Thinking through Craft: Modern Weaving in Peru and Venezuela in the 1980s

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Fig. 1. *Lliqllakuna* on hanging rods. Callañaupa Family House, Chinchero, Cusco, 1985. Digitalized photograph. Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco

Fig. 2. Ernestina Pumayalli, Santusa Huaman, Maribel Franco, Elizabeth Quispe, and other weavers wearing *lliqllakuna*. Chinchero, Cusco, c. 2000. Digitalized photograph. Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco

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Weavings are not flat objects. Not exclusively and not primarily. According to Bolivian weaver and researcher Elvira Espejo Ayca, abstracting a woven surface from the embodied labor and tridimensional techniques structuring it would be like "separating the body from the mind."[1] To be sure, a woven surface's alluring iconographies and color fields can distract non-practitioners. But a weaver would know better. They would think about the front and back of a piece simultaneously while also considering the third layer of threads caught in between. They would ponder how a maker raised and released yarns from the warp—the vertical set of threads one extends on a loom before starting to weave—to define both the front and back. Or how an artist working off-loom interlaced meticulously, by hand, the weft with the warp to create an intricate pattern. In other words, they would think tridimensionally[2].

In this essay, I discuss the work of two Latin American artists—Nilda Callañaupa Álvarez (Peruvian, born 1960 Chinchero, Cusco) and Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt, Venezuelan, born 1912 Hamburg; died 1994 Caracas) whose projects in the 1980s underscored the tridimensional nature of weaving. Their work built upon and intervened in local and transnational discourses on weaving, craft, and modern art in the Americas. But more than responding to said narratives, their thinking emerged from what the craft itself showed them. Their artistic projects highlighted the embodied, tridimensional aspects that, in more recent years, Espejo Ayca and Denise Y. Arnold have theorized (in their studies of Andean textiles) as vital to weaving's ontology.

By the 1980s, the discourse on weaving was at a crucial juncture in the Americas. Since the first half of the twentieth century, and with more insistence during the second half, US-based artists like Anni Albers (American, born Germany, 1899–1994) had sought to disrupt the medium's relegated status within modern art frameworks.[3] Albers's 1965 monograph *On Weaving*—dedicated to her "great teachers, the weavers of ancient Peru"—demonstrates both the "visual and structural" aspects of weaving, positing the medium as both visual art and highly technical craft.[4] Moreover, in the 1960s and 1970s, studio weavers like Lenore Tawney (American, 1907–2007) and Claire Zeisler (American 1903–1991) began to deploy hand-knotting techniques in their Post-Minimalist-like sculptural works. Elissa Auther has noted that by "liberating" the medium from the loom, these artists sought to disrupt the dichotomy between fine arts and crafts.[5] Exhibitions and publications like *Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric* (1972) are testament to such a rich fiber arts scene.[6] Latin American artists like Gego dialogued with this milieu—her 1969 *Reticulárea*, a large-scale work made of knotted steel wires, operated in a "fabric-like manner," according to curator Mildred Constantine and textile designer Jack Lenor Larsen.[7] But what place, if any, did the weavers of Peru who inspired Albers and some of the Post-Minimalist works in *Beyond Craft* have in the modernist reassessment of weaving?[8] Fiber arts of the 1970s, it seemed, had to be large-scale and sculpture-like to be considered modern. As if to produce modern weaving, one needed to go "beyond craft."

Narratives on weaving took a related yet distinct shape in twentieth-century Peru and Venezuela—the two countries I discuss here. In both, white and mestizo elites asserted their claim to modernity by distinguishing their paintings and sculptures from the arts of Indigenous and Black communities, often naturalizing racist sentiments against the latter and their so-called *artesanías* (a Spanish term that imperfectly translates as "crafts" or "folk arts").[9] In Peru in the 1940s, as Natalia Majluf has argued, influential *indigenista* painter José Sabogal (Peruvian, 1888–1956) conceptualized weaving as an *artesanía* of a lesser status than his modernist paintings or the Spanish-derived figurative carved gourds or wooden sculptures he celebrated as the country's "popular art."[10] In Venezuela in the 1950s, designer Miguel Arroyo (Venezuelan, 1920–2004) advocated the study and practice of local pottery and weaving techniques to invigorate the country's emerging decorative arts scenes. Arroyo was the director of the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas in 1969, when Gego installed her *Reticulárea*; as Jorge Rivas and Mónica Amor have noted, Arroyo's "artisanal attitude" dialogued with Gego's production at the time.[11] But in Gego's *Reticulárea*, weaving is more a metaphor than a method. In Venezuela and Peru in the 1960s and 1970s, modern art galleries and museums preferred woven projects that went "beyond *artesanía*"—not unlike modern art galleries and museums in the United States.[12] Even further, critics' and artists' increasing interest in Andean textiles often stemmed from the visual

Fig. 3. Belt with *t'ika chili* pattern. 2010. Digitalized photograph. Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco

similarity of these woven works to color-field paintings like those of Barnett Newman (American, 1905–1970) more than from the technical specificities of their making or the social milieus that gave them value and meaning.[13]

While Gego developed a few woven rugs in the 1970s, it was only in the 1980s that she explicitly engaged in weaving as a methodology—with the warp and the weft that structure a piece—in what was, in effect, a form of tridimensional experimentation. An analogous conceptualization of weaving was already being explored by Indigenous weavers working in the Andes at the time. To account for the latter context, my essay starts by discussing the work of Quechua weaver Nilda Callañaupa.[14] Between the late 1970s and early 1980s, she and other weavers organized a workshop in Chinchero to study old textiles and produce new pieces on the loom. Shortly after, she opened the space to tourists to showcase something that she and her colleagues knew very well—that a woven piece is not a flat surface but a tridimensional object achieved through a highly skilled embodied choreography. In 1996, she established the Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco, an NGO including a research center, a museum, and a network of textile associations that has gone on to dynamize the economy of the Cusco Department as a whole.[15]

I am not suggesting a direct intellectual dialogue or artistic exchange between Callañaupa and Gego—two artists from different generations and distinct cultural and racial backgrounds. Instead, I am interested in examining how, in the 1980s, both of them explored weaving's tridimensional nature. Although their projects operated in dialogue with the local and international narratives on art and craft that I have briefly summarized above, I argue that their ideas about weaving emerged through the craft itself. Ultimately, this comparative essay points toward a Latin American art historiography that considers the aesthetic thinking of artists emerging from distinct social backgrounds within a shared cultural tapestry—as opposed to from segregated or otherwise incommensurable fields. While a more comprehensive history of modern weaving in the region is still to be written, comparing specific case studies is a necessary first step.

