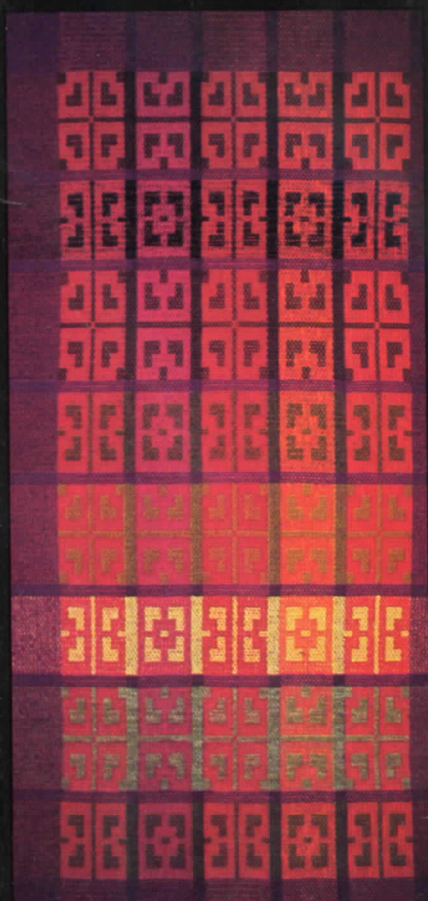
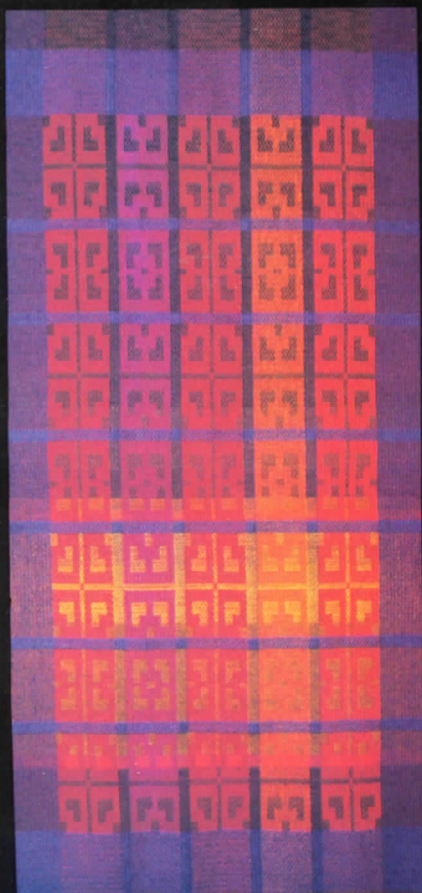
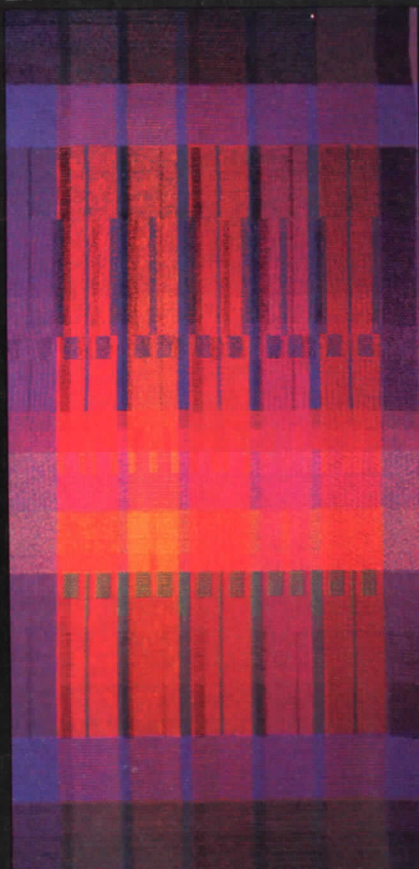


A.

B.

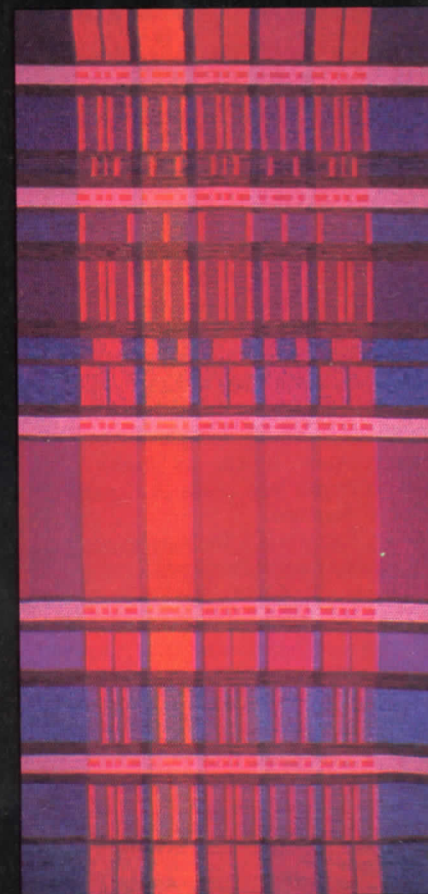


D.



