



AMERICAN TAPESTRY ALLIANCE

A TRIANNUAL REVIEW OF TAPESTRY ART TODAY

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Every Picture Tells a Story, Don't It?

HONORING TRADITION, INSPIRING INNOVATION

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Cover image: Terri Stewart, "My Sleep Study,"
22.5 in x 19 in, photo: T. Stewart. Wool and
computer wires.

Directors' Letter, Fall 2020

Dear Members,

We welcome you to this engaging issue of *Tapestry Topics* which explores the narrative in tapestry.

Tapestry has a long, rich history of storytelling. From passing on cultural, religious or political information to commemorating the pivotal events of a life, tapestries have told engaging stories. Through images, and sometimes text, great and small moments have been captured and preserved. This desire to tell stories in tapestry continues today as you will see when reading the many fascinating articles by ATA members in this issue. Thank you to Nancy McCray, the theme coordinator who curated this compelling selection of articles, and to Leslie Munro and her entire team of wonderful volunteers who produce each issue of *Tapestry Topics*.

As with all stories, our story here at ATA continues to evolve. From the personal anecdotes crafted at our looms during these times of solitude and quarantine, to the collaborative legend supported by 50 years of member contributions, our vision is a time-honored legacy graciously supported by our Board members. With that, we want to express immense gratitude to our retiring Board members: Susan Iverson, Tommye Scanlin, Dorothy Clews, and Regina Dale. We wish them each engaging and fruitful blessings in the creation of their own new stories and welcome our new incoming Board members.

Enjoy this new issue and all of the wonderful resources provided on our website. And, wherever you are, please stay well and stay safe.

On behalf of the entire Board of Directors,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shelley Socolofsky'.

Shelley Socolofsky
President



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sue Weil'.

Sue Weil
Director at Large

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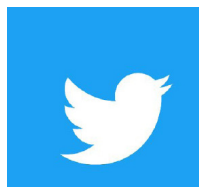
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Every Picture Tells a Story

Nancy McRay, Theme Coordinator

Five years ago, after selling my beloved yarn shop, I reengaged with a full-time studio practice. I am a fiber artist with a full bag of tricks—but the strongest call was from tapestry. As I was in the process of rebirthing my art, I realized that this posed a great deal of pressure. I suffered from something similar to the blank canvas syndrome that blocks painters, multiplied by however many warp threads you need to wind around your frame.

There are so many decisions that need to be made to begin a tapestry. The time investment is not insignificant so the final product better not be either. So I lowered the bar. In the back of my closet there was a mid-sized Mirrix loom with a warp on it from long ago. After a deep breath I made a couple of decisions. One is that I would weave every day, and the other was that I wouldn't judge my output too harshly. I would simply weave what came to mind. This turned into a two-year practice of weaving eight small tapestries. I learned a great deal about myself. It turned out that I did have a narrative going, even if it didn't reveal itself until very near the end of each piece.

"Summit" is an example of this. I started it in late fall; there was lots of wind, and lots of fading warm tones. For the first half of the work, I thought it was pretty boring, and really didn't know where it would lead. Adding some dark on one side, and light on the other, I was reflecting the shortening days. Then, in February, my first grandchild was born, and my brother-in-law died. The weaving changed in response. As I came to the very top, I pondered a bit and decided on a bit of bright blue. As soon as I wove those last few passes, I knew what this one was about. I was transported back to a time hiking in the mountains in Colorado. We were camped in a high mountain bowl and needed to hike out over a formidable pass.

After two years of weaving whatever came to mind, I decided I craved deeper, more intentional design. One year ago I was lucky enough to enroll in Jane Kidd's workshop, "Creating Complexity." It was just the workshop I wanted.



Nancy McRay, "Summit," 12 in x 12 in, 2014. Wool.

And indeed, over the course of the four-day workshop my initial idea of relating branching rivers and trees to branching veins and arteries morphed into to a full-blown abstraction of lakes, lungs, rib cage, and blood flow. I experienced a wonderful AHA moment when I realized how autobiographical the design was turning out to be. Once it is finished and shown, I am sure others will not see all the intentions I wove into it. That's fine by me—my hope is that they find themselves in my work, rather than me.

The articles in this issue are richly varied. Terri Stewart tells us about a sleep study she endured, and how that became a cartoon for her tapestry.

Lindsey Marshall describes how her work is inspired by poems, written texts, and sometimes the shape of text itself as a graphic image. Margo MacDonald explores how her approach to painting differs from her approach to tapestry weaving, and how these two media communicate differently. Deborah Forbes and Murray Gibson both comment on the historical context and the continuation of tapestry as a contemporary medium. Rebecca Mezzoff also references texts and documentation as inspiration for her series of small tapestries and their power to tell stories. Jasmine Petrie reviews *Stitching Resistance: Women, Creativity, and Fiber Arts* (2014), by Marjorie Agosin, again bringing together text, history, and community.

I am grateful to all who contributed. Each essay gave me fodder for future sources of inspiration.

Nancy McRay is a fiber artist living and teaching in Northern Michigan. She teaches Rigid Heddle Weaving and Tapestry at Northern Michigan College, and to Michigan guilds and other groups. Her work will be included in two wonderful fiber shows, at The Scarab Club in Detroit and at the Urban Institute of Contemporary Arts in Grand Rapids.



Thank You to Our Contributors

Including Nancy McRay, Theme Coordinator

Deborah Forbes is an artist and educator living in Medicine Hat, Alberta. She has worked in a number of media including tapestry, painting, and mixed media installation. Her work has been shown in public galleries in Canada and the USA. Forbes has taught art education and art history at Medicine Hat College, AB; lectured widely across Canada; and has been a visiting scholar at Xiangfan University, Hubei Province, China.



Margo MacDonald has always been a visual person; she had a hard time remembering her history lessons—unless there was a painting or statue involved. Her passion for art led her to the Rhode Island School of Design and to teaching art at Charles Wright Academy in Tacoma. Along the way, she picked up tapestry weaving and was a partner in a Tacoma collaborative studio that created large tapestries for Mary Bridge Children’s Hospital. Her pieces are held in public and private collections. She works out of her home studio and most of her work, whether painting or tapestry, focuses on the environment.



Murray Gibson has been a tapestry artist for over 35 years. He first studied with Jane Kidd at the Alberta College of Art, Calgary, Alberta, then with Janis Jefferies at Goldsmith’s College, University of London, UK. He continues his studio practice and teaches an introductory-level tapestry course at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, NS. Gibson is a Master Artisan of Craft Nova Scotia and is an elected member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts.



When she wasn’t digging in the sand in her backyard in New Mexico, **Rebecca Mezoff** grew up making dolls out of her dad’s old socks. Now she makes large-format tapestries and is often found weaving in her pajamas which she affectionately calls her “home pants.” She also creates online courses and occasionally she leaves the studio to teach weavers in the real world about color, design, and technique in tapestry. Her current work focuses on human perception and the long scale of geologic time. Her studio is in Fort Collins, Colorado. You can find out more about her on her website and blog at www.tapestryweaving.com. Her new book, *The Art of Tapestry Weaving*, comes out in October of 2020.



Lindsey Marshall studied at Liverpool College of Art, followed by a PhD at Lancaster University. She has exhibited work nationally and internationally and has work in private collections. Her pieces have been shown in juried exhibitions in the UK, Ukraine, China, Europe, Russia, Australia, Canada, and the USA.





