



Tapestry Topics

A Quarterly Review of Tapestry Art Today

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Letter from the Directors

By Alex Friedman and Christine Laffer

The Dorr Mill in Guild, New Hampshire opened its doors September 20th, as the second venue for the juried ATB5 exhibition. Over 200 people attended an evening of art, music and food. Alex gave a gallery talk for a sizable group that evening and followed up the next day with a more detailed talk for educators who will present the show to many school groups and other groups who plan to come see the exhibition.

Although it is in a rural location in New England there has been a steady flow of visitors from far and wide including New York City, Boston and eastern Canada. People have been very excited to see it and have returned bringing

friends and family. Every Thursday evening lecturers will discuss the exhibit and related subjects and answer questions. (See listing in Members' Section, pg 21)



Christine Laffer, "White Sac," detail, 18"x 8.5"x 2.5", 1994, silk, cotton, wool, bas relief tapestry, see article, page 10.

Last chance to see ABT5! The Rochester Art Center in Rochester MN is the third and final venue for ATB5. The

new dates of the exhibition have expanded from March 26 to May 8, 2005. Susan Iverson, one of the represented artists, will give the opening talk and gallery walk so make a date to be there. Joanna Foslien will also provide a gallery tour to train the docents. The RAC is an exciting brand new venue and, judging by the website <http://www.rochesterartcenter.org/>, should provide an excellent educational and promotional service for the exhibit. If you are in the Midwest, we hope you will plan to see it.

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After the very successful Critical Forum in Denver organised by Mary Lane and Michael Rohde there has been a concerted effort to find ways to continue the discussions that were so stimulating. We have now set up two online study groups for a start; one moderated by Sharon Marcus and the other by Mary Lane. These were each limited to ten people and have already filled. Sharon has even filled a second group. Along with reading materials there will be online discussions to start a creative discussion. We hope to add more study groups in the future. If you are interested in moderating one please contact Mary Lane at Marylane53@mac.com

We are very pleased to announce that Mary Lane is our new board member. She has recently come off the board of the GFR/Tapestry Center, and has already made big contributions in planning our educational events. She brings a wealth of experience and good ideas and we know that Mary will be a valuable asset to ATA.

Ellen Ramsey has agreed to become Chair of the Fundraising Committee in addition to her current position as Chair of the Membership Committee, thus formalizing the connection already in place with the Circle Membership program. If you are interested in helping on the fundraising committee, have fundraising experience to share, or have suggestions for funding sources, please contact her at ew.ramsey@comcast.net. ATA is planning an exciting event for our 25th Anniversary in 2007. Ellen would like to hear from any members who would like to take an active part in our Anniversary celebrations.

There is a new feature on our web page, called the ATA e-news, which will keep you informed of events or updates on a monthly basis. Managed by our very able Web Editor, Christine Laffer, it comes via e-mail. News will also be placed in the newsletter but it will not be as timely.

ATA continues to thrive, now having up to 70 Circle members, a great show of support for the organization. We encourage more of the Circle member to send images of their work for their artist pages to help our website give a more complete picture of who we are. Contact Michael Rohde at rugweaver@aol.com for instructions.

The call to add tapestry catalogs to the ATA Library has been very successful. We have received donations from Helga Berry, Jon Eric Riis, Marika Szàraz, and Aurelis, a Belgian tapestry group. As soon as we can get them catalogued, they will be available for loan, as we do for the slide packages. Watch for an update on this or contact Kathe Todd-Hooker for information. Are there any volunteers in Oregon who can help Kathe?

By the time you receive this, ATA will have just had a Resource Booth at SOFA (Sculptural Objects and Functional Art Expo) in Chicago. It will be the first time we are represented in this premiere art furnishings show. We anticipate that making ATA visible in a national event will help to make tapestry a more prominent part of the art community. We thank Dave Johnson, Christine Laffer, and Anne McGinn, among others for helping to organize this.

American Tapestry Alliance would like to sponsor Small Formats again in 2006. We need an organizer to make this happen. Is there anyone in the Michigan area who is willing to take it on?

American Tapestry Alliance is growing stronger and stronger as a supporting organization of contemporary tapestry. We have an exciting board and wonderful volunteers. If you want to get involved please contact us.

Alex and Christine

About this issue

By Linda Rees

We have many interesting articles about weavers who create nonrectangular tapestries. In several of the articles there are references to other artists who have influenced their work. Searching the Internet can provide information about most of the artist mentioned. We are also pleased that ATA member, Joann Cromley of Afton, MI, responded by submitting images of her shaped tapestries. Joann states that she has always woven geometric tapestries but wanted to go "beyond the straight selvages - to actually allow the shapes to come alive."

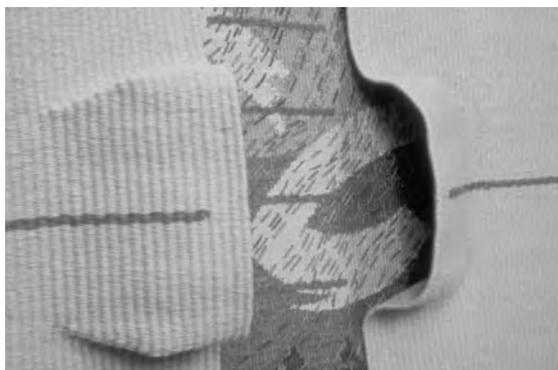


Joann Cromley,
"Hourglass of Childhood,"
58" x 20

A new feature is coming to Tapestry Topics, a column called ASK ATA. Read about it on page 21.

Initially, when we started soliciting reviews of tapestry exhibits, I specified that they be written by outside observers, not organizers or exhibiting members. However, it is logistically a challenge to find reviewers to accomplish this goal, especially because we do not have funds for professional writers. In an attempt to communicate about the activities across the country, we will accept thoughtful reviews by participating

members. I would like to encourage regional groups who are planning exhibits to make an attempt to find an objective source for review early in the planning. In either case, the goal is to have an objective review. If you are traveling and fortunate enough to see a relevant exhibit, please consider writing about it. Some of our best reviews have been by our own ATA members.



Susan Iverson, "Horizon - Red Line"
detail of tapestry with pulled warp,
see article, page 6.

Letter to the Editor

The following letter from Joann Cromley was initially sent to Monique Lehman who suggested it be sent to her through the ATA newsletter, so that a discussion could take place.

Dear Monique,

I would like to commend you on an outstanding job as Exhibition Chair for the American Tapestry Biennial Five exhibit. I found the art work quite unique, expressive and beautiful. For a tapestry weaver, the body of work is inspiring.

My concern is the extremely negative and psychologically destructive comments in the catalog by Tomas Osinski, Juror. I found his remarks scathing, stinging, and hurtful and wonder why? Does such blatant and diminishing criticism have any positive value to the artists or the art? I found his remarks unnecessarily painful. It also sounds as if he dreaded the entire process, which makes me wonder why he consented to be a juror.

Your response to my concerns would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely and with respect,
Joanne Cromley
Afton, Michigan

Dear Joanne,

I had exactly the same feelings about Tomas Osinski's essay when I read it the first time, I even asked him to rewrite it; he refused and asked me to print without any corrections. When I read it again I started to pay attention to what he said and not how he expressed it. He made a few valuable points.

The juror wants to see original artwork, the repetition and imitation is boring.

Tapestry weaving takes a long time and the artist should spend more time thinking about what he will weave and not waste his time on trivial subjects.

Tapestry artists should be more controversial; they don't need to worry about everyone liking them.

continued...

Artists should create art and not decorate boring interiors.

By criticizing all the entries and purposely diminishing their value he elevated even more the one that he liked. Most Eastern European critics have a different style of writing than American writers. The writer is expected to be controversial and negative; he often makes fun of the artist. The critic sometimes is sarcastic but always thought provoking.

Osinski didn't care if we liked him and he achieved what he planned, he made us upset to the point that we had to notice his essay and remember what he said. To my surprise he said that he enjoyed being the judge for the Biennial.

Monique Lehman ATB 5 exhibition chair

(A second letter sent to Monique)

Keeping in mind that for at least the last hundred years, few artists or critics agree on what is valid art or literature, I have a reaction to Tomas Osinski's statement about Biennial 5. One who agrees to be a juror of an exhibit should state his criteria clearly and completely. His statement, "I was searching for some message about 'Universal STUFF' and I merely found things that were trivial," leaves me wishing for HIS definitions of "trivia" and "Universal STUFF." He never gives us these, nor does he give examples of what he was looking for. He found one lonely example of the universal in all of the three hundred submissions. Dare we ask which one that was, so we can get a glimmering of what he approves? Could we be allowed to know which few examples "stick out" as excellent?

Does the photo of himself perhaps give us a clue about his attitude? Is he telling us his judgments are intentionally contradictory? Is he telling us that the trivial can reveal the universal only when it brings a new awareness or recognition greater than it actually portrays? Is he teasing us?