Experiments on the Loom

Suspended on two horizontal rods above the patio of a tiled-roofed house on a hill, over a dozen *lliqllakuna* (Quechua for "woven shawls") manifest their intricate patterns and contrasting palettes (fig. 1).[16] An individual *liqlla*'s size, about 36 by 42 inches, follows its function—to protect its wearer's shoulders from the high Andes cold weather, cover her head during mass or other special occasions, or help her to carry her young child (fig. 2). Considering the garment's utilitarian nature and direct relationship to a woman's body (and the interdependence of the two), why would someone hang a large number of them collectively on their patio? Acquiring or producing more than twelve *lliqllakuna* for individual use would be uncommon—four or five of them would be enough for weekly errands and socializing. And even if they belonged to the same person, why would they be presented like this? Have they been hung to dry after being washed by their owner—by the woman who utilizes them daily? O are they displayed to highlight their rich iconographies and vibrant color fields for a specific audience?

These particular *lliqllakuna* belong to Nilda Callañaupa, and the photograph depicts the enclosed patio off her house in Chinchero—at the time the image was taken, a small village of less than a thousand inhabitants.[17] Once a year, Callañaupa airs her personal collection of textiles by hanging them on the same wooden rods she uses for drying clothing. More research is needed regarding the early years of Callañaupa's research on local textiles.[18] In the early 1980s, she did not catalogue her collection with exact dates. Photographs with more precise dates—like the one described here, which was taken in 1985—thus offer essential entry points into how Callañaupa conceptualized her practice at the time.

The act of airing her textiles, as I noticed when I visited Callañaupa recently, is simultaneously unceremonious and heartfelt. She brings them in bulk to the patio, throws them onto the grass, and then suspends them one by one from the rod. But once they are installed, she looks at them with growing excitement. As they air, she examines them from one end of the rod to the other, going back and forth between specific examples that have caught her attention. She closely inspects their patterns, trying to understand how they were made. And then she develops hypotheses regarding old pattern-making techniques that she will later test out in new works, in a methodic process of trial and error, often without immediate return.

That a Quechua woman would collect and study old woven garments was, in and of itself, a statement at the time. Andean woven garments have always been changing—emerging, mutating, or disappearing.

Fig. 4. Adela Callañaupa teaching a tourist to use a backstrap loom. Callañaupa Family House, Chinchero, Cusco, 1986. Digitalized photograph. Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco

Yet, the disappearance of specific pattern-making techniques in the twentieth century, in particular, was the result of enduring prejudice against the cultural and racial identity of the people who used them. Callañaupa's mother, Guadalupe Álvarez (Peruvian, born 1929 Chinchero), recalls that as a child in the 1930s, she would see *lliqllakuna* with intricate floral patterns that would require many weeks to produce.[19] But throughout her childhood, relatives, and acquaintances often told Álvarez, "You should not learn that [old patterns]. You should be *mestiza*."[20] At that time, echoing social and cultural changes in Cusco City (the cosmopolitan capital of the Cusco Department), women in Chinchero started wearing garments that were locally known as "*mestiza lliqlla*"—woven shawls with simple embroidered (as opposed to woven) patterns. Social and fashion changes in the Cusco Department bolstered the loss of some of these patterns, but racist prejudices against Indigenous women also played a role. As Marisol de la Cadena has pointed out in her studies of race and racism in modern Cusco, in the 1940s and 1950s, women of Indigenous descent often embraced Eurocentric notions of high culture and respectability to "de-Indianize" themselves in order to secure a higher social status in society—that is, the status of *mestizas*.[21]

Callañaupa began copying patterns as a child in the 1960s. Then, in around 1975, she met US anthropologists and weavers Christine and Edward Franquemont, who were visiting Chinchero.[22] Inspired by Anni Albers's appraisal of "the weavers of ancient Peru," and aware of the 1960s and 1970s fiber arts scene in the United States, the Fraquemonts secured funding from the American Museum of Natural History to travel to Chinchero to learn backstrap weaving—a handweaving method where the loom is attached to the weaver's waist and a pole, allowing them to handle the threads easily and realize patterns. Callañaupa, though still a teenager, became their teacher. A number of years later, in the early 1980s, she studied tourism at the Universidad Nacional de San Antonio Abad del Cusco in Cusco City, where she earned her degree, and spent a semester at the Pacific Basin School of Textile Arts (then Pacific Textile Arts) in Berkeley, California.[23] At some point between the late 1970s and late 1980s, she organized, in her own words, "informal bi-weekly meetings" on her enclosed patio—sometimes with the help of the Franquemonts—with older weavers such as Dominga Quillahuaman, Benita Gutiérrez, and Agustina Llihuac from Chinchero.[24] She asked them to bring their personal textiles with them in order that they could talk about and study them together.

At first, the weavers did not understand Callañaupa's research-oriented perspective. "Why do you want to replicate this? This is too hard."[25] She realized early on that weavers rarely have the time to study and reproduce old techniques—that they were more concerned with sustaining their households. After a decade of the Revolutionary Government's military regime, the democratically elected President Fernando Belaúnde (1980–85) had turned a blind eye to the struggling rural economies of Peru's Southern Andes, which prompted social and political unrest throughout the 1980s.[26] To cement the weavers' commitment to the project, Callañaupa decided to incorporate a commercial aspect. In the late 1970s, Chinchero's Sunday market, where people from the district sold food products and handmade garments, attracted sellers from throughout the Cusco Department and an increasing number of Peruvian and foreign tourists.[27] Callañaupa explained to the weavers that tourists acquiring textiles in the market would value works with old, intricate patterns and thus be willing to pay more for them. Intending to sell their products at a cost that better reflected the value of their skill, weavers committed to Callañaupa's ambitious project.