Jasmine Lace Petrie is a weaver and fiber artist from Northern Michigan. Find out more about her at www.facebook.com/TangledUpInTextiles

Terri Stewart started weaving tapestries in 1993 after spending many years in other artistic interests. She has owned a weaving shop and co-founded the Tapestry Artists Of Sarasota (TAOS). In 2008, she was presented the Handweaver's Guild of America Small Expressions award. Self-taught in tapestry and many other endeavors, she enjoys the full process of tapestry weaving—from creating a cartoon, to weaving the final product, and exhibiting her work with various tapestry groups. She teaches nationally and locally with small groups or on a one-on-one basis, and teaches online as a mentor with the American Tapestry Alliance. She is a member of the British Tapestry Group, ATA, and TAOS.



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My Latest Design Inspiration

Terri Stewart

Recently I had to have a sleep study test and I thank my lucky stars that it was only for one night. If you have never experienced this for yourself (and my best to your psychoanalyst if you have), it is one of the most laughable yet degrading medical tests you can willingly put yourself through.

Sleep study tests must be based on Dr. Frankenstein's theory of bringing life back from the dead, because you look like the "monster" once the technicians are done wiring you up.

I lack that certain photogenic quality that many members of my family have and as a result I avoid cameras wherever possible. When I entered the facility for this study, I was greeted very nicely by the two female techs who would hook me up and monitor me all night. I was immediately led to the nicely furnished bedroom and promptly told to change into my bedclothes and then start filling out many pages of forms. They gave me a few minutes to comply, and returned with wires, straps, ointment, paper tape, breathing tubes and other things to be applied to my body, all the while explaining what this will do and answering any questions.

It took approximately 20 minutes for both ladies to apply goop to my hair for EEG electrodes, and more to my back, chest, throat, and legs. Then a breathing tube was taped to my upper lip for my nose, with another attachment taped below that for my mouth. More sensors were applied to my cheeks and eyebrows that would measure blinking and other facial movement, and a pulse monitor to my finger. All of these wires were then coated with several strips of paper tape



Terri Stewart, "My Sleep Study," 22.5 in x 19 in,
photo: T. Stewart. Wool and computer wires.

to secure them. A large belt was then wrapped around my waist and another under my armpits and around my chest to hold all said wires in place so they would not dislodge during my sleep. My bedclothes are now bunched up and my backside is peeking out a bit. I am not looking my best.

And here is the rub: You may not get out of bed without assistance. There is a microphone to ask for help should you need to use the restroom. There is also a camera that begins its video feed as soon as you are hooked up to the power

source for all this wiring. “Smile at the camera” is something I try to avoid! After you are settled into bed you may watch TV or read, but at 11:00 pm it is lights out, no matter what. “Try to sleep like you normally would,” I was told. I don’t make it a habit of going to bed looking like an electrician’s worst nightmare, but I’ll do my best. The wires are not very long, so readjusting your body position in bed is problematic. Once the techs had to come in to help me roll over. Sadists.

After a couple of hours I did ask for assistance to make a quick trip to the restroom. No bathrobes allowed, mind you—they tangle up the wires. So you drag all this wiring across your shoulder and hotfoot it down the hall, praying to everyone’s god that you don’t run into a fellow test subject.

By 5:00 am I was more than ready to go home, clean up and get ready for work in another two

hours. Actually, I was ready by 2:00 am to do exactly that, but was told I had to stay or else repeat the study. Sleep eluded me for the most part but they said the study went well, all things considered. After I was unplugged, I was given another batch of forms to complete and then I was free to dress and leave. However, the camera would remain on until I left the facility. *Say what?* The explanation for that was to make sure I was awake enough as to not be a hazard to other drivers. Being very fearful that this part of the video feed might somehow end up on YouTube one day, I carefully got dressed, showing the least amount of 50+ years of skin as possible to what I felt was now a viewing room full of perverts having a laugh over beer and popcorn.

I have already begun a cartoon based on this experience. May your inspirations come from less unusual places.



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Text and Image

Lindsey Marshall

My interest in incorporating storytelling in my textile work has developed from my work in visual communications. So, in effect, two disciplines are merged: visual communication, typography, and graphic design, which has been my occupation for many years, and textiles, which I studied donkeys' years ago, and have returned to in the past 10 years. The influence of my typographic background is evident in the work where words are embedded in the design.

This has involved conveying meaning through combining text and image and, in many cases, using text as image. Many letterforms are abstract shapes and can contain the power of symbols. The designs are generally formed from typographic shapes, calligraphic and gestural marks. Although spoken and/or written words are an underpinning, fundamental element, they are not necessarily intended to be legible or obvious.

Using letterforms/words/texts as images allows me to communicate more directly with an audience—putting my interpretation on a word, phrase, sentence, or section of text, and often experimenting with new contexts and/or meanings. It is intended to convey my reaction to them as well as opening up a visual dialogue with the onlooker. This could be a narrative, such as the piece “When fortune flowers...,” or it may be a concept such as a concern for people enduring war: concepts that resonate with life today, both personally and in a more general way.

Although much of my work has derived from written texts, past and present, such as Greek myths (“When fortune flowers...” and “Resinous dazzle”), some of which are more playful than others (“She looked at us...”), some are responding to and experimenting with overheard snippets of conversation or pieces of text from social media (“Vox; Let me in”). So, I find inspiration almost anywhere: a whole



Lindsey Marshall, “When fortune flowers...,”
22.5 in x 22 in, 14 epi, photo: John Seth Marshall.
Linen, cotton, and metallic materials.

story/book, a paragraph, or a word/phrase. These have provided a resource for communicating meaning and, hopefully, for allowing the viewer to interpret meaning. The titles of pieces may provide clues or nudges (e.g. fragments of text), but my intention is that the work should stand with or without its title.

Some pieces veer towards, or are completely abstract, such as “When fortune flowers...” This piece is from Aeschylus’ *Oresteian Trilogy* (translated by Phillip Vellacot). It relates to the process and aftermath of war and I find it has particular relevance to the world today. The full section of text is:

*“When fortune flowers too lushly,
Decay, her envious neighbour,
Stands eager to invade;
Glory’s brief hours are numbered,
And what has flowered must fade.”*

I have used colour and abstracted typographic forms to convey the passage from fortune to decay. The type also represents people and their effect on fortune: human beings changing the world, moving from utopia to dystopia.

Other pieces are more obvious interpretations such as “Resinous dazzle.” This work is also a visual interpretation of, and response to a section of verse from a Greek myth which relates to the process and aftermath of war. It incorporates abstracted script-based letterforms, shapes, colour, and texture to communicate meaning. The work is divided into four panels to indicate and represent the four sections of verse. The design is intended to suggest the contrast between the organic, curving movement of the sea and the strident, angular interruption of lightning. The colours are used to indicate both harmony and discord—conveying the meaning of the text. I have also attempted to convey this in a deliberate way with the use of a semi-cursive script which, although an important element of the work, may not be immediately legible or obvious. The gestural script provides a counterpoint to the first two verses whilst resonating with the latter two. The third panel is distinct from the other three as it describes the lightning itself rather than the event and I have incorporated abstracted capital letterforms, the type becoming image, to reinforce this. I have used metallic thread in an obvious way to indicate a lightning bolt referred to in the text and more subtly to suggest the reflective qualities of water.