C.

E.



A. Hanging 1, *Intrigue*

B. Hanging 2, *Summer Patterns*

C. Hanging 3, *Fire Through
A Grate*

D. Hanging 4, *Continuation*

E. Hanging 5, *Position*

Variations on One Warp

by Philis Alvic

Early in my career as a weaver of wall hangings I discovered pattern weaving. My fascination with pattern has led me to increasingly complex multi-harness loom controlled weave structures. In this type of weaving, planning the piece and dressing the loom can often actually take more time than weaving the hanging. Since I prefer throwing a shuttle to bending over the loom while threading it, a long warp was the perfect solution to minimizing set-up time and maximizing weaving. My husband suggested that I weave several identical hangings from each warp and send them to galleries in diverse parts of the country. Although his idea would make the most efficient use of my time, I found it boring. Following my husband's plan, after I had done the initial hanging, the creative excitement was over until I began the next warp. My own approach to dealing with the long warp was to develop as many variations as possible.

Producing many different hangings on one warp became a game — a test of my creative ingenuity. However, after working for some time with long warps, I began to feel the need to be more systematic in my investigations. The Handweavers Guild of America's Certificate of Excellence program provided an excellent opportunity to pursue this interest. "Variations on One Warp" became the topic of my major study for the Certificate of Excellence. During the course of study for the certificate, I became aware of the many possibilities that working in this manner offered. Rather than being a finite bit of work, this study opened the door to the procedure I have followed since.

One approach to dealing with what I have learned in my investigations would be to catalog variations under the obvious headings of pattern, color and texture. Unfortunately, I have found that things in the real world can't be sorted into such neat lists. At any

given time, one element may predominate, but the rest are always lurking in the background. Often, the subtle interrelationships of the various elements are the real essence of the piece, and of the particular variation. Therefore, to illustrate my way of working — rather than listing variations — I will describe the progression of "Warp 79B." (My system for naming the warp is: first, the year, and second, a capital letter, which denotes which warp. In other words, 79B was the second warp I worked on in 1979.)

By carefully describing — in the order produced — the hangings created on this warp, I hope to shed light on the process of variation I use. Each piece is unique because the focus or objective of the work has altered. Throughout the five hangings, the constants I had to deal with were warp colors and textures and the threading pattern. All changes were made in the weft. I will describe the most important of the many decisions I made as the warp advanced.

In March of 1979, an exhibition of my work was scheduled for a gallery in Louisville, Kentucky. As I was gathering my work about a month before the shipping date, I noticed that blues and greens predominated. Although there were some pieces done in warm colors, something bright was definitely needed for this exhibition. Since I am an individual who enjoys working right up to a deadline, I began work on warp 79B.

There was a design in Ruth Holroyd's book *Patterns of Jacob Angstadt* that I had found very interesting and had been wanting to try. Many sheets of graph paper later, I had the essential parts of a double weave draft adapted to Summer and Winter. Since boxes alone seemed too busy, I added a border to draw attention to the design of the boxes. The number changed from three large boxes to five small boxes as I made adjustments to fit the

40-inch threading width.

Since time was a factor, I was not able to order any special yarns, and chose all materials from the stock that was on hand. I started the task of selecting yarns by lining up a selection of reds, and then beginning to include some oranges. The yarns were arranged in groups, so that each box in the design would be a slightly different color and also of a different texture. The border presented a special problem, because I wanted something that would set off the red but not present too great a contrast. After much deliberation, I finally chose purple for the border.

After the major decisions of planning the design and selecting the colors and textures of the warp, came the time-consuming tasks of winding the warp and threading the loom. When I finally got to the weaving, I knew that I wanted the first hanging to be simple, direct, and fast. I decided that using warp colors for the weft appeared to be the safest and easiest way to achieve a bright piece. The pattern, which alternated two types of boxes, was woven exactly as threaded. The weft color changed with each box in the color progression of the warp. The "master plan" was to follow the warp progression and then reverse, for a total of nine boxes in length. However, about half way through, it became obvious that the hanging would be much too long if I followed the plan.