Then, around 1983, Callañaupa realized that if she invited tourists into her workshop, they would gain better understanding of the laborious, methodic labor and skillful choreography required to produce textiles. In Chinchero, many weavers use a backstrap loom, which requires the weaver to extend a warp diagonally by attaching one of its ends to a semi-vertical pole and the other end to a rod attached to their waist.[28] After the weaver secures the warp, which she can now easily handle, she shapes and colors the patterns by raising some warp yarns while releasing others. Evoking the act of picking up threads, the Quechua term for a "woven pattern" is *pallay*, which translates as "to harvest." For their part, color fields without patterns are called "pampas," alluding to the empty areas from which the *pallaykuna* emerge. During the weaving process, the weaver inserts the weft horizontally over and under the extended warp; the weft's function is not to produce *pallaykuna* but rather to hold the warp yarns in place, thus helping to define the finished product. In brief, the finalized "warp-faced" surfaces of Chinchero textiles account for only a portion of their making. The rapid, choreographed movement of picking up and releasing threads is only visible to those who perform it—and now, at Callañaupa's workshop, to the tourists who witness it.

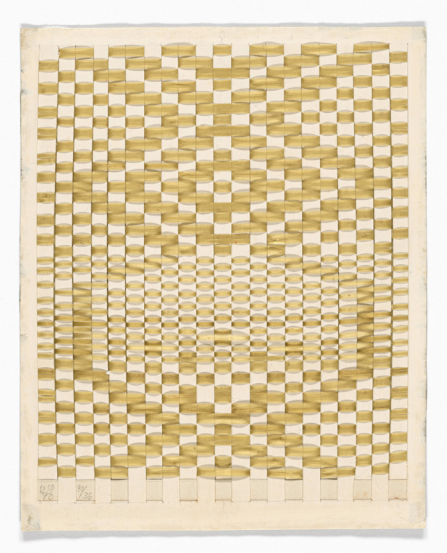

Fig. 5. Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt). *Tejedura 90/36* (*Weaving 90/36*). 1990. Pencil on cut paper woven with plastic packaging, 6 1⁄4 × 5 in. (15.9 × 12.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Patty Lipshutz. PG821.2016

Fig. 6. Back of fig. 5.

The Franquemonts aptly noted the choreographic nature of backstrap weaving. In a 1978 report submitted to the American Museum of Natural History and later published, they argue that because local girls were trained early (beginning "at about the age of five"), the principles of *pallay*-making become "second nature" to the point the young weavers do not have to think about them while working.[29] To be sure, muscle memory and instinct play crucial roles in the process, but present-day research, imagination, and innovation are also essential.

Take, for example, Callañaupa's research of *t'ika chili*—a white floral *pallay* with a background interspersing blue and red (fig. 3).[30] Around 1980, in one of her first research visits with local elders, Callañaupa met Elena de Choqueconza, who owned a nineteenth-century *lliqlla* with *t'ika chili* on its bands.[31] While floral patterns or *t'ika* are relatively common in Chinchero, Callañaupa and other weavers from her generation were unfamiliar with *t'ika chili*, the production of which is labor-intensive. The weaver must have extended three yarns (blue, white, and red) on the loom, then applied two yarns (blue and white) while holding the third (red) until she finished the section's bottom half; then, applied the second and third yarns (white and red) while holding the first (blue) to finalize the section; and then, moved on to start a new section. In order to recreate the pattern she had seen at Choqueconza's house, Callañaupa had to conceptualize and test numerous different hand movements on the loom. Like other weavers before her, her *pallaykuna* manifest highly skilled labor, both physical and intellectual.

At Callañaupa's workshop, tourists witnessed the weavers' skillful labor of memory and creation. Further, visitors participated in hands-on exercises designed specifically for them. In one such session, weaver Adela Callañaupa teaches a young tourist using a backstrap loom to separate the red yarns of her warp with a beater made of bone (fig. 4). With sticks and makeshift beaters, weavers finalize or refine patterns, or keep the warp from tangling. Unlike stages in the process that require quicker body movements, finishing patterns with tools can be slow. Thus, this exercise is an ideal way to familiarize tourists with the loom—in contrast to the exercises used to train local weavers, who as young girls would have had to perfect their handling of weaving sticks and spindles before their elders would have allowed them to even touch the loom.[32]

To be sure, as sociologist Pablo García has argued, "performance for tourists" plays a role in this project.[33] When producing work in front of tourists and researchers like myself, weavers underscore certain aspects of the process that they would not focus on otherwise. They also dress in elaborate handwoven garments, which they would probably not do if they were working at home. For example, the weaver in the aforementioned photograph is dressed in the semi-oval hat and woven red jacket worn at least since the beginning of the century by women in Chinchero. I nonetheless argue that such a display was not merely "staged authenticity" for tourists—as scholar Dean MacCanell put it when describing Indigenous performances in a different context.[34] Borrowing from Diana Taylor's concept of "performance as history," I contend that by staging specific weaving traditions, women at the workshop made the tridimensional dimension of their craft tangible to outsider eyes.[35] They enacted and made visible an aesthetic and epistemic framework—the understanding of the tridimensionality of weaving—that were their own to share.

Through its members' relentless daily labor, the workshop gained regional visibility in the late 1980s. Furthermore, locals and Quechua weavers themselves began to see their output through different eyes. In a more recent interview, Centro de Textiles Tradicionales member Simeona Auccacusi stated: "At first [when I started working at the Centro], I was too embarrassed to wear my traditional clothing, I used to change [my outfit] very quickly after the demonstrations. But now no one cares, I think, because I don't hear any critique anymore. On the contrary, there are some compliments and admiring phrases about my clothing."[36] Amid severe political and economic instability and persistent prejudice against Quechua women, Callañaupa's workshop was a significant platform for improving the economies of local households in the 1980s. It also became a space for aesthetic thinking, linked to and yet unrestrained by outsiders' narratives of modern art and craft.

