



**Peter Pap Rugs**

**Frank Stella's Personal Collection  
Navajo (Diné) Blankets and Rugs**

**Exhibition and Sale  
May 15 - June 10, 2026**

**Peter Pap Rugs  
at Arader Galleries**

**29 East 72nd Street  
New York, NY  
(Corner of Madison Ave. )**

**Open Daily  
Hours: 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.**



# Frank Stella's Personal Collection of Navajo (Diné) Blankets and Rugs

Peter Pap Rugs presents 48 Navajo (Diné) blankets and rugs from the personal collection of Frank Stella, shown together publicly for the first time. Collected over decades, the textiles reflect Stella's enduring attraction to bold color, graphic pattern, strong geometry, and visual intensity.

Created by Diné women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the works represent a period of remarkable innovation in Navajo weaving. Through experimentation with scale, optical effects, and expanded color palettes, these weavers pushed longstanding traditions in new and highly individual directions.

Several textiles entered Stella's collection through artist Tony Berlant, and one blanket appeared in the landmark 1972 touring exhibition *The Navajo Blanket*, organized with LACMA curator Mary Kahlenberg, which later traveled to the Brooklyn Museum. Most of the works are now being shown publicly for the first time.

Accompanied by new scholarship from Dr. Jill Ahlberg Yohe, the exhibition considers Stella as a collector while centering the authorship, technical sophistication, and artistic achievements of the Diné women whose work he admired.

These works were made to be seen closely, slowly, and in person.

**Frank Stella (1936–2024)** was one of the defining figures of postwar American abstraction. Born in Malden, Massachusetts, he studied at Phillips Academy and Princeton University before moving to New York in the late 1950s, where his groundbreaking *Black Paintings* helped establish a new direction for contemporary art and anticipated the rise of Minimalism.

Over a career spanning more than six decades, Stella continually expanded the possibilities of painting, sculpture, and printmaking through an exploration of color, geometry, structure, and pictorial space. Working in series, he moved from shaped canvases and geometric abstraction to increasingly ambitious reliefs, constructions, and monumental public sculpture. His work has been the subject of major museum exhibitions worldwide, including a retrospective organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2015, and in 2009 he received the National Medal of Arts.

Alongside his artistic practice, Stella assembled a personal collection of Navajo textiles over several decades, drawn to their visual power, technical sophistication, and bold formal presence.

Cover Image: Textile, Navajo artist c. 1900, Wool and dye, 3'3" x 3'9"

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some Navajo weavers explored minimal, square, and vertically oriented designs, as seen here. Different shades of yarn create subtle movement across the colored squares.

**About Peter Pap Rugs:** For over 50 years, Peter Pap Rugs has been a leading authority on antique rugs and historic textiles, recognized for scholarship-driven exhibitions and close collaboration with collectors, museums, and designers. Pap is a longtime appraiser on PBS's Antiques Roadshow and has exhibited at The Winter Show for nearly three decades. In 2025, Pap set a record for a 20th-century tapestry with the sale of Sørøver (Southward) by Frida Hansen, achieving the highest known price for a tapestry of its period. His work is defined by careful research, long-term stewardship, and a commitment to presenting significant material within its proper historical context.

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**Essay by: Jill Alhberg Yohe, PhD.**  
 Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art  
 Cafesjian Art Trust Museum, Minnesota

**About Jill Alhberg Yohe, PhD:** Alhberg Yohe has more than a decade of experience creating innovative exhibitions, scholarship, and programming as an independent consultant and museum curator. She earned her PhD from the University of New Mexico and served for many years at the Minneapolis Institute of Art as the associate curator of Native American Art, during which time she organized notable exhibitions including "Hearts of our People" and "In Our Hands."



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Behind the Scenes: How Stella worked with Sørøver and Wilton Ladd at the Sacconi Art Museum, Paris, 2022. Below right: Sørøver space installation at the Dallas Museum of Art, Texas, 2009.

### Frank Stella's eye-dazzling collection of Navajo weavings

BY JILL ALHBERG YOHE

Artist Frank Stella Quietly Collected an Array of Navajo Textiles — and Now They're on IstDibs

Expert dealer Peter Pap has collected some 200 Navajo pieces, from their core of geometric abstractions to intricate weavings from Afghanistan (see page 10) for sale. "There is a long lineage of geometric and color in weaving that is carried across many nomadic and village cultures throughout the world, and he probably found a fascinating how some designs were universal." While there is certainly a strong demand for Navajo weavings, no single style consistently commands a higher premium. "Weavings of specific styles of the past are not considered higher prices," Pap says. "On the other hand, extremely rare and beautiful weavings with very dense lively designs, like eye designs, and they are more iconic, they tend to command a premium with great negative space." Pap adds that "over half of the total weavings sold are going to collectors, but to individuals who appreciate their beauty and the fact that they are unaltered relative to other art forms. Very serious collectors are looking for the value created by the work."

