



AMERICAN TAPESTRY ALLIANCE

## “Hey Kids! Let’s Put on a Show in the Barn”

Troy Dale



*American Tapestry Biennial 11, San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles. Photo: Rebecca Mezoff*

Hold on, Mickey. Not so fast. Let’s think about this for a minute. It may not be that simple. So, you saw a notice about an upcoming ATA show. The theme of the show resonates with your current artistic tendencies. You spend sleepless nights coming up with an appropriate concept for a tapestry to enter. Your task, however, has just begun. Now you must create a design, select a color scheme, maybe dye some yarn, warp your loom, and spend countless hours weaving your masterpiece.

Mounting and photographing must be done in a way that shows your tapestry in its most appealing light. What title will you give your tapestry that will entice the juror to accept it into the show? It has to be relevant to the theme. After all this has been accomplished, you submit your entry according to the guidelines, and after what seems like an eternity, you are notified that your tapestry has been accepted. YAY! You mail your tapestry to the designated location,

and not too long after, you receive a catalog, which contains photos and descriptions of all the tapestries in the show, **including yours**. You've been published!

You show this catalogue to friends, family, and anyone else who will stand still long enough. Hundreds of people will view the tapestries in this show. Some shows will stay in only one place, others may move to two or three different locations. Depending on the location, you might even be able to attend the show and see your tapestry hung on the wall of a gallery or museum. If you have designated a price, you may even sell it to an art collector. All is right with the world.

This is **why** the American Tapestry Alliance sponsors shows – to give its members an opportunity to showcase (and possibly sell) their work, and to offer to the general public an introduction and appreciation of the world of tapestry. But, did you ever stop to think about **how** this show happened? Believe me, it was a little more than Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland deciding, on the spur of the moment, to put on a show in his uncle's barn.

The first thing that has to be accomplished is selecting and securing a venue for the show. Unfortunately, the barn may not be available, and the climate inside the barn is probably not conducive for such material. So, we have to locate a gallery or museum that has the budget, desire, space, and open dates for our show. In some cases, we may need two or three such facilities for our show. This is probably the most critical, as well as the most difficult step in putting on a show. Without a place, there is no show. There is a list of possible venues that is generated from every source imaginable. This list contains the names and contacts for hundreds of galleries and museums that might be interested in hosting a show of this type. The Exhibition Chair and two or three other volunteers each take a portion of the list and begin the process of contacting and re-contacting these venues.

After months of asking and enduring the rejection rate of approximately twenty nos to one yes, the process of negotiating and finalizing a contract begins. Finally, we have a venue or venues for our show. Great! Let's put on a show! Not yet. There's still a lot of work to do.



*Small Tapestry International 2: Passages at Weaving Southwest in Taos, New Mexico. Photo: Rebecca Mezoff*

ATA offers three different types of shows. ATB (American Tapestry Biennial), accepts tapestries of any size, happens in even numbered years; STI (Small Tapestry International), as its name implies, accepts only smaller tapestries, is held in odd numbered years; and the Unjuried Show, which takes place in conjunction with Convergence in even numbered years. As you have already guessed, the even numbered years are quite busy, with two shows in the same year.

The ATB and STI shows need a juror – someone with the expertise, time, and desire to judge each entry and select the tapestries, that will go in the show. (Too bad Aunt Maude isn't qualified, she'd do it in a heartbeat – for free). This, of course, requires more contacting, negotiating, and finalizing. Once the juror is selected and a theme for the show is chosen by the Board, a call for entries is created and posted in the newsletter, on the web site, in select magazines, and online listings. As you can see, a lot has been accomplished before you even know about the show, but we're not done yet.

So, you and over a hundred other members submit photos of your tapestries to the show of your choice. As these photos are received, they must be logged onto a spreadsheet, and

eventually organized into a format that can be sent to the juror for deliberation. The juror makes his or her choices, chooses certain tapestries for awards, and sends those results back to the Exhibit Chair. Acceptance and non-acceptance letters are sent out. There are some happy artists and some unhappy artists. The ATB 11 show had a total of 221 entries, but only 36 were selected for the show. The STI 4 show had a total of 127 entries, with only 45 selected. Competition is stiff.



*Tapestry Unlimited: unjuried small format show 2016. Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee Wisconsin.*

Unlike the ATB and STI shows, the Unjuried Small Format Show has a venue that may not have a gallery or museum staff. Therefore, the Exhibit Chair for the Unjuried Show, and his or her committee must receive all entries (usually over 200 tapestries), create a label for each tapestry, mount and hang the tapestries, manage the show while in progress, dismantle the exhibit at the end, and ship all tapestries back to the artists. This show requires many more volunteer hours than the other two shows.

Once the entries for a show are selected, photos and artist information must be sent to the catalog designer, who determines whether images are of sufficient quality for a print catalog, extracts the image of the tapestry from the photo, adds a drop shadow, designs page and cover layouts, and after two or three people proofread for errors, works with ATA's printer to insure a

high-quality catalog. When the printing is completed, the catalogs are sent to ATA's Catalog Distribution volunteer, who stores all our catalogs and packs and ships them when orders are placed. There is a lot of coordination and communication between the Exhibit Chair and the venue during the show. Things don't always go according to plan. But your tapestry has been hung and is being displayed for public appreciation.

At the end of the show, all the tapestries must be returned to their artist. So, we have put on a show. Hopefully, you have a new appreciation for what has been accomplished. There have been countless volunteer hours spent by members of ATA. Money has been collected, invoices have been paid, letters have been sent, tapestry pieces have been shipped, catalogs have been printed and mailed, and your tapestry has had its "moment in the sun."

One very important fact to remember is that, aside from the juror, the printer, and the Executive Director, all of this has been done by volunteers – members of ATA who freely devote their time and energy to this process. If you would like to be involved in this process, there is a place for you. Email the Volunteer Coordinator. You will enjoy the ride. So, "Let's Put on a Show!"

**Troy Dale** lives on twenty acres in Bartonville, Texas with his wife Regina, two dogs, two cats, nine chickens, eight goats, six sheep, nine alpacas, and four horses. He is a wood turner and is learning to play five string banjo.