

ARTEMORBIDA

Textile Arts Magazine

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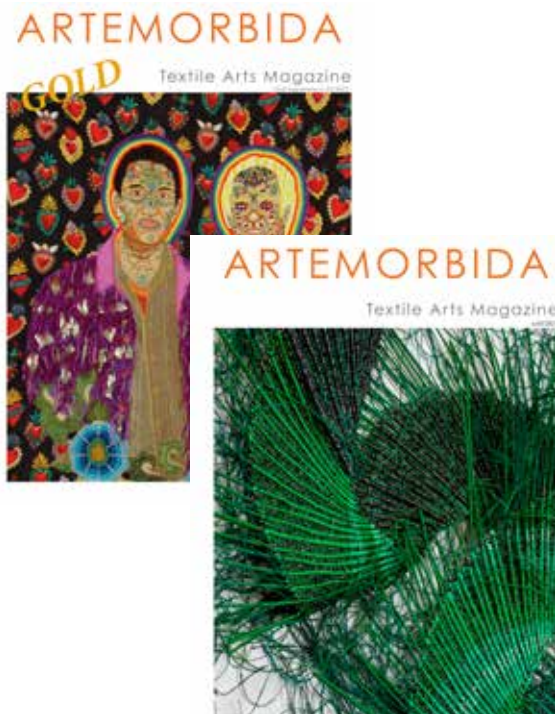


Editoriale

Third issue. Time just flew. ArteMorbida is becoming more and more interesting, featuring new collaborations and new sections. Our project is full of passion and it could not be otherwise because it really is a great commitment. But what can I say? There is so much positive energy, curiosity, desire to search, understand, share...

Textile art in Italy and worldwide is continually evolving. Only through sharing and cooperating can we keep the pace. Ours is a fantastic team. We couldn't wish for more and this is evident in every issue of our magazine and not only: our website, ArteMorbida.com has finally been registered as an online magazine. We are growing. Keep following us on the web!

*Enjoy your reading!
Emanuela D'Amico*



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TECHNOLOGY AS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION: INTERVIEW WITH WLODZIMIERZ CYGAN



"Organic 3", 300 x 60 cm, viscose, polyester linen, 2019, photo Thiswaydesign, copyright Włodzimierz Cygan

<https://cyganart.com.pl/#index>

Włodzimierz Cygan is a Polish textile artist originally from Łódź, trained at the Strzemiński Academy of Fine Arts. Since he was a boy he has felt the influence of the "Polish School of Textile" phenomenon and of the work by Magdalena Abakanowicz, in the 1970s he chose to devote himself to textiles as object and subject of his artistic research, also thanks to one of the oldest and most prestigious competition exhibitions promoting Fiber Art: the International Triennial of Tapestry, organized in Łódź since 1972. In the context of his artistic and personal career, the experience gained as a professor at two universities with different vocations, one artistic and the other technical, enabled him to build experience and skills, paving the way for a bold artistic exploration, experimenting with the structural potential of the warp. Technique, inspiration and technology blend together, creating textile surfaces that are enriched with unusual materials, giving form and meaning to the artwork.

Where does your passion for weaving come from and where does it take its nourishment? How has the cultural context in which you grew up influenced your artistic path?

