the valley

where I was raised, the landscape is awash in family farms, mostly beef cattle, where large dairies used to predominate. Everyone I know on those neighboring farms raised milk cattle, usually Holsteins, in the 90's when my parents first moved out there. When neighbors chat about days and seasons of farming gone by, the stories are punctuated with the trials, challenges, and comedies of farm life. As you travel out of the valley toward the mountains that course through Unicoi County, Tennessee, the farming landscape shifts to crops such as tomatoes, strawberries, corn, and in decades past tobacco. The flood plains of the Nolichucky River offer fertile and flat land which is often a challenge to come by between the elevation and coarse red clay that East Tennessee is known for. The farms keep crops growing all summer long right next to the water's edge. For decades, this was a safe place to grow produce until Helene's flood waters came.

So much of the local economy of Washington and Unicoi counties relies on the crops those fields produce and the tourism some of the farms generate. One such farm, a smaller one in Washington County, along highway 107, is Fender's Farm. Most people who have grown up in the area or are still children, teens, or young adults, know of and have fond memories of the farm. The owners offer a dazzling array of farm experiences for people of all backgrounds to enjoy the simple pleasures of country life: u-pick pumpkin fields, a petting zoo, hayrides, a fake cow to milk and everyone's favorite, the corn maze. Fender's Farm is known for its corn maze and pumpkin patches. People flock to the farm for the maze and to host events there. I have had at least one birthday party and numerous visits with friends there throughout my life. When I was a young child, the corn maze and

pumpkin patch were a staple of my autumnal experience as it is for much of the community.

Residing next to the river, Fender's farm was impacted severely, materially and financially. When the flood waters came the farm was getting ready to open for a fall season that was not to be. The back half of the farm, which rests right along the edge of the river, was decimated and the crops washed away. In the early hours after the water began to subside that weekend, the force of the water was made more visible in aerial photographs and videos by how far afield their pumpkins had traveled. They were found washed downstream and lodged in the mud long the riverbanks, in other people's farmland, and in the parking lots of other local family-owned businesses along the river. Much like the orange spray painted markings on homes and businesses that are synonymous with human rescue efforts after hurricanes, these bright orange pumpkins shone through the desolation as though nature was crying for its own rescue. Hurricane Helene is one of those climactic events that meteorologists and scientists call "rare" or "once in a hundred year" events. Yet every year, "rare" becomes more common.

## All That's Left Behind

The town of Erwin, TN like so many others across the tri-state region dealt with widespread and challenging desolation that ground life to a halt for months. One of many of the painful stories of loss that came from Erwin was that of a plastics factory that sits alongside Interstate 26 that runs by Erwin and over the mountains to North Carolina. The factory made large, golden yellow tubing that they wrapped and secured into columns and

stored in areas outside the factory. When the waters came, they swept the yellow columns of tubing far down the river and deposited it up and down the river and along the interstate. It was quite a scene to witness a month after the flood when I had the chance to see it. The force and volume of water is hard to comprehend until you see the stark contrasts of the tubing against the brown bush and red clay post flood landscape. Abstracting and combining the views I witnessed in that place at that moment combines the chaos of the time and the cacophony of emotions swirling through the people of Appalachia.

### Aftermath: Desolation, Consumption, Rebirth

The weekend in September 2024 when Hurricane Helene struck Appalachia no one could have imagined the hell that Western North Carolina, Eastern Tennessee, and Southwestern Virginia would experience. The once idyllic landscape of rugged purple peaks that towered above vast rippling hay fields glowing golden yellow in the Autumn sun was in a moment razed by numerous feet of gushing floodwater that left little more than a brown and gray hellscape in its wake. Autumn's beauty was replaced by months and miles of exposed red Tennessee clay, piles, feet high in some places, of rock and boulders, and miles of uprooted trees and underbrush, and smoke from an ever-burning brush pile in every town that burned so long one could find it hard to remember the town without it. Amongst this withering web of destruction and desolation were scattered and woven into it the belongings, homes, and people that live near the river. The stench of death hung over the mountains like heavy fog. It permeated every fiber of existence in those communities. There was hardly a mountain life untouched by these losses whether you are a resident or a resident at large.