Colour plays an important part in interpretation, often used to emphasise meaning. For example, in “Vox” the concept was to communicate my thoughts about the dissemination of the “people’s voice” via social media and the interaction, often aggressive, that it can provoke. The colours used are intended to communicate the often opposing views of *vox populi* frequently expressed on social media platforms. The script becomes a space where communication between polarised viewpoints is possible. The word *vox* is produced in a cursive, gestural script; it separates the two parts in an almost unbroken line. The word is intended to be interpreted as word



Lindsey Marshall, “Resinous dazzle,” 71.5 in x 47.5 in, 14 epi, photo: John Seth Marshall. Cotton, silk, linen, wool, and metallic materials.

and/or image rather than as being legible or obvious. The positioning of the word, spreading beyond the confines of the vertical format, is intended to provide a feeling that the meaning went beyond what is immediately visible. The technique of woven tapestry, in this instance horizontal/vertical structure, is intrinsic to the interpretation of the concept.

“Let me in” is also a comment on our world. It was inspired by an overheard fragment of conversation

about refugees. It incorporates abstracted cursive script and more angular capitals to indicate the contrast between two states: soft, comfortable, pleasant/harsh, unforgiving, dangerous. The colours are intended to reinforce this disjuncture. The counterpoint, together with the use of wire to form a barrier, is intended to draw the viewer further into the work and its meaning. The concept was triggered by thoughts of the destruction of human beings in areas of conflict.

A less serious, more playful piece is “She looked at us...” This work is a response to a passage from Richard Kennedy’s book, *A Boy at the Hogarth Press*, in which he describes sitting with Virginia Woolf. I based the portrait on Kennedy’s written description: “She looks at us over the top of her steel-rimmed spectacles, her grey hair hanging over her forehead and a shag cigarette hanging from her lips.” This, together with a small line illustration in the book, were my starting points from which to develop a rough sketch to form the basis for a woven tapestry. As my first visual clue was the line drawing, I intensified the outlines in the image with

dark thread evoking the sternness of the character – or how she was perceived by the author. The spectacles were formed from soft wire as I wanted them to appear in front of her face – reinforcing the meaning. The piece diverges from my usual use of letterforms to interpret meaning. Here, I have a much more literal interpretation—using image alone. I wanted to convey my reading of the author’s description of his encounter with Virginia Woolf who, to him, was a figure of importance (his employer) and a literary giant. Despite this, his description is humorous and incredulous.

So, the narrative in my work derives in part from stories and written texts and in part from an attempt to convey meaning, often using a word or phrase—either overheard or captured from social media or similar sources. This approach predominates in my textile work but does not prevent me from investigating or being drawn into other concepts or ways of expressing myself.



Lindsey Marshall, “Vox,” 7 in x 7 in, 14 epi, photo: John Seth Marshall. Linen, cotton, and wool materials.



Lindsey Marshall, “Let me in...,” 8 in x 7 in x 5 in, 12 epi, photo: John Seth Marshall. Materials: wool, cotton, linen, copper wire.



Lindsey Marshall, “She looked at us...,” 12 in x 7.25 in, 14 epi, photo: John Seth Marshall. Cotton, linen, wool, and galvanised metal wire. In private collection.

How Tapestry Differently Communicates its Image from Painting

Margo MacDonald

As an artist who goes back and forth between painting and tapestry, this posed an interesting question that found me looking at both mediums a little more closely. On the surface, I can tell you that the processes and mindset are completely different. Tapestry builds from bottom to top, often without realizing the finished piece until it's off the loom. Painting evolves into focus over time, the surface constantly changing until it is judged as finished. Tapestry is limited by its very nature to imagery that can be constructed through its grid structure, often using a limited palette and relying on blending yarns to get the right color. It is not often spontaneous but usually planned ahead of time, often using a full color cartoon which again reduces the freedom to make changes. The options for painting are by comparison limitless; thick or thin paint and endless color choices free the artist to go where the painting takes her. Paintings may take months to finish while some processes, like sumi-e, are finished in a matter of minutes.

So why does the medium make a difference? Tapestry has a rich history of storytelling, of recognizable design traditions and elements that are referenced throughout history. Contemporary work from around the world often applies these conventions in new ways. The women of Central Asia have a centuries' old tradition of weaving, incorporating flora and fauna into their prayer rugs. Starting in 1979, after the Soviet invasion and continuing through the Taliban rule, these motifs were replaced with images of war. Helicopters, missiles, and soldiers became accepted designs, reflecting the impact of war on these women. Further, the Muslim decree that depicting living creatures was idolatrous made these new images acceptable. The results are powerful commentaries on contemporary life in a context that held meaning beyond the image.



Artist unknown, Central Asian war rug.

Closer to home, Mary Lane has recently been weaving images using historical textiles as a reference. "I have always been drawn to tapestries from the past. That influence can be seen in my use of the woven techniques that were developed in the medieval tapestries of Europe. My most recent work references historical textiles more directly through the incorporation of borrowed patterns, motifs and/or details. The excerpts are combined with each other, and with other image sources, such as drawings or photographs, to produce a layered image in which the different components are merged together into



Mary Lane, "Boundless," 24 in x 24 in, 8 epi, 2020, photo: courtesy of the artist. Cotton warp, wool weft. It is composed of two different tapestries. The more colorful and patterned tapestry on the top is 15 in x 10 in. The tapestry on the bottom with text is 4 in x 10 in.

one blended image. "Boundless" consists of two separate tapestries mounted together. The source images for the upper tapestry are a stepped triangle pattern from a Nazca discontinuous warp and weft fabric and a double headed serpent motif from an Andean double weave. I use Photoshop to create the layered and fused images. The bottom tapestry is text dissolving into the background. The word, which is also the title of the piece, offers an opportunity to reflect upon the suggestive and absorbing nature of repeated patterning."

The use of materials relevant to the imagery is another aspect of tapestry that can enrich the context of the work. Contemporary artist Diedrick Brackens is a good example. "Cotton is the primary material because it is a very easy material to manipulate, it takes color beautifully and its historical significance in the U.S. relative to enslavement, violence, and subjugation has had lasting effects on black bodies," he says. "I think of the process of handweaving cotton as a small way to pay tribute to those who came before me and worked with the material under very different circumstances." His work also references the textile traditions of West African strip weaving and American story quilts. Together, these components suffuse his work with a deeper message. You can see Diedrick's work at <https://www.diedrickbrackens.com/weavings>

Connie Lippert, "Canyon de Chelly Pictograph," 14 in x 42 in, photo: courtesy of the artist. Fibre, natural dyes.



The techniques inherent to tapestry weaving can provide design elements in developing an image. Slits, hachures, wedge weave, surface work, and textured yarns can all contribute to the overall impact of the tapestry. Connie Lippert's use of wedge weave drives her images. In her work "Canyon de Chelly Pictograph," the zig zag structure, developed by Navajo weavers, reinforces the idea of the canyon. Susan Martin Maffei is another tapestry artist who uses the nature of the medium to enhance the image, an example being "Darts," where she uses slits to define the floor pattern and figures in a local pub. Susan describes the use of slit technique in an article on her webpage (<http://susanmartinmaffei.com/manipulating-slits>).



Susan Martin Maffei, "Sports Series-Darts," 11 in x 8 in plus trim, woven tapestry, photo: courtesy of the artist. Cotton warp, wool weft, cotton & wool crochet trim.

All these aspects of tapestry can work to communicate ideas beyond the visual image. It requires the awareness of the viewer to understand the subtle influences being used, but doing so takes the viewer to a new appreciation of the piece.