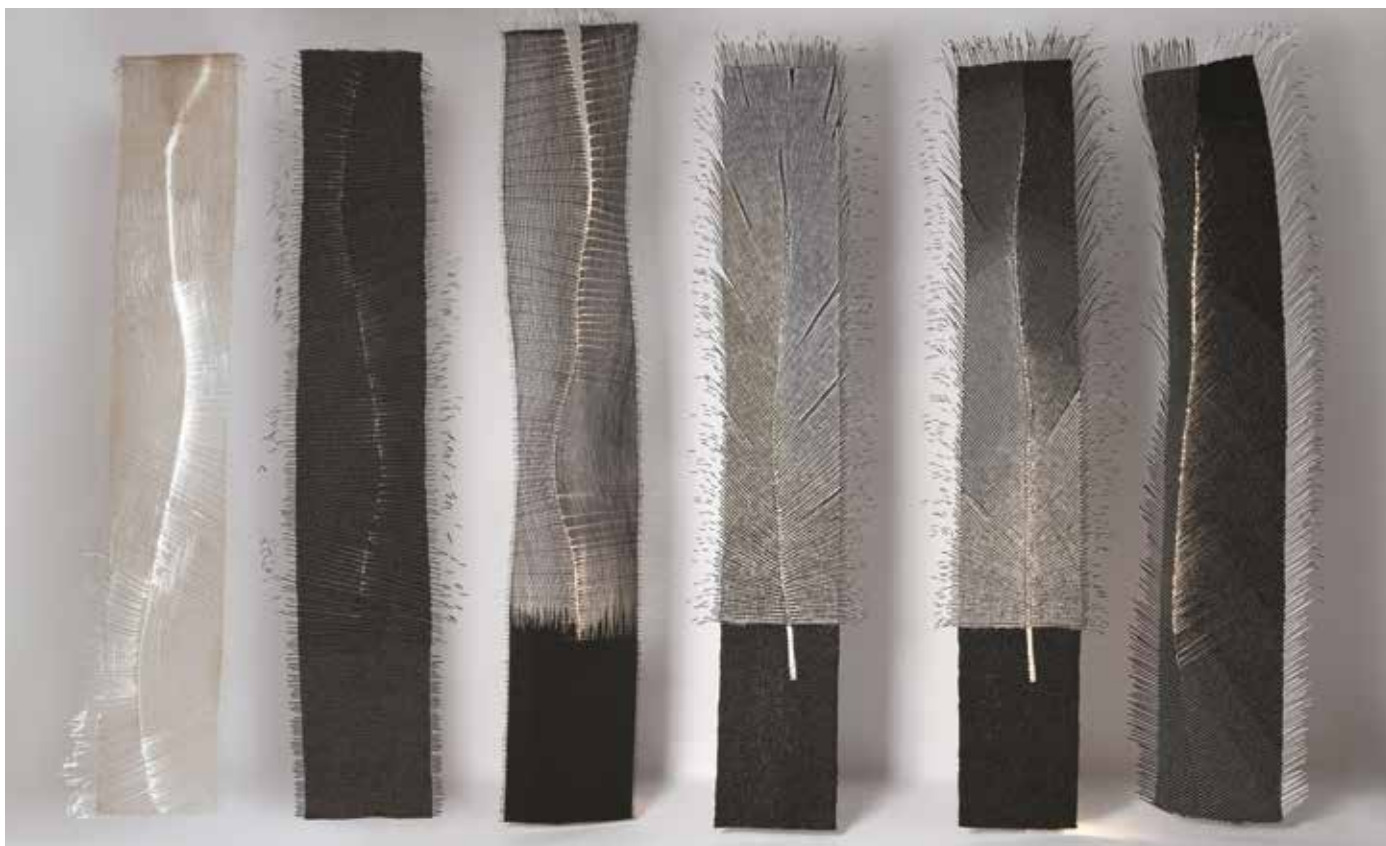
I don't think I've ever liked being idle for too long. Yes, sometimes I indulged in it and then treated it as a substitute for luxury. I like to do something, I like to be busy according to my needs, I like to build - sometimes even from nothing. I still have a feeling that, following my intuition, I will come across something really important, important to others, maybe the future generations. Doing so provides me with a necessary sense of freedom. I decide on my next projects myself. As I set out on my next path, I dream that the result will evoke even a fleeting sense of awe in someone else. From early childhood, it could be noticed that my type of sensitivity, mental construction and temperament predestined me rather to the environment of people who broadly understood culture and art, who are closer to art than to any other field. I owe my love of DIY to my father. Thanks to him, I had the opportunity to encounter basic handicraft techniques, materials and tools. In the cultural context, it was very important to feel an early fascination with the phenomenon of "Polish School of Textile". The realization that weaving is my way of life occurred at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s and matured with the establishment of the International Textile Triennial in my city - Łódź.

