


Finding the Universe in

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TEXTILES AND PHOTOGRAPHS
BY ARTIST GARY GOLDBERG



Photograph: *Finding the Universe in Oaxaca, Blue, yellow, with brown sky and white rain*, 2018. 20" x 30", Archival pigmented print. Gary Goldberg.

*Finding the Universe in Oaxaca:
Textiles and Photographs*

The Art of Gary Goldberg
by John Zotos

Examples of early textiles have survived from the time of the ancient Greeks. The rise of the art form though did not occur until towards the end of the middle ages when the display of textiles bearing recognizable images became synonymous with history, wealth, and power. Artist Gary Goldberg's new large-scale wool textiles are translations of architectural photographs interpreting details of the worried facades of colonial buildings in Oaxaca City, Mexico. Up to now, they are the capstone of an ongoing series modestly titled *Finding the Universe in Oaxaca*. These pieces are a captivating aesthetic

statement about both the nature of representation and the union of the arts and crafts that would fulfill William Morris' wildest dreams.

Monumental in size, the textiles were realized through Goldberg's long-term collaboration with indigenous artisans at a felting workshop known as the Taller de Afelpado in San Agustin, Oaxaca. The starting point for each one lies in his choice of a particular photograph. A time-consuming group effort ensues, like a metaphorical leap from an instant and solitary aesthetic practice into the unknown, where the final product only imperfectly begins to exist in the collective imagination of what is now a group effort. Its as if Goldberg hopes the viewer follows along this visual journey, toward an outcome he openly shares.

In the transfer process, a kind of cartoon derived from the photograph is used as a guide that the artisans weave into a final textile. Goldberg, heretofore primarily a photographer, oversees the process and makes formal changes to color and line elements. Upon completion, the images are transformed from color photographs of walls, mysterious and bracing in their own right, into hand-made wool textiles that assume an entirely different presence. In general, the pieces are inspired by nature, taking on the form of landscapes, topographies, and celestial realms. Or conversely, they can also reference abstract painting from the period immediately following the Second World War.

Nature clearly informs the cosmic *Finding the Universe in Oaxaca, blue ground blue sky low horizon*, 2016. Along the 120-inch horizontal stretch of this long rectangular tapestry is a band of night blue peppered with white spots that resemble stars in the darkness. Above this a lighter color scheme with textured formations delineating a horizon line, which resembles a terrain, perhaps a planet of some sort. This inverts the typical representational trope where the sky is above us; here it's like peering at the southern pole of the moon.

In addition to disrupting perspective via the horizon lines, Goldberg revels in manipulating scale; he transforms images obtained from a grounded eye-line into aerial landscapes. The final product bears only a slight resemblance to the photograph it's based on. Through this decidedly analog process, Goldberg's pieces are at once a throwback and something that expands the possibilities of photography itself.

The natural world finds itself compounded in the riveting triptych *Finding the Universe in Oaxaca, Sunset, Lightning, Night Sky*, 2018. Modest in scale this time, three distinct vertical textiles represent different events or cycles in the cosmos marking the passage of time. They each express their distinct temporal ontology in flat cutouts isolated from the universe as if they were cropped sections of the grand celestial panorama. The central panel, primarily in light blue with wisps of white, links those on either side with energetic lightning lines of force radiating over the surface.

The larger vertically oriented pieces, sized at 96 inches tall, strongly channel New York School Abstraction while remaining steadfast to their particular visual mode. From the same series *floating oval on deep red ground*, 2016, Goldberg places the oval band of dark pigment in the upper section of the image. This is similar to exactly where Adolph Gottlieb positioned the circular forms in his famous abstractions, the floating ball of paint usually in tense opposition to a flurry of brushstrokes. Goldberg lets the oval take its place alone, interacting with the red ground, spare, dark lines, and a mesh of white lines to the lower right. Where Gottlieb dealt with the nuclear age and post-war anxiety, Goldberg offers an iconic expression of calm and rich contemplative surfaces that suggest meditative states.

In *mujeres bellas on green ground*, 2017, another vertical abstraction, there is a hint of figuration. A whirling, funnel-shaped form might be an abstracted body, or else it contains them, as its extremities exit the frame at left and below. Surrounding the figure are a lattice of interconnected and irrational shapes that provide the ground; they visually isolate the central form that seems to compete against them in order to take over the entire surface. Sedate light and dark greens comprise the color range, highlighted in parts with yellow strands.