Flattening the Net

Numerous golden strips extend horizontally over a matte white background assembling a tightly packed luminous pattern (fig. 5). At the top of the composition, the golden strips form an inverted triangle, followed by a diamond-like shape, then a long rectangular shape with triangular ends, and lastly, at the bottom, a triangle that

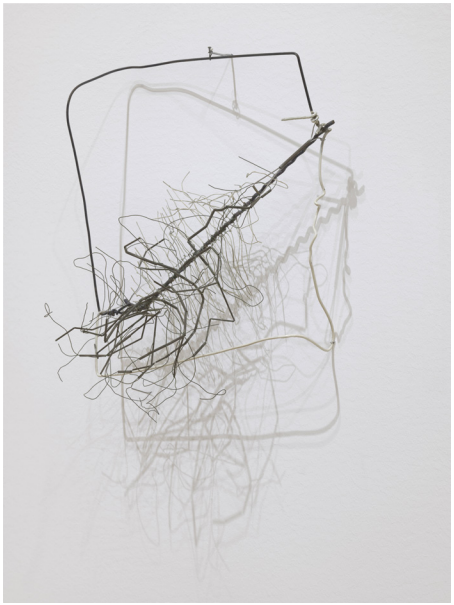

Fig. 7. Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt). *Dibujo sin papel 85/19* (*Drawing without Paper 85/19*). 1985. Stainless steel and copper, 9 13/16 × 9 13/16 × 7 7/8 in. (25 × 25 × 20 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Jerry I. Speyer. 818.2016

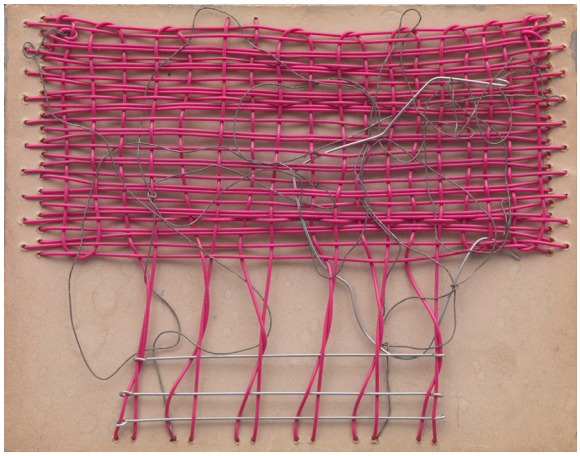

Fig. 8. Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt). *Tejedura 88/26* (*Weaving 88/26*). 1988. Iron, steel, aluminum, plastic, and paperboard, 4 3/4 × 5 7/8 × 13/16 in. (12.1 × 14.9 × 2.1 cm). Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

echoes (although it is inverted) the one on the top. From a distance, the small piece, which measures 6 1/4 by 5 inches, looks like a pattern sample printed over a flat white rectangle. But as can be seen by looking closely at its sides, the object's surface is richly textured and warped. Before weaving this work, Gego made tiny vertical cuts in a white paper, thus creating openings through which she could pull the multiple golden bands—the weft—from the back to the front. The bright texture of the piece is conferred by its materiality: the bands are translucent golden strips from cigarette packs. And the white paper into which the cuts were made is in fact recycled magazine paper or a postcard showing, on the back, a street with two parked cars (fig. 6). The artist's use of recycled materials supports the elegant, hypnotic rhythm of this "weft-faced" weaving.

Gego finished *Tejedura 90/36* (Spanish for "Weaving") in 1990; the work is part of an extensive series of woven paper works she undertook between 1988 and 1991.[37] Born in Hamburg, Gego had studied architecture in Stuttgart in the 1930s, but in 1939, as World War II escalated, she moved to Caracas, where she worked as an independent architect and furniture designer in the 1940s.[38] Then, from the 1950s to the 1980s, she developed a prolific, intermedial body of work between Caracas, Tarma, New York, and many other cities. In 1965, she met US curator Mildred Constantine and designer Jack Lenor Larsen, who co-curated Wall Hangings at The Museum of Modern Art in 1969 and later, in 1972, included her *Reticulárea* (1969) in their publication *Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric*.[39] A site-specific work, *Reticulárea* consisted of metal wires suspended from the ceiling of the exhibition space and arranged to create a gridlike structure that appeared to float in midair. For Larsen and Constantine, *Reticulárea* operated in a "fabric-like manner."[40] Gego, for her part, considered her effort "beyond craft." Indeed, when asked by the Constantine and Larsen whether her work was "art, craft, or decoration," she firmly responded, "ART."[41] Scholars such as Luis Pérez-Oramas and Mónica Amor have mobilized the notion of "weaving" as a metaphor to describe Gego's intermedial oeuvre—a theorization the artist herself invited.[42] Yet, while the artist authored woven pieces in the 1960s and 1970s, only her *Tejeduras* and other works from the 1980s follow the specific logic of the warp and weft.[43]

Before the 1980s, Gego had designed various large wool color-field rugs, probably realized by her students at the Instituto de Diseño Fundación Neumann (IDD), where she taught from 1963 to 1977. Amor has aptly noted that said works repeat the logic of the flat, gridlike drawings on paper upon which they were based and "occluded the operative parameters of the loom."[44] By contrast, as mentioned above in the discussion of the work of Nilda Callañaupa, loom weavers make the patterns emerge from the background by rapidly handling threads while making formal decisions as they go along. Gego became familiar with loom weaving's principles in the 1980s thanks to Lucia Madrigal, a student at the IDD and daughter of Colombian weaver Judith Quevedo.[45] Thus, Gego's firsthand encounter with loom weaving set the stage for her *Tejeduras*. But more than the result of a dialogue with loom-weaving techniques, with *Tejeduras*, Gego built upon previous projects destabilizing the boundaries between two-dimensional surfaces and tridimensional spaces.

Consider *Dibujo sin papel 85/19* (Spanish for "Drawing without paper") (Fig. 7). This small-format object is part of a larger series with the same name that Gego began in 1976.[46] Its upper margin resembles the top of a rectangle, while its middle section is comprised of a diagonal network of numerous tangled filaments. The piece's almost regular and flat shape thus gives way to an irregular and bulky web, reminiscent of the artist's larger sculptural works from previous years. In brief, *Dibujo sin papel* challenges the conventional idea that a drawing is a flat and two-dimensional object.