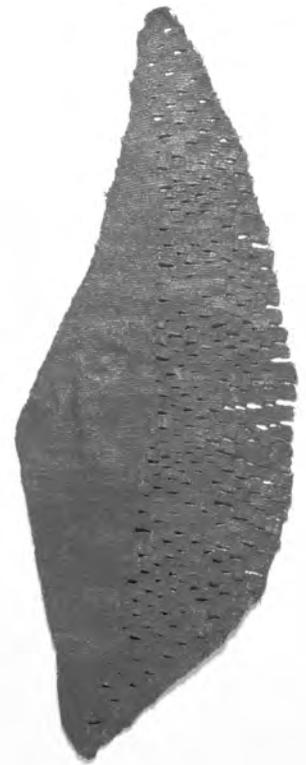
I would love to know, in concise language, what this artist is trying to tell us.

Jeanne Walker

A Different Direction

by Sharon
Marcus

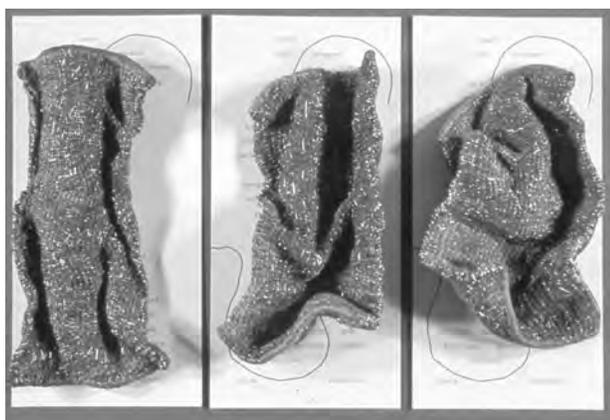
Beginning in 1997 I began to tire of the flat, pictorial and essentially rectangular format of my tapestries. Since 1978 I had been working in a fairly traditional style, using cotton seine twine warp, wool weft, and a cartoon traced onto the warp. It seemed time for a more experimental approach. At the same time I began to move away from thinking about tapestry as an exclusively narrative medium, and considered how I could evoke responses from viewers without imagery.



Sharon Marcus, "Burn,"
44"h x 16.5" to 3"w, 2003,
mixed media, wool warp,
linen, cotton and wire weft.
Exhibited in ATB5

The initial work in this new style came about in response to an artists' retreat I attended in Lake Mungo, Australia in 1997. After this experience I decided to work not exclusively in tapestry, but to branch out into book arts and metals media as well. The first tapestry in this body of work was "Site," wedge-weave woven in linen and wire, with a small amount of curving linear imagery. Though the three parts of the piece were woven as rectangles, they were manipulated post-loom into a high-relief, shaped presentation. The second tapestry in the Lake Mungo work was "Chapters," a set of ten small, linen, hemp and wire wedge-weave woven, embroidered tapestries, stained with tea and positioned on laminated hand letter-press cards containing text. As with "Site" the small tapestries were woven as rectangles, and manipulated after weaving into a more sculptural format. These forms not only had high relief, but intriguing shapes as well.

I have always found it useful to recycle my own imagery. It is a means of delving more deeply into the same material to explore its potential. I have done this since the early days of working pictorially, but continue to do so whenever it seems appropriate. Importing slide images of the ten parts of "Chapters" into the computer, I began to look at them simply from the standpoint of their two-dimensional outlines, appreciating the interest of the shapes without considering their high relief characteristics. From this observation came a group of ten more small units comprising the "Walls of China" tapestry. In this case I used the silhouettes of the "Chapters" pieces as the outlines for ten wedge-weave woven, flat, shaped tapestries. The weft was wool/rabbit hair and wire and they were tea-stained after weaving.



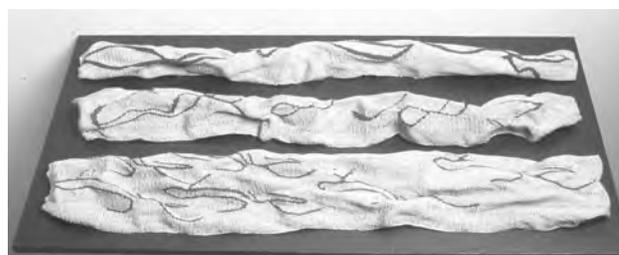
Sharon Marcus, "Chapters" Weavings
6-7"h x 3-4"w x 1"d, 1999
linen, hemp and wire, wedge-weave tea-stained
and embroidered. Cards: 8.25"h x 4"w,
hand-letterpress laminated cards

The sculpted and shaped tapestries woven for the Lake Mungo installation evolved into shaped pieces in a very natural way without a great deal of pre-planning. I chose materials and techniques that supported the over-riding focus about the colonial impact on early Australia. I believe that the ease with which I went from flat to sculpted to shaped work in this instance came about because my mind was very open to a major change in my working process at that time. Being in the stark Outback landscape, away from the familiarity of my studio in the Pacific Northwest, I had an ideal opportunity for a transformation in my working process. Though the actual tapestries were completed in my studio, the impetus which made them possible came from

Australia. The total body of work stemming from the experience extended from 1997 to 2001, and includes photography, book arts, metals and textiles.

In 2003 I began the "Personal Knowledge" series, which is on-going as of this writing. Currently seven tapestries have been completed in this group: "Burn," "Facade," "Shield," "Intersection," "Connections," "Seam," and "Restraint." Conceptually the work relates to my current interest in natural coverings - skins, crusts, husks, barks, hides, pelts, peels, rinds, sheaths, shells, plates, veneers and so on. I am curious how these various coverings relate visually and in a tactile sense to weft-faced textiles. How do the textures, patterns, structural lines and forms correspond to weaving? Rather than attempt to replicate what is found in nature in a pictorial way, I decided to approach it from a structural point of view, applying a limited number of tapestry techniques to the problem, primarily eccentric, shaped weaving and joins.

The tapestries are woven very spontaneously. The outline is pre-determined and traced onto the warp, but all weaving occurs in response to the shape as the tapestry develops. The materials in the first ten of these pieces are wool warp and linen and wire weft. Ends are darned in afterwards so the tapestries are completely double-sided. They are then distressed, and mixed media materials applied. The resulting tapestries are flat and hang on the wall, but I have plans to bring more dimension to the work as the series continues. After years of working in a more constrained manner, I am exalting in the degree of freedom that this approach has brought. My hope is to create work which is evocative and archetypal, connecting to the viewer on a subconscious level.



Sharon Marcus, "Site,"
1"h x 32"w x 16"d when lying flat,
1998 linen and wire wedge-weave

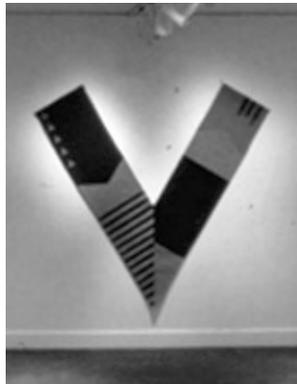
Tapestry as Object

By Susan Iverson

When I first started weaving tapestries, I associated the technique with the ability to produce a fabric with strength and texture that could come off the wall - to become dimensional - to become an object. I must admit that this was the early 70's and the artists that I was looking at were making tapestries that did everything but hang flat on the wall. I saw tapestry, despite its history, as a new art form - one that could hold its own with the contemporary painting and sculpture of the time. I was looking at the work of Peter and Ritzi Jacobi, Jagoda Buic, Magdalena Abakanowicz, and of course, Herman Scholten, a Dutch artist who significantly influenced the way I thought about tapestry. Having seen his tapestry "Yellow Braid" in New York and his work in the book "Beyond Craft: the Art Fabric," I started to think about the technical side of dimensional and shaped tapestry. That was the beginning of my fascination with pulled warp. I was truly intrigued with the notion that you could weave something flat, and then make it dimensional without any artificial means.

In the early 70's I was at Tyler School of Art, Temple University studying with Adela Akers and I had the good fortune to enter the program the same year as John McQueen. John was weaving then and producing woven objects in very inventive ways. He made a number of pulled warp objects but quickly moved on to the basketry techniques that he became so well known for. Adela did some beautiful pulled warp pieces later in the 80's. I made a few small samples to explore the technique but had no serious ideas for major pieces at that time. I did not use shaping until the late 70's and early 80's when I did a series of 6-7 ft. tall V shaped tapestries. Around that same time I did a few workshops and lectures about pulled warp.