Perhaps another reference to painting inspires *Finding the Universe in Oaxaca, Yellow, Red, Blue*, 2018. But, this time via the color field painters. Two formidable bands of paint, in yellow and blue, cascade down along

the surface, bisecting the piece and revealing a green hue where they meet. Color field painting was about thin, flat, underworked surfaces where paint on unsized canvas soaked directly into the substrate, resulting in both anemic and transparent beauty. Goldberg has seized upon the color saturation but highlights texture and depth remaining steadfast to his vision, recapturing the truth that nature reveals as he pictures Oaxaca through his lens.

With the photographs and textiles that make up *Finding the Universe in Oaxaca*, Goldberg starts with the troubled legacy of the colonial past in one of the poorest states in Mexico. He transforms this past into a universal message about hope through the metaphysics of abstraction that testifies to the resilience of the people there, whose cultural traditions are some of the richest in the country, and without whom his work would remain plainly two-dimensional.



Production of *Finding the Universe in Oaxaca, Red ground gray sky*, 2016. 48"x120"x1", Textile, wool felting.

This body of work began as photographs made in Oaxaca, Mexico and is part of a larger, photographic series entitled, *Finding the Universe in Oaxaca*. The actual physical subject matter of these images came directly from the richly layered walls and facades found in Oaxaca City. These photographic images have been transformed into textiles using a dry felting process at Taller Afelpado, San Agustín Etlá, Oaxaca, Mexico. These works are imbued with references to landscape and Mexican mythologies.

These textiles explore many threads and one central concept: is landscape a construct? In this work, I am making reference to the landscape by imposing a false horizon line and creating a pictorial space that refers to a land-sky relationship. These works seek to explore the idea of abstracted landscapes by bifurcating a composition and utilizing dark and light values. This work also explores borders, the passage of time, and mapping.

It is my hope you find the universe in Oaxaca that I have seen and created.

Gary Goldberg

Photograph: *Finding the Universe in Peach and Gold*, colors from Klimt, 2016. 20"x30", Archival pigmented print. Gary Goldberg.

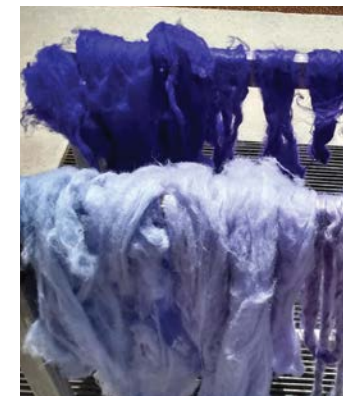




Finding the Universe in Oaxaca, Blue triangle on purple ground, 2016, 96"x60"x1", Textile, wool felting.



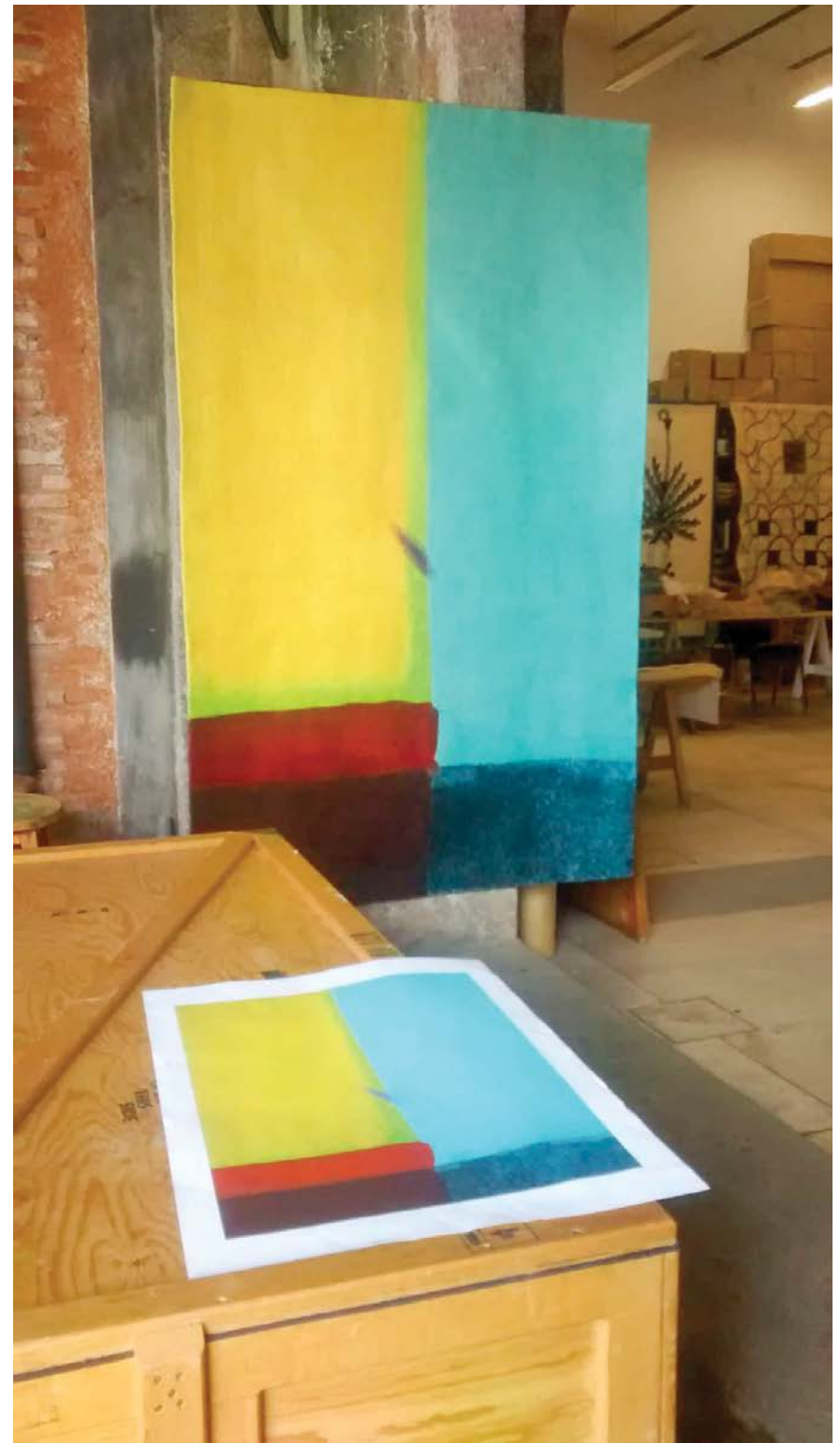
These large, felted textiles are fabricated in Oaxaca at Taller de Afelpado. This felting workshop is located in the Centro de las Artes de San Agustín, a fine arts center in San Agustín Etla, referred to colloquially as CaSa.