Fringeless: Four selvedge warping with Sarah C. Swett

(produced by Rebecca Mezoff)



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Christine Aaron, *Vestiges II*, 2019

Philosophical Musings on Tapestry-weaving and Contemporary Art

Deborah Forbes

overandunderandoverandunderandoverandunder ...

In 2016, Joanne Marion, Director/Curator of Exhibitions and Collections at Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre in Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada, had an idea about a contemporary tapestry exhibition. She approached me to act as guest curator.

What resulted, in 2018 and early 2019, was **overand-underandoverandunderandoverandunder...**

Three Contemporary Canadian Tapestry Artists: Murray Gibson, Jane Kidd, and Ann Newdigate.¹

These names are well-known to tapestry weavers and aficionados. Ann Newdigate's ongoing artistic and educational practice spans four decades and multiple continents, earning her the Saskatchewan Lieutenant Governor's Lifetime Achievement Award. The Saidye Bronfman Award, part of the Canada Council's prestigious Governor General's Awards, recognized Jane

Kidd's lengthy, varied, and continuing contributions to the fine craft of tapestry in 2016. Murray Gibson, himself an alumnus of Alberta College of Art and design (now Alberta University of the Arts) who studied with Jane Kidd, exhibits internationally while teaching in Nova Scotia, and was named a Master Artisan by Craft Nova Scotia in 2015.

As a teenager, I dropped down a rabbit hole in the millefleur² of the Unicorn Tapestries (1495–1505 CE) at the Cloisters in New York City. Later, I learned to weave tapestry in Edinburgh from Archie Brennan, internationally renowned tapestry artist. Although my art practice has moved away from tapestry, I remain curious about the breadth of contemporary contexts and content that make their way into tapestry weaving. Somehow, it just does not get old.

Time

The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once. ~ Albert Einstein

In trying to write words with meaning about contemporary art and tapestry weaving, it has been difficult not to talk about everything at once. Ideas run away into collisions at intersections, everything is talking simultaneously and colliding, so that only fragments of meaning audibly surface at any time. In deep frustration, I began to realize that the troubles I am having in keeping discreet sections in writing is very much akin to the processes of weaving tapestry; you cannot weave the intersection, then the vehicles, then the shouting people with their mouths open, in a tidy sequence. These all have to be woven at the same time.

What makes tapestry weaving a pursuit so distinct, and so grounded in a continuum of history, is its ability to construct meaning in ongoing contemporary worlds. Even in current times, the history of tapestry is present in tapestry weaving,



Ann Newdigate, *Familiars Series*: "Carrie A. Cross inherited considerable property provided that she did not marry certain people." 28 cm x 23 cm, n.d. Cotton warp, weft: silk, linen, cotton, wool and synthetics.

sometimes as subject, always in process. Tapestry weaving has been practiced for hundreds of years in diverse cultures, almost exactly as it is practiced today. The exquisite mystery, however, is how an archaic process can comfortably carry content contemporary to every age in which it has lived. Nova Scotia tapestry artist, Murray Gibson, writes of the incorporation of history as subject and content:

The “Drapery Series” is a collection of tapestries inspired by women of myth and legend, poetry and prose who are textile practitioners; with their practice, they control the lives and deaths of others, and at times, of themselves. These tapestries share a common aesthetic of an abstracted background overlaid by a delineated image. The abstracted background is derived from images of gowns these heroines wear in other, historical artistic depictions.³

When Gibson writes *overlaid*, he means *overlaid* only in a visual sense, in how it appears. Creating this appearance of overlaying is a complex journey that requires the physical integration of images. This is a singular potential of tapestry weaving which changes both the visual impact and the transmission of content. (Ed. note: also see p. 28, “Arachne”)

Divided and Undivided?

Interestingly, the history of tapestry is filled with anonymous makers and viewers. Often, only the commissioner of the work, and sometimes the designer (usually a rockstar painter of the day), are recorded for posterity. The weavers, however, remain present in their extended physical contact with the object. It delights me to think their DNA might still be detectable in the threads. Artist-weaver, one and the same, describes the practices of our three contemporary Canadian tapestry artists: Murray Gibson, Jane Kidd, and



Murray Gibson, *Drapery Series: “Ariadne,”* 57 cm x 47 cm, 2018. Wool and cotton.

Ann Newdigate. Given tapestry’s deep historical roots and laborious production, why would a 21st century artist choose tapestry as a medium, over other media, to express many kinds of content? If the answer is that the artwork could only be tapestry, then it has everything to do with the perfect alchemical concoction of subject, process, and content, which Gibson, Kidd, and Newdigate seem to consistently and adroitly mix.

Text, Affinities, and History Intertwined

In an age in which nearly anything can be communicated in code of zeros and ones, there is a strange binary affinity in the ubiquitous and rapid flight of digital information and the slow production of tapestry in its overing and undering; meaning the weaving of weft thread over and under the warp yarn that is held in tension by the loom. Endemic to the binary nature of the human

brain, neurons have two states: fire, don't fire. I see the binary system of overing and undering in tapestry weaving as aligned with both digital communication and the functioning of the human brain. West Coast-based Ann Newdigate, whose decades-long practice inextricably links drawing and weaving, writes:

...drawing can intersect freely with the warp of the unconscious. In contrast, the pixelated grid, which is shared by medieval style woven tapestry (ends per inch) and digital prints (dots per inch), dictates a taut saga between old and new technologies.³

This excites me; whenever I see processes that are nested and aligned, I suspect they are connected to larger alignments in the universe that speak to larger ideas. In tapestry weaving, at its highest artistry, process is always honoured in both subject and content of the image. This has something to do with technical virtuosity, but much more to do with the sensitivity, intelligence, and connected creativity of the maker.

Jane Kidd writes:

The history of tapestry as an object created for the elite to express their power and prestige is of interest to me. It brings me a certain amount of subversive pleasure to use this process to explore issues that have come about largely through greed and abuse of power. As artist- weaver, I wander into areas of contemporary environmental politics; my approach is always personal in reflecting my own confusion and uncertainty and what I find to be an increasingly bewildering world.³

The title of this exhibition, **overandunderando-verandunder... Three Canadian Contemporary Tapestry Artists**, comes from an intention to consider tapestry as a semiotic text with codes, a text that has endured over the course of time. Tapestry's conventions likewise have deep roots. Gibson notes, for instance, *"I have*

*frequently used decorative borders in my designs alluding to a long history of tapestry aesthetic and functionality."*³ In one of the early seminal works on tapestry, Helen Churchill Candee writes, *"For a long time there had been gropings, the feeling that some sort of border was needed, a division line between the world of reality and the world of fable."*⁴ In looking at tapestry as text in a semiotic sense (while not going as far as textual determinism, in which the form and content of a text very prescriptively determine how it is decoded by the viewer), tapestry carries codes before we even get to content. If tapestry is to be considered more than an anachronistic and very labour-intensive way of illustrating ideas, thoughts, feelings, and telling stories, one must consider tapestry as text expressed in a variety of codes. John Berger, noted art critic and author of *Ways of Seeing*, which revolutionized art criticism, writes, *"Appearances, at any given moment, are*



Murray Gibson, "Babel," 157 cm x 155 cm, 1991, photo: Jeffery Parker. Wool.

a construction emerging from the debris of everything that has previously appeared.”⁵ These words could not be more true than when applied to tapestry. Tapestry seems to carry its past with it in mysterious ways, and each of the three Canadian contemporary tapestry artists in **overandunderandoverandunder...** carries history into the present to investigate distinctly different contemporary content. Gibson writes about the influence of the *Devonshire Hunting Tapestries* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London) on this work:

*It is these noble men and women and their costumes that are inspiration for much of my tapestry practice for the past many years. What interests me is the shorthand approach the weaver uses to drape the clothing over the body beneath it. The complex silhouette of the garment—the actual shape and surface area it would take up in a tapestry—is decorated with a flat rendering of pattern. The garment is flat: there are neither layers nor drapery—only illusion.*³

The *Devonshire Hunting Tapestries*, woven in a studio in Arras, France (mid 15th century), are

excellent examples of designer-weaver collaboration, an integrated approach that brings together the particular demands of the medium and the imagery that is depicted therein. That is, it is about the tapestry weaving depictions of woven textiles.

