

Introduction by Peter Chin

The field of textile studies is vast, and as the first essay by Hector Meneses states, "Wherever textiles are found, there is a civilization." These handmade textiles speak with power, rare beauty, and technical brilliance, about the human condition and our lives in partnership with the world around us, seen and unseen. By investigating cultural details from traditional and indigenous textile cultures in South East Asia and Mexico, as well as some details about their methods/techniques of creating textiles, compelling metaphors of life and living become available for contemplation. This is what I have done to create my new work *Woven*.

Human Threads – Sensing Life by Hector Manuel Meneses Lozano

"Wherever textiles are found, there is a civilization." This is how my mentor, Lorena Román, welcomed me on my very first day of the textiles seminar during my training in conservation, quoting Fernando Arechavala. This quote has stuck in my head since then. Textiles inform us of relationships, whether these are among people, among trades, or among cultures. They also inform us about both public and private life. For the former, it is through them that we can better understand, among many other things, where and how we live, what resources are available to us, the highly specialized craftsmanship that characterizes different nations, as well as the political system that requires such specialties. To explain the latter, one could simply say that textiles are our most faithful companions: since the moment we arrive on this planet until our departure, we live surrounded, wrapped, and sheltered by them. It is not by chance that our vocabulary, in many different languages, has adopted so many textile-related metaphors to refer to our lives. It is because of all these reasons that we have been able to understand civilizations long gone. We have also been fortunate enough to experience ongoing traditions that have been passed on from generation to generation, traditions that have defiantly resisted numerous attempts of destruction.

When examining and experiencing these traditions and the messages they communicate, it makes me uneasy to think of the meaning that we are conveying through our current approach to textiles. What are we, as a civilization, expressing through the textiles of our time? I would like to say that technology has brought benefits... and it has, but there is so much more to it. So many actions of our time aim at homogenizing us. It does not take too much effort to see it: we could travel all around the world and in every single stop of our journey, we would witness how local identities are either lessened and weak, or consciously making choices to preserve their heritage, in a perpetual struggle against a dominant and, generally, foreign system. There are several reasons that have led to these changes, and it is unfortunate to notice that many of them come from cultural violence, economic greed, and/or discrimination. Textiles are so close to our hearts and to our essence, that, together with language, they make the perfect target when hatred and ignorance are given a chance to rule.

Peter Chin's *Woven* allows us to take a pause and re-examine local identities. Textiles are a key element of identity, of civilization. Looking at dancers from different backgrounds only

enhances that concept, without excluding the idea of a global world. To say that local traditions are important is not in opposition to the thought of cultural exchange. The world has always been connected and humans have been able to integrate, adapt, and transform foreign elements, whether these are tangible or not. Numerous American nations, for example, quickly embraced the wool that came along with the first Europeans; Europe, in turn, was fascinated by the silks that came from the Far East; the whole world was coloured red by a tiny insect that is native to the Mexican region of Oaxaca, cochineal.

The existence of projects that value these traditions, that recognize their knowledge, their wisdom, and their awareness of the world, makes me think that we are still part of a human civilization. It only takes a few conversations with weavers, regardless of their background, to connect lives across cultures. Human life is woven on a loom and embellished with the help of a needle. Relationships are as delicate as the finest silk thread, but, as such, they are also amazingly strong. Better yet, if broken, they can be mended. Colourful friends, just as colourful fabrics, brighten up our darkest moments. We are all connected... We are all interwoven. Let us appreciate our histories, our identities, our artistic expressions. Let us enjoy the tactile qualities of a hand-made cloth, for it embodies its creator's heart. The moment the last weaver leaves this world, I wonder whether we will still be allowed to call ourselves humans.