Small-scale tridimensional works like *Dibujos sin papel* were the foundation for Gego's interest in producing tridimensionality on flat surfaces. For *Tejedura 88/26* (1988; fig. 8), which measures 4 ¾ by 5 ⅞ inches, the artist cut multiple holes in the four margins of a horizontal rectangular paperboard. Then, she used a long red telephone wire to create a gridlike pattern on the front of the board by weaving the wire in and out of the holes. Visually, the piece resembles a "loose-weave" textile—a term used for light woven pieces in which the vertical warp and horizontal weft are not tightly packed, thus allowing for significant airflow. But unlike a textile, weft and warp are one and the same here. The work thus operates similarly to Gego's *Dibujos sin papel*, often realized with a single wire. Further likening this *Tejedura* to her *Dibujos sin papel*, the latter includes, as does the former, cluttered arrangements of steel wire that disrupt the otherwise relatively ordered grid.

Like *Tejedura 88/26*, *Tejedura 90/36* presents numerous discrete incisions that enable the crisscrossing of the weft. But here, the warp and weft—the white cardboard and golden bands—are distinct. Gego

Fig. 9. Yekuana People. *Waja* (*Tray*). Tirite bark, reed, curagua fiber, and vegetable dye, 18 1/8 × 18 1/8 × 1 15/16 in. (46 × 46 × 4.9 cm). Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

Fig. 10. Arquitectura y Urbanismo C.A. Page from *Integral*, no. 3 (April 1956). Closed: 8 3/4 × 12 1/2 × 1/4 in. (22.2 × 31.8 × 0.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York

laboriously inserted the golden strip through various holes, slowly and carefully making her way from one hole to the next until the weft reached the other side of the paper. In a way, *Tejedura 90/36* reveals the tridimensionality of weaving: how it makes patterns "emerge" from the background. But patterns appear here differently than on a loom-woven fabric; on a loom, the weaver finishes a horizontal section with a single hand movement while raising and releasing threads. In this *Tejedura*, by contrast, Gego mapped out the overall gridlike pattern she wanted on paper and only then began work on the weft.[47] Thus, sketches that betray Gego's architectural training support her exploration of weaving's tridimensionality. As Amor has noted, Gego often conceived of her work in architectural terms—as the organization of interdependent elements to produce a system.[48]

Despite not being structured like a loom-woven piece, *Tejedura 90/36* echoes other woven art forms. Scholars have recently noted how the patterned surface of the piece resembles those of natural fiber-made *wajas* (circulars trays) handwoven by the Yekuana people—an Indigenous group settled in the Caura River and Orinoco River areas of the Venezuelan Amazon (fig. 9).[49] At least since the 1950s, images of such trays were reproduced in local publications related to modern design and architecture that Gego certainly knew (fig. 10).[50] Structurally, however, the *Tejedura* works differently than a basket. Basket weavers often operate diagonally, crisscrossing sturdy fibers from opposite sides to produce mirroring patterns. The resulting tightly woven piece adequately serves its purpose—to carry and contain other objects. By contrast, Gego structured *Tejedura 90/36* to mimic the perpendicular structure of textile weaving—the encountering of the vertical warp with the horizontal weft. At a technical level, Gego's piece more closely resembles the kindergarten exercises developed by German educator Friedrich Froebel with blocks and papers. Specifically, those that required students to interlace by hand thin paper strips to create patterns on a vertical flat surface, as Madeline Murphy Turner has recently underscored.[51] To be sure, Gego's selection of materials such as cigarette packs and magazine pages resonates with the playful vein of children's lessons.

The *Tejedura 90/36*, in sum, accounts for the rich tapestry of visual and technical references Gego developed throughout her constant moving between transnational art worlds—such as the kindergarten exercises she may have been exposed to as a child in Germany, the commercial baskets imitating the *wajas* that often decorated Venezuelan households, or the experience of handling a loom with her student in the 1980s. Just as importantly, and despite their deceivingly discrete surfaces and scale, the *Tejeduras* built upon her larger-scale experiments in tridimensional space from previous years. Art historians have looked upon her small-scale projects of the 1980s as the product of her diminished capacity—as a woman in her seventies struggling with health issues—to operate on a monumental scale and in spacious environments.[52] Aside from these physical factors, the *Tejeduras* constituted a specific form of tridimensional experimentation. If the *Dibujos sin papel* put her cluttered wire nets of the late 1960s in dialogue with flat walls, through her *Tejeduras* of the 1980s, Gego conceptualized weaving as a tridimensional practice in and of itself. She envisioned the craft of interlacing warp and weft as the experimental artistic medium it has always been.

The Tridimensional Textile

To conclude, let us consider a large woven piece by Nilda Callañaupa. She designed the object in 1998 and realized it intermittently between 1998 and 2010, with the assistance of Centro de Textiles Tradicionales members Felipa Cusihuaman, Felicitas Huaman, Lisbeth Apaza, Alina Cusihuaman (fig. 11). Although *Iliqllakuna* are usually medium-size, for their function is mainly to cover a woman's shoulders, this piece measuring 57 by 57 inches is uncannily large. Its unusual dimensions allowed the artist to unite twenty *pallaykuna* native to Chinchero—among others, the *t'ika chili* Callañaupa mastered only after years of trial and error. Further, the *Iliqlla*'s indigo background is the product of years of research undertaken in the 1990s at the Centro on producing the pigment through natural-dyeing workshops. In that sense, the object embodies the rich aesthetic and technical heritage of Callañaupa's hometown as well as her own skill and that of her collaborators. Further distinguishing itself from other *Iliqllakuna*, the object has tiny hangers on its four corners, enabling it to be hung on a wall and displayed to whoever would like to appreciate its numerous, intricate *pallaykuna*.