I came from an undergraduate program at Colorado State University where Sherri Smith



Susan Iverson, Virginia Museum of Fine Art - gallery shot from 1981 of "V" shaped tapestry done with pulled warp.

stressed multi-shaft weaving and making the weave work for you. When I switched to tapestry, I missed the technical problem solving that was so inherent in pattern weaving. Tapestry can be so beautifully straight forward. I liked what I perceived as the honesty of tapestry but I missed the mental games involved in working with complex structures. Pulled warp filled my need to experiment and solve problems. Over the years I have woven quite a few samples of pulled warp and I feel that I haven't even scratched the surface. Pulled warp is an extremely versatile technique that can make a simple curve, an undulating surface, a complex geometric dimensional surface or many other things. It lends itself to the notion of tapestry as object. It can physically make a tapestry 3-dimensional or, even if the tapestry stays relatively flat, the movement of the warp contradicts the idea that the tapestry is merely image.

In the mid 90's after many years of teaching pulled warp, but not using it in my own work, I started using it again. While I have always thought of my tapestries as objects, they have been relatively flat. The dimension of the thick fabric and the fact that the image, color, and texture are formed by the structure itself makes me refer to many of the tapestries as objects. In the "Horizon" series that I



Susan Iverson, detail of "Useless Dreams" - side view to show the depth.

started in the mid 90's, the tapestries became dimensional and came off the wall by several inches. I used pulled warp to make ripples or folds in the tapestry. They were as much about being fabric as they were about the concept/visual content. Currently I am using pulled warp in about half of my work - when I need a dimensional surface I use it. It is another tool, a means to an end.

Mary Kester's Formed Objects

By Linda Rees

Shaped tapestries by Mary Kester were selected for three of the five American Tapestry Biennials, exhibits 1, 3, and 5. She has been quietly weaving "formed" tapestries since the early 1970s.

A native of Iowa, she discovered weaving after trying various media at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls. She was never interested in painting but rather was looking for a way to "do objects." Substance was of more importance than a picture. Throughout the decade she produced weaving, acquiring more proficiency through classes with Walter Nottingham at the University of Iowa and at Penland. As the decade progressed, she did many commissions.

Mary's first weaving "was flat but it had holes in it and hairy parts." Her pieces were not really dense enough to consider as tapestry until a move to Syracuse, NY, gave her the opportunity to get an MFA at Syracuse University in 1981. Since that time she has used a scaffold loom but her focus has not wavered from an interest in depicting form through depth illusion and weaving in layers.

In the ATBI catalogue, Mary states:

My tapestries depict forms from landscape and human studies. "Cloaked" is part of a portal series. In this case, the portal is cloaked by a softer drape contrasted by thrusting side struts. I create depth of form by making layers as I weave and by picturing depth through shading and color juxtaposition. The dense substance of tapestry fabric allows me to create both layers and detailed image necessary for making the depth illusion I seek. I also admit to a love of the tactile process and the solitary time requirements of tapestry work. I find the contradiction of depth illusion and fiber substance intriguing and hope the viewer does too.



Mary Kester, "Brittany Portal," 72" x 69" x 4"

In 1995, probably the year when this artist's statement was written, Mary took a trip to Ireland where she discovered a compelling fascination with monolithic stones. The stone portals were a physical manifestation of what she had already started to express in "Cloaked" and other portal pieces. She has visited other sites in France and Scotland since and finds it invigorating to be "studying again." Mary likes

"to work with abstraction, not direct depiction and feels that the neolithic sites, which are enigmatic ruins of unknown people for unknown purposes, qualify."

"Kerbstone," Mary's entry in ATB5, is a more direct interpretation of a stone at Newgrange, Ireland than most of the earlier pieces in the series, such as the intriguing "Brittany Portal" from the ATB3 exhibit. While the form of "Kerbstone" is realistic, she has altered the colors from the stone's relatively uniform gray and extrapolated the meanings and form of the symbols on this "pretty rock". (See photo pg 18.)

Mary has been working on two thematic series for several years. Images in the second "Quarters" series, such as "Colorado Bloom," have a decided Georgia O'Keefe feel, and make even more use of layering than the "Portal" series does. She uses two warps together and when she wants to break the fabric into two layers, she switches the warp pairing. If she had been hand picking the units 1 and 2 alternating with 3 and 4, now she would have 1 and 3 on the front and 2 and 4 as the back layer. If she makes more than one layer that needs to come away from the body of the tapestry. She leaves enough

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extra warp when she cuts the weaving off so that she can pull it back down to where the first layer would be extended and finished. The process may require needle-nosed pliers for leverage.

Obviously, Mary must plan her design very carefully before beginning the weaving. Once she has her design worked out she makes the large cartoon. Most of the time she weaves the tapestry on its side.



Mary Kester, "Colorado Bloom," 80" x 90"

Tabs are woven on the edge that will rotate to form the top with cotton yarn of about the same density as the body of the piece. Horizontal slits are needed in this portion to simulate how a seamstress would clip the facing for a collar. A steel rod is forged to match the top's profile.

In order to achieve the desired layering effect she has evolved a unique system of working from both the front and back of the warp. In converting an outbuilding that had a dirt floor for her studio, they created a sunken central area for her two weaving bays. A large wooden beam was embedded into the concrete. Huge eyehooks in the beam and in its corresponding beam in the ceiling provide a stable means of anchoring her scaffold looms. The space is 18 feet tall and allows her to move freely from one side to the other. . Mary believes "one of the good things about having several types of studio before is that this time I got it right."

Marika Szàraz

by **Kathe Todd Hooker**

Marika Szàraz has been weaving tapestry since 1975. Her first five years of learning to weave tapestry were in Hungary weaving tapestries from cartoons provided by leading contemporary artists. She married and moved to Belgium where she maintains a studio, teaches and weaves her extraordinary shaped tapestries.

I first saw a tapestry by Ms. Szàraz in an ATA show "World Tapestry Today" in Chicago in 1988 and again at the ATB2 show in Atlanta in 1998. We were also in a miniature show in Sombathely, Hungary many years ago. In those years, I was more interested in trying to figure out where I could show my small format/sewing thread tapestries than shaping tapestries. I was fascinated with the facts that her tapestries were not in the more traditional square or rectangular shapes and that some of them were small format. I had been introduced to creating shaped pieces in graduate school so I was familiar with how they were created.

Shaped tapestry is a term that Ms Szàraz and most of Europe find puzzling and she just calls what she does "my technique". In a recent e-mail she thought perhaps she might call it "technique szama". In North America, shaped tapestry is a catchall phrase for anything woven in tapestry technique that isn't a flat-woven rectangular tapestry. Her technique is based on leaving wedge shaped voids in the structure of a flat woven tapestry. Later after the tapestry is cut off the loom the wefts are pulled along the warps in a way that distorts the rib structure and shapes the tapestries.

When viewing Ms. Szàraz work, it would be very easy to get lost in the magic of "how" and forget the equally fascinating "why". It is a common attitude in American tapestry weaving, that tapestry is at its best when technique disappears and the design becomes the most important element. Ms. Szàraz, however, takes the opposite tack. In her own words "I narrow down my subject until it is the essential-- of the structure, the tapestry. The structure becomes the medium and the subject in the same time."

Ms. Szàraz exhibited her first shaped tapestry weavings in 1980. She began experimenting on the computer with the shaped designs in 1979 and feels she is still discovering - even though she is no longer interested in using the computer to design her work. "Each tapestry brings me another question, another solution, and [is] full of surprises." She loved weaving tapestry, but felt the "rectangular shape was an obstacle" and gave her a "closed feeling." In an article by Peter Snowdon, from "The Bulletin," April 29, 2004, she said: "Working in a square always bugged me. I felt like I was caught in a trap, and wanted to get out." When asked in an e-mail why she weaves shaped tapestries that aren't rectangular and square, she said, she had 'never asked why because it was a simple continuation. As a child, when listening to stories and fables her question was always the same: "and after... what happened after?" Through teaching, experiencing the act of weaving, and studying whatever she creates technically she has no fear of the doing. She has internalized the techniques until they are part of her.

When asked if any of her designs were ever serendipitous, she said, "For me [chance or accidental] don't exist. I have a trust and reliance. I am the executor, channel. I propose, but I accept also."

Talking about her philosophy of weaving and art, she explained:

Kandinsky created abstract painting to express something inexpressible. I would like to show in my art works something essential, [focus the] feeling of essential as harmony, peace, faith, and communication. I would like to transmit this feeling of art to people... Through this [narrowing] you can feel the long hours spent next to the loom, ritual motion and gesture. You are one with the material, no times, nothing around, only you and peace. It is a great moment of joy. My life is filled with great moments.



Marika Szàraz, "Contemplation," 89" x 44", Exhibited in n ATB5.

She prefers not to weave figuratively because she feels this would be an "expression of limitations" and likes the sensibilities of abstract painting.