Not only artist, but also professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk and at the Technical University of Łódź. How has teaching affected the way you look at textiles?

I started working as an academic teacher late in life. After graduating from the Strzeminski Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź, I tried to build my future on independent artistic work. The political and social circumstances (martial law in Poland in 1981-86) did not favour this. I devoted myself entirely to weaving and tried - with mixed results - to earn a living this way. After the change in the political system, new possibilities appeared. In 1991 I started to publish a magazine devoted to fibre art. "Texti Textil" was a bilingual publication. Thanks to this activity, I deepened my bonds with artistic textiles and widened my circle of friends. It was not until 1994 that I got a chance to work at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk (350 km away). I was eager to take up the challenge, especially as the Gdansk academy has a very strong track record in the discipline of artistic textiles. Three years later I was invited to cooperate with the Technical University of Łódź, where at the Faculty of Textiles a new course was being created - Textile Architecture. My many years of work at both universities with very different teaching profiles have greatly enriched my knowledge and skills. Also, working with two different types of students, one from a university of art and the other from a technical university, required a lot of effort, but also provided



"The Cycle Tapping", 6 pieces, viscose, polypropylene, sisal, linen, optical fiber, 2014, photo Thiswaydesign, copyright Wlodzimierz Cygan



"Tapping", 6 pezzi, 265 x 50 cm, 6 pieces, viscose, polypropylene, sisal, linen, optical fiber 2014, photo Thiswaydesign, copyright Włodzimirz Cygan

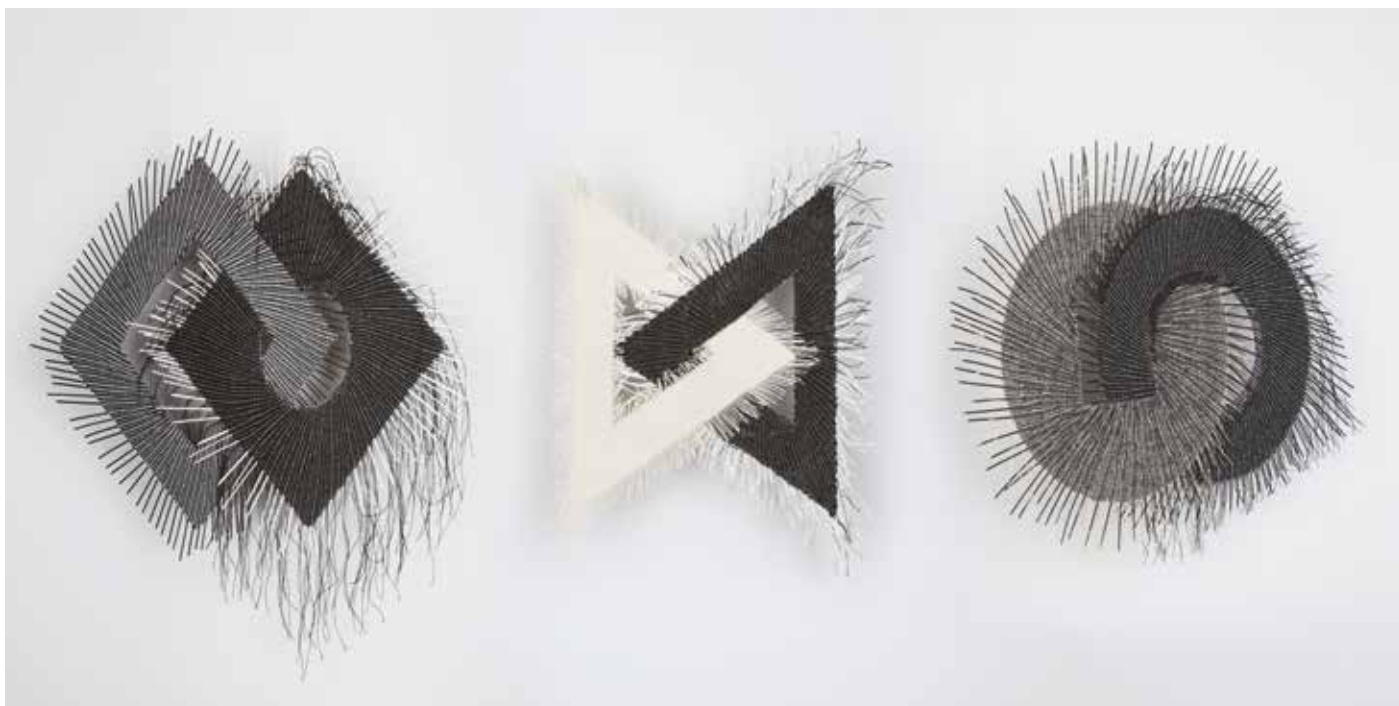
an opportunity to develop the profile of a teacher and artist who balances the issues of technique and technology with autonomous artistic creation. In 2008, I said goodbye to the Academy in Gdansk and joined the Academy in Łódź, my *alma mater*. I still work here.