I am thinking about Marshall McLuhan’s famous quote, “*The medium is the message*,”⁶ which presages the deconstruction work of semiotics. Julia Kristeva proposes that a text is intelligible only through “a mosaic of references and quotations that, in many cases, have lost their origin.”⁷ Kristeva uses mosaic in a sense that is very similar to the popular use of the word tapestry. Woven tapestries, as works of art that are texts in a semiotic sense, and in their materiality, are mosaics of implied references and responses that have endured in some form for roughly 12,000 years. **overandunderandoverandunder...**, as a title, recognizes the importance of this. In the words themselves, there are implications of the layers of history, process, ideas, and developments in different bodies of work. The exhibition title acts metaphorically, as well as literally; it acts in linear progression as well as in manners layered and



Jane Kidd, Land Sentence Series: “Arbour,” 83 cm x 205 cm. 2009. Wool, cotton, rayon, silk, linen. Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

webbed. John Berger has famously noted, *“Metaphor reconnects that which has been separated.”* In considering tapestry as a text with codes that has endured over the course of time one has to wonder—why has tapestry weaving endured as a process to express, interrogate, connect, and communicate in the 21st century? One has to wonder why tapestry weaving has not been reduced to merely an historical process to which we cling through fear of loss. Tapestry weaving, however, simply continues to speak to us about itself over millennia, while at the same time talking about the ongoing present, the contemporary. Kidd writes:

I use a compartmentalized composition to collect and juxtapose historic and contemporary tools, [making] reference to botanical drawings, taxonomy, diagrams and mapping. I also reference historic textiles emphasizing those that show evidence of colonialism and cross-cultural exchange, drawing parallels between the human urge to transform the natural world into material culture and the West’s preoccupation with accumulating and possessing other cultures.³

Newdigate’s small woven portraits flow, in part, out of an archaic tradition of woven Coptic portraits from the 4th–5th centuries CE in Egypt. Large, soulful eyes were particular features of fully developed Coptic art,⁸ in both painting and tapestry. Newdigate’s “Sad Little Coptic Ancestor”⁹ stares inside its own little head. Inward-looking eyes focus on hurt and pain that is visible to the viewer through the constructed tears. The tears themselves are created before the eyes are woven, which sets up particular import to the tears. It is as if the tear determines the eye rather than the eye determining the tear. These woven tears appear so very intentionally built of experiences. The overing and undering performed by the artist to build each tiny tear of the “Sad Little Coptic Ancestor,”⁹ “Henry Settler,” and “Carrie A. Cross,” has allowed time for contemplation and ritual as part of the text. Newdigate writes:

I find tapestry to be a natural extension of drawing. Drawing, which preceded writing, is a basic method of communication. Tapestry adds a dimension of ritual for the maker and for the viewer because it can signify the presence of time and convey the drama of mythology through its physical presence.³

Illusions of three dimensions on a two-dimensional plane are built, not applied; these illusions are accomplished in real time and at the same time, as evidenced by the strands of thread that appear to overlay the folds of fabric beneath in Gibson’s “Arachne.” The strands and the folds occupy the same space. Illusions are rampant and structural. The artist-weaver focuses, dreams, meditates, and then returns to hard decisions along the way, dropping in and out of frontal lobe consciousness to a dreaming brain state.



Ann Newdigate, *Colonial Gents series* (#9): “Henry Settler,” 28 cm x 23 cm, n.d. Cotton warp, weft: silk, linen, cotton, wool and synthetics.

Tapestry, and its potential for integrating disparate content provokes intertextuality, because of the physically integrated manner of the construction of images. This greasy quality of time seems to incite the kind of intertextuality of which Kristeva speaks. Differential and historical traces, and tracings of other texts, are manifested in the process of making. There is time for the tapestry artist, in the slippage of doing, for drifting into webs of connection and interconnection over time and space, into texts of every kind. The sensory intimacy of sitting with a tapestry, in connection, for sometimes months at a time (and over the course of years), situates the weaver in an unusually sustained relationship to the work. It is one in which their experience of the present is both functional and metaphorical. I have come to realize that the time spent in the meditative ritual of the genre code⁹ of tapestry should not be minimized. Speed has become of such value to us at this time in history, that anything deeply time consuming, which has time invested in it, seems to almost shock!

Kidd writes:

In our contemporary culture, which is dominated by the reproduced object and the mediated and appropriated image, handmade objects such as tapestry can stand for authentic experience. Their material presence provides a direct link to the original act of making that circumvents anonymity for both maker and viewer.³

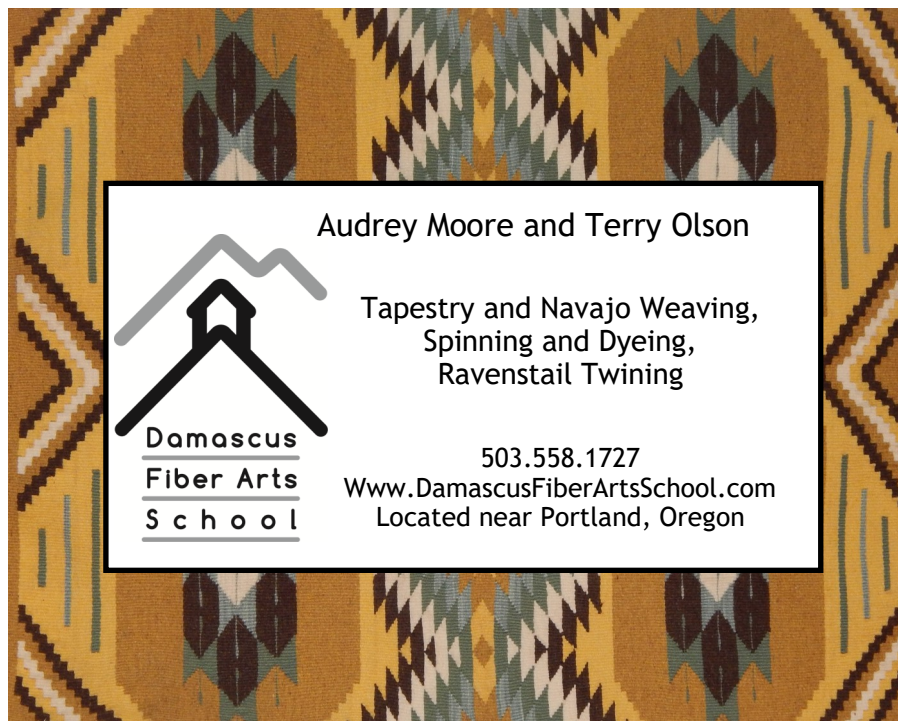
For me, good art is worth spending time with. It shows me something—some way of looking at life in the universe. It makes me tilt my head a bit, it provokes questions, it inveigles curiosity, it catches me off guard, it delights in a prickly sense, and it disperses energy. Tapestry can do this in a very particular way: the integration of form and function has to be so intimate if it is to hit this exquisite point of “art worth spending time with.” Gibson, Kidd, and Newdigate achieve this in their work and each does so very differently. I urge you to dive deeply into their work! They each honour the poetry of the imperfect language and history of tapestry weaving to explore contemporary experience.