Therefore, I deleted two boxes in the actual weaving. My accommodation to size proved to be a distinct advantage, because it focused the interest. The purple border also helped to set off the boxes. The hanging was cut from the loom, hemmed, boxed and shipped off to the exhibition with the previously selected pieces.

Now that I had met the deadline for my show and completed the first hanging, there were fewer constraints and I could enjoy my

explorations on the remaining warp. I began by assessing the piece that I had just completed. I was very fond of the boxes and liked the general proportions and the border. The color was safe, and although bright, a little dull. I decided that in the second hanging in the series, I would retain the successful elements of hanging number one, while experimenting further with color. By choosing complimentary colors, I got a strong warm-cool contrast that I felt was desirable. Since red and green have such a strong identity with Christmas, I decided to concentrate on the textures of my weft yarns in order to minimize this association. I also planned to negate the Christmas-like effect by using a progression of shades from box to box. Since I followed the same general format as for the first hanging, number two presented no problem.

The third hanging evolved in quite a different manner from the first two, which demonstrates the way the world around me affects my production. One night, after a long day full of disagreements with my children, I sat gazing into the fireplace at a friend's party, ignoring the activity. Time and the relaxing effects of watching the fire made me forget my woes, and I became intrigued with the flames. The old house had the original iron grate still in the fireplace and the flames danced behind its rigid, dark silhouette. As I continued to sit in the large easy chair and study the fire, I began to design a hanging in which the colors of a definite pattern changed irrespective of the pattern.

The red warp currently on my loom would lend itself nicely to the theme of fire, with a brown and gold weft representing wood and fire. The pattern of boxes could be the rigid grate, contained by the outline of the fireplace in the form of the purple border.

By this time I was sufficiently experienced with warp 79B that it

was fairly easy to execute the piece largely as I had planned it that night at my friend's party. Later, I sold this hanging to my romantic friend after I related the story of its conception in her house.

There was no design plan for the fourth hanging other than that I would continue to weave within the successful border. I wound bobbins with lots of attractive colors and started weaving. As I wove, my main fascination was with the way the different colors affected the warp. As I played with the color, the shapes grew long and skinny without much forethought. Although this is a fun way of working and may even be legitimated by calling it "designing on the loom," the resultant piece definitely betrays my lack of planning. I am afraid that it lacked the strength of design which I feel characterized the earlier pieces.

All of this work had finally brought me to the end of the warp, with one final hanging to do. In hanging number five I felt secure enough with the many elements of the warp to give up even the border which had been successful in the previous pieces. In my way of working, it is important to vary as many different elements as possible over the full length of the warp; even to the extent of changing things which have proven to be quite successful. The previous hanging, number four, had convinced me that although I liked the random changes in color, I definitely needed a tighter organizational plan. I decided to use light horizontal stripes as my unifying factor. The weft colors were selected to enhance the richness of the red. I didn't want to overpower the emphasis on color with too strong a design. Therefore, simple, random boxes were chosen as the main pattern element. By hanging number five I understood this warp to the extent that the finished piece was as I envisioned it at the outset.

I have outlined very broadly some of the major decisions that I

made as I progressed through warp 79B. Because the choices of color and threading proved to be very versatile, I was sorry to see this warp come to an end. Even after five hangings, I still had several ideas that I wanted to try.

By the time I started to plan the fourth hanging, I was getting bored with boxes. This boredom is predictable and actually spawns new ideas when the obvious ones have been worked through. As I progress through each variation, I find it possible to let go of the last approach and move into a new one. As my confidence builds I get more adventurous.

Warp 79B is a good example of my approach to variations on one long warp. When I start a warp, I usually have a clear mental picture of the first hanging, which develops from my adaptation of a traditional pattern. However, at the beginning, I don't like to commit myself to more than the first piece. Of course, the warp colors and basic threading are with me throughout the rest of the pieces, and I try very hard to wind warps that will have the greatest possible flexibility and strength. Even given the constancy of the warp, it is amazing how many other factors I am able to manipulate. Ideas multiply as I assess the strengths and weaknesses of each piece; and the world about me influences my thinking.

Several years have passed since I completed the Certificate of Excellence and I continue to use and expand this way of working. Rather than constricting me, the rigid format forces me to call on all of my creative powers. Each hanging is unique, as I change the focus to explore different elements. This method of working has proven to be very successful for me and I hope that others will consider trying it. ■

Phyllis Alvic was awarded the HGA Certificate of Excellence in Handweaving in 1976.