Callañaupa has no problem showing her large woven piece to weavers and non-weavers alike. Despite its unusual scale and exhibition potential, the first time she showed it to me, she did not hesitate to put it on her shoulders—like a long shawl—to clarify its utilitarian roots. Furthermore, aside from private showings, she has no pressing desire to present it in a gallery or museum.[53] The object is a unique

Fig. 11. Nilda Callañaupa with the assistance of Felipa Cusihuaman, Felicitas Huaman, Lisbeth Apaza, and Alina Cusihuaman. *Lliqlla*. 1998–2010. Wool, natural dyes, 57 × 59 in. (149.9 × 149.9 cm). Nilda Callañaupa Collection. Photograph by Horacio Ramos.

piece, to be sure, but not in the sense of an artwork that a modern art museum or gallery would have interest in displaying. Like any other *lliqlla* produced at her workshop, its primary meaning and value stem from how it crystalizes the methodic handwork of her hometown's weavers, past and present.

In this essay, I offered a comparative analysis of two distinct yet interrelated case studies. In Chinchero, from 1983 onward, Nilda Callañaupa shared with tourists and researchers what she learned during childhood—that weaving is a tridimensional practice. She worked on a loom, which required her to enact swift, intricate, embodied choreographies—some of them memorized as a child, and others the product of adult trial and error. Experiments in the present time. In Caracas in 1989, Gego conceptualized weaving as an extension of her tridimensional experiments of previous years. She worked off-loom. Her meticulous deployment of the weft and the warp resulted from her previous careful planning on paper. Evidencing her architectural training, she conceived the piece as the interlacing of interdependent yet distinct elements to produce an organized system. Experimentation came after design. The resulting piece reveals the spatial, tridimensional nature of weaving.

For much of the twentieth century, it seemed like weavers needed to move "beyond craft" to be modern in the Americas. As T'ai Smith has noted, US weavers like Kay Sekimachi (born 1926) chose to focus on the specificities of the loom, to "re-craft" their practice, in the late 1970s and 1980s—a time when the "fiber arts" category became mainstream in the art world and studio weavers felt "less anxious" regarding the status of their craft.[54] In Latin America, to posit *artesanía* as modern, artists had to also challenge long-standing cultural hierarchies and racist sentiments at the core of their respective countries' Eurocentric arts system. Although Callañaupa and Gego were undoubtedly knowledgeable of the contemporary discourse on modern art, crafts, and *artesanía*, their explorations and conceptualization of weaving emerged from the practice itself. In other words, modernist art discourses played a role, but not the most important one. Their attention to craft led them to ascertain a key aspect of weaving's ontology—that weaving is a tridimensional and experimental practice in and of itself.

Endnotes

1 Denise Y. Arnold and Elvira Espejo Ayca, *El textil tridimensional: La naturaleza del tejido como objeto y como sujeto* (La Paz: Fundación Xavier Albó, Instituto de Lengua y Cultura Aymara, 2013), 54.

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2 My discussion of weaving's tridimensionality is inspired by Arnold and Espejo Ayca, *El textil tridimensional*. See also Denise Y. Arnold and Elvira Espejo Ayca, *Ciencia de las mujeres: Experiencias en la cadena textil desde los ayllus de Challapata* (La Paz: Fundación Xavier Albó, Instituto de Lengua y Cultura Aymara, 2010); and Denise Y. Arnold and Elvira Espejo Ayca, *Ciencia del tejer en los Andes: Estructuras y técnicas de faz de urdimbre* (La Paz: Fundación Xavier Albó, Instituto de Lengua y Cultura Aymara, 2012).

3 From her time at the Bauhaus, in the 1920s, onward, Albers's work blurred the lines between fine art and crafts. See T'ai Smith, *Bauhaus Weaving Theory: From Feminine Craft to Mode of Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

4 Annie Albers, "On Weaving [1965]," in *On Weaving: New Expanded Edition*, by Albers with contributions by Nicholas Fox Weber, Manuel Cirauqui, and T'ai Lin Smith (Princeton: Princeton University Press in association with the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, 2017), IX. Albers saw ancient Andean textiles for the first time in German museums and then again during her travels in Mexico, Peru, and Chile in the 1930s.

5 Elissa Auther, *String Felt Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

6 Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larsen curated two shows on contemporary fiber arts in the late 1960s and early 1970s: *Wall Hangings* in 1969 and *Beyond Craft* in 1972, both of which opened at The Museum of Modern Art. In 1973, they published a book that discussed the work of artists not included in the show. See Constantine and Larsen, *Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1972).

7 Constantine and Larsen, *Beyond Craft*, 73.

8 See Zeiler's 1971 *Symbolic Poncho* in Constantine and Larsen, *Beyond Craft*, 290.

9 According to Marisol de la Cadena, Latin American white and mestizo elites developed a "culturalist" definition of race in the twentieth century. Unlike in the United States, where racism was explicitly manifested in legal terms, in postcolonial Latin America racist practices were legitimized by narratives that vilified the cultural practices of Black and Indigenous communities. See, among others, Cadena, "Reconstructing Race: Racism, Culture and Mestizaje in Latin America," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 36, no. 6 (May–June 2001): 16–23. On Latin America's exclusionary arts system, see Natalia Majluf, "Time and Place: Notes on the System of the Arts in Latin America," in *A Companion to Modern and Contemporary Latin American and Latina/o Art*, ed. Alejandro Anreus, Robin Adèle Greeley, and Megan A. Sullivan (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2021): 489–503.

10 *Indigenismo* included a broad group of nationalist political and artistic discourses that celebrated and idealized the Indigenous peoples in Latin American nations. For a critical perspective of *indigenismo*'s approach to popular arts and *artesanías* in Peru, see Gabriela Germaná and Giuliana Borea, "Discusiones teóricas sobre el arte en la diversidad," in *Grandes Maestros del arte peruano*, ed. Gabriela Germaná and Giuliana Borea (Lima: Transportadora de Gas del Perú, 2008), 12–21. For an illuminating analysis of Peruvian *indigenistas*' perspective on weaving, see Natalia Majluf, "Arte / Textil: Un ensayo sobre categorías estéticas en el Perú del siglo XX" (paper presented at the seminar "Artes Populares en el siglo XX," Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City, November 5, 2021); see also "Artes Populares en el sigo XX—Natalia Majluf," YouTube video, 57:32, https://youtu.be/OnFckxIk2-g.

