Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@181937
Title: Forsythe loom used by Dorothy Liebes
Date: ca. 1920
Medium: Wood, metal, cloth, string; cotton, synthetic fibers, Lurex
Dimensions: Overall (Loom): 56 × 29 × 37 3/4 in. (142.2 × 73.7 × 95.9 cm) Part (Shuttle 1): 11 3/4 × 1 3/4 × 1 3/8 in. (29.8 × 4.4 × 3.5 cm) Part (Shuttle 2): 11 1/2 × 1 3/4 × 1 3/8 in. (29.2 × 4.4 × 3.5 cm) Part (Boxes): 5 × 26 × 6 in. (12.7 × 66 × 15.2 cm) Part (Wood Rod): 22 7/8 × 5/8 in. (58.1 × 1.6 cm) Part (Metal Rod): 9 5/8 × 1/4 in. (24.4 × 0.6 cm) Part (Eyehook): 6 3/4 × 2 3/8 × 1/4 in. (17.1 × 6 × 0.6 cm) Part (Rope): 10 in. × 2 1/2 in. (25.4 × 6.4 cm) Part (Can): 5 1/2 in. × 4 in. (14 × 10.2 cm)
Credit Line: American Textile History Museum Collection, Gift of Douglas Todd
Object Number: 2017.62.1

Object Name: Loom
Classification: ARTISTS' TOOLS & EQUIPMENT

Curatorial Remarks:
During her lifetime, Dorothy Liebes was upheld as an example of a profoundly successful career woman who made her mark in American homes and fashion—from elite to middle class—and in the public sphere. A California native, she began weaving on commission in 1930 and opened a studio in San Francisco in 1937. By 1940 she worked bi-coastally, opening a second studio in Manhattan at some point before permanently relocating in 1948. Although the press dubbed Liebes the “First Lady of the Loom,” her activities stretched far beyond handweaving. Like other prominent weavers of the
period, she emphasized the translation of her work on the handloom to industrial applications and achieving a handwoven “look” in mass-produced items. During the 1930s she gained national recognition for incorporating then-unsual materials such as bamboo, grasses, cellophane, and synthetics. In the post-World War II era, Liebes was central to the emergence and popularity of Lurex in commercial textiles. In the 1950s, she parlayed her penchant for startling color combinations, firmly established in her early work, into a significant role as a consultant, trend predictor, and ambassador for consumer brands that relied on her power as a household name to market their fashions, textiles, and interior furnishings. These included Dupont, Dow, Sears, Goodall Fabrics, Jantzen, Bigelow-Sanford, and United Wallpaper. Liebes owned at least three special looms with unconventional hand-carved details. These appeared in press photographs and accounts and formed a part of her reputation as a tastemaker. “The textiles are woven by hand on beautifully carved looms,” noted a 1938 newspaper article. This bold red loom appears in publicity photographs of Liebes and her studio from the late 1930s to the mid-1960s. She gifted the loom with its work-in-progress to her ten-year-old great-niece Michelle Todd in 1967. Todd never learned how to use it and instead kept it “as an art piece” in her bedroom. Nina B. Forsythe, who patented the “Forsythe loom” model, was born in Boston, Massachusetts. She studied textiles there and in China, Japan, Paris, and London, including a stint with the arts and crafts designer William Morris in the summer of 1894. She went on to teach in various colleges around the United States until moving to Berkeley, California, where she opened her School of Textiles and Handcrafts in sometime before 1919.

Physical Description:
Bright red painted counterbalance loom with four harnesses, four treadles, string heddles, and hanging beater with metal reed; hand-carved, polychrome castle beam set into the posts depicts two opposing angels holding a basket filled with fruit; metal plaque on castle side with text: “THE FORSYTHE LOOM/ SCHOOL OF TEXTILES/ AND HAND CRAFTS / PATENTED JUNE 1919”; partially woven work in progress has yellow cotton or cotton blend warp with cotton and synthetic weft (including Lurex) in yellows, green, and blue.

Markings: Shuttle 1: Stamped: "Nilus / Leclerc / L'ISLETVILLE, QUE." "BRAEMAN" is written in pencil in the upper right Shuttle 2: Stamped: "METIER A TISSER WEAVING LOOM / LECLERC / NILUS LECLERC INC. / L'ISLETVILLE / CANADA" "BRAEMEN" is written in pencil in upper left Return Address Sticker: "S. Braeman / 878 Ferngrove Drive / San Jose, Calif. 95129"