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# Weekly

## Weekend Edition

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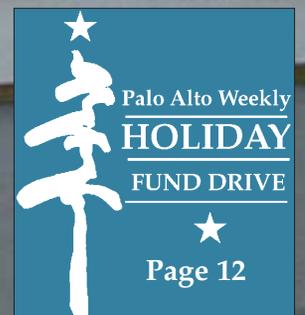
A sharp 'Dagger'

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# Arts & Entertainment

*A weekly guide to music, theater, art, movies and more, edited by Robyn Israel*



Norber von der Groeben

*Artist Ulla de Leros inside her Cubberley Center studio.*



Norber von der Groeben

*Spools of colorful thread inside Ulla de Leros' studio.*

## Dreamweaver

WHAT LOOMS AHEAD FOR  
ARTIST ULLA DE LERIOS



"Crossings #2" (2003), hand-woven silk by Ulla de Leros.



"Crossings #4" (2004), hand-woven linen by Ulla de Leros.

by Marge Speidel

"Crossings" is the theme of the current work of Palo Alto weaver Ulla de Leros, and it also serves as a metaphor for her life.

The Scandinavian artist came to this country in 1970 and has lived in Palo Alto for 20 years. De Leros' series of large woven hangings relates to crossing between here and Sweden, where she still has family and visits at least once a year.

"I have this feeling of two-sidedness," she said. "'Crossings' speaks about being in two cultures and not stepping wholly into either one. I see these pieces as more or less a continual crossing, a person in limbo. A lot of immigrants feel this way."

Another reason the crossing theme applies: de Leros is seeking to cross from weaving to incorporating painting into her creations. She has earned a degree in painting from the San Francisco Art Institute and is completing work on a master of fine arts degree at San Francisco State University.

She is the only weaver among the artists who maintain studios at Cubberley Center.

"The craft of weaving is essential to my work," she said. "But I paint with dyes on the warp and the weft before I begin weaving." (The warp is the vertical part of the weaving and the weft is the horizontal. Most artists who incorporate painting in their weaving paint on the warp only.) "By weaving the painted yarn together you get areas where the colors mix. I'm interested in the interactions between colors."

De Leros' well-lit Cubberley studio boasts three looms of various sizes. But as

with many art forms today, the computer also plays a part. Her largest loom has a "black box."

"The loom is run by a small computer," she explained. "I design on the laptop and it sends signals and executes what the pattern calls for. It's a technique that has been available for about the past 15 years."

According to de Leros, the computer is actually based on the loom.

"The Jacquard loom [after French inventor J.M. Jacquard] was built on exactly the same principle as the computer: 1s and 0s. The pegs are the 1s and the holes are the 0s. Every time I program a pattern into my loom it's like using the oldest computer around. I have a background in math and physics, so there is a logic to this that just appeals to me."

The "Crossings" hangings, an ongoing series, are subtle designs of black, gray and white. In the process of weaving de Leros creates areas of plain linen fabric. She intersperses these with varied and imaginative woven sections, some of them containing intricate, tiny figures based on 3,000-year-old petroglyphs. The painted threads add to the interest.

"It doesn't always come out as planned," she said. "Every time I take something off the loom I have to get used to it. I see these pieces as a medium to express my feelings, as in painting."

Treasure, a Los Altos art and clothing shop, recently displayed four of the "Crossings" panels, two in the front window and two inside the store. They can be

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"Crossings #6" (2004), hand-woven linen by Ulla de Leros.

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## Ulla de Lerios

(continued from previous page)

viewed from either side — the way de Lerios prefers to see them hung. Three of the hangings are of linen woven in the process of creating them. The fourth, on silk, has a motif of a small fleet of ancient boats. Some of the images stand out; others are very faint.

“This one is the attempt to show the passage from one side to another,” de Lerios said on a visit to the store. “Silk is very tricky to dye. The chemistry is delicate. The boats are silk-screened on the weft. I enjoy dyeing everything first; then the images vary. You have happy accidents, too!”