Stella collected pieces of these blankets and rugs, some 25 of which are on display (as well as his collection of Navajo blankets, now comprising a major portion of Pap's collection) in his home only three days after he purchased them. "I bought the collection of rugs who collected the 500-year-old Stella was almost alone in his home only three days after he purchased them," observes Dr. Jill Alhberg Yohe, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Cafesjian Art Trust Museum, Minneapolis, MN. "Stella's collection of Navajo weavings, including his collection of eye designs, is a testament to his deep appreciation for the art form and his desire to share it with the world."

One of the Navajo "eye design" weavings in Stella's collection.

Stella's collection of Navajo weavings, including his collection of eye designs, is a testament to his deep appreciation for the art form and his desire to share it with the world.

**Weaving Together the Past**  
 Frank Stella's collection of Navajo (Diné) rugs and blankets goes on display—and sale—at Peter Pap Rugs in New Hampshire this month



These are the kinds of collectors in the world those who have everything they can find of something and those who seek only what they want of something. The artist Frank Stella (1937-2024) was the latter.

When Stella began collecting Navajo blankets and rugs in the 1970s, he was motivated by their design and geometric, especially when he saw intricate geometric patterns that were all about shapes and forms rather than anything abstractly figurative or narrative. These Navajo blankets from the 19th and early 20th century are defined by their vibrant diamonds and chevrons,



The Sun King's Carpets

Frank Stella's collection of Diné (Navajo) textiles is an artist's collection. Filled with textiles of boundless experimentation and creativity, the Navajo weavings Stella collected reveal a visual conversation happening between artists across time and place. Stella (1936-2024), a legendary figure in Minimalism, played a leading role in the development of a new abstract art movement in the 1960s. Minimalist artists like Stella shifted painting from the gestural and subjective painting of Abstract Expressionism towards post-painterly abstraction, focusing on the objective qualities of a painting's surface and its most fundamental, structural elements: geometry and form, color and shape. As Minimalism took hold of the New York art scene in the mid-to late 1960s, its meteoric rise afforded successful artists like Stella to begin building personal art collections of their own. Celebrated artists — Donald Judd, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, and others — started to acquire historic Navajo textiles for these personal collections. Admiring the bold, crisp, and abstract geometries of Diné textiles, Frank Stella and others recognized familiar visual vocabularies and artistic adjacencies between Navajo weaving and their own paintings and sculptures.

Rio Grande Banded Textile, c.1900  
Wool and dye (synthetic); 3'9" x 6'7"

This simple yet elegant textile incorporates pink yarn, a fashionable color in the late 19th century. Weavers enjoyed creating unusual color combinations in their textiles, however traders discouraged experimentation with non-"traditional" color palettes, preferring to establish consistent types of textiles they found to be more "authentic."



Post-Classic style textile, c.1885  
Wool and dye (synthetic), 4'2" x 7'3"

The all-over composition of this textile resembles Frank Stella's edge-to-edge and large stripe paintings. While Stella acquired this textile nearly a decade after helping develop a new style of painting in the 1960s, he may have admired this textile in relation to his own work: bold and confident color choices and geometrically proportionate half-chevron designs covering the entire design field. Notice the weaver's deliberate decision to outline only two of the half-chevron designs in blue, while using white yarn for all other outlines. This balances and grounds the top and bottom of the textile together.

The Diné textiles in the Stella Collection represent a breakthrough moment in Navajo weaving art history. Made in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> and very early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the textiles in the collection demonstrate an era of individual artistic freedom and creative innovation. Weavers of this era created textiles with novel design combinations, bold new colors, and illusionistic play, and the varieties of individuality. This originality has confounded Navajo weaving scholars for more than a century. Diné textile scholarship –built in anthropology rather than in art history— looks for cultural generalization and material-based technique over creative impulse. The more unusual and individualistic a textile is, the less attention it gets paid. This era and those in Stella’s collection defy established categories and analysis, leaving them outside of the reach of canonical scholarship and further depriving them of their rightful place in art history and in important collections.