To see the new landscape from above after the waters receded, was both a painful and humbling experience. The ferocity of the waters coupled with the terrestrial scars and gashes left behind remind me of my own human frailty in a way that humbles my heart to think of how small and insignificant I am when faced with the vastness and strength of the land and Earth. One of the many reasons I am continually drawn back to the Blue Ridge mountains is the expansiveness of the landscape and the struggle to exist as a fragile human in such a rugged land. Challenges provide humans an opportunity to be molded and shaped in so many ways that when utilized to its fullest potential can be the greatest and fastest way to learn and obtain resilience.

Since birth, my life has been marked by potentially life altering challenges that few people experience in their formative years. For instance, at thirteen years old, I was forced to face my own mortality and fragility and accept the very real possibility that I might die on the operating table while having open heart surgery to replace my pulmonary valve. Before the surgery, I had a period of nine months to prepare myself mentally and spiritually in case I did pass on. Watching the reports of the destruction and loss of so many helpless and innocent lives in the flood, brought me back to my time of reckoning with my own mortality. So many people were caught off guard and swept away by the waters. Some floated down the river in their still intact homes hurtling toward the death that would ultimately befall them. I cannot help but wonder if and hope that they could find some portion of acceptance or peace that they had done everything they could to save themselves and they had lived a good life no matter how long.

It is moments in life like this that remind me how much humanity takes the gift of life for granted until something threatens to take it away. In the bustle of the day-to-day, it is a challenge to remember the gift it really is for all of us to be here on this earth at this time in history. Each and every one of us has a deeply important role to play in our world no matter what that role may be. Although there is a lot in life we have no control over, we always have agency over our inner lives, and much of how we perceive the world is controlled by the type of inner life we choose to encourage and support through the actions we choose.

### Processing... (Connection, Peace, Hope)

One of the most important, yet hidden parts of recovery from any disaster is the emotional journey everyone walks to bring them closer to a normal life. Connecting with others who can understand and support the experience the people have gone through makes the people impacted feel less alone. Asking people to tell their stories and listening to their experiences is healing for everyone impacted. Seeing how community organizations and so many people from other states in the nation give the people who are picking up the pieces of their lives peace and hope that they will one day see restoration. Hope springs anew with each bridge that is rebuilt and with every person who steps into their newly built home. Tears of joy and relief are shed by those who can finally set down the weight of homeless life that so many Appalachian people of all ages who survived the flood were forced to experience.

## Whispering Pine

When I was a very young child, my mother described spirits as invisible beings moving and flowing through the air like the needles and branches of the pine tree swaying in the breeze. The moment reminds me of the smallness of humanity against the expanse of the Earth, the universe, and the spirit realm. It offers a focused perspective on the things and people that are the most important in life when it is so easy to get lost in the challenges and business of life. My mother provided me a concrete example of how little we know about and can perceive of the universe even through direct means which now gives me hope in trying times. Thinking back on that memory, I take comfort in the knowledge that there are so many forces acting on our civilization that are outside of our human control and working for our good. The bending and swaying of the white pine abstracted in the cloth mirrors the resiliency that mountain folk learn to have as you grow with the challenges Appalachian life offers.

## Crocus

My experience of Helene and that of so many other born and bred Appalachian natives is best described as a layered experience. Starting with the land beneath the Nolichucky and so many other rivers and creeks, everyone's lives no matter the socioeconomic, cultural, or racial background were homogenized in a blender of tragedy as the water rose and lives were swept away. Regardless of the time and distance from Helene, Appalachia will always bear her mark. However, above the tragedy, we mountain folk will rise, learn the lessons she brought, find community and newfound family, and

rebuild our towns, communities, and farms using our own brawn and Appalachian ingenuity. Spring is a season of hope that draws me to the joy of what might be and thrill of making it a reality. Little signs of spring in the Blue Ridge, such as the first spring crocuses or new fiddle leaf fern heads and the delicate curls of fresh grape vines in the forest undergrowth tell of the regenerative, restorative, and forceful power of natural resilience in the face of complete desolation.