In many of your tapestries you use optical fiber. What is the role of light in your works and how does such an unusual material for a tapestry enrich the expressive potential of the textile medium?

It is now difficult for me to think of any of my works in which light would not be the main means of expression. In my earlier works I used to assign the role of light to sisal fibres which seemed to shine on a black woollen background. But in fact, they only shone, glittered. For artists, it became available at the beginning of the 21st century. The possibilities it brought with it seem revolutionary to me in several dimensions. The effect that for centuries had been achieved by using silk and metal threads or only pretending to be gold has now found its physical identity.

In your opinion, can tapestry today maintain its traditional function as an object of utility, and at the same time see its autonomous artistic identity recognized? Or are artistic identity and functional aspect irreconcilable?

It depends on how we define the term Tapestry. Historic fabrics in the Franco-Flemish style will always retain their utilitarian value as decoration, warming up a cool wall, and their artistic autonomy depends on the talent of the cartoonist and the weaver. Contemporary fibre art activities do not demand simultaneous artistic autonomy and utility. In simpler terms: a textile artwork may fulfil a utilitarian role, but it does not have to. Instead, it must constitute an autonomous artistic statement if it is to be counted as a work of art. Otherwise, it will be treated as a craft object. The boundaries separating these two concepts are often discretionary, and therefore subjective and blurred. I personally believe that the combination of both qualities - artistic and applied - is a distinctive feature of this discipline of human creativity. Especially in recent times, when new technical and raw material possibilities have appeared, allowing for a significant extension of the repertoire of functional functions, the popularly known as smart textiles, allowing for modelling of the functions of textiles and their interactivity with the user, may become a tempting means of expression also for artists. For me, optical fibre has become such a temptation. In my practice I strive to maintain a balance between the function of creating a mood in an interior, providing it with a positive aura, and sometimes even organising the space while provoking the imagination of the user of such an interior. Stimulating his emotions encourages him to calm down and go



"Interactions", 3 pieces, 65x50cm, 60x60 cm, 70x65cm, linen, viscose, 2019, photo Thiswaydesign, copyright Włodzimierz Cygan

deep into himself. The possibility of using fibre optics and devices that emit light in a programmed manner, in addition to its aesthetic qualities, can serve as additional interior lighting.

Among all the tapestries you have realized during your career, can you identify a common thread, a *fil rouge* or a principle that inspires and founds all your tapestry production?

From an artistic point of view, light is such a common denominator. From the technical point of view, I would emphasize a fact common to almost all my previous works: despite numerous temptations, I have remained faithful to weaving as a performance technique. 98% of my work is woven. As a weaver, I think I have always been more of a builder than a painter.