As trite and overused as the expression seems, in the case of Ms. Szàraz's tapestry it is appropriate to say "less is much more". The structure of the tapestry and the play of light across the ribbed structures have become the statement. Simplicity is used to define a complexity and multiplicity of ideas: "The woven surface within which the routes are more important than the destination." The work is meant to be contemplative and meditative, both in the doing and viewing. Many of us who weave tapestry have commented on the place one's mind goes when all of the elemental levels of tapestry weaving become one with time and place. Ms. Szàraz's tapestries are the final step in this expression of that place. "It is the sensation of going nowhere in a temporal moment of peace and solitude."

Her designs appeal to the viewer who takes the time to look and contemplate in much the same way as mazes, chanting and Zen sand gardens appeal to the viewer and listener. In an interview with Ann De Bodt in the Art Magazine Ms. Szàraz states: "I experience my work as an exteriorization of internal silence."

In the same interview with Anne De Bodt, Ms. Szàraz states: "For me a very simple shape harmonized with empty space gives the impression of the song of silence, of harmony, of serenity... Its message is so evident that trying to explain it could only falsify it. This form invites the spectator to participate instead of just looking." For me this has been true every time I have seen one of her tapestries in real time.

Questioned about where she saw her work going and where she wanted it to go, Ms. Szàraz replied, "Forward-- to the most far reaching discoveries and to the surprises."

Shaped tapestry: Why?

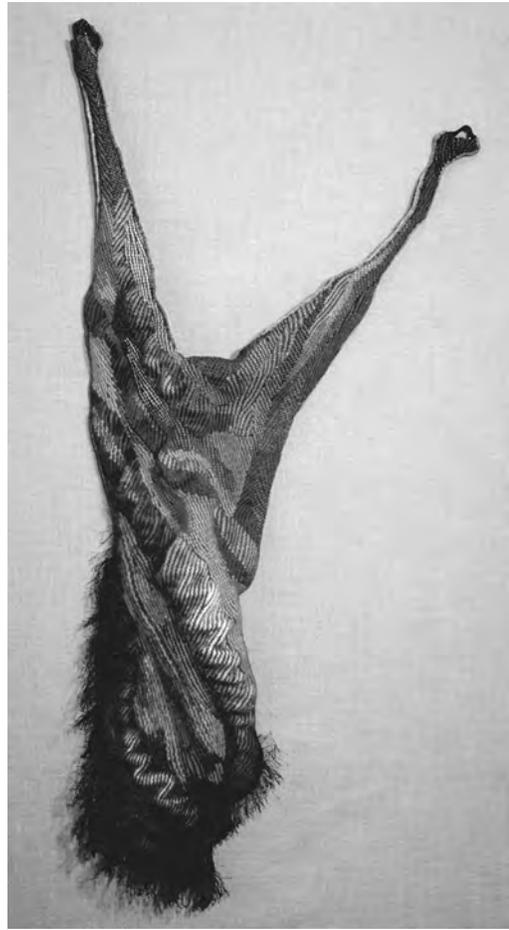
by Christine Laffer

The possibilities of how to approach tapestry weaving usually start with weaving from the front or the back of the loom and stop with the choice to weave from a cartoon turned on its side or kept vertical. All of these options refer to the orientation of the tapestry maker to the image as it is woven at the loom. The unexamined assumption is that the tapestry will have a rectangular shape. This shape comes from the perpendicular relationship between the stretched warps and the beams of the loom. The resulting rectangle makes sense to a weaver in the same way that a bronze caster finds sense in pouring molten metal down and not up when casting.

While this analogy of tapestry weaving to bronze casting doesn't really hold much truth, I used it to imply that certain physical laws play an absolute or determinant role in the process of weaving. While it is true that woven yarns obey the laws of physics, gravity is not paramount among them. Tension, compression, elasticity, and friction provide the dominant network of forces that make interlaced structures work.

In 1987, Marika Szàraz pointed out to me that tapestry has more in common with basket weaving than with any other weave structure. It took me several years to fully decipher what she meant. Now, whenever I feel the warps under my fingers I know that their taut verticality is only temporary. Once off the loom they will find other directions that depend on the stress and structure of the wefts that surround them.

Shaped tapestry sets its boundaries without accepting warp and beams as fixed, determinate entities. A tapestry maker might find that a rectangular shape does fit the content of the piece. At other times, it can interfere. For example, if you wish to weave a fish within a rectangular field then you must make decisions about what that environment consists of and how much illusion of three-dimensional space you want to convey. Some of your content will be determined by the nature of the pictorial field.



Christine Laffer, "Suspension," 57"x 27"x 4"
1994, wool, cotton, linen, bas relief tapestry

I will try to summarize my thoughts on this from two sides. If I were to approach the rectilinearity of tapestry from a textile viewpoint, I can see that both yardage and rugs have sound reasons for shapes that fit the parameters of carpentry. It makes sense that the logic of the grid would carry the most weight in making textiles when we want them to fit the rooms that we live in. Further, a rectangular cloth rolls or folds neatly and efficiently.

On the other hand, if you accept the William Morris/Jean Lurçat definition of tapestry - which has proven its validity - then tapestry contains images within a shallow pictorial field. This field does not lend itself to delicate atmospheric nuances but instead brings the viewer constantly back to the surface with bold color and form. If the shallowness of this field becomes the same as the surface itself then the image and the object become one and the same. Ritzi Jacobi achieved this ultimate distil-

lation of a tapestry with "La Dernière de Cette Serie" (1987), erasing any image it might have carried and leaving only the tapestry itself marked by time and misfortune. At this point, tapestry as object has taken its position on the threshold between the illusory and the real.

Clearly, looking back, Magdalena Abakanowicz had discovered this presence of the object in works dating from 1962 and on. Marcel Marois discovered, in the early 1970s, that he could assemble several pieces woven on different warps into one piece using layers as part of his content. Archie Brennan's "Steak and Sausages" (1972) may have been intended as an elaborate joke, but it certainly shows a valid exploration of shaped tapestry as real object. Marika Szàraz produced shaped pieces since the late 1980s, if not earlier. Janet Moore, whose work I first saw in 1990, brought shape and image together in an almost mythical way. (See Tapestry Topics Fall, 2003, pg 4)

Once you decide not to weave the ground as a space and the content as a representation of reality, then some previously unencountered difficulties arise. How is the work displayed? What is its relationship to the wall?



Christine Laffer, "Untitled Drawing 1," 11"x 8", 1992, ink on paper, drawing

Your content will have to respond to the real world in a way that fits with the object's physical qualities. Instead of creating an image of a fish, you create a fish-like object - an analog - with the shape and markings of a "real" fish.

tions on all sides of the spectrum, from ambivalence, to the extremes of humor or distaste. Second, the immediacy of the object causes the viewer to read the piece in a different mental framework

This does two things. First, it produces a certain anxiety in both the artist and the viewer. This can result in reac-

where expectations of art and its standards of judgment are questioned or modified.

I write these things in the process of looking back. I can fill in the narrative gaps with information accumulated over the last eighteen years. But in 1992, as I developed in skill and the issues presented by tapestry grew more focused for me, I



Christine Laffer, "Cloth of Construction: Tarps," 8.5' x 11.5' 2003, wool, bas relief tapestry

grew desperate. My struggle with representation versus object qualities had reached a point where I had to resolve them. I decided to complete a Masters of Fine Arts degree at a local university where questions about the complexities and puzzles of art making could be answered. I had started a large piece, "Cloth of Construction: Tarps" in 1991 where I intentionally developed eccentrics to buckle the weave and create a synthesis of image and surface. From there, between 1993 and 1995 as I completed my degree, shaped eccentric tapestry became my entire method of working.

The key that unlocked this wellspring turned out to be the work of two artists, that of Eva Hesse and Joseph Beuys. Each of these artists had stumbled upon the instantaneous perceptual link between shape - particularly silhouette - and reality. In general, we exist in and move through the world based on visual factors (phenomenological information) that we process at an incredible speed. We react to shape, size, motion, and color before we even begin to think in terms of language. If the artwork is square, motionless and colorful, we can engage

with it as peaceful and we then progress to seeing the image and reacting to its content. If the artwork is oddly shaped, moves, or is hard to see, then we are on guard until the object is properly identified. Kinetic sculpture, in particular, has explored this terrain.

Drawings that I made in late 1992 that explored the power of silhouette became small shaped tapestries. The audience response that I had access to at the university made it clear that presentation of these tapestries was as important as the weaving of them. Rarely did anyone ask me how long it took to weave, or whether I had painted the cartoon in gouache or acrylic, or what yarns did I use - none of these questions arose. Instead, people tried to figure out what it was they were looking at (they were, in fact, on guard), what they thought of it, and what I was trying to convey. Once I ironed out the presentational difficulties (still in flux), they reacted to the work outside of the frame normally used by viewers of tapestry. It put me in fresh territory. And I had no desire to go back.

