



CILLA ALDEN working on her Spanish Walking Loom.
LISA KRISTOFF/Boothbay Register

Creative Maine

Imagery woven of the threads of her imagination

Meet weaver Cilla Alden of Starfish Studio & Studio 53 Fine Art

By LISA KRISTOFF

Priscilla “Cilla” May Alden’s life was forever changed, artistically and spiritually, after seeing the work tapestry weavers were creating in Taos, New Mexico a few decades ago.

The weavers’ contemporary woven tapestries, in brilliant colors, visually embodied civilizations and weaving techniques of long ago.

“(The tapestries) just drew me in. I knew it was what I wanted to learn to do,” Alden said. “It was very different from the pattern weaving I’d been doing; there was the freedom to design, to create imagery ... that really excited me. From that moment on, tapestry weaving was my focus.”

Alden has returned to Taos twice to study traditional techniques at Weaving Southwest, and enjoys challenging the boundaries of those traditions in her tapestries.

Although she has several smaller, vertical looms for her tapestries done in silks and fine yarns, most of her tapestries are woven on a (Rio Grande) Spanish Walking Loom. A favorite among weavers, this loom is built to suit each weaver’s height because, as its name implies, the artist

weaves while “walking” the treadles. Alden opted for the largest loom to accommodate tapestries up to five feet wide.

She orders most of her dyed yarns, the wool from the Navajo-Churro sheep, from Taos.

While some weavers will draw up a watercolor “cartoon,” of a new design, Alden with the image in her mind, prefers to figure it out as she goes along; for her, this is part of the fun.

But once she steps onto the treadles of her loom, she is completely focused on the tapestry at hand, spiritually in tune with that ancient expression of creativity.

“The weaving techniques are difficult, some of them are very difficult,” she said. “There are no distractions – just quiet music (like Indian flute or similar genre) in the background.”

In the fall of 2015, and into 2016, Alden’s focus has been on learning new weaving techniques and color blending. While weaving a ceremonial-inspired dress in the fall, she wove some areas a bit looser than in others.

“I wanted it to have movement, like clothing – not feel like a blanket.”



PRISCILLA MAY ALDEN'S "Spirit Woman" 2012

In addition to the southwest, the coast of Maine has been another primary source of inspiration in her work.

"I've done a lot of weaving about the spirits in the stone, ledge and the islands. I've done tapestries about stone totems and a lot of weaving and monoprints about the power of the sea and spirits of the coast," Alden said.

As a teacher, Alden passes on the techniques as women have done throughout the centuries. As an artist, the images she weaves from the threads of her imagination, using the dyed wools of the Churro, are a tactile testament to this ancient art form.

"Fiber art, and tapestry in particular, isn't seen everywhere. Those of us involved in it are very passionate, very serious about it. We are driven to create it, and to keep the art form alive."

Alden is also a member of Studio 53 Fine Art in Boothbay Harbor. Her works have been shown in traveling shows throughout the U.K., in Denmark, and Canada.



A SOUTHWEST-inspired tapestry woven and designed by Priscilla May Alden.