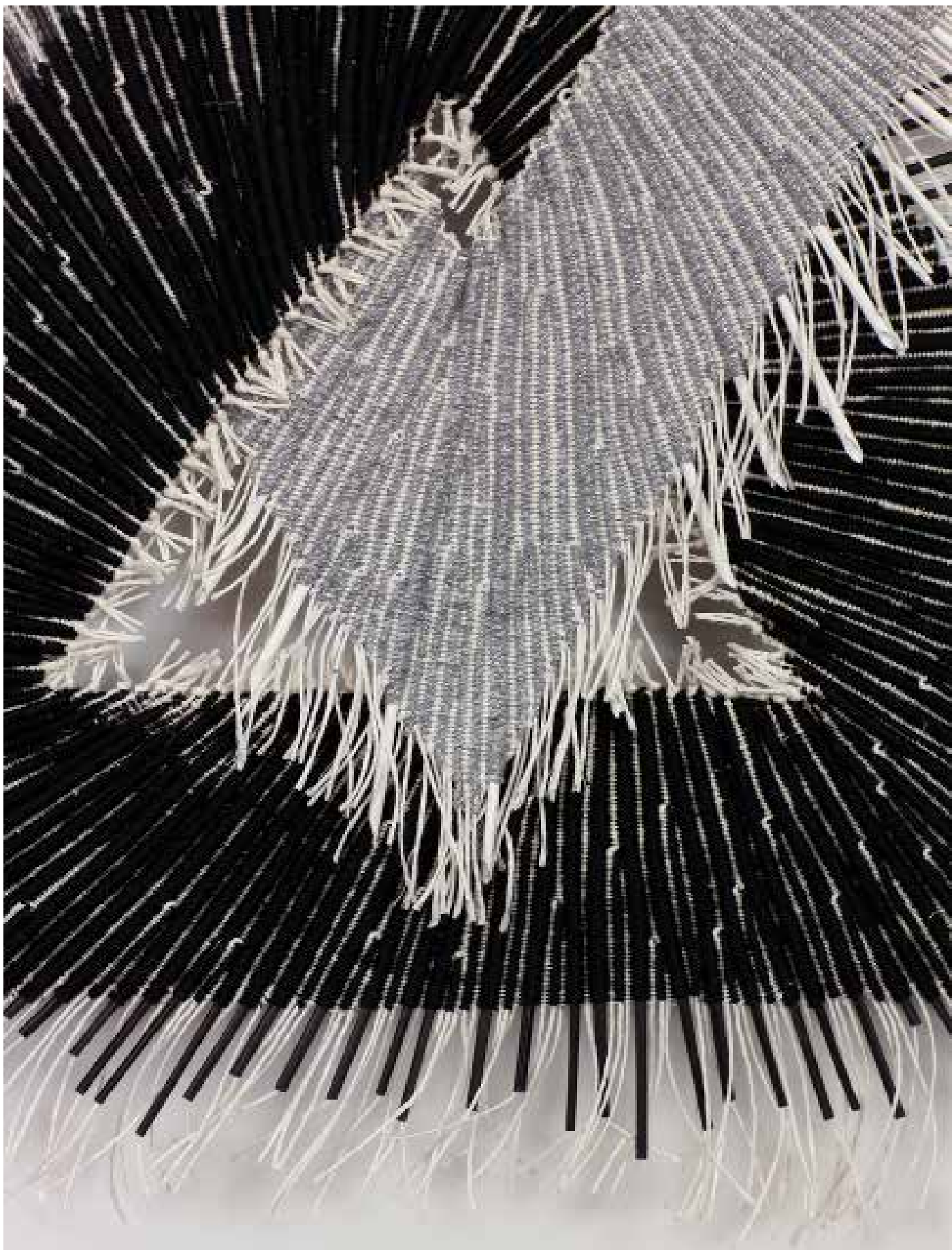
A distinctive feature of your tapestries is the radial warp weaving technique. You build a tapestry from the inside. What characteristics, aesthetic or stylistic features led you to develop this technique and "abandon" traditional horizontal weaving?

Shortly after graduation, I bought a vertical loom for making tapestries with the scholarship I received. Quite early on, I began to wonder about the essence of the beauty of artistic textiles. One of the observations was the characteristic structure obtained from grosgrain columns. Their parallelism sometimes caused a certain distortion of the woven image. I wondered how to use this innate structural property to enrich the palette of means of expression.