Geometric textile, c.1895  
Wool and dye (natural and synthetic); 3'8" x 5'4"

This textile is a classic example of late 19th and early 20th century weaving: graphic and bold compositions across the entire design field. The design is geometric, evenly spaced, and confident.



Late Eyedazzler Variant Textile, c. 1885  
Wool and dye (natural and synthetic); 4'2" x 6'4"

The Diné (Navajo) weaver who created this textile combines understated elegance and detailed elaboration. Using a Classic Period-style crimson red yarn base, she incorporates natural grey, black, and white wool into delicate, overlapping multihued shapes. The effect makes the thin lined designs dance on top of the stable red surface, creating subtle dimensionality and light optical movement.



Textile, c.1900  
Wool and dye (natural and synthetic); 4'10" x 6'7"

The weaver combines a traditional Diné graphic pattern, then flips colors in perfect symmetry to create optical play. The multi-colored border, with thin stripes of color, halts the moving opticality of the illusory plane in the central design.

Most of the textiles in the Stella Collection are categorized as Transitional Period/Era weavings; term rarely defined and extraordinarily loose, Transitional Era weavings were created between approximately 1885 to 1910, defined by time period rather than style. They are also classified in terms of what they are not: they are not textiles created during the Classic Period (1800-1885) nor of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Trading Post/Rug era. The thin scholarship didn't dissuade artists like Frank Stella and other artists from collecting them; as artists, they intuitively understood their innovative and creative nature and value.

Navajo textile collections found in major art museums and private collections are largely works of art from an earlier era, the Classic Period (1800-1885). Characteristics of this time period include tightly woven blankets mostly for wear and intertribal trade, most notably *Hanoolchaadi* (Chief Blankets), waterproof blankets made for high-ranking peoples of the Plains. *Hanoolchaadi* features alternating wide horizontal bands across the entire compositional plane. They are made from naturally processed white and brown/black wool yarn, and weavers incorporate smaller indigo-dyed blue lines. Later phases of *Hanoolchaadi* include cochineal or lac crimson red yarn imported from Europe, in small blocks or in more elaborated diamond-shaped designs. Textiles of the Classic Period are widely admired and considered the most elegant and valuable of all Navajo weavings, praised for their understated simplicity and graceful restraint. By the 1860s, serapes with various embellishments, including serrated steppe designs, elaborated triangles, zig-zags, and horizontal and vertical lines took hold. These stylistic inventions of the Classic Period became further developed in the forthcoming years.



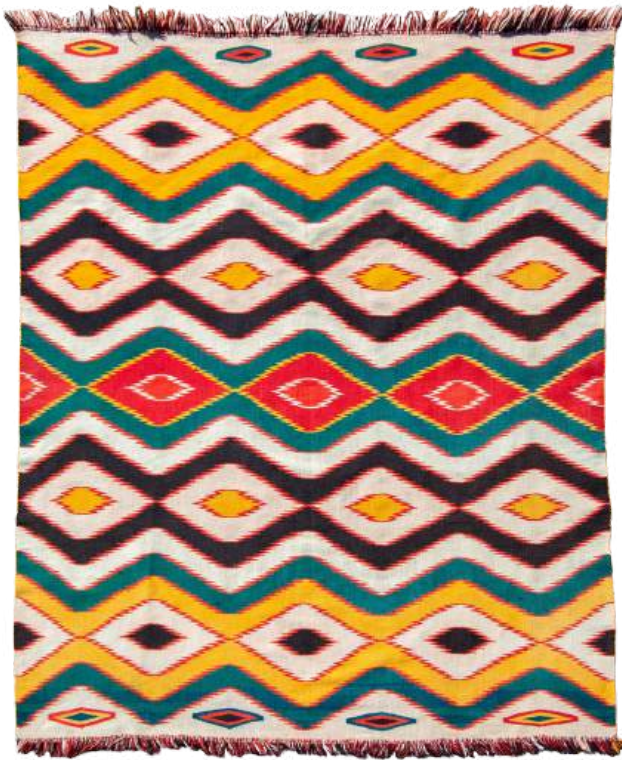
Post-Classic Banded Textile, c.1900  
Wool and dye (natural and synthetic); 4'0" x 5'2"

This well-loved textile exemplifies Diné weavers who explored color theory. Bands of bright orange, red, and yellow yarns stretch across the compositional frame, and the weaver grounds her experimental color combinations: the brown/black stripes set the boisterous colors in place.