Jane Kidd, “Wonderland Series: Folly,” 182 cm x 121 cm, 2016.

- 1 Forbes, Deborah (Ed). *overandunderandoverandunder ... Three Contemporary Canadian Tapestry Artists; Jane Kidd, Murray Gibson, and Ann Newdigate*. Medicine Hat, AB: Esplanade Art Gallery, 2018.
- 2 Millefleur is a kind of tapestry characterized by a background motif of many small flowers.

- 3 Quotes come from correspondence between Deborah Forbes and each artist in 2018.
- 4 Candee, H. C. (1912). *The Tapestry Book*. New York: Frederick Stokes and Company. p. 203.
- 5 Berger, John (1973). *Ways of Seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books.
- 6 Marshall McLuhan, Canadian professor, philosopher, and public intellectual. His work is one of the cornerstones of media theory that essentially predicts the World Wide Web 30 years before it was invented.
- 7 Julia Kristeva, Bulgarian-born French psychoanalyst, critic, novelist, and educator, best known for her writings in structuralist linguistics, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and philosophical feminism.
Kristeva, J. (1980) *Desire in language: a semiotic approach to literature and art*. Columbia University Press, New York. p. 31.
- 8 The term Coptic was originally the Arabic term for the native Egyptians but came to refer to the practicing Christians in Egypt. Coptic art is art produced by the Copts.
- 9 An image of Ann Newdigate's "Sad Little Coptic Ancestor" can be seen at http://annnewdigate.ca/archives/pages/FAMILIARS/familiars%20details/familiars_detail_12.html
- 10 Genre codes are systems of signs, which create meaning. Genre codes for movies could be comedy, thriller, horror.



Audrey Moore and Terry Olson



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Symbol, Allegory and Narrative

Murray Gibson

I have been interested in the aesthetics of medieval artworks for many years, particularly tapestry. I enjoy romantic ideals of knights, damsels, and unicorns while trying to ignore the unpleasantness of historical facts like plagues and wars. Medieval tapestry imagery is dynamic: almost a shorthand distillation of an idea rather than an analytical representation. Formal design elements enhance the general two-dimensional quality of the imagery: hierarchical or vertical positioning modes of perspective; strong figurative silhouettes; patterning and limited details within those silhouettes to give form and volume—all these stylistic approaches enhance the overall flattening of the imagery. Within my exploration of historic tapestry, I am intrigued by the spectrum of narrative styles ranging from episodic, linear readings to the abstracted language of symbolism and allegory. I will be discussing a few of my tapestries within these parameters and their influences on my creative practice.

When viewing the late 14th C *Angers Apocalypse*, I cannot ignore plagues and war, nor is there a damsel or unicorn to be seen. The allegorical narrative of the *Book of Revelation* allowed the creative imagination of the artist Jean Bondol and the weavers of Nicholas Bataille's workshop broad scope for interpretation; many panels are literal depictions of the verses of the biblical text. At the same time the multi-panel narrative sequence goes beyond illustration with the decorative scheme of alternating red and blue patterned backgrounds, the ruffed clouds opening windows to heaven and its host of angel musicians above, and the lower verdure with its frightened rabbit.

The late 15th C *Life of St. Stephen* is a similar illustrative sequence that reads like a 20th century comic book with narrative panels separated by architectural elements, heraldic crests, trees, and groups of figures orientated like opposing pages of a book. The narrative is further elaborated by actual text: the medieval equivalent of a speech balloon

from said comic book. The sequence of images shifts from historical narrative to allegory in the panel following the saint's lapidation, in which his body lies on the ground while his soul is carried to heaven by angels. St. Stephen is surrounded by symbolic animals including a unicorn (!), and the porcupine is possibly my favourite area of tapestry within the collective acres of cloth woven throughout history.

Another late 15th century series, *The Hunt of the Unicorn*, exists on two planes of reading: the literal and the allegorical. Like the *Apocalypse* and the *Life of St Stephen* there is a linear narrative; the hunt of the fantastical animal proceeds in a logical sequence from initial sighting to death—game over, as it were.

It is then necessary to reconsider the series as an allegorical sequence; after all there is the final tapestry with the unicorn in an enclosed garden (what's that about?), and, if you think about it, here is a group of men setting out deliberately to kill a unicorn! A medieval understanding of the characteristics and qualities of a unicorn closely parallel those of Christ; it is widely understood that the allegorical reading of the series tells the story of the life of Jesus Christ with an emphasis on the Passion. *The Hunt* is also replete with esoteric hidden symbolism in the plants, animals, and personages throughout the tapestries.¹

The mid-15th century *Devonshire Hunting Tapestries* are a jumble of narratives told simultaneously from numerous points of view, depending on which hapless creature is being

¹ Among other references: *The Unicorn Tapestries*, Margaret B. Freeman, for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cloisters Collection, 1983, and *The Oak King, the Holly King, and the Unicorn: The Myths and Symbolism of the Unicorn Tapestries*, John Williamson, 1986.

hunted at any one time. The tapestries give today's scholars insight into medieval hunting techniques, social hierarchies, and courtly fashion (though it is unlikely that damsels in their finest brocade gowns would take part in the hunt itself). I admire other formal elements, including multiple perspectives that isolate scenes into the various narratives. Groups of personages, in the essentially flat world they inhabit, are dressed like paper dolls, with patterned clothing and minimal attention to representing drape and volume.

The late 15th century series *The Lady and the Unicorn* abandons literal narrative, giving only a passing glance at reality with islands of allegory floating on millefleurs seas. There are many symbolic animals scattered among the flowers; I am particularly intrigued by the rabbits. There are only four rabbit shapes throughout the six tapestries, each varied silhouette defined by ears, haunches, and tails. They are not actual rabbits, per se, rather they are symbols of rabbits. The flowers have their own symbolism within a medieval language of flowers and they, too, are variations on the "idea" of a flower and depict only very few identifiable species with multiple variations.

I am awed by the elegance of distilling an abstract concept into a single symbol: like *The Hunt*, the *Lady's* unicorn reinforces the purity of the damsel, like the Virgin Mary herself. In "Smell," the tapestry doubles down on allegory and symbolism: the floral crown of carnations evokes the strong fragrance of cloves which, by their shape, symbolize nails, so in turn we are led to remember the Crucifixion. The mirror is a perfect symbol in "Sight," and my favourite is the symbol of a musical instrument in "Hearing." "Taste" and "Touch" are far less sophisticated, in my opinion.

These historical works have had a strong effect on my own practice. I have learned from their imagery, the formal aesthetics of design, the weaving techniques, and the range of narrative

styles. These influences have helped me to understand that the dynamic quality I so admire is the result of the cloth and the story being created simultaneously—neither object nor image dominates. This levels the playing field, almost literally, as background and foreground flatten to become more like pattern than illusory space.

