

NIRAJA CHERYL LORENZ





Visionary Dreams, 2019
Hand-dyed solid-colored
and shibori dyed cottons
Machine pieced and quilted
20 x 20 in



Collision, 2017
Hand-dyed and commercial
solid-colored cotton
Machine pieced and quilted
55 x 55 in

Previous page

Cosmos 3-Eclipse, 2017
Hand-dyed and commercial solid-colored cotton
Machine pieced and quilted
54 x 38 in



Black Hole, 2019
Hand-dyed solid colored cotton and commercial batik
Fabric and strip piecing by Anne Parker
Designed, pieced and quilted by the artist
37 x 37 in



Strange Attractor #20-Big Blue, 2016
Hand-dyed and commercial
solid-colored cotton
Machine pieced and quilted
73 x 67 in



Strange Attractor #18-Red Splash, 2016
Hand-dyed and commercial
solid-colored cotton
Machine pieced and quilted
73 x 68 in

FROM THE MICROSCOPIC TO COSMIC

by Marcia Young

Throughout the history of art quilts, artists have pushed the boundaries of their medium by experimenting with textile manipulation, color, texture, and a diversity of mixed media. In recent decades, the art quilt medium as a whole has gradually been embraced by the art world. Even so, it is rare to come across an artist like Niraja Lorenz, who has developed a truly original vision.

Art quilts are often referred to as “paintings created with fabric.” In contrast to that interpretation, Lorenz’s work emerges from the color or texture of her fabrics and their ability to help her express her original awareness of the universe. Unlike more “painterly” quilt artists, Lorenz’s mind doesn’t interpret a subject as an independent entity, separate from its background. Instead, her world is made up of intertwined, moving elements, lacking a definable foreground or background. She eschews the idea that the eye needs a place to rest. Instead, she works from the center of each part of the composition and breaks it down into increasingly smaller units. Lorenz’s world consists of hundreds of color blocks working together to create a whole; further, her penchant for breaking elements down into smaller and smaller components is one of the many ways she captures the viewers’ imagination.

Lorenz’s educational background of a bachelor’s degree in biology, capped with a Ph.D. in psychology laid the groundwork for her thought process that combines science, art, and the way humans interact with them.

Lorenz’s father, Edward Lorenz, discovered the scientific principle of chaos theory and the popularly known “butterfly effect,” and the artist traveled extensively with him as he lectured about his work. It’s no wonder that—whether consciously or subconsciously—Lorenz’s work recalls chaos theory. In the artist’s words, “One of the concepts of chaos is that the initial conditions can be changed just a tiny bit, even by one degree, and the result can be ultimately totally different. I see that in my work.”¹

While she does not consciously start with chaos theory as a primary influence, her high-frequency works are brought into focus for the viewer with the titles she has given her recent series, all relating to her father’s work. Much like chaos theory, Lorenz’s work is highly sensitive

to slight changes. With each initial, seemingly small shift in color, shape, or position, her process magnifies that tiny shift, leading to strikingly different results.

Lorenz’s *Strange Attractor* quilt series further reveals how she decodes the world around her; each element is broken down into several color cubes, which are then connected to create swirls of movement. It’s the sublime combination of angular shapes in conversation with each other, resulting in their opposite—rounded swoops and bows, half-moons, and imagined universes. When viewing the *Strange Attractor* series, one can at once see both the nanosized elements in a leaf—or other elements of nature—and the vastness of our cosmos, as it could only be seen with a telescope. These kaleidoscopic forms exist on every scale, from the infinitesimal to the celestial.

She also attributes the development of her unique creative viewpoint to the influence of artist Nancy Crow. Lorenz’s work represents her deepest feelings as a response to her view of the world around us, not unlike Crow’s work.

On most days, Lorenz can be found in her studio, planning, cutting, and building units that will be auditioned for her next piece. She basks among heaping piles of fabric, organized by color family and dyeing processes. Her pieces start with the strip-piecing technique. As she moves the piece along its trajectory, the strips gradually recede, and the kaleidoscope comes to the fore. Ultimately, the rest of her vision comes into focus. She relishes building in the details, repeatedly pulling out and re-inserting elements. Lorenz is deeply connected to her process, adding, replacing, auditioning, and re-auditioning colors and components, exploring how they communicate with each other to build a stunning overall composition.