Banded Textile, c.1890  
Wool and dye (natural and synthetic); 4'3" x 5'7"

Stella's preferences for colorful, striped blankets is on full display in this collection. While most historic collections of Navajo textiles lean towards more exuberant design fields, Stella's own painting style of horizontal stripes across the entire visual plane are reflected in the textiles he was most drawn to.



Late Elaborated Serape/Eyedazzler/Germantown Variant Textile, c.1885  
Wool and dye (Germantown and synthetic); 5'1" x 6'5"

This textile has presence. Large horizontal and angular bands of bold, colorful yarn create inner diamond vertical shapes evenly placed in the design field. Each band and shape is outlined by an orange/red serrated edge, creating tension and action while simultaneously bringing each design element into a harmonious whole.

While Stella acquired Diné extiles of the Post Classic/ Transitional era, an earlier generation of European and American painters were attracted to those of Classic Period, who associated these textiles as more “authentic,” and imbued with spiritual essences and primordial artistic truths. Surrealist artists like Max Ernst and Dorothea Tanning collected Native American art of the Southwest, and many leading Abstract Expressionists – including Jackson Pollock – drew inspiration from the iconography and spiritualism they found evident in Diné arts and practices.

Adolph Gottlieb and Barnett Newman attributed many of their artistic breakthroughs in relation to Navajo textiles and Native American art as examples of “primitive” human consciousness or inner pan-human psychological states.

In contrast to artists of earlier generations, Stella and other Minimalists (and later, Color Field painters) were attracted to surface-level designs and the more formal elements within Navajo textiles. These artists most likely grasped Navajo weavers’ confident geometries, color theories, and the individualities of the artists evident in each textile. Frank Stella seemed most interested in elements of textile’s composition, as they resonated with core principles in his art: edge-to-edge color paintings, graphic striped canvases, and geometric resolution.

Banded Textile c.1895  
Wool and dye (natural and synthetic); 4'2" x 4'6"

The green bands within the three banded designs in the textile elevate a textile likely used for everyday activities or a saddleblanket. Stella’s preferences for colorful, striped blankets is on full display in this collection. While most historic collections of Navajo textiles lean towards more exuberant design fields, Stella’s own painting style of horizontal stripes are reflected in the textiles he was most drawn to.



Those who are familiar with Stella’s art might immediately sense why he acquired the kinds of Navajo textiles seen here. Many of the textiles in the collection incorporate Stella’s preferences for horizontal bands that stretch across the entire compositional surface. Much like Stella’s signature 1960s monumental scale stripe paintings, the banded textiles convey minimalist sensibilities and foreground attention to color theory and line. Other Diné weavings in the collection combine horizontal lines and/or squared step designs, highlighting clean geometries in the context of a flat compositional surface. In many of the color-banded and square-step designed textiles, the undyed white woolen yarn acts in similar fashion to a primed white canvas. White negative space pulls the geometric forms to the weaving surface, while simultaneously creating balance, harmony, and order.



Post-Classic Banded Textile, c.1900  
Wool and dye (natural and synthetic); 2'7" x 4'6"

This unique textile has a design within it that you might not notice. The weaver incorporates chevron and diagonal block designs using the same creamy white yarn she uses for the background. She also places brown yarns at the tips of the chevron designs, creating an additional design element, resembling thin hatched lines stretching across the compositional plane. You can visually read the textile design in two completely different ways, like an optical exercise or a Rorschach Test.

Post-Classic Banded Textile, c.1900  
Wool and dye (natural and synthetic); 5'0" x 5'8"

This banded textile features a stunning combination of natural brown and white wool yarn with a variety of pinks and light red, creating an atmospheric lightness. The weaver also blends different shades of white and brown yarns in bands, creating subtle movement and dimensionality.



Post-Classic Banded Textile, c.1900  
Wool and dye (synthetic); 4'0" x 5'2"

This well-loved textile exemplifies Diné weavers who explored color theory. Bands of bright orange, red, and yellow yarns stretch across the compositional frame, and the weaver grounds her experimental color combinations: the brown/black stripes set the boisterous colors in place.

You may also take notice of Navajo textiles that have a similar boldness of color found throughout Stella's artistic career. Textiles in the collection reveal weavers who are fascinated by unimaginable color combinations. As a broad spectrum of new aniline dyes poured into the Southwest in the late 1800s, weavers innovated with new colored yarns in extraordinary fashion, learning novel complementary and contrast color combinations in their textiles.



