

Essay by Richard Born, Senior Curator, Smart Museum, University of Chicago. 1987

Ani Afshar's weavings and related works in fiber encompass a wide range of intellectual, contextual and emotional concerns. The artist holds a deep respect for tribal weavings of her native Turkey and, more broadly, the modern folk and ancient courtly textile traditions of the Near East. She does not imitate or merely copy the outward appearances of such weavings, but instead she imbues her own highly individual work ---weather wool hangings, shawls, bed spreads, pillows, or beaded and woven jewelry --- with her deep felt understanding and appreciation of the aesthetic principles operative in this rich age old textile heritage. The artist is, as well, European educated and responsive to modern art of Europe, America and Chicago, where she has lived for over a decade. Her works are an inextricable blending of all these diverse cultural experiences, and it is at once avant-garde and traditional and evinces an identifiable originality founded in the artist's own personal vision, taste and sense of propriety.

Working within the disciplines imposed by the loom, Ani Afshar nonetheless does not feel bound strictly to its conventions. Often dense and open weaves define a single work, composed with the artist's uncanny and honed respect for separate properties of each fiber or thread and woven with an inevitable certainty as she follows a general, but not rigidly defined design for a new piece. The yarn and frequently encountered metallic thread are chosen as much for their tactile as well as chromatic values, and this interest in the weaving as an object is reinforced by the idiosyncratic woven embellishments of the surface of a work with favorite beads, feathered, and or other whatnots collected by the artist for the purpose. This high incidence of complexity and preference for surface ornamentations are symptomatic of the remarkable presence of her works which bridge the usual distinctions between the decorative and fine arts. Ani Afshar's weavings and related necklaces are simultaneously utilitarian objects and works of independent beauty intended both for use and appreciation at the same time.

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