

## FROM THE HEART

There is a wealth of experience woven into the unique rugs and kilims made by Beate von Harten as **Philippa Gort-Barten** discovered



**B**eate Von Harten should not be underestimated simply because her textiles aren't designed to shock. She is exuberantly creative, utterly dedicated and a virtuoso of her trade. As well as producing fabulous rugs and kilims, Beate is a highly experienced textile restorer. These two careers run side-by-side; a tall order but she

is always working, thinking, creating. When I ask when is a good time to make contact, she says 'you can call me any time... I am an artist all through the weekend!'

She grew up in the northern German textile town of Neumünster. "When I was five, I would go to the big industrial buildings, see the undyed wool being flocked on the



1 Beate Von Harten in her Stiflgasse studio in Vienna inspecting a kilim from the Hin und Her collection

roads and smell it when it was washed. I listened to the sound of the mechanical looms, but I didn't know what it was. Finally, when I was 19 and studying textiles in Hamburg, I returned to the places I had known as a child...and I realised what it was I had been hearing... the rhythm of weaving"

In 1979 Beate moved to Stuttgart to study interior design at the Academy of Art and Design, where she met an architect from England. They soon moved to London, where she began training in antique textile restoration. By 1984 she was once more in the German speaking world, but this time in Vienna, where she has now established her own weaving workshop.

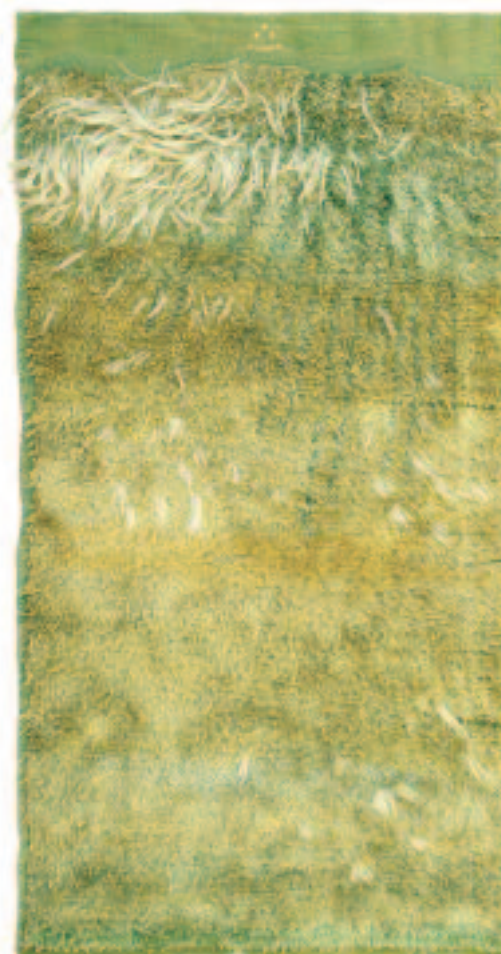
Her *Texilatelier* is now flourishing but she knows that "weaving cannot pay for life." She supplements her work with teaching and restoration, and is aided by her boundless ability to draw people, and thus clients, to her. She has exhibited virtually every year since the early 90s. I ask her where she gets her energy from. "The energy", she replied, "I get out of myself. One can create even this"

Her workshop produces textiles made entirely by hand; the silk and wool is dyed

organically by her colleague Johanne Bilek at the Neusiedler Lake; to create her favourite green (a colour that Beate often uses for its calming qualities), it is double dyed, first with birchtree and then briefly with indigo.

I ask her how her dual occupations as a weaver and restorer fit together; does the latter influence the former? She replies that, although the patterns of the textiles she has tenderly brought back to life are not repeated directly in her work, "the textiles are my teachers and I thank them a lot, because in them I have observed the reasons for longevity in material and design"