Twill saddle blanket, c.1900  
Wool and dye (synthetic); 2'1" x 4'7"

Twilled saddle blankets are both soft and durable. Saddle blankets needed to endure hard wear and the weight of the rider and saddle. The weaver of this saddle blanket combines active designed bands with more restful ones. Larger bands of red woolen yarn feature alternating purple outlined squares or horizontal chevron designs. These more elaborate banded designs are complemented by the calm unembellished bands, made with red and white yarn twilled together.

Post-Classic Geometric Textile, c.1895  
Wool and dye (synthetic); 4'2" x 5'3"

While some of the colors in this textile have likely faded due to fugitive synthetic dyes, the overall composition remains strong. This textile design is unusual; Diné weavers typically balance their design fields with areas of calm and rest. The square block designs that fill the entire textile create tension without release, a quality not often seen in Navajo weaving.



Late Classic or Post-Classic Textile, c.1880  
Wool and dye (natural and synthetic); 4'0" x 4'6"

This beautiful textile has personality. The weaver likely learned to weave during the Classic Period (c.1800-1880), when weavers produced exceptionally balanced and tightly woven textiles. The weaver incorporated alternating square block designs, expanding a simple banded textile into a modernist work. The weaver adds her own personality to the textile design by creatively placing blue indigo yarn in two grey/white squares at the upper corner.



By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Navajo weavers had developed one of the most significant contributions to American art history: Germantown style blankets and Eyedazzler textiles. Unlike any other art of its time, Diné weavers had found a way to create energetic movement and optical illusion within abstract designs. Vibrant colors of yarn from Germantown, Pennsylvania woolen mills entered Navajo territory in the 1860s and by the 1870s weavers were creating eye-dazzling textiles with mesmerizing energy and active design fields.

Post-Classic Banded Textile, c 1900  
Wool and dye (synthetic); 4'0" x 5'10"

This simple banded blanket was likely made by an emerging weaver. Navajo weavers learn to weave experientially and by watching others weave. Beginning weavers often make textiles unevenly: their weavings often start wide at the bottom and gradually become less wide at the top.



Textile, c. 1880-1890  
Wool and dye (synthetic); 4'7" x 8'0"

The weaver incorporates active red zigzag designs commonly found in wedge weave textiles of an earlier era. By placing these muscular zigzags in bands within a backdrop of natural white wool yarn, the weaver balances fields of energetic action with stated calm.

Classic/Post Classic Textile, c.1880  
Wool and dye (indigo and synthetic); 2'8" x 4'1"

One of the oldest textiles in the Stella Collection, this weaving incorporates signature Classic Period designs found in many late Hanoolchaadi (Chief Blankets): wide unembellished white bands, red bands with alternating blue and white ticking designs, and outlined steppe patterns. Stately and confident, the overall composition is simple yet grand.



Magnetic zig-zags, and pulsing serrated and outlined triangles, diamonds, and stepped vertical and diagonal lines of endless variations appeared, offering weavers a well-spring for creativity and innovation. The Stella Collection has many examples of this artistic movement, including two creatively colorful and designed serape-style eyedazzlers, an extraordinary Germantown-style eyedazzler, a Classic-style zig-zag eyedazzler, a uniquely strong optical designed textile and many others that fall into this optically energetic style.

Germantown Textile, c. 1885  
Wool and dye (Germantown and synthetic)  
4'7" x 7'3"

Certainly one of the most unique textiles in the Stella Collection, this Germantown-style weaving includes design elements from the Classic Period (1800-1880), Eyedazzler movement, and individualistic creativity. The outer portion of the textile features Classic-era design composition: crosses within fields of crimson red yarns. The middle design field displays hallmark designs in Eyedazzlers: large geometric and multi-banded criss-crosses with serrated edges, creating energy and movement. The center's pink and purple diamond design reveals the work of a weaver confidently experimenting with color combinations, creating an original and unique work of art.



Germantown Textile, c. 1885  
Wool and dye (Germantown and synthetic); 3'0" x 4'3"

By the second quarter of the 19th century vibrantly dyed woolen yarn manufactured in Germantown, Pennsylvania poured into the American Southwest, ushering an explosion of creativity in Diné weaving. The expanded color palette allowed weavers unbridled experimentation in color to further activate and expand conventional design fields. The weaver of this textile incorporates complementary colors to energize individual designs while simultaneously maintaining a grounded and cohesive composition. She also creates optical effects of three dimensions in a two-dimensional plane: the lined hatching of the outermost triangles and the tension of complementary colors turn triangles into three-dimensional squares.

