



HILARY BRACE
WEAVING TALES

TEXT: CLAUDIA TAYLOR
PHOTOGRAPHY: ASSASSI PRODUCTIONS

Portrait: Hannah Roy Taylor

Artist Hilary Brace is well known for her intricately wrought charcoal images that transport the viewer into a heightened natural world, poetic and symphonic and yet seductively silent. With a master's technique, she depicts the forces of nature: moisture, turbulence, majestic heights and cavernous depths, ominous thunderheads and diaphanous clouds, piercing light and shadow, wind and snow.

Brace has now moved into a new realm beyond her intimate hand-rendered work: By using Photoshop as a drawing tool, she uses digital platforms to create complex studies and increase the scale of her drawings, then translates those into tapestries measuring up to 5 feet by 9 feet. The inspiration for her latest series of work was sparked by seeing the Raphael tapestries at the Vatican Museum during her tenure as a visiting artist at the American Academy in Rome in 2015. She soon sought out other tapestry masterpieces, including *The Lady and The Unicorn* series at the Musée de Cluny in Paris. Subsequently, and quite coincidentally, while visiting friends in Tilburg, The Netherlands, she was introduced to the TextielMuseum and its adjacent TextielLab. She began to consider how she could translate her brilliant imagery into light-reactive textile pieces that might convey the sense of drama and mystery characteristic of her drawings.

"My skills and interests just came together when I visited the TextielLab and looked through their drawers of samples," Brace says. "I had been wanting to increase the scale of my work, but also address the central aspects of my imagery. I thought if I could make something light-reactive, perhaps it could be ethereal and mysterious in itself, and even enhance my imagery." Brace soon returned to the TextielLab to begin a period of intense exploration. Some weaving processes are now digitized, so working with technicians in the lab, Brace was able to translate her digital drawings to sophisticated jacquard looms. She also explored numerous thread combinations to finally achieve the effects she imagined, and has produced a series of tapestries. She will have a solo exhibition including tapestries and charcoal drawings at Craig Krull Gallery in Santa Monica, California, from January 20 through February 24, 2018.

At her home studio in bucolic Santa Barbara, where her surprisingly well-natured parrot, Ella, lifts her wings to offer visitors a welcome, Brace is deeply involved with every aspect of her creative process. Here, she unveils a stunning new tapestry. One can see the living aspect of the piece—moving closer or farther away changes the light play on the artwork. The subtle reflective qualities create the effect of a living, breathing artwork. "It's alive in terms of the image and it's alive in the way it responds to light—and to us."

In describing her creative process, Brace explains that it is largely explorative. "When I work directly in charcoal, making a drawing, I don't have a preconceived idea," she says. "I add and subtract charcoal until an image presents itself, then bring it slowly into focus. On the computer, it's more of a building process. I take bits of images from many sources and create a chaotic soup, stretching, scaling, rotating and flipping the pieces. Out of this chaos I begin to imagine an image and then work toward fully describing it, using the brush tools more like in traditional drawing. I love working this way, because it's so mutable. I can make changes and revisions much more quickly than is possible on paper." When asked to describe the central message of her work, Hilary says, "I don't want to make a single statement, because I want the work to be mysterious and open to interpretation. My images of the natural world serve as a reminder of its forces, but also its impermanence and fragility." ■ hilarybrace.com; craigkrullgallery.com

