

# Book Review

## Tapestry with PULLED WARP Inspiration, technique, and the creative process

Author: Susan Iverson

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Reviewer Sally Reckert, April 2024



Susan Iverson

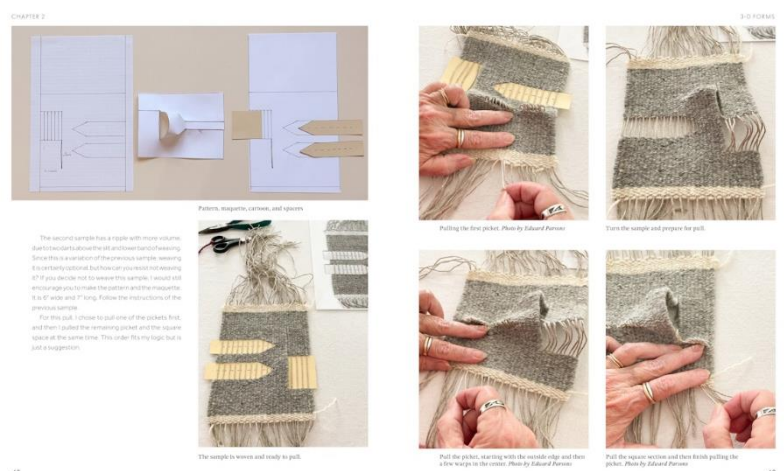
*Tapestry with Pulled Warp (cover)*

Susan Iverson is a tapestry artist who has explored the technique of pulled warp for nearly 50 years. However, as she stresses throughout this book, concepts should take precedence over technique; not all her work uses pulled warp.

In her Preface, Iverson describes her "romance with weaving and with pulled warp". From her tutor, Sherri Smith, at Colorado State University in the early 1970s, Iverson learned "to think deeply about textile structure and the power of taking chances with technique". Throughout her book, she poses the 'What if' question at the end of each project section, encouraging readers to take their own ideas further.

Following the Preface there is a chapter on 'How to use this book', then three projects, each with its own chapter. For clarity and continuity, the instructions for each project are similarly structured and photographed at the same stages, with the additional visual support of having a differently coloured weft for each project. There is then a section devoted to finishing solutions.

On the face of it, pulled warp technique appears straightforward: a cardboard spacer is inserted between the warps to keep the non-woven areas of the tapestry in shape during the weaving process; once off the loom the spacers are removed, and the unwoven warps are then pulled through the woven areas at the top or bottom of the tapestry. However, for this technique to be successful, preparation and attention to detail are important, as is the testing of ideas by creating a pattern and a maquette before weaving the main work.



*How to make ripples - photos (c) Edward Parsons*

The first chapter on making a simple curve is more detailed than the following technical chapters. The learner is taken through the basics of pattern making, creating a paper maquette to test whether the pattern has been correctly measured and drawn, weaving a sample, removing the



*'Fleeting' (2015) - photo (c) Taylor Dabney*

turned to after reading Susan Iverson's preface! This is an important catalogue raisonné of the tapestries woven by Iverson since the early 1970s.

Visually, her weavings have a uniformity of texture and of organic shapes, juxtaposed or collaged with geometric pattern. Discrete hues are placed on neutral, often dark backgrounds. Even where the work hangs in soft drapes, as does 'In the Ether' (pp158-159, there is no index) colour blocks have been skilfully placed across the tapestries to be seen as distinct features in themselves when the work is hung.

The last pages are devoted to other weavers, including Fiona Hutchinson, Barbara Burns and Laura Meyers, who have used pulled warp in their work. Comparing their works with Iverson's shows how pulled warp can be used with a variety of weaving techniques, such as chiné and hachure, and in story-telling, as Barbara Burns does in her 'Little Devil Corset'.

It would be wrong to see Iverson's work through the lens of pulled warp technique alone. She takes time to observe, think through and distil an idea down into abstract patterning. She says of 'In the Ether' that "this tapestry alludes to my belief that there are ideas floating in the ether, ideas that can connect or affect large groups of people during a specific time period."

Many of her works are either in series or revisited over time. One such is 'Night View', a series of tapestries looking at the world at twilight, which Iverson worked on from the early to mid-1990s and revisited again in 2014.

Throughout 'Tapestry with Pulled Warp', Susan Iverson emphasises the importance of preparation, modelling and trialling, using maquettes before embarking on using pulled warp. Even then, she asks the reader to pause and consider whether the technique is right for all projects; concepts should take precedence over technique. Anyone working on the projects in this book should first feel confident of their use of pulled warp, then choose carefully which of their ideas to use it with. 'Tapestry with Pulled Warp' is as much about Susan Iverson's own work as it is a useful instruction manual.

shapers, pulling the warp threads and securing the finished shape. The photographs and points set out in boxes are clear. However, I found the text a little confusing, with asides getting in the way of instruction. A pencil would be useful to underline instructions in the text.

The next chapters, on 3-D forms and complex pulls, assume the reader has mastered pattern and maquette making, as they dive straight into creating these complex forms.

The book's final chapter is 'Deciding when to use pulled warp' - the first section I



*'In the Ether' (2019) - photo (c) Taylor Dabney*