

woven together

A California native finds a second home in Chicago, at the helm of an industrial weaving studio for fellow artists, including adults with developmental disabilities.



KS How has that program evolved?

EW When Matti Sloman and I started The Weaving Mill, we moved into an existing space that had equipment and programmatic infrastructure, but we wanted to build a textile education program that allowed the Envision Unlimited participants to step into themselves as designers, weavers and makers. That was the foundation of Westtown Education for Textiles (WEFT), a program based at The Weaving Mill.

KS What do participants make?

EW Tote bags, rugs, place mats, pillows—we sell those online at theweavingmill.com and distribute 60 percent of the income to the weavers and 40 percent to the program budget. We've done collaborations with companies like Starbucks Reserve Roastery and Blue Bottle Coffee.

KS Then there's also WARP.

EW Right. The Westtown Artist Residency Program is our bridge to the wider Chicago arts community. We bring in working artists to be teachers in the WEFT program and then also provide them with access to our studio space, equipment and tools.

KS As a working artist yourself, what's inspiring you right now?

EW I have a background in history, so I find it interesting to think about how we can give context to objects. I have a long-running research project on wool supply chains and using them as



The Weaving Mill operates at a unique scale that falls in between handmade and industrial.

ARMED WITH DEGREES IN HISTORY

and textiles, Emily Winter cofounded an artist-run weaving studio in Chicago in 2015. Through community outreach programs and collaborations with big-name companies, The Weaving Mill is a tiny-but-mighty force for ethical textile production in the heart of the Midwest. *Interview with Kelsey Schagemann.*

KS When did your interest in weaving develop?

EW I went to a technical arts high school in San Francisco, so I've been craft- and skill-focused most of my life. After college, I was feeling burned out and not sure what to do next. But I was curious about weaving. It felt inaccessible until I got connected with The Chicago Weaving School. I became an assistant there and eventually was hired by Envision Unlimited, a social service agency, to expand a handweaving program for adults with developmental disabilities.

case studies to talk about historical, political and social issues. If you pick up a blanket, you're not going to see all of those issues, but they're there. We also have these other projects at The Weaving Mill, like a mail-order catalog and quarterly print newsletter, where we're trying to expand the way people talk about textiles beyond just how a product looks or is used.

“We're trying to expand the way people talk about textiles beyond just how a product looks or is used.”

emily winter
COFOUNDER

PHOTOGRAPHS: (MILL) SARAH FLOTARD, (PRODUCTS) NATHAN KEAY

KS Why does the world need a place like The Weaving Mill?

EW The Weaving Mill is a unique alternative to many of the more dominant modes of object textile-making. We're very small. We produce erratically. There's no pretense that we are trying to reshape the textile industry or offer a large solution. But we are, I think, a model for a small, context-dependent and local solution, a historically conscious alternative to thinking about how we make things and put them into the world.

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

EDITOR PICKS

from the looms

The Weaving Mill's collection changes regularly. Here's a taste.

PLUM-MINT NAPKINS
\$60 for four

LINEN BATH TOWEL
\$82

PENCIL POUCH
\$12

PLAID TOTE
\$45