11 My understanding of this context stems from Jorge Rivas, "Modern Design for Living in Venezuela: Miguel Arroyo and His Circle, 1948–1963" (PhD diss., Bard College, 2018); and Mónica Amor, "Weaving," chapter 2 in *Gego: Weaving the Space in Between* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023). See also Tanya Barson, "The *Tejeduras*: Gego's Woven Abstractions," in *Gego: Measuring Infinity*, ed. Geaninne Gutiérrez-Guimarães and Pablo León de la Barra, exh. cat. (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2023): 246–57.

12 The exhibition *Formas tejidas* (*Woven Forms*), organized by the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York, traveled to the Museo de Bellas Artes in 1963. As noted by Amor, the show included "sculptural shapes made with interlaced threads." See Amor, Gego, 79.

13 For a contemporaneous account of the "curious correspondence" between Andean textiles and US color-field painting, see Barbara Braun, "Technique and Meaning: The Example of Andean Textiles," *Artforum* 16, no. 4 (December 1977): 38–42. Argentine artist and writer César Paternosto also reflected on the similarities between Andean textiles and US abstract painting; he further theorized an Andean "tectonic" aesthetics present in textiles and built environments. See Paternosto, *Piedra abstracta: La escultura inca; Una visión contemporánea* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989).

14 Although most Quechua speakers are native to Peru, there are some significant populations in Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, and Argentina, as well as important diasporic communities throughout the world. The 2017 Peruvian census accounts for 5,176,809 people within national borders who identify as Quechua (more than 23 percent of the country's total population). See Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, "Quechuas," *Base de Datos de Pueblos Indígenas u Originarios*, https://web.archive.org/web/20170426152129/http://bdpi.cultura.gob.pe/pueblo/quechuas.

15 For Callañaupa's account of the history of the Centro de Textiles Tradicionales, see Callañaupa Álvarez, *Tradiciones textiles de Chinchero, herencia viva* (Cusco: Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco, 2012). For more on the Centro, see the Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco website, https://www.textilescusco.org/.

16 "Lliqlla" can be translated as woven shawl. The standard plural-maker in Quechua is to add "kuna" after a noun; thus, the plural of *lliqlla* is *lliqllakuna*.

17 In 1972, the district of Chinchero covered 135 square kilometers and was a hamlet of 777 inhabitants. The district was established in 1905 and it ranges in elevation from 3,300 to 4,500 meters. See Pierre van der Berghe and George Primov, *Inequality in the Peruvian Andes: Class and Ethnicity in Cuzco* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1977): 201. Callañaupa's father, Vicente Callañaupa, and her mother, Guadalupe Álvarez, worked at the Hacienda Watata in Chinchero until the mid-1960s. The authoritarian administration of the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces (1968–89) expropriated haciendas from local oligarchs and distributed them among *campesinos* and workers. During that period, Vicente Callañaupa became owner of the land where Nilda Callañaupa's workshop still stands. See Nilda Callañaupa Álvarez and Christine Franquemont, *Rostros de una tradición viva: Maestros tejedores de los Andes* (Cusco: Centro de Textiles Tradicionales, 2013), 43.

18 During the context of this fellowship, I was able to digitalize and organize only a portion of the Centro's extensive material. I thank Elisban Huarhua for his help with digitalization.

19 Callañaupa Álvarez, *Tradiciones textiles de Chinchero*, 91.

20 Nilda Callañaupa in conversation with the author, August, 9, 2022.

21 Marisol de la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919–1991* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000): 177–230.

22 Christine Franquemont had already visited Cusco in 1960, but it was only in the 1970s that she and her husband, Edward Franquemont, visited Chinchero. On their experience in Chinchero, see Christine Franquemont and Edward Franquemont, "Learning to Weave in Chinchero," *Textile Museum Journal* 26 (1987): 55–79. See also Callañaupa Álvarez, *Tradiciones textiles de Chinchero*, vi–x.

23 Founded in 1974 by studio weavers Inger Jensen and Pat McGaw, the Pacific Basin School of Textile Arts was a studio school in the 1970s and 1980s. Callañaupa showed her textile collection there in 1985. Now, the school exists as the NGO Pacific Textile Arts. See Jensen and McGaw, *Pacific Basin School of Textile Arts: The History, 1972–1986* (self-pub., Pacific Textile Arts, 2016), https://issuu.com/ingerjensenpatmcgaw/docs/pacific_basin_school_of_textile_art.

24 Callañaupa, in conversation with the author, June, 29, 2022. For more information and local weavers' life stories, see Callañaupa Álvarez and Franquemont, *Rostros de una tradición viva*, 39–52.

25 Callañaupa in conversation with the author, August, 9, 2022.

26 On the economic hardships Chinchero experienced at this time, see KPFA, "Interview with Nilda Callañaupa," recorded March 1986, on Berkeley, California, KPFA Radio, cassette, available at the Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco. For an overview of this context, see Carlos Contreras and Marcos Cueto, *Historia del Perú contemporáneo: Desde las luchas por la independencia hasta el presente* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2018), 366.

27 In 1977, Chinchero's Sunday market attracted "from one hundred to two hundred sellers," "from several hundred to a thousand buyers," and "at least twenty to forty tourists" interested in buying textiles. Van der Berghe and Primov, *Inequality in the Peruvian Andes*, 218, 221. On the tourist industry in this period, see Mark Rice, *Making Machu Picchu: The Politics of Tourism in Twentieth-Century Peru* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018): 98–128.

28 In the context of this essay, I focus on backstrap weaving techniques. I acknowledge that in doing so, I am abstracting weaving from the other equally essential stages of its production—among them, the obtaining of sheep's wool, yarn production, dyeing the wool, etc. Both Elvira Espejo Ayca and Nilda Callañaupa underscore how every stage of the process plays a crucial role. See Arnold and Espejo Ayca, *Ciencia de las mujeres*; and Callañaupa Álvarez, *Tradiciones textiles de Chinchero*, 66–87. These books also offer more detailed technical explanations of waist-loom weaving techniques, which I am only partially describing here. For a detailed description of weaving techniques used in Chinchero in the late 1970s, see Franquemont and Franquemont, "Learning to Weave in Chinchero."