When Lorenz completes a piece, she is elated. In her words, “I can’t even describe the feeling. The work takes me to a different place. I’m not attached to outcomes. Instead, I let the work unfold.”²

Indeed, the *Strange Attractor* series invites all of us to gain a glimpse into the world that Niraja Lorenz experiences, from microscopic to cosmic.

¹ Conversation with the artist, March, 2020.

² Ibid.



Strange Attractor #16, 2016
Hand-dyed and commercial solid-colored cotton
Machine pieced, long arm quilted by Susan Miner
82 x 82 in



Edge of Chaos, 2020
Hand-dyed solid-colored and shibori dyed cottons
Machine pieced and quilted
85 x 124 in

NIRAJA CHERYL LORENZ

b. 1953. Lives and works in Eugene, Oregon

2019 Hallie Ford Fellow

Niraja Cheryl Lorenz was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1953. The daughter of an artist and a scientist, Lorenz began weaving as a teenager. After high school, with a table loom and a foot locker of yarn, she explored the U.S. in her VW van visiting national parks and wilderness areas. Later she studied biology and earned a PhD in Human Experimental Psychology from Cornell University. She began quilting in 1995 and first studied with Nancy Crow in 2007. After twenty years as a research psychologist she is now a full-time artist. Lorenz's quilts have been shown throughout North America, as well as internationally. She has won numerous awards including Best of Show, Design Excellence, and Creative Artistry.

Hallie Brown was born in 1905, outside of Tulsa, in Indian Territory that would become the state of Oklahoma. She supported herself as she earned a bachelor's degree at East Central University and taught in Oklahoma before her parents moved their family to rural Oregon. In 1935 Hallie married Kenneth W. Ford and together they established Roseburg Lumber Company in the midst of the Great Depression.

Hallie Ford was drawn to art all her life, specifically the accessibility of artmaking. She took classes with the painter Carl Hall at Willamette University in Salem, and painting became a central part of her life. Her philanthropy established and supported key Oregon visual art museums and universities.

After Hallie's death in 2007, The Ford Family Foundation's Board of Directors honored our co-founder by establishing a Visual Arts Program. The first element of this program was the Hallie Ford Fellowships in the Visual Arts, awarded since 2010. Through these unrestricted fellowships, we seek to make significant awards to visual artists who have worked to establish their voice and craft.

Another of our goals is to help support the ecology that builds connections and capacity in the visual arts community of our state. As the Fellows become the focus of exhibitions throughout the world, they bring more attention and support to their Oregon peers. We are certain that Hallie Ford would be pleased to see how both individual artists and the visual arts community in Oregon have flourished since the establishment of this program in her honor.

We could not be more excited each year to bring new Hallie Ford Fellows into this family, and to share their work with you.

Anne C. Kubisch
President, The Ford Family Foundation

The Hallie Ford Fellowships are the flagship element of The Ford Family Foundation Visual Arts Program. The Foundation commits to an ongoing relationship with our Fellows through exhibition support, convenings, and professional development opportunities. In addition, the Visual Arts Program offers grants to visual artists for unanticipated career opportunities; supports artists-in-residence programs in Oregon and nationally; brings curators and arts writers from outside the region to Oregon for studio visits and community dialogue; commissions arts writing and publication; supports exhibitions, catalogues and other forms of documentation for Oregon artists; and awards grants to enhance exhibition spaces.

The Foundation is pleased to partner with the Oregon Arts Commission, University of Oregon, Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA), Portland State University, Reed College, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA), Creative Capital, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, United States Artists, and the artists and visual arts organizations of our state.

The Ford Family Foundation was established in 1957 by Kenneth W. and Hallie E. Ford. Its mission is "successful citizens and vital rural communities" in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. The Foundation is located in Roseburg, Oregon, with a Scholarship office in Eugene. For more information about the Foundation and its Visual Arts Program, visit www.tfff.org.



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