## Crisis

As the social, political, and economic fabric of our nation unravels from the center outward, we are forced to watch everything we have known begin to disappear. The security we once thought we had is gone. Over the last 60 plus years, America has made enormous social, economic, cultural, and moral progress. We now find our leaders backpedaling to the worst times in American history at warp speed. Even though we are living through a national era of despair, there is at some point in the future a better life for everyone. When I look upon the landscape of my Blue Ridge mountain home, I feel secure and peaceful cradled in the bosom of those soft, blue and purple peaks. Through civil unrest, wars, depressions, hurricanes, and many other calamities, those mountains have stood firm like a sentinel over her people. For a moment in time my anxieties and troubles fade away, and I feel the carefree peace I so long for and remember from when I was a child. Within this work, I express the painful period we all must go through to reach what will hopefully be a better nation and future for everyone one day.

## REFERENCE ARTISTS

### Robin Kang

New weavings from artist Robin Kang (Appendix B Figures 1-3) investigate the resilience of nature in her hometown of Kerrville, Texas. In Fall 2025, Kang opened a show at Austin Central Library's gallery entitled "The Light That Grows Here" that ran until January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2026. Looking through the gallery of her work on her website, her work took on a dramatic shift from electronic circuit board patterns to natural floral structures intertwined with the historical motifs of her ancestry and hometown region. This stark change in her art was brought on by catastrophic and unprecedented flooding that occurred in her hometown. Of her latest works she explains, "The idea is that they are the light. This idea of the resilience of plants native to the Texas Hill Country, of the semi-arid climate and the need to preserve water when it's needed" (Bora). Throughout all of her weavings, both past and present, she intertwines the advancements of handloom technology with the history of the craft in her region to bring about a balance between the old and new (Kang).

Kang's TC2 jacquard weavings share many similarities to my own work for this exhibition from concept to technology and a love of color. Conceptually, she and I lean on the natural landscape of our respective regions to gain inspiration and a sense of healing from catastrophic flooding (Kang). In our design process, our regional weaving traditions are a central and grounding presence in our jacquard weavings honoring the past and present in one artwork through a tragedy imposed on your homeland. All of her weavings from this exhibition feature vibrant color and complex TC2 design processes that remind

me of many of my own works. It is inspiring to see another TC2 artist using that technology to communicate community resilience in the face of an unprecedented flood.

## Ruth Norbury

The exquisite embroideries sewn by Ruth Norbury (Appendix B Figures 4-6) express the loneliness and darkness of abandoned or destroyed places. She utilizes found materials to create these masterpieces rather than using new fabrics. She finds the story contained within the used fabrics adds greater meaning and depth to the artwork she creates (Norbury). Often, she describes her works as having a “slight post-apocalyptic feel” due to the dark tones and harsh environments she depicts (Hall). The dichotomies of death, abandonment, and decay and delicate beauty seen in every work Norbury creates remind the viewer of the beautiful things that can come of the most terrible circumstances if one has the desire to look for it.

These works of Norbury’s echo themes in my own work. The buildings in varying stages of abandonment and decay mirror the ones so common around Appalachia before and especially after Hurricane Helene. Anywhere the waters touched there were abandoned lives, hopes, dreams, and livelihoods awash with the sorrows of the people touched by the disaster and the loneliness of the places left to time and nature. In my works, I capture the emotive quality of the buildings and landscape as both attempt to work in harmony to rebuild what was. The differences I find during the immediate aftermath and the landscape one year later speak to the resilience of the community and the healing that the people and time can bring.

## CONCLUSION

The work detailed in this thesis and shown in my exhibition describe a journey that all Appalachian people have experienced no matter where they may reside. The use of the TC2 for this work builds on decade's long tradition of textile work in the Appalachian Mountains and my family. The TC2 advances the tradition of weaving into the present and future of fine arts in a unique way. Utilizing advanced technology to tell the story of Appalachian resilience in the face of tragedy encourages me to dig deeper into my artistic expression of these ideas and go listen to more stories of people and places in the tri-state region that were impacted by the hurricane as they endure the process of recovery. Thus far, I have only told the story from my side of the mountain, so there are many other stories to tell. As I launch outward into the next chapter of my artistic life, I will take this exhibition to other museums and galleries around Appalachia to show in the areas impacted by Helene. As I grow artistically, the works shown in the exhibition will grow with me to include not only TC2 works, but also more sculptural pieces to capture more of the visceral side of the story. I hope, as people view my art, they take away a little of the heart of Appalachia and her stubbornly resilient spirit that they can inject into their own life challenges.