29 The 1978 report was published as an article in 1987. See Franquemont and Franquemont, "Learning to Weave in Chinchero."

30 For a survey of patterns, see Nilda Callañaupa Álvarez, *Weaving in the Peruvian Highlands: Dreaming Patterns, Weaving Memories*, trans. David Burrous (Cusco: Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco, 2007).

31 Callañaupa Álvarez, *Tradiciones textiles de Chinchero*, 96.

32 Franquemont and Franquemont, "Learning to Weave in Chinchero."

33 García's analysis of the workshop's impact on household economies in Chinchero focuses on the post-1990 period—a period marked by President Alberto Fujimori's neoliberal economic reforms, a topic that goes beyond the scope of this essay. See Pablo García, "Weaving for Tourists in Chinchero, Peru," *Journal of Material Culture* 23, no. 1 (March 2018): 3–19.

34 Dean MacCannell, “Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings,” *American Journal of Sociology* 79, no. 3 (November 1973): 589–603.

35 Diana Taylor, “Performance and/as History,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 50, no. 1 (189) (Spring 2006): 67–86.

36 Callañaupa Álvarez, *Tradiciones textiles de Chinchero*, 145.

37 I thank Inés Katzenstein for bringing Gego’s *Tejedura 90/36* to my attention while I was conducting research for this essay. I first encountered this work during the Mellon-Marron Museum Research Consortium (MRC) Study Sessions that took place at The Museum of Modern Art in May 2018. My perspective builds upon Madeline Murphy Turner’s discussion of Gego’s work during those sessions. See Turner, “Gego, *Weaving 90/36* (1990) and *Weaving 89/21* (1989),” *MRC Dossier 5: 2018 Museum Research Consortium Study Sessions* (2018): 69–72.

The term “tejedura” is less often used than “tejido”—the more common Spanish term for “weaving.” For an early analysis of the works, see Eliseo Sierra, “Organismo vivo: El mundo gráfico de Gego,” in *Gego: Dibujos, grabados, tejeduras* (Caracas: Fundación Centro Cultural Consolidado, 1996): 41–47.

38 For a survey of Gego’s prolific career, see Iris Peruga, “Gego: El prodigioso juego de crear,” in *Gego: Obra completa*, 1955–1990, ed. Iris Peruga (Caracas: Fundación Cisneros, 2003): 24–57.

39 Larsen and Constantine invited Gego to participate in the seventh edition of the Biennale Internationale de la Tapisserie in Laussane in 1975. For that event, she produced netlike works. See Amor, *Gego*, 138; and Barson, “The *Tejeduras*,” 248–49.

40 Constantine and Larsen, *Beyond Craft*, 73.

41 Amor, *Gego*, 74.

42 Luis Pérez-Oramas, “Gego: Laocoonte, las redes y la indecisión de las cosas,” in Peruga, *Gego: Obra completa*, 296–311; and Amor, “Weaving.”.

43 In this essay, I focus on Gego’s small-scale *Tejeduras* and do not discuss the large untitled piece woven with synthetic maritime rope that she realized in 1987. I have not had the opportunity to study the production methods used to make that particular work in the context of this research, but I hope to address them in subsequent projects. See Barson, “The *Tejeduras*,” 250.

44 Amor, *Gego*, 83.

45 As noted by Amor, Quevedo helped establish a weaving workshop at the Instituto. She was a close friend of Colombian fiber artist Olga de Amaral, who was in dialogue with Gego from the late 1960s onward. Amor, *Gego*, 83.

46 For more on the *Dibujos sin papel*, see Peruga, “Gego,” 52–56. See also Sierra, “Organismo vivo.”

47 Turner, “Gego.”

48 Amor, *Gego*, 78.

49 See Inés Katzenstein and María Amalia García, “Introducción,” in *Sur moderno: Recorridos de la abstracción—Donación Patricia Phelps de Cisneros*, ed. Inés Katzenstein and María Amalia García with Karen Grimson and Michaël de Lacaze, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2019): 14; Amor, *Gego*, 234; and Barson, “The *Tejeduras*,” 256. It goes beyond the scope of this essay to summarize the literature on Yekuana arts. For a useful survey on their weaving practices, see David M. Guss, *To Weave and Sing: Art, Symbol, and Narrative in the South American Rainforest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). See also Charles Brewer-Carías et al., *Orinoco, viaxe a un mundo perdido: Unha colección da Fundación Cisneros*, exh. cat. (Santiago de Compostela: Xunta de Galicia, 2013): 184–99.

50 Max Bill, “Forma, función y belleza,” *Integral*, no. 3 (April 1956): [52-54]. Venezuelan painter Carlos Germán Bogen, *Integral*’s editor at the time, probably made the decision to translate and reproduce Bill’s article and accompanying it with photographs of Yekuana basketry.

51 Turner, “Gego.”

52 Peruga, “Gego,” 49–51. See also [Gertrud Goldschmidt] Gego, “Hace bastante tiempo . . .,” in *Sabiduras: Y otros textos de Gego / And Other Texts by Gego*, ed. María Elena Huizi and Josefina Manrique (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Museum of Fine Arts [Caracas] and Fundación Gego, 2005), 221.

53 To my knowledge, Callañaupa has only shown a work at a modern art gallery once—a different, more recent *Iliqlla* in the show *Hilos que resisten, hilos que subvierten: Identidades, memorias y cuerpos en el arte textil peruano*, curated by Gabriela Germaná, August 10–October 8, 2022, Galería John Harriman del Centro Cultural Británico, Lima. See Gabriela Germaná, “Hilos que resisten, hilos que subvierten: Identidades, memorias y cuerpos en el arte textile peruano,” *Artishock: Revista de Arte Contemporáneo*, October 18, 2022, https://artishockrevista.com/2022/10/18/hilos-que-resisten-arte-textil-peruano.

54 T’ai Smith, “Architectonic: Thought on the Loom,” *Journal of Modern Craft* 4, no. 3 (2011): 269–94.

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