The theme of “crossings” pervades another area of de Lerios’s work: She has designed several chuppahs (the canopies under which Jewish wedding ceremonies take place), including one for her daughter’s wedding.

“I really enjoy the chuppah and the symbolism behind it, even though I’m a Protestant,” de Lerios explained. “It represents the new home, open at all sides so there are lots of entrances for friends and family.”

After receiving specific instructions from the brides, de Lerios designed the chuppahs to fit their requests.

“Usually they end up as wall hangings that are around four-by-six feet,” de Lerios said. “My daughter wanted hers as a bedspread when it was all done so it was very large,” she said. “I used a special weave structure for it but it was fairly plain, with blue stripes all around and a white pane in the middle.”

De Lerios learned weaving as a teenager from her grandmother in Sweden.

“She made rag rugs from pieces of old clothing and that was my

first weaving.”

One such rug lies on the floor in her studio, made from the old work clothes of the man who designed one of her looms. She knew early on that she wanted to go into weaving more thoroughly and began taking classes in drawing and painting at Foothill College.

Her largest loom, an AVL Looms model, is a 16-shaft model. Most looms have four or eight shafts.

“I found this one on e-mail, when a family was moving back East,” de Lerios said. “It would be for someone who has done a great deal of work already. It was five times the loom that I hoped to get and has mechanisms I didn’t know existed. It was in wonderful shape even though it was about 15 years old.”

Despite its intricacies, she found it easy to operate because she had worked on computerized looms in her classes. But setting it up for a piece like one of the “Crossings” panels takes several days, as she separates yarn and threads it through the proper shafts.

De Lerios pointed to one piece on the wall for which she had spun all the yarn and estimated it took 40 hours of work on the loom just for one colored segment on the plain background. It is not work to be rushed.

Is there ever a bad day at the loom?

“Sometimes, when the threads break and have to be repaired, or I’ve looked at it so long I can’t see it any more!” ■

### About the cover:

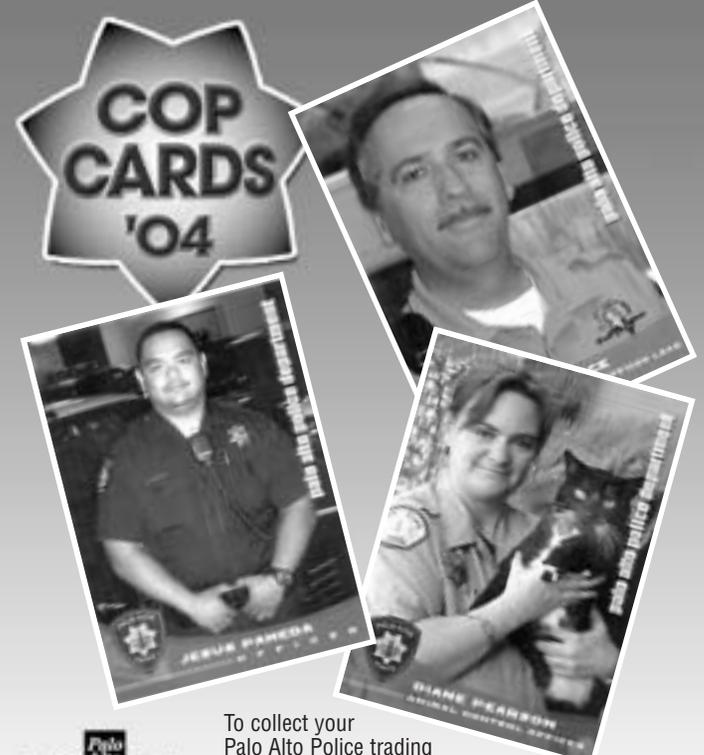
Artist Ulla de Lerios inside her Cubberley Center studio. Photograph by Norbert Von Der Groeben.

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