I wove "Bitter Harvest" while living in NYC. Medieval-inspired waters of the Hudson River surround the free-floating island of Manhattan



Murray Gibson, "Bitter Harvest,"
60 in x 34 in, 10 epi, 1991, photo: Jim-Ann
Howard. Cotton warp, wool, silk, and gold weft,
Gobelins tapestry, Private collection, USA.

with silhouetted towers on the skyline; a ruffed garland of clouds separates the red and blue sky patterned with a drop-repeat of fire-breathing rats; and a caged apple tree bearing the labelled fruit of the Seven Deadly Sins completes the image. I have used a medieval narrative to comment on my impressions of contemporary life in NYC. In a companion work, "A Numbering of Days," I have used many similar design elements, and my iconic unicorn quotes the final tapestry in *The Hunt*, though its days are numbered as the flood waters rise.



Murray Gibson, "A Numbering of Days," 60 in x 36 in, 10 epi, 1994, photo: Jeffrey Parker. Cotton warp, wool and silk weft, Gobelins tapestry.

"Attack" was created in 1994 for the 8th International Triennial of Tapestry in Lodz, Poland. I am aware there is a different idea of modern tapestry in central Europe, so I deliberately designed my tapestry to be as narrative-tapestry-ish as it could be: millefleurs and the symbolic language of flowers tell my story. Around the border are plants with malevolent characteristics either symbolically or with poisonous qualities. Within this border are plants with beneficial attributes, again symbolic or with real healing properties. The top border alludes to the heavenly musicians from the *Apocalypse*, but rather than playing instruments they are casting down a plague of locusts attacking only the benevolent plants. The "locusts" are really 3,000 brass paperclips hooked into the cloth. "Attack" is an allegorical statement about the varied reception of flat-woven tapestry and the value of a unique



Murray Gibson, "Attack," 70 in x 67 in, 10 epi, 1994, photo: Murray Gibson. Cotton warp, wool, silk, cotton, metallic yarn weft, Gobelins tapestry, Private collection, USA.

handcrafted artwork versus the value of a machine-made multiple.

In my recent series of tapestries, much of the imagery is abstract and there are few figurative representations. I rely more on symbolic imagery to tell a less literal narrative: one that approaches allegory. Often, the tapestry's title is the clue to understanding the image.

This series is based on literary women who are textile practitioners and use their practice to set in motion fate and destiny. The abstract design elements derive from images of clothing the heroine wears in another artist's historical creation that depicts the same narrative; this draped cloth becomes a symbol of the protagonist and her story. My own figurative design elements distill the narrative to another symbol; in combination, abstraction and representation create a single allegorical image.

For example, my "Arachne" is based on the famous narrative in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The abstracted imagery derives from the early 18th C painting by René-Antoine Houasse in which Athena is about to strike Arachne. I chose an area of the painting that shows Athena's robe where it drapes over her upraised arm and, more importantly, her iconic aegis; these two images reference Athena. Arachne is symbolized by her tapestry: a rainbow-coloured warp and the weapon-attributes of the gods whom Arachne mocks in her flawless cloth.

These symbolic representations of Athena and Arachne combine to relate an allegory created by the layers of influence and meaning in my tapestry: there is the original story of the heroine as textile artist; my own reading of the original narrative; its many visual interpretations by past artists; which historic artwork I select; and the symbols I create to distill meaning. The final layer of meaning is the weaving itself to create both object and image.

This essay is my somewhat jumbled narrative of the influences of historical tapestries on my own textile practice: images, aesthetics, techniques, and styles blend together in reference and memory as I strive to weave within a continuum of practice that is centuries old.



Murray Gibson, "Arachne," 22.5 in x 24 in, 10 epi, 2016, photo: Murray Gibson. Cotton warp, wool and cotton weft, Gobelins tapestry. Designed and woven with the financial assistance of an Arts Nova Scotia Creation Grant.

Telling Stories One Tiny Tapestry at a Time

Rebecca Mezoff

I am a narrative person at heart. Maybe most humans are this way. Who doesn't love a good story? I have kept all kinds of journals throughout my life. As a little kid I had a tiny journal with a lock on it where I wrote earth-shattering things like, "Mom let me buy the next L.M. Montgomery book today with my allowance." Today I navigate the ups and downs of adult life by marking days in various journals and sketchbooks. It comes from an impulse to cement the story of my life and to hope that it matters somehow.

Though I easily keep a ten-year journal with a daily entry, I have never quite been able to keep a more traditional tapestry diary where a small portion is woven every day. Instead, I call a motley collection of mostly tiny tapestries my "tapestry diary" and work on it whenever it suits me.

I will admit that large format tapestries make my heart sing. The bigger the better. The weekend in 2012 when I took a workshop with Helena Hernmarck at the America Swedish Institute which was entirely full of her monumentally sized tapestries, was one of the best tapestry experiences I've ever had. I had the good fortune of seeing the Apocalypse Tapestry in Angers, France, last year. It is another incredible example of narrative tapestry, though stories are told through sequential panels of weaving. This work is so large, the scale is impossible to grasp in any concrete way, even when you're standing right in front of it.

There is something about art that is very large that sucks me in. I love weaving large tapestries, though the size of my current looms limits how big I can go without breaking a work up into panels. But I will admit that my tiny tapestries that are responses to events and places are also something I love in a different way.

In a single tapestry, can we tell a story? I think so, but how long can the story be in one panel? The itch to tell a longer story has led me to do works in series in both large-format tapestries and tiny snips of weaving. That allows me to explore visual concepts further and to flesh out the story I'm writing in my head. I also love abstract imagery. I'm far more attracted to form and color than telling a story in a more concrete way as you might do with realistic images. Can you tell a story when your imagery is not realistic? I think artists like Silvia Heyden and Anni Albers would argue that you can, but the story being told might well be evolving in the head of the viewer for the most part.

Since my business teaching tapestry has gotten so busy in the last few years, I've had less and less time to devote to weaving large format tapestries. The need to spend some time weaving led me to little looms and a practice of weaving while traveling. The travel narratives that became small tapestries became a habit and now I call this practice of marking events, places, thoughts, and feelings my tapestry diary. It doesn't matter what I call it really. The series of tiny pieces tell the stories of things that were notable to me.

Susan Martin Maffei's travel tapestries were one inspiration for this work. Susan used to travel a lot by train, including long trips across the country to teach. She wove tiny tapestries of scenes along the way and mounted them all together in her Travel Series. On her website, she calls these weavings a story board and they are mounted in the order she saw the scenes pass out the train window. Go to Susan's website and click on the details for Travel Series II and then use the right arrow to page through the details. You feel like you can see the country pass by from NYC to California. That is storytelling in tapestry. <http://susanmartinmaffei.com/travel-series>

So I've taken this idea of marking moments in my life in hand and woven many small tapestries. I tag each one with where and when I wove it and with the materials I used.

This practice started for me rather accidentally. I was chosen for a month-long artist residency at Petrified Forest National Park in late 2016 and decided once I got there with an assortment of little looms that I would weave one 2 x 2 inch tapestry every day of what I saw in the park. I had the time each evening to weave those tapestries and I found that spending 2-4 hours working on a piece every night really cemented what I had seen and sketched that day out in the park. It was a way to explore experience through fiber materials and to create something that continues to remind me of what I learned there about myself, the desert, and my response to it.