Shaped Coptic Textiles

by Mary Lane

The term Coptic is derived from a Greek word meaning Egyptian. The Egyptians were subjected to the rule of a series of outside cultures beginning in 332 BC, when the Ptolemaic Greeks conquered their country, When the Arabs conquered Egypt in AD 640, bringing their Islamic culture, they continued to use the term Coptic to refer to the native people who by then were primarily Christian. It is still used to refer to the Christian minority in Egypt today.

The "Coptic period" in Egypt began in the late 3rd century AD, under the influence of late Roman art and continued to develop during the Byzantine Period, AD395 - 611. Its efflorescence coincided with the integration of Christianity into Egyptian society. Hence, Coptic textiles date from the late Roman period to Islamic times. They include garments, hangings, cushion covers and other household decorations. Earlier burials from the Dynastic Period in Egypt contain textiles such as mummy wrappings or grave goods, but textile remains are considerably more numerous after the dynastic practice of mummification was abandoned in the 4th

century AD. After that people were buried fully clothed with additional textiles wrapping the body. Most of the excavated textiles show signs of wear, indicating that they were not made specifically for burials.¹

Among the vast repertoire of Coptic textiles, tapestries exist primarily as fragments. Many of these were shaped and originally adorned plain-woven linen tunics. Like other Coptic fabrics, tunics, were woven in both rep and tapestry weave. A linen ground cloth was combined with tapestry ornaments in the form of bands, squares, ovals and roundels. To achieve transitions from plain to tapestry weave, the warp might be doubled or trebled in the tapestry areas or some warps might be skipped and allowed to hang on the back as floats, or trimmed later.²

The Copts adopted the tunic from the Romans, who conquered Egypt from the Greeks in 30 BC. They were often worn in layers, the outermost being decorated with the colorful, tapestry inserts. Because the tapestry areas were more time consuming to weave, the width of the bands and the extent of additional decorative ornaments reflected the value of the cloth and the wealth and rank of the wearer. Although the form of the tunic remains fairly consistent through time, the mode of construction changes. Early tunics were woven as one piece of fabric - starting with one sleeve, proceeding through the body and finishing with the other sleeve. This layout requires a loom almost three meters wide. Eventually (maybe in the 4th or 5th C), the tunic sleeves were woven separately and sewn onto the body of the tunic, which was still woven from side to side with a slit opening for the neck. The loom width required for this is only half that of the poncho style construction. Other modifications in design include weaving the ornaments separately which meant they could reuse ones from worn garments. Weaving the tapestry sections separately would have also allowed for specialization among the weavers.³

Tapestry panels on tunics usually consist of a pair of purple, longitudinal bands running from the shoulder down the front and back. (Fig. 1) The long narrow bands, called clavus bands, or clavi, are either unpatterned or combined with linen.⁴ Additional tapestry embellishments on tunics include: orbiculae (round or oval ornaments) or other shaped ends to the clavi; tabulae (squares) placed at the shoulders, sleeves or hem; and trans-



Fig. 1 Tunic with cavaliers,
45.5 cm x 85 cm , Akmin 7th
C Rutschowskaya, *Coptic Fabrics*.

verse bands at the neck-line between the clavi and the sleeve.

Several factors hinder accurate dating. Most textiles were collected before archaeology became systematized and consequently are not accompanied by prove-

nance, stratigraphic dating or other contextual records. In addition, grave looters looking for more precious materials often discarded textiles, separating them from artifacts, such as coins, that are more easily dated. Because textiles were often cut into pieces and sold to several museums, understanding even the form and format of Egyptian textiles is difficult.

Although wall paintings, mosaics, book illuminations and written sources give important information about textiles that help date pieces, style has been the principal dating criterion. Stylistic dating, however, is also problematic, primary because the earlier classical style persisted during the later development of a more abstract mode. These two styles occur at different times and places in many variants and intermixtures. The variable ability of weavers to replicate the models; the slower dissemination rate of stylistic changes to provincial workshops and the development of independent regional styles further complicate dating. The complexity of such factors, however, results in a richly diverse corpus of Coptic textiles.

Ornaments on tunics were often placed at the shoulders and knees, two vulnerable joints subject to disease and crippling. The placement of the decoration may have been apotropaic, warding off the evil eye. Defense against the evil eye was typically achieved by an eye that stared back with a power that counteracted the evil force; an upraised hand; or a design so complex and fascinating, e.g. an inter-

lace pattern, that it captured the stare of the evil eye and kept it moving.⁵

"Tunic with Cavaliers" is a typical example of a 7th C Coptic tunic. (Fig.1) The longitudinal clavi terminate in palmettes with two tapestry squares at the shoulder. The clavi bands are ornamented with grape clusters. The grape harvest, associated with Dionysus and death and resurrection is therefore symbolic of the harvesting of lives. The flanking squares (Fig. 2) show a mounted rider with his hand raised. This image combines the apotropaic, protective function of the raised hand with the mounted rider, a symbol of Christian victory of life over death, and also reminiscent of Christian orant, or praying figures.

Christian saints are often depicted astride horses, in either of two iconographical types, the armed fighting horseman who evokes the militant triumph of Christianity over paganism and the static horseman, who is surrounded by a halo of his martyrdom or apostate.⁶

Monochrome tapestries, such as "Tunic with cavaliers," rely on line and silhouette for their effect, a design sensibility also present in painted Greek vases. The most successful achieve a sense of balance and clarity amidst their detail. In this piece the image is defined by the combination of the purple tapestry weave with a technique referred to as "flying shuttle", in which the lighter linen thread floats



Fig. 2 Tunic with cavaliers, detail, Akmin 7th
C Rutschowskaya, *Coptic Fabrics*.

across the surface of the fabric in order to create finer, vertical lines, especially apparent in the figure and the horse. Flying shuttle is developed to a much greater extent in the patterns common in tapestry inserts such as "Tunic roundel with a human face." (Fig. 3) (See online color Tapestry Topics.)

Multicolored tapestry inserts may be realistic, with hatching and other illusionistic devices, or they may utilize large areas of bold color and/or conventionalized detail. Three examples will display the variety present as cultural changes produced a shift from realism to abstraction.



Fig. 4 Orbiculus with the head of the Nile god, 3rd C, 29.6 cm x 29.4 cm Rutschowskaya, *Coptic Fabrics*.



Fig. 5 Head of Dionysus, 3rd - 4th C Volbach, *Early Decorative Fabrics*.



Fig. 6 Rectangular Panel with a Bust of a Woman, 5th C, 31.5 cm x 24.9cm, Trilling, *The Roman Heritage*.

The "Orbiculus with the head of the Nile god," (3rd - 4th Centuries) (Fig. 4) exemplifies the fusion between the Nilotic imagery of Dynastic Egypt and the classical realism of the Greek and Roman cultures. The figure personifies the ancient Egyptian god of the Nile River. His hair contains riparian flora and he holds the symbol of the river's fertility, the cornucopia. The style of the figure, however, is classical, like late Roman portraiture. Within the body and the drapery, hatching with several values of a flesh tone creates an illusionistic, three-dimensional representation of the figure. The finely rendered features of the face and beard enhance the individualism of the figure. The Nile god is glancing over his shoulder, as though caught at a specific moment in time. The decorative, circular border contains the bounty of the Nile.

The persistence of pagan motifs, used singularly or in a newly Christianized context, reflects both the

cultural complexity taking place and the underlying similarities between the two belief systems. Both are built upon dualities symbolized by battles between men and animals or mythical beasts, or by pairs of identical humans.⁷ The structural similarities allowed for the incorporation of elements of the older, indigenous belief system into Christianity, thus easing the transition.

Around 450 - 500 AD the shift to the Byzantine style becomes apparent. The "Head of Dionysus" (Fig. 5) no longer displays the same interest in realism seen in the representation of the Nile River god.

The Greek god, Dionysus, often shown with a garland of grape vines, replaced Osiris, the Egyptian god of the dead and resurrection, allowing for his subsequent assimilation into Christian iconography.⁸ This image of Dionysus does not express the individualism seen in the portrait of the Nile River god. The Byzantine style favors absolutism and ceremony and is marked by abstraction and otherworldliness. Forms are simplified, anatomy becomes less precise, and features are stylized. Note the enlarged eyes with thick outlines, the broad caricatured mouth and distortion in the proportions of the body. The interaction between the foreground and the background also plays a much greater role in the image.

Such stylistic changes do not necessarily imply a loss of technical skill. More commonly they reflect cultural changes. The prevalent imagery and style of a particular time period reflects the current cultural

ideology. The stylistic changes seen in the representations of the Nile River god and Dionysus mirror the shift from a more humanistic, pagan culture to the other worldly focus of the Christian Byzantine period in which the individuality of the person and the specificities of life on earth were of less importance.