Classic/Post Classic Textile, c.1880  
Wool and dye (natural and synthetic); 4'2" x 6'4"

This magnificently designed textile has elements of Classic Serapes, Eyedazzlers, and Classic era banded weavings rolled into one. The muscly serrated red zig-zag designs stretching across the entire compositional frame are a quintessential serape design from the Classic era. Because the size of the textile is smaller than Classic blankets, the zig-zags radiate and move the eye, a signature element found in Eyedazzler textiles. The brown horizontal bands underneath the energetic zig-zags ground the textile, a technique weavers would employ in earlier 19th century banded blankets.





Eyedazzler/Optical Textile, ca. 1900  
Wool and Dye (synthetic); 4'9" x 6'7"

One of the strongest works of art in the Stella Collection, this textile is an excellent example of late 19th century/early 20th century Navajo creative mastery. The weaver tightly weaves radiating and overlapping abstract designs that are made to trick the eye. Four vertically separated quadrants of serrated triangles create vibrating energy, activating the all-over composition and the viewer's perceptive fields.

Late Graphic Textile, c. 1900  
Natural wool and dye (synthetic); 4'11" x 6'0"

Navajo weavers took pleasure in finding new visual references they found in their daily lives and incorporated them into their textiles. The weaver of this textile experiments with English letters spelling *Coffee*, most likely from memory and seeing this word on an earlier trip to her local Trading Post. Weavers design all of their textiles without any sketches or studies, keeping complex geometries and designs in their mind's eye.



Post Classic and Eyedazzler Textile, c. 1885  
Wool and dye (synthetic) 4'4" x 5'8"

This textile has characteristics of Classic Period and Eyedazzler weavings. The large background of red woolen yarn is a key attribute of Classic era serapes. The weaver incorporates several shades of different red yarn, most likely utilizing what was available to her at the time. The weaver incorporates alternating white and brown rhombus angled forms as the main design elements. As the weaver changes the end points in different angles of these designs, she creates optical movement, a signature feature of Eyedazzlers.

Textile, c.1900  
Wool and dye (natural and synthetic); 4'9" x 7'3"

This textile is perplexing. The weaver clearly illustrates her abilities to maintain proportionality and straight lines, yet the bands intersecting the main design field are off kilter. Many weavers would have disproportional, slightly skewed lines. Here, it seems as if the offset horizontal lines could potentially be intentional.



Post-Classic textile, c. 1890  
Wool and dye (natural and synthetic); 4'10" x 6'6"

Most Diné weavers attempt at achieving symmetry and balance in their textiles, counting each of the wefts that create their designs. There are no studies in Navajo textiles: all designs remain in the thoughts and minds of the weaver. In this instance, the weaver begins her textile with a wider, expanded design field, and as she weaves, the designs become more compact. While asymmetric and unbalanced, the effect allows the design movement and energy: the smaller design fields brings kinetic movement to the all-over design.



Optical textile, c. 1890  
Wool and dye (synthetic); 4'6" x 5'0"

It seems natural to compare this work to the geometries found in Paul Klee's paintings. The weaver, like Klee, uses alternating geometries to activate the optical field and, much like Klee, applies designs across the compositional field, stacking form upon the other. Notice the weaver's intentional decision to incorporate different hue yarns within the individual serrated block forms, adding additional movement and variability to the all-over design. She also places brown and white geometries on the edges and in the central body of the textile, while weaving blue and white forms everywhere else. The red borders act as the frame of the piece, drawing the eye towards the activated design.



Post-Classic Serape style textile, c. 1890  
Wool and dye (natural and synthetic); 4'3" x 7'0"

Many of the weavers in the Classic era (1800-1880) continued to create textiles throughout the 19th century. This later Serape design textile may have been made by one of these weavers or created by their daughters. Notice the artist's incorporation of variegated red yarns, likely a result of less access to finer yarns. By the late 19th century, the superior yarns available decades earlier resulted in weavers needing to be resourceful with what was available at the time.



Late Classic Variant Textile, c. 1880  
Wool and dye (natural and synthetic); 4'8" x 5'10"

This textile exudes both calm and energy. The weaver incorporates fundamental characteristics found in many Late Classic Period textiles. There are multiple hues of crimson colored yarn, both synthetic and likely cochineal dyed wool that create dimensionality and interest. The center of the textile contains an open negative space, offering balance, order, and harmony. The post Late Classic design delivers opticality and energy: the brown and white striped bands of alternating colors and direction make the textile feel like it is moving in our mind's eye.