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## APPENDIX A

### TC2 Technical Explanation

Jacquard weaving is a unique and exciting technology that lends itself to many more artistic possibilities in weaving than a traditional multishaft loom. The Thread Controller 1 means each vertical warp thread is controlled individually allowing for a non-repeat in the cloth. The warp threads are vertical threads on the loom that remain under tension while the weft threads are the horizontal threads added during weaving to create the cloth. Harness looms raise multiple threads simultaneously limiting the type of repeat available. Early design for the first Thread Controller (TC) loom began in 1990 by Norwegian weaving professor Vibeke Vestby. Many of her weaving students would lose interest in weaving due to the labor-intensive process and transition to other art forms such as printing and painting. These students found that the preparation stages for weaving stunted their creativity. Vestby's dream was a loom that could act as a sketchbook. She contacted Tronrud Engineering in Oslo, Norway to develop her dream loom. It took five years of research and four prototypes to develop the first Thread Controller loom, the TC1. After the development of the TC1, Digital Weaving Norway (DWN) was created to sell and distribute the TC1 and any looms that would follow (<https://digitalweaving.no/at-25-years-down-the-line-remembering-the-tc1/>). While the TC1 was an "ahead of its time" technology, there were numerous issues with the loom. Using customer feedback and research at DWN, design for an upgraded model began. In 2012, DWN released its new, improved, and redesigned loom the TC2 (<https://digitalweaving.no/about>).

Part of my draw to the TC2 is its ability to weave images. Most shaft looms that art students and craft artisans have ready access to, can only create repeating units or patterns across a cloth. Usually, the cloth maintains a clear x, y axis between the interactions of warp (thread under tension) and weft (thread moving left and right through the warp). In the case of a TC2, the x, y axis disappears and the artist can create outside the bounds of the repeating unit allowing the weaver to make photorealistic image collages in cloth using weave structures. The loom is able to create these images by using an air compressor that attaches to the heddles inside the body of the loom. When the signal to lift certain threads to create the shed (the space between warps where the weft goes through) is sent to the loom from the artist rendered design in the computer attached to the loom, the air pressure changes within units above the heddles that pull the proper heddles upward. The compressor system allows individual control of each of the 1,320 heddles and associated warps on our TC2 at East Carolina University.

## APPENDIX B

### Artwork Images



Plate 1: *Broken and Strong*, 2024, Cotton, Twine, Wool, Tencel, 3" x 3 ½" x 28"



Plate 2: From left to right and below - *Jonesborough, TN Campground: 1 month later*, *Jonesborough, TN Campground: 1 year later*, *Jonesborough, TN Campground: Restoration and Hope*, 2026, Cotton, 12" x 16"



Plate 3: From left to right and below - *Telford, TN: 1 month later*, *Telford, TN: 1 year later*, *Telford, TN: Restoration and Hope*, 2026, Cotton, 12" x 16"

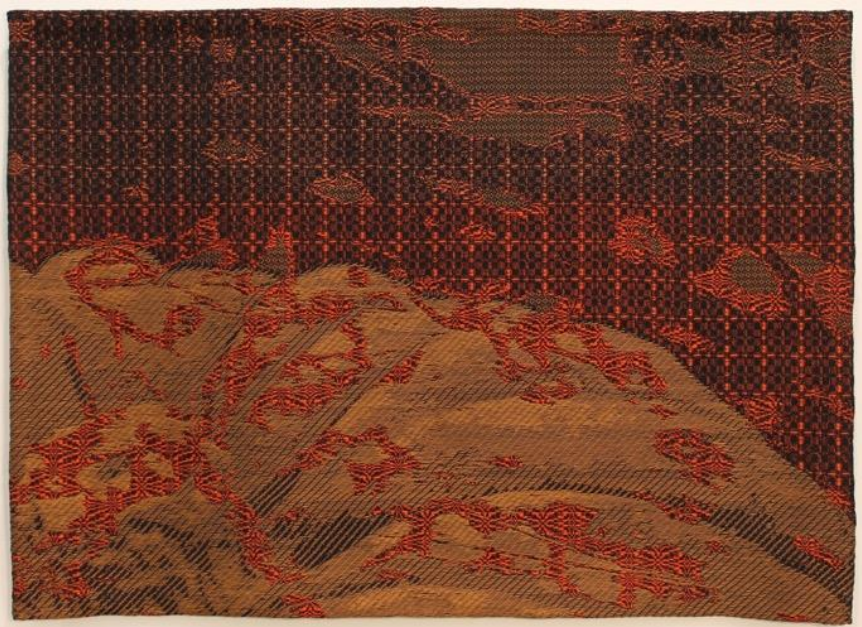


Plate 4: *Harvesting Resilience*, 2025, Cotton, Synthetic, 40" x 30"