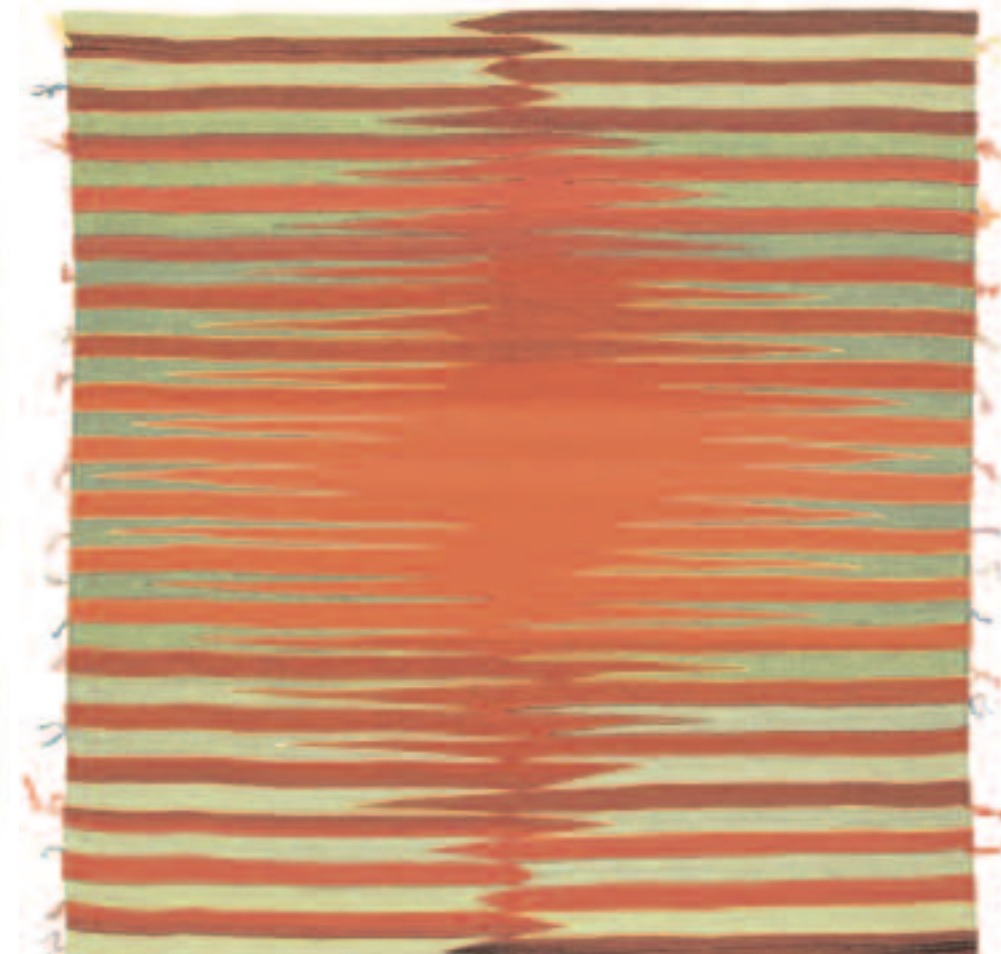
It is that longevity that she aims to recreate in her own weaving, both in substance and design. Her new collection, *Field and Meadows*, one of which has been chosen by the Textile Museum in Washington DC for 'Green, A Colour and a Cause', (16 April-11 September 2011), is a selection of, as the name suggests, strips of land expressed in abstract form. They can be fitted together or not as desired. Beate explains: "They are made from silk, wool and vegetable dyes like antique textiles, but created with the viewpoint of 500 years time in mind. If we do not take better responsibility for our



earth, these carpets might be the only lasting memory to show the beauty of our planet. Information on photographs is not yet proven to survive as long as textiles do"

Not all of her work has to have a narrative element. Indeed a previous collection, *Hin und Her*, sprung directly from the practical processes involved in weaving as the designs symbolise the movement of the shuttle on the loom back and forth as weaving occurs. "The kilims in this collection do not want to tell a story. They just want to be... and be admired by their owners for their quality, simplicity and beauty."

Ethical considerations do prove to be a theme that runs through her work, though this can be seen more usually in terms of the creative process rather than in the actual design. All of her textiles are woven in Vienna, something that is not only practical geographically since she weaves much of her work herself, but also reflects her strong ethical bent. After seeing first hand how weavers in other parts of the world were often poorly recompensed for their work, she feels it her duty to ensure this is not the case with her own creations. Since then Beate takes care to always act to the highest



ethical level in the production of her work.

She also invites customers to contribute to the artistic process in when making a commission. "If they are near, they are invited to observe the weaving-process and if they want, they can influence it in a way that suits"

During her career, she has travelled extensively, completing restoration commissions and honing her weaving knowledge worldwide. Brazil, Romania, China... the list goes on. I asked her if all of her conservation projects have been good experiences and she relates the tale of being asked to refill the middle of a 16th century Mamluk carpet. It was, she says, "a horrible adventure! I could not find the design anywhere and I had to do it twice, because the middle was not exactly in the middle and a mistake in one row of knots appeared. I couldn't sleep... but it only started to work when I began to plan it knot by knot. Then it developed its own logic. Now, any Mamluk can come to me and I can reconstruct it... but then that was the 80s ...conservation is the attitude now"

I hope that her rugs enjoy the same legacy of care and respect from their fortunate owners in the years to come.

[www.beatevonharten.at](http://www.beatevonharten.at)

2 *Svenja*, Field and Meadow collection, designed and made by Beate Von Harten, 0.91 x 1.74m

3 *Strawberry Green*, Hin und Her collection, designed and made by Beate Von Harten