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**Bark New (detail)** – 27 x 14 inches, cotton, rayon, woven, by Lia Cook, 2022, as it appears on the wall of her Berkeley studio. Over the next few weeks, two of Cook’s weavings will be exhibited as part of group shows in Chicago: “Little Tunnel B” (1989), a weaving from Cook’s “Tunnel” series, at Volume Gallery’s APEX Curated by Meaghan Roddy; and “Facing Touch” (2011), from her Material Pleasures series, will be shown at the Art Institute of Chicago. Looking forward to June 2024, Cook will be participating in panel discussions at the Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian American Art Museum, where her piece, “Crazy Too Quilt” (1989), will be exhibited as part of “Subversive, Skilled, Sublime: Fiber Art by Women.” To read more about the weavings of Lia Cook, turn to page 14.

INSIDE	UC UPDATE .....	2	COMMUNITY CALENDAR .....	6	ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT.....	12
	CITY NEWS .....	3	MEASURE H KICKOFF .....	8	ARTS CALENDAR.....	13
	OPINIONS.....	4	MLK CELEBRATION.....	9	LIA COOK STUDIO .....	14
	BERKELEY BLUE .....	5	FEATURES .....	10	POEM & DEDICATION .....	16



## ART UP: Lia Cook studio

BY R. TODD KERR

There's much to consider in the West Berkeley studio of Lia Cook, and much to learn about her unique approach to the craft of weaving. The lesson starts with a bit of jargon about the fibers involved in the weaving process.

The "warp" refers to the vertical threads, the structural fibers of any weaving that hold their tension during the weaving process. The "weft" refers to the horizontal threads – those that are woven over and above warp threads to create a textile of varying quality. Typically, Cook uses black or white cotton fibers as her warp. For her weft, she uses rayon yarn that she collected in bulk in the 1970s, then dyed to suit her specific needs.

There are also many looms in Cook's studio, including a punch-card, industrial loom from France (c. 1823) – a manual loom that contributed to the industrial revolution. Tucked away in the corners of her studio, she also displays ancient looms from England and Japan.

"They offer no advantage over modern, digital looms," she explained about the older looms, directing my attention to her work area, where her most recent projects were emerging from contemporary looms – weavings of nature scenes, especially tree bark.

In addition to all the eye-catching spools of yarn, evidence of Cook's five decades of weavings were close at hand. Since I remembered it from my childhood and so asked, Cook showed me a sample from her "Landforms" series – a very satisfying textile featuring undulating waves in black and cream. She casually referred to it as her "Humpty-Bumpy" phase but seeing that sample immediately transported me to the early 1980s, seeing Cook's three-story black/white weaving gracing San Francisco's Embarcadero Center.

Many other genres of Cook's weavings were also evident: "Crazy Quilts" from the 1980s; "Master Draperies," from the 1990s, when Cook took inspiration from the background textiles in the paintings of great masters, such as Leonardo Da Vinci (see image #2); "Point of Touch" from the 2000s, all about hands; and more recent works featuring faces with overlays of neural networks.

All of Cook's expressions are thoroughly researched, a quality that she probably inherited from her mother, Miriam Holman, who graduated from Cal with an Art degree in the 1930s, and her maternal grandfather who was a UC professor of Botany back in the day.

Lia Cook does not remember the moment she self-identified as an artist. Instead, she explained that what others call "Art" is an activity that she grew up believing "it's something that one does."

After discovering her fascination with textiles during her travels to Mexico not long after graduating from Cal ('65), she began studying weavings and tapestries during her travels to Sweden and Russia. Then after further studies and a master's degree in Environmental Design (Cal '73), Cook began weaving textiles that were mashups of different cultures. Her breakthrough was in 1973, when her weavings were selected for the 6th International Biennial of Tapestry, Musée Cantonal des Beaux Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland.

**Image captions:** 1. Lia Cook in her Berkeley studio, posing in front of her digital loom, 2024 (image courtesy of the artist). • 2. *Leonardo I*, 53 x 77 inches, linen, rayon, acrylics, and dyes, woven, by Lia Cook, 1993. • 3. A weaving currently in process, as part of Cook's series featuring nature scenes, especially tree bark. (Staff photo).

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SEE PAGE 16