Plate 5: *All That's Left Behind*, 2026, Cotton, Rayon, 40" x 40½"

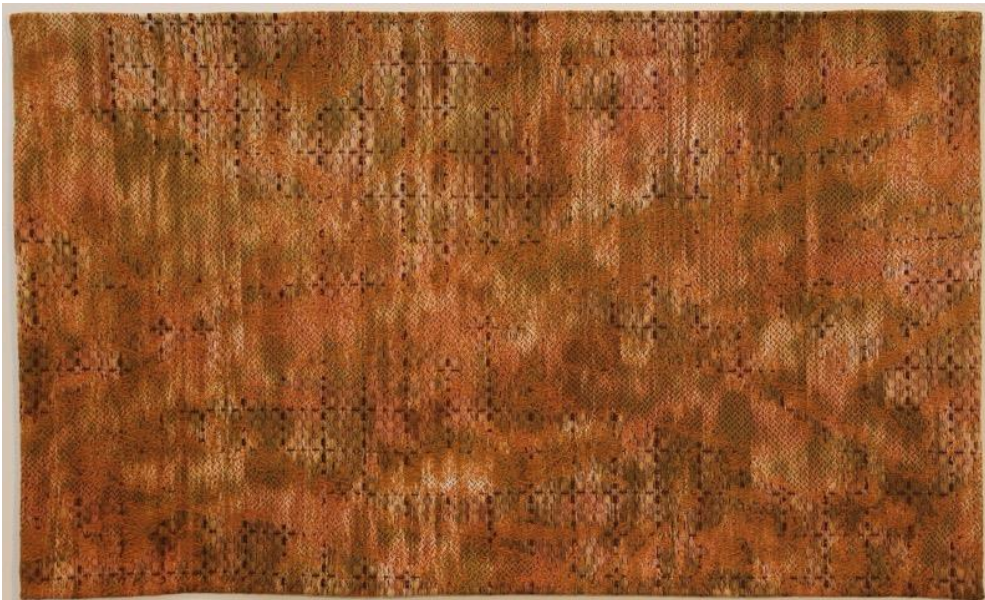


Plate 6: *Aftermath: Desolation*, 2025, Cotton, 39" x 23½"

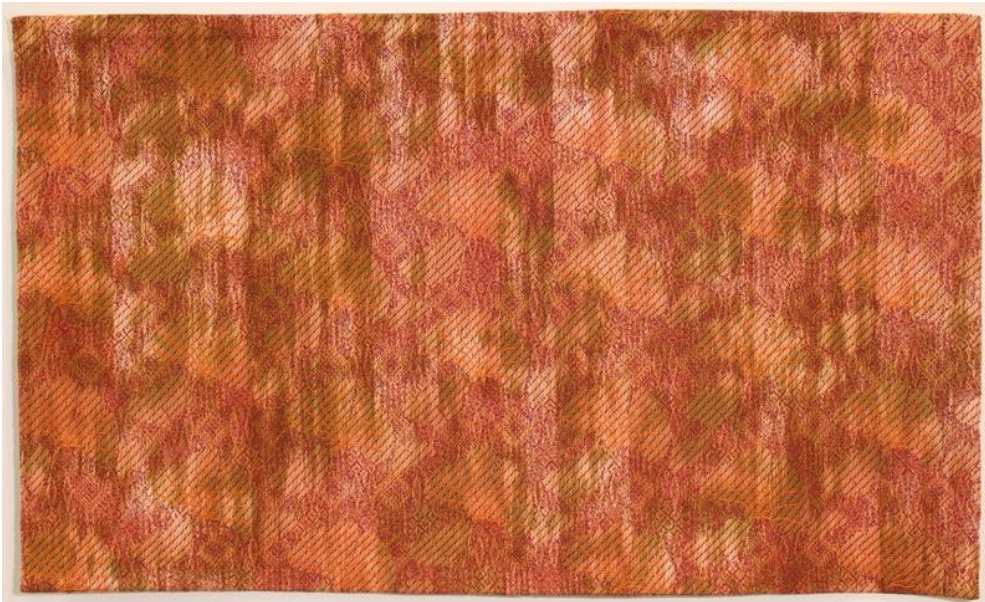


Plate 7: *Aftermath: Consumption*, 2025, Cotton, 39" x 23½"