The extremely conventionalized approach to representation during the later Byzantine period is apparent in the "Rectangular panel with a bust of a woman" (Fig. 6), dated to the 5th C or later. The frontal, static portrait employs a geometric approach to form. Facial features and structural anatomy are reduced to heavy lines and circles, jewelry to a line of squares, and hair to a repeating arc. The bust is surrounded by equally stylized vine motifs and squares containing flowers. This style, which focuses more on composition and design than on realism, emphasizes the timeless and spiritual nature of life rather than the humanity of the individual.

The stylistic variety exhibited in this small selection of Coptic tapestries reflects the influences of the various cultures that ruled Egypt. From the incorporation of new deities and spiritual faiths, to the assimilation of stylistic devices, these transformations mark the interchange between cultures. In the case of Coptic art, this interchange did not involve a wholesale adoption of each succeeding ruling culture's artistic mode, but rather a complex and unique blending of elements from Dynastic, Greek, Roman and Islamic art. The lively intermixture of motifs, the strong colors and the technical weaving skills combine to produce a vital and compelling art form that continues to delight viewers.

¹ Thompson, Deborah. *Coptic Textiles in the Brooklyn Museum*. New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1971, 1.

² Hoskins, Nancy Arthur. *The Coptic Tapestry Albums & the Archaeologist of Antinoé, Albert Gayet*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004, 43-44.

³ Carroll, Diane Lee. *Looms and Textiles of the Copts: Memoirs of the California Academy of Sciences, Number 11*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986, 40-41.

⁴ Since the cost of the tunics was based on the weight of the dyed yarn, a combination of wool and linen would have extended the more costly dyed woolen threads over a greater area.

⁵ Carroll, Diane Lee. *Looms and Textiles of the Copts: Memoirs of the California Academy of Sciences, Number 11*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986, 54.

⁶ Rutschowskaya, Marie Helene. *Coptic Fabrics*. Paris: Editions Adam Biro, 1990, 137-140.

⁷ Carroll, Diane Lee. *Looms and Textiles of the Copts: Memoirs of the California Academy of Sciences, Number 11*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986, 65.

⁸ Rutschowskaya, Marie Helene. *Coptic Fabrics*. Paris: Editions Adam Biro, 1990, 82.

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New Book: *Shaped Tapestry* by Kathe Todd Hooker.

**Fine Fiber Press and Studio
Albany, Oregon, 2004.**

Review by Sharon Marcus

After a brief historical introduction, the book begins with a chapter on "Looms for Shaped Weaving". Interestingly, all of the looms mentioned are of "off-loom" or portable loom design, many of them familiar to people who teach weaving to children and young adults. The implication with the focus on such looms, is that there is a natural connection between shaped tapestry and small scale hand-made looms. There is only a brief mention of stationary looms for more large scale work. The various looms Todd-Hooker describes are: pin looms, using foam core, Firtex™, or cork; slash looms made of slashed cardboard; slash loom variations such as circles, boxes, and cylinders; wrapped loom cylinders; comb looms; frame looms; and a variety of miscellaneous ideas for ways of warping in an "off-loom" and small-scale manner.

"Weaving Basics", the second section of the book, deals with weaving materials, small hand tools, and techniques for stabilizing the beginning and ending of shaped tapestries. It provides the kind of preliminary information important for commencing a weaving. Of particular importance is the caution that tapestries woven with an intent to manipulate through pulled warps, should choose fibers that are smooth, and slide easily in post-loom finishing.

continued...

The Gallery Section could have been substantially improved by expanding it to include a few of the many, well-known artists outside the United States who have produced innovative shaped tapestries e.g. Tass Mavrogordato (UK), Shelly Goldsmith (UK) Yumi Kobayashi Lindsay (UK), Silvia Heyden (Switzerland), Joanna Buxton (UK), Diana Wood Conroy (Australia), Wodek Cygan (Poland), Ci dem Gürel (Germany), Birgitta Ljungberg (Sweden), Claire Rado (France), Eta Sadar Breznik (Croatia), and Marika Szaraz (Belgium). Jon Eric Riis (USA) should also have been included. The Gallery section would have been more useful if each tapestry image had been accompanied by a sentence or two listing what specific techniques mentioned in the book have been applied to the work.

The chapter "Shaping as You Weave" offers useful information concerning the many ways tapestries can be shaped on and off the loom. The various methods described include leaving open spaces with the use of scaffolds (space holders), using "darts" and pulled warps to shape tapestries after they are cut from the loom, weaving with the cartoon turned on the diagonal, manipulating the warp to create twists in the weaving, using cloth as a foundation for tapestry, adding extra layers, manipulating slits, weaving eccentrically, embellishing with fringes, fasteners and so on. The instructions in this section are uniformly clear and easy to understand, and the diagrams, when available, are accurate and illustrative of the process. The primary problem with this section has to do with the age and dated look of many of the photographic examples illustrating the various techniques. "Water Fall" (1978), "Anger's Edge" (1978), "Falling" (1974), "Geometric Abstraction" (1972), and "Red and Purple Composition" (1972) should have been replaced with more contemporary examples. It would have made the chapter more inspiring for today's audience.

The final chapter on "Finishing" is wide-ranging and does not apply exclusively to shaped work. Though this is a book on shaped weaving, many of the finishes suggested seem more appropriate for square or rectangular pieces than for shaped, free-hanging or more sculptural tapestries. However, there are several good suggestions for the finishing and presentation of small format work.

In summary, Todd-Hooker has produced a book which is a good introduction to the topic of shaped weaving, and it consolidates otherwise widely dispersed information into one easy to read source. Though diagrams are easy to follow, the book would benefit from more and better quality photographs. The emphasis is on small-scale work utilizing portable looms. True off-loom and large-scale tapestry constructions are not addressed in any substantial manner. This is unfortunate because the change in scale involved in moving from small format to medium or large-scale work is not simply a matter of applying all the same techniques to a bigger piece. It almost always involves serious problem solving and experimentation to be successful. It would have been useful to include a trouble-shooting section directed specifically to such changes in scale. Despite the shortcomings mentioned, Shaped Tapestry is a worthwhile addition to the library of any person weaving tapestry who is interested in exploring a shaped format.

Self Worth and Self Knowledge: Reflections on ATB5

By Larry Knowles

Among its many good works, the American Tapestry Alliance should be complimented and thanked for inviting Thomas Osinski, an architect and associate of Frank Gehry, to act as a juror for the exhibit American Tapestry Biennial Five. Mr. Osinski's brief statement in the exhibit catalogue should be required reading for every tapestry artist in North America. I am tempted to copy it into this review and stop right there. For those who haven't seen the catalogue, let me quote two paragraphs:

I was looking for art that would take me to places that I have not been before and found very few examples. I was searching for some message about "Universal STUFF" and I mostly found things that were trivial. The quest for rebellious creativity resulted in one lonely example.

Why does an artist feel compelled to be just like the next artist? Why would anybody spend endless time doing tedious work to create a tapestry about nothing addressed to everybody? Is it

partially because tapestry artists want, at any cost, for their work to be liked enough so that someone will hang it on a beige wall? Maybe not every artist should feel obligated to make art, or maybe for some, art is a safe murky asylum for "emperors with no clothes" where they will never be exposed.



Kaija Rautiainen, "Sense of Earth," 36" x 31"

If I had any beige walls, there are several pieces in ATB5 that I would be happy to hang on them. Two works were, in my view, quite wonderful -- beautiful, exciting, interesting. Not to be coy about it, they were Kaija Rautiainen's "Sense of Earth" and Verona Szabo's "Passage." I was also delighted to see a handful of works that integrated the techniques of three-dimensional fiber art into tapestry. It is, I think, no accident, that these shaped works were among the most coherent pieces in the exhibit. Mary Kester's "Kerbstone" most fully integrated the pictorial and the sculptural. While some may think Silvia Heyden has gone to the same well a few too many times, "Unfolding" is a satisfying demonstration of her gentle, distinctive approach to pushing tapestry into three-dimensional space. Sharon Marcus, always interesting, shows that you can make a compelling tapestry with just one color in "Burn." Marika Szaraz's "Contemplation" is a lovely, undulating sculptural form (though you wouldn't know it from the catalogue).

I would like to ask Mr. Osinski what was the one work that showed "rebellious creativity." To my eye, the exhibit was lacking in creativity or originality, all of the works being derivative in imagery, conception, and realization. The few ideas on display were old and tired (even shaped tapestry has been around for about 50 years now). Originality has never been a strong suit of tapestry; the medium is by nature derivative. Still, even for tapestry, the work in this exhibit seemed unusually unimaginative.