Finding the Universe in Oaxaca, Blue Green Ground, Blue Sky, 2018, 48"x120"x1", Textile, wool felting.

Each work takes approximately three artisans three weeks to complete. These works were started in 2016 and completed in 2019. Over the last three years, I made many trips to Oaxaca and spent months involved with the textile creation process.



Finding the Universe in Oaxaca, Yellow, Red, Blue, 2018, 96"x48"x1", Textile, wool felting.

This collaborative process would not have been possible without the expertise of the Taller staff. The photographs from which these tapestries are derived were made over the last five years during frequent trips to Oaxaca.



Finding the Universe in Oaxaca, Sunset, Lightning, Night Sky, 2019, 32"x47"x1", Textile, wool felting.

Dedication

Maestro Francisco Toledo, who made this work possible.

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Photographic Credits:

Kevin Todora, Tim Tracz, Eva Alicia Lépiz, Jesús Martínez and Gary Goldberg

Taller de afelpado (felt workshop) Artisans:

Blanca Miguel Doquiz, Xóchitl Ruíz Nuñez, Alejandra Sánchez Salgado, Jesús Martínez, Marcela Ortega Ramos, Margarita Ramos Ramírez, Anahí Mendoza Cruz

Artists who have collaborated with the felt workshop include:

Francisco Toledo, Jan Hendrix, Francisco Castro Leñero, Irma Palacios, Miguel Castro Leñero, James H.D. Brown, Trine Ellitsgaard, Sabino Guisu, and Jaime Ruíz Otis

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It is a pleasure to work with the Martin Museum of Art in loaning Gary Goldberg's works for his exhibition *Finding the Universe in Oaxaca*. Erin Cluley Gallery has represented Goldberg's work since 2016 and has placed his work in prestigious private and corporate collections across the United States.

Erin Cluley Gallery is a contemporary art gallery representing emerging, mid-career, and established artists from Dallas and the United States. The gallery presents a provocative program of artists working in both traditional and alternative forms, including painting, sculpture, new media, photography, sculptural installation, and public intervention.

In 2014, Erin Cluley Gallery ignited a creative movement in West Dallas acting as a hub for visual arts and community engagement. After nearly five years on Fabrication Street, the gallery has moved its operation to Riverbend – a development in Dallas' Design District celebrating the intersection between culture and commerce.

Erin Cluley, September 2019

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Cover Photograph: *Finding the Universe in Oaxaca*, Yellow on yellow with blue sky, 2016, 20"x30", Archival pigmented print, Gary Goldberg.