What bothered me was the need to define technical parameters and the limited possibility of making any changes during the realisation of a given fabric. I was looking for a way to break free from the rigidity of warp thread parallelism. At the beginning I was looking for a way to deepen the space of the picture thanks to a kind of subcutaneous suggestion of convergent perspective used in painting. But with time, as a non-painter, I began to notice the abstract, symbolic and energising qualities of the technique of weaving on a radial warp. Successively examining, complicating and mixing together other methods of warp building which I was experimenting with at the same time, I came to the conclusion that the potential expressive possibilities inherent in the system are clearly underestimated and can be as much a carrier of artistic message as the weft. Weaving on a warp that is not parallel entails several interesting consequences.

One of them is the freedom from having to weave from the bottom up (or vice versa) or from one edge to the other. The warp threads are tensioned one at a time on the frame, so each thread can be accessed at any time, and it is possible to change it. Weaving from the inside causes the growing area of the fabric to take on different shapes along the way. Sometimes surprising and worth remembering. The necessity to be attentive in this process significantly reduces the feeling of weariness even during the long realization of the fabric.

Can you tell us about "Orbitrek", the tapestry awarded at the 12th Lodz Tapestry Triennial in 2007? What role has this work played in your artistic and professional development?



"Interactions-detail", 3 pieces, 65x50cm, 60x60 cm,70x65cm, linen, viscose, 2019, photo Thiswaydesign, copyright Włodzimierz Cygan



"Orbitrek", 100x300 cm, wool, sisal, 2007, CMW, photo Thiswaydesign, copyright Włodzimierz Cygan



"Orbitrek-detail", 100x300 cm, wool, sisal, 2007, CMW, photo Thiswaydesign, copyright Włodzimierz Cygan



"Viruses-detail", 3 pieces: linen, viscose, polyester, PVC tubes, reflective fibre, fiber optic, 2020, photo Thiswaydesign, copyright Włodzimierz Cygan

This work, in its technical layer, was an attempt to bring together past experiences.

It contains features recognizable to my earlier textiles.

Starting with my favorite set of materials (wool and sisal) and colors (black and light beige) through the way of weaving based on the domination of point and line, and finally to the characteristic arrangement of warp threads, but this time to two points of convergence.

The simplicity of the geometric composition was softened by the use of natural raw materials.

The two-centered layout of the warp imposes an association with a natural organism such as a larva, but can also be associated with a caterpillar vehicle. I was inspired by this duality of interpretation: on the one hand, the larva - a harbinger of a butterfly, and on the other, a caterpillar enabling the movement of motor vehicles on difficult terrain, e.g. on the moon. *Orbitrek* is the name of fitness equipment that I use.

I found the presence of the segment "orbit" juxtaposed with the promise of endless walking to be a very apt metaphor for my working life (and beyond). I have always enjoyed walking. I once confessed that I think best when I walk.

Thanks to the *Orbitrek*, I reached the stars on my own two feet and at my own pace.

Are there any themes, ideas, objectives that you now

feel the need to develop or deepen in the continuation of your artistic career?

Technology is an inspiration for me. I think it's no coincidence that I worked at both a technical and an artistic university. I consider myself first and foremost a weaver who is sometimes given the opportunity to be an artist.

I am currently influenced by new material and construction possibilities which, more than ever before, make it possible to get to the heart of the phenomenon of weaving as one of the most ancient human ways of living and creating.

I am fascinated by this juxtaposition of the ancient with the newly invented (discovered). I am a staunch opponent of treating artistic textiles as any kind of substitute medium, a carrier of other artistic disciplines. I believe that the fabric itself is the source of the rules that apply to it and of all comparative criteria. I am fascinated with fabrics which justify their presence in the world of art by themselves.

Thanks to certain properties of raw materials, combined with sensors that are still being perfected and miniaturized and the possibility of writing down the expected effects in a programming language, I can today dream of a fabric that is responsive, interactive and, at the same time, capable of evoking reflections about being in time, in some deeper, truly poignant way.