The designer Yael Lurie argues that one of tapestry's distinguishing challenges is that it has no background or foreground; every pick is equally important. A successful tapestry must find a way to energize every spot and integrate it coherently, vibrantly into the execution of the design. Most all of the works in ATB5 suffered from dead zones, a part of the tapestry that failed to hold up its end. Ruth Jones demonstrates the old fashioned way to enliven an entire tapestry using medieval milles-fleurs. Few, if any, weavers have Jones's technical facility or her apparent ability to stare anachronism in the face without blinking an eye. But the busy-ness of milles-fleurs is by no means the only way to avoid these debilitating dead zones. Ironically, they often result from the weaver introducing some fussy weaving technique to fill in a plain area even though it has no intrinsic relation to the design and fails to achieve its mechanical objective in a way that harmonizes with the rest of the tapestry.

continued...



Verona Szabo, "Passage-Our Grove is already wilting, its ornaments falling," 64" x 72"

For readers asking "who the hell does this guy think he is, anyway?" I should introduce myself. I wove tapestries for over 20 years, putting my loom in its crate (not for good, I hope) seven years ago when the demands of parenthood forced me to simplify my life a bit. I studied with many talented tapestry makers offering workshops around the country. I also spent six months at the Gobelins. For someone without any real artistic talent, I made a few tapestries that look reasonably good on beige walls. My day job is practicing law. I have also written several reviews and articles about tapestry for the usual publications. Most of my old tapestry acquaintances have written me off as an offensive ignoramus and those who haven't probably will after they read this.



Mary Kester, "Kerbstone," 26" x 56" x 3"

Contemporary tapestry makers often fall victim to a logical fallacy that might be presented by the syllogism: Socrates is a man; I am a man; therefore, I am Socrates. Some of the statements in the ATB5 catalogue fall into this trap, invoking the glorious history of tapestry as if that alone validated the work of contemporary tapestry makers. I play soccer on weekends; so does David Beckham; but I have no illusion that I am David Beckham.

Arguments about the place of tapestry, or about the mission of an organization like ATA, are little more than fantastical musings if they are not based on honest self assessment and self knowledge. Neither of these should be a threat to a healthy, realistic sense of self worth. ATB5 is a pleasant enough exhibit. Its participants should be proud of their work. They should also be honest enough to take the accolades of friends, enthusiasts and uncritical casual observers for what they are and not let them go to their heads. I think Thomas Osinski got it

exactly right -- but what matters most is what you do with that sort of assessment, how you use it to better understand and assess your individual place as a tapestry maker and the appropriate goals and objectives for your organization. Ignoring such views, harsh as they may seem, will leave you wondering why no one sees you the way you see yourself, the way you want to be seen. Sort of like where tapestry artists and organizations have been for the last few decades.

New England Tapestry 2004

By Priscilla Alden

The Library Arts Center Gallery in Newport, NH was the setting for an exciting regional exhibition of 21st century tapestries woven by seventeen New England artists. The juried exhibition was sponsored by the Tapestry Weavers of New England (TWINE) from September 24- October 30, 2004. I was one of these artists and quite pleased to be part of this celebration. Our exhibit was held in conjunction with the ATB5 exhibit at the nearby historic Dorr Mill in Guild, NH. The two shows were a welcomed opportunity to showcase tapestry weaving to a New England audience.

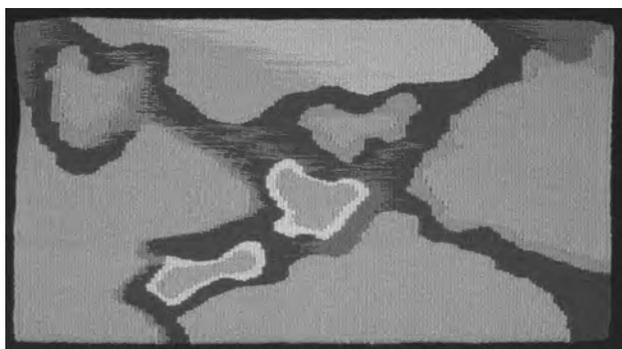
The jurors of this exhibit, Suzanne Pretty, Elinor Steele and Jan Austin, selected "Unfinished Dream" by Maria Estela Serafini as the ATA Award for the best tapestry in a regional exhibit. Maria's tapestry is an elegant portrayal of "La Isabela", her home in Cordoba, Argentina. The wild dry grasses and three different kinds of trees were woven with hand dyed sisal that she twisted and sometimes mixed with wool threads of different hues. Maria weaves with a long needle on a frame loom. (See image and award details on pg. 22)

It was very exciting to enter the gallery and be surrounded by the colors and diverse themes of the exhibit. There were faces, dancing starfish, landscapes, abstractions and geometric images revealing humor and pain, along with political and social concerns. The challenge of displaying the dramatic range of colors was masterfully executed by Jan Austin and Betsy Wing of TWINE, with gallery director Doris Nelson. It was decided to group the tapestries according to cool and then warm - and

sometimes hot, colors. As I traveled around the gallery, the colors and emotions carried me on an artistic journey.

Maria Kovacs' "Ein Augenblick," (a blink of an eye) is a composition of seven aerial view tapestries showing the division of land and water. They form a linear group that references the horizon line. Her colors are mostly muted, describing a cloudy view. Katie Bloomfield describes 'Glencolumbkille," her soft Irish coast landscape,

I begin at the Earth... Move farther away from myself, out into the world that is held by this particular piece of the Earth, and arrive at the horizon and end at the heavens, the infinite. I immerse myself in my own view of a place that has touched my heart and planted itself there. "St. Spiridon Church" is another small landscape of similar colors, woven by Meredith Gonzales. Both pieces are intimate and feel three-dimensional.



Maria Kovacs, "Ein Augenblick," detail, 11" x 20"

Another wall in the gallery was filled with turquoises. Suzanne Pretty's "Balance" depicts:
...a scene with china stacked in a precarious pile set on a rock tablecloth in front of cloud wallpaper. A Caribou Cup is balanced on the end of a fork placed in a Flamingo Cup set beside a Fish Teapot stacked on top of a Snake in the Grass and Rock Plates. Each piece of china is carefully balanced and teetering as the worlds depicted on the china try to balance"

Dolores Broberg's tapestry "Rejoice: Birth Announcement for a Turtle" is a delightful seascape bordered by turtles celebrating a turtle hatching out of his egg at the edge of the sea. It is indeed joyful, woven of sandy and watery colors.

The next group of tapestries features reds and yellows. Elinor Steele's "Reconstruction 1" is a bold bright geometric composition. It is "one of a series of designs that represent my desire to weave the fragments of destruction into something strong and ordered." Elinor has a very strong sense of design and color and uses the computer to define her ideas. "Opposites Attract" by Susan Perrine is a non-traditional tapestry woven with beautiful red, cream and green papers. The wide paper warp ends protrude several inches from the surface and create a colorful, textural grid. It is difficult not to touch them!

Elinor Elkin has three small pieces in the show, "Hands," "Invisible" and "Dream". Her weaving is textural as she uses different kinds of yarns together. There is good humor and emotion in her designs, a dreamlike quality to them revealing a strong sense of imagination. Her colors are more earthy and neutral.

Betsy Wing's three tapestries are about color gradations and geometrics. Beautifully blended colors are contrasted with dramatic stripes of strong color. They hung very well next to Priscilla May Alden's bright "Ancient Flow" tapestries. These pieces are bold geometric designs "about the con-



Priscilla May Alden, "Ancient Flow II," 30" x 24"

nection I feel to past cultures. There is a rhythm, like the beating of distant drums, which connects me to the Spirit Place and flows through me".

"Three Faces" and "Eye on the Prize" are Deann Rubin's dramatic, beautifully designed tapestries. They "were studies in children's book illustration themes that I have been exploring in computer drawings". Her contrasting bright colors contributed to the strength of her design. Thor Carlson's "Lozenge Quadrille" is an abstract design of vibrant colors. He uses the techniques of Flemskvav, Kilim,



Eve Pearce, "Petra Ifan," 31" x 36"

Soumac and Native American weavings in his work. "Monk's- Book of Kells" is Nancy Corkery's purple and red tapestry. She uses different kinds of yarns to create texture and softness.

Janet Austin's three small tapestries, "Red & Green Apples" are beautifully woven and hung. She is "playing with the contradiction between flat geometry and the asymmetrical depth of organic images."

Eve Pearce's large tapestry, "Petra Ifan" is a wonderful woven representation of a smaller unsung Stonehenge. "Standing under the headstone I could almost touch it. The monolith rests delicately on three points, each smaller than my fist". Her use of shading and color blending adds to the success of this landscape. At the end of my walk around the exhibit is Louise Abbott's "Twilight Shadow ". It was designed from a photograph she took while gar-

dening. She was so surprised to see her shadow in the picture that she wanted to see it in fiber. The shading and blending is beautifully done in this very weaverly piece. (See online color version.)

"New England Tapestry 2004" was a wonderful opportunity to educate the public about the art of tapestry in a beautiful gallery setting. TWINE is proud to have this exhibit near the ATB5 Biennial. Newport and Guild, NH both have a proud heritage of textiles celebrated by these exhibits.

