



Left to right: Polly Barton, *Morning Rio* (detail), 1999. Photo courtesy of the artist; Barton examines a Navajo tapestry weave blanket (TM 1965.51.70) in the museum's collection storage this January. Photo by Katy Clune.

Sourcing the Museum: Artist Spotlight

Polly Barton Finds Inspiration in The TM Collection

The Textile Museum will open the exhibition *Sourcing the Museum* in spring 2012. Curated by renowned textile designer Jack Lenor Larsen, the exhibition will feature work by twelve contemporary fiber artists directly inspired by the museum's permanent collection. The TM collection, with its wealth of visual vocabulary, is regularly studied by artists and designers interested in basing their work on historical precedents. In preparation for the exhibition, artists Olga de Amaral, James Bassler, Polly Barton, Charles Blanchard, Archie Brennan, Lia Cook, Helena Hernmarck, Ayako Nikamoto, Jon Eric Riis, Warren Seelig, Kay Sekimachi and Ethel Stein were

invited to select objects from the collection that they found inspiring. Whether it was the technique, the visual characteristics or the stories of their selected objects that caught the artists' attention, each will create a new artwork drawing on textile traditions. Many of these artists have been in and out of Washington, D.C. to view their selections in person before starting on their artwork in earnest, including Polly Barton.

Barton, who delivered a lecture titled "Loosening the Knot: Contemporary Ikat" at The TM this January, is a Santa Fe-based artist who creates what she calls "silk ikat paintings." After graduating with a degree in art history from Barnard College, Barton travelled to Kameoka, Japan where she studied at The Oomoto School of Traditional Japanese Arts. She was impressed with how the artisans with whom she studied incorporated weaving into their daily routine, and she kept this interest in mind when she returned to New York to work as an office assistant for the abstract expressionist painter Helen Frankenthaler. Feeling the call of the loom, Barton returned to Japan in 1981 to apprentice with master weaver Tomohiko Inoue. Under Inoue she practiced traditional weaving techniques, including an exploration of the ikat process.

Returning to the U.S. with technical mastery under her belt, Barton and her husband settled in New Mexico, enabling her to dedicate more of her time to her craft. Drawing from influences as varied as Frankenthaler and a pre-Columbian textile she stumbled upon in a New York gallery,

Barton developed her signature subtle weaving style. She firmly believes that the spirit of the maker is visible in their final product, whether it is expressed through the characteristics of a brushstroke or in the personality of the weft threads of a weaving. Barton typically works with silk and natural dyes, and she has recently experimented with some of the more vivid hues available in synthetic dyes. Working independently, it takes her between three and four months to create a finished piece—with most of her labor dedicated to the multi-faceted dyeing process.

During her visit to The Textile Museum, Barton was interested in viewing several Mamluk rugs and two Navajo weavings in preparation for creating her *Sourcing the Museum* piece. She was impressed by the complexity of color of the Mamluk pieces in particular. Literally surrounded by historic textiles, Barton could not resist asking staff to pull a Chinese rug, which struck her with its simplicity. "Call it fantasy but I have always loved the idea of a magic carpet ride," says Barton. "I flew to Egypt and China on two carpets from the TM's Collection—one stunning and delicately floral (Mamluk), the other serene and abstract (Chinese). My studio now beckons me to my looms inspired by new colors, political landscapes and cultural histories into which I can delve and explore."

Watch this space for upcoming profiles of other artists involved in *Sourcing the Museum* throughout 2011. 🍷



Barton at work in her studio in New Mexico; spools of hand-dyed threads prepped for weaving. Photos courtesy the artist.