Plate 8: *Aftermath: Rebirth*, 2025, Cotton, 39" x 23½"



Plate 9: *Processing... Connection*, 2024, Cotton, Synthetic, 11½" x 11½"



Plate 10: *Processing... Peace*, 2024, Cotton, Synthetic, 11½” x 11½”

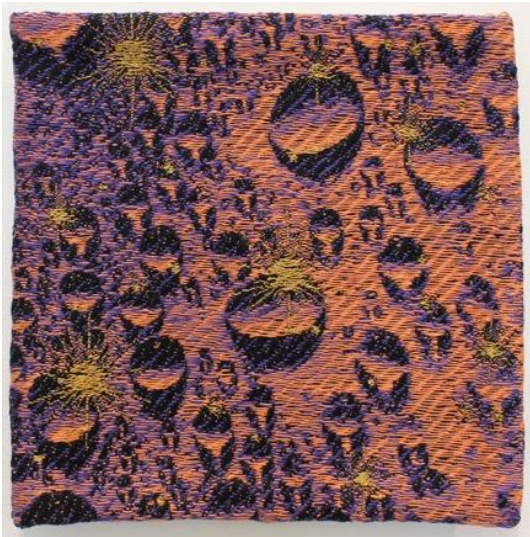


Plate 11: *Processing... Hope*, 2024, Cotton, Synthetic, 11½” x 11½”



Plate 12: *Whispering Pine*, 2024, Cotton, 40" x 59"



Plate 13: *Crocus*, 2024, Cotton, 40" x 25½"

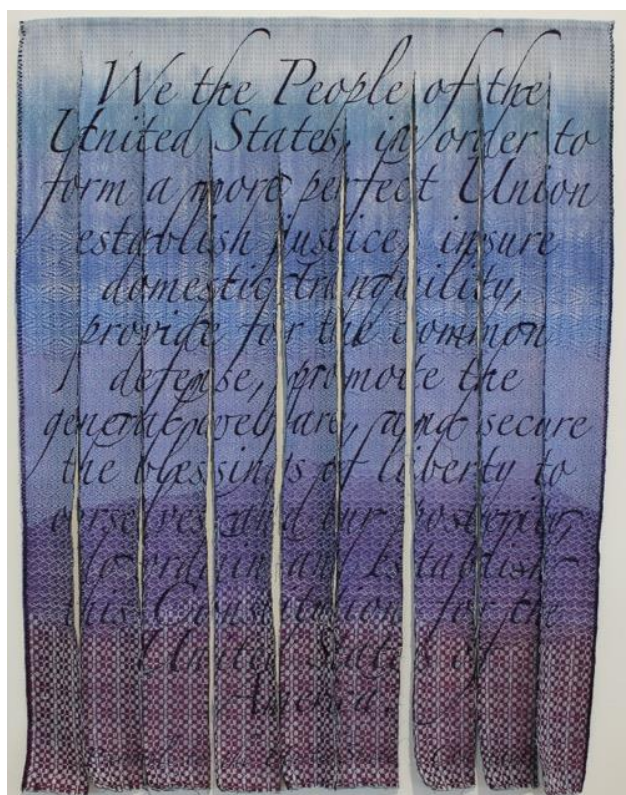


Plate 14: *Crisis*, 2026, Cotton, 40¼" x 53"



Figure 1: Robin Kang, *Buttercup*, 2025



Figure 2: Robin Kang, *Cactus of the Four Winds*, 2025



Figure 3: Robin Kang, *Chocolate Daisy*, 2025



Figure 4: Ruth Norbury, *We Are the Plague 3*



Figure 5: Ruth Norbury, *We Are the Plague*



Figure 6: Ruth Norbury, *Lost in a Heartbeat*