**Extended Dates for ATB5
in Rochester, Minnesota
March 26 - May 8, 2005**

Tapestry Comes to New England

By Alex Friedman

The Dorr Mill opening on the 20th of September was a resounding success. The venue, which had been a former woollen mill and the last to close in the Connecticut Valley last year, reopened in a new guise. New walls and lighting were added to the former finishing room of the mill to make an innovative setting for the ATB5 exhibit. The walls, painted plum and gold provided a handsome backdrop for the collection. Patryc Wiggins, the director of the Guild Institute, which is sponsoring the event, hired professional exhibition designers and recruited many local people to help make the startling transformation.

The café and two smaller shows relating to the Mill and the people who worked there were set up in large tents nearby within the vast industrial building. One, a collaboration between a poet and a photographer, called SPIN, forms an oral history project. The second is a small exhibit about machine tools crafted in the local area. It was recently part of a Smithsonian exhibit.

The opening itself was attended by about 200 people including two of the artists represented in the show, Lorna Ramlochansingh and Eve Pearce. The evening included food, music and a gallery talk to an eager audience. It is the first time that an ATA

Biennial show has come to New England and word of mouth is spreading the news far and wide.

ATB5 will be on view until Jan 9, 2005 at the Dorr Mill Business Center, Dorr Mill located in the middle of Guild, NH on Routes 11 and 103. Gallery hours are Wed. thru Sat. 10-4pm and Friday 10-8pm.

Weekly talks on Thursday evenings are planned

- October 28, Christine Laffer
- November 4, Sue Pretty
- November 11, Janet Austin
- November 18, Micala Sidore
- December 2, Lorna Ramlochansingh
- December 9, Elinor Steele

Later lectures will be with Jerome Regnier; Eve Pearce; Tamar Shadur and Mary Kester.

Telephone for further information
(603) 863-8857.

And now to ATB "Six"!

Jurors: Shelley Goldsmith, UK and
Lotus Stack, USA

Entry deadline: November 2005.
Exhibition Dates in 2006-2007

The American Tapestry Biennial Six is open to all tapestry artists who design and weave their own tapestries, either individually or collaboratively. For this exhibition, tapestry is defined as "handwoven weft-faced fabric with discontinuous wefts." Entries must be one of a kind and have been completed after January 2003. Artists may submit two entries but only one tapestry per artist will be accepted.

The goal for the exhibition is to show the best of contemporary tapestry from around the world. For this ATB6, the jurors will be looking for a diversity of works that draw upon the unique characteristics of tapestry technique. References to textile traditions in form, structure, and/or materials will be a consideration.

Look for full information in the Spring 2005 newsletter and on the ATA website.



ATB5 displayed in red and gold gallery at Dorr Mill

ASK ATA

By Jan Austin



Announcing a new question and answer column for the ATA website and newsletter to be managed by Janet Austin.

I am a reference librarian who is experienced at answering questions on topics I know nothing about! I will make use of reference materials and expert consultants on various aspects of tapestry weaving from the technical to historical and perhaps even philosophical, ethical, and spiritual matters.

Please let me know if you are an expert in any of these or other pertinent areas. I would expect to have more than one answer for many questions, as there is often disagreement about the absolute truth when it comes to tapestry!

We will post the questions and answers on the ATA website, and select the most interesting ones for the newsletter. If you don't use a computer, then submit your question by snail mail, and we will send you the answer the same way.

Guidelines: questions should be about some aspect of tapestry, and preferably thought provoking and of interest to other readers, not JUST to the person asking the question.

Email your questions to me at
nitsuanaj@yahoo.com, or mail to:
154 PineHill Rd,
Wakefield, RI 02879, USA

Maria Estela Serafini Wins ATA Award

By Jan Austin

The ATA Award was presented to Maria Estela Serafini for her tapestry "Unfinished Dream," at the opening reception for New England Tapestry 2004, on Saturday, September 25, 2004. The award consists of a ribbon, one year complimentary membership in the American Tapestry Alliance, and an ATA catalog. The jurors, Suzanne Pretty, Elinor Steele and Janet Austin chose Serafini's tapestry because of the artist's creative use of tapestry techniques and materials to eloquently portray the dreamlike feeling of a remembered place.

Maria Estela Serafini was born in Dean Funes, Province of Cordoba, Argentina. She got her Teacher's degree in the '60s. At the end of the '70s and in the '80s she was dedicated to China painting, and took drawing classes at the same time. In the '90s she began to work with textiles in frame looms at La Rueca (The Spinning Wheel) in Cordoba, Argentina where she was one of Graciela Szamrey's students.

Serafini has lived in a suburb of Boston since 2001. In November, 2002, her tapestry "Knowledge Tearing the Ignorance" got an Honorable Mention in the Second International Biennial "Interlacements: Fiber and Metal" in Coral Gables, Florida.

The artist writes about her ATA Award winning tapestry, "UNFINISHED DREAM":

Each human being has a personal idea of paradise. Mine was fulfilled when we found "La Isabela", the ranch which became our home. It didn't last long; by then I began to "write" my dream in the white page of a warp.

I awoke before my dream finished but when I now look at my tapestry the strength of the memories comes out enlightening my present: each sunset, each laughter, each conversation, each goal we achieved is already woven.



Maria Serafini, "Unfinished Dream," 56" x 61" with frame

I remember the music of the wind when I watch the trees; or the fragrance of the grass after a rainy day. I remember my kids growing as teenagers and the warmth of my husband's hands after an intense day of working.

When I wonder what is the shape or the color of a dream, there is my tapestry! "

And more Kudos

Barbara Heller has won second place in the 2004 International Juried Online Symbolist Art Show, 'The Artist As Shaman' for her tapestry "Still Life...with Bird." (Pictured in the Fall, 2004 Tapestry Topics) The exhibition includes 38 juried finalists, and opens May 1, 2004, at <http://www.dracoblu.com/symbolistshow.html>. More than 300 entries from artists representing 19 countries included: painting, printmaking, photography, drawing, etching, collage, fibre, sculpture, and digital works of art.

Janet Austin earned the HGA Award for her tapestry "Granny Smith," at the Weavers Guild of Rhode Island Exhibit, "Woven Expressions" at the Slater Mill Gallery, Pawtucket RI, September 2004. (See color image on ATA web site artist pages.)

Membership News

By Ellen Ramsey

Thank you to our newest Circle Members! Studio Circle: Myra Dorman, Mary Lane, Pat McMullen, Anita Shankles, and Pat Williams. Curators Circle: Georgeann Blaha. Your generous support is critical to our continued organizational success.

December 31st is approaching, and now is a great time to make a tax deductible contribution to ATA by upgrading your support to Circle Membership. For information about how you can join the Circle and take a tax deduction for 2004, contact Ellen Ramsey. ew.ramsey@comcast.net (206) 440-8903.

The 2005 Membership Directory will be produced and mailed in January. Now is the time to notify ATA of any and all changes to your contact information for the roster section. Send corrections to

Jan Austin, nitsuanaj@yahoo.com, or
154 Pine Hill Road, Wakefield, RI 02879.

Moving? Please don't forget to notify ATA. Our newsletters are mailed via bulk mail, which means they are not forwarded by the postal service. We do pay for Change Service, which means the post office will tell us your forwarding address, but by notifying us you will save ATA \$2.81 (the combined cost of the change service fee, a second newsletter, and first class postage to mail the second newsletter). We think you are worth every penny, but please be aware of this easy way you can help ATA.

Contact ATA

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ATB5 Chair

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ATA MEMBERSHIP FORM

	1 year	2 years	Name_____
Individual	\$35	\$65	Address_____
Studio Circle	\$55	\$100	_____
Curator's Circle	\$125	\$225	City_____ State_____
Collector's Circle	\$250	\$450	Postal Code_____ Country_____
			Phone_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Please contact me about volunteer opportunities		Fax/Alternate phone_____
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Send payment to:	ATA Membership		_____
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			card holder's signature

American Tapestry Alliance
PO Box 28600
San Jose, CA 95159

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Tapestry Topics

Guidelines for submitting articles to Tapestry Topics:

Next deadline: 2005: January 15, April 15, July 15,
October 15

Send all items to: Linda Rees lerees@charter.net
--Or--
1908A Senate St.
St. Louis, MO 63118

All photographs and electronic images should include size,
date completed and photo credits.

Articles should be under 2000 words. Submissions will be
edited for clarity and space requirements

Exhibition reviews: We seek articles that describe the
show with insight and critical observations. Describe the
overall sense of the show and explain the parts that
contribute to this sense.

Newsletter committee: Proofreader: Anne Clark,
Layout: Elinor Steele, Distribution: Ellen Ramsey

visit our website
www.americantapestryalliance.org



Mary Kester, "Binding," 57" x 37" x 6"