I don't currently have the time to weave a tiny tapestry every day in my normal life, but I do make a point of working on small things frequently and to take looms with me when I'm traveling

or backpacking. Much like a drawing practice, weaving what you see quickly and without too much angst, is a good way to train yourself to look carefully and to consider what is important. Or perhaps, becomes a way to see what you are paying attention to and ask yourself if that is as it should be!

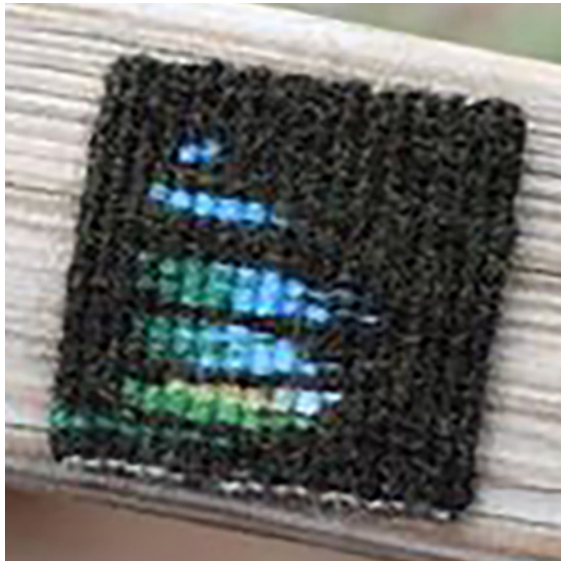
Since that artist residency I've done a few more and continued the practice in my own studio. The photos here illustrate some of the stories of these small pieces. The larger story is just my life and my experience of it. May we all find ways to pay attention and be present right where we are today.



.Rebecca Mezoff, "Petrified Forest, Day 3," 2 in x 2 in. One of the daily pieces I did while an artist-in-residence at Petrified Forest National Park, this piece looked at the layers of rock that were everywhere in the park.



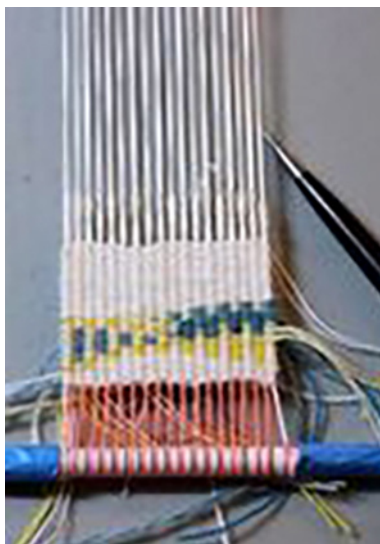
Rebecca Mezoff, "Far Away," 2 in x 4 in. This piece contains the story of a cabin that I used to walk to frequently when I teach at a retreat center in the Rockies. Last year it burned right before we arrived and this tapestry memorialized the place



Rebecca Mezoff, "Redacted-Nature," 2 in x 2 in. Part of a short series about how humans obscure the truth. This one was a reaction to the Trump Administration's roll back on environmental protections and public lands protections.



Rebecca Mezoff, "The Red Door," 3 in x 4 in. Inspired by a red cabin door during an artist residency at Lillian E. Smith Center in Georgia. The door changed every day in color and as the world in my head shifted.



Rebecca Mezoff, "September Chamisa Bloom," 2 in x 2 in. The colors of the chamisa blooming against the sage on a hike in northern Colorado inspired this piece.



Rebecca Mezoff, "Rainbow I" and "Rainbow II," 2 in x 2 in each. These pieces were centered around summer, Pride events, and the inevitable inner turmoil of "passing" or being out.



Rebecca Mezoff, "Sad Snowman," 2 in x 4 in. The climate is changing and yet another December visit to my home state of New Mexico with no snow made me commemorate the trip with wishes for a snowman.

HONORING TRADITION, INSPIRING INNOVATION

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Review

Stitching Resistance: Women, Creativity, and Fiber Arts (2014)

Jasmine Petrie

As the mortal-turned-spider Arachne is tied to her web, allegory is intrinsically tied to the fiber arts. The language of mythology has evolved by the light of the hearth alongside working hands — crafting tapestries, bed coverings, and embroidered edges. These mundane works communicate the hopes and hardships of life in a myriad of ways. In *Stitching Resistance: Women, Creativity, and Fiber Arts (2014)*, Marjorie Agosín brings together a group of writers to delve into these concepts through the cultural analysis of textiles.

Throughout this well-researched (and, at times, quite dense) book, twenty-two authors transcend borders to recall the stories of subjugated women from around the world. Woven throughout the essays are histories of “women’s work” as well as its undeniable tie to literature—from Homer to Alice Walker to Julia Alvarez to the unnamed authors of Sephardic folk songs. This book delves into the importance of texts written about the ephemeral art of textiles. It questions the writers of history and traditional notions of fine art while compelling the reader to view the handwork of ordinary women with new eyes.

In unity, these writers uplift the work of women to be revered and cherished. From Chilean *arpilleras*, to the artist activists Guerrilla Girls, to the quilts of Gee’s Bend, it is recognized in this text that history has a way of silencing these commonplace artists. Each essay is stitched together to spin a cross-cultural common thread that conveys the story of cloth as a story of the people. Further, we are invited to ponder how “the need to create forms of beauty allows the artist to transcend horror, improve society, and envision a brighter future” (Agosín, 2014, page xi).

The reader is led through *her*stories of prolific hope during times of oppression and loss. We follow

industrious women who form cooperatives and create tapestries seeking to provide better lives for their families. These individuals also seek justice through their art as they stitch and weave the stories of lost loved ones. We see the processing of trauma through handiwork and the creation of beautiful objects. This text reflects on the fiber arts of the downtrodden as a fabric woven with unshakable strength and include many full-color photos of distinct works. The opening essay takes us furthest back in time to consider the common theme of allegorical weaving in the Greek myths. In the pages that follow, we traverse the globe through this lens. In Chile we delve into the artwork of individuals crushed by military dictatorship from 1973-1990. Their patchwork tapestries are called *arpilleras* and are stitched onto burlap and other household cloth – it is a form that is still being created across South America today. We discover the fiber art of deeply affected Holocaust survivors. These women learned that, through embroidery and cross stitch, they could process their memories that could not be spoken aloud. From storytelling quilts of Ireland during the Troubles to the many-layered patchwork of African Atlantic writers and stitchers, we are compelled to consider the art of utilitarian objects alongside those created for art’s sake. Perhaps we are further compelled to consider that these are one and the same.

This pivotal text compiled by Marjorie Agosín ties together “identity, memory, legacy, witness, resistance, and hope” (Steinhardt, 2014, page 166) and conveys the stories that rarely make it into history books. Anyone interested in civil liberty, cultural history, or the fiber arts is sure to find fascination in *Stitching Resistance: Women, Creativity, and Fiber Arts*. Enjoy this book by the fireside and you can’t help but feel the thread of weavers of stories that extends before us and after us.

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ATA Volunteer: Nancy Nordquist

What brought you to tapestry weaving?

I have always been interested in textiles, both as the subject of historical study and as a hands-on practice. Weaving has fascinated me since I saw my first Navajo weavings in the summer after my sophomore year of college, although it was many years before I had an opportunity to learn how to weave. At first my interest in weaving concentrated on pattern, but gradually my interest became more pictorial. Tapestry draws me because it allows me to combine visual imagery with the process of weaving. I love making small pieces that challenge me to express an idea with a limited number of warp threads.

How did you find out about ATA?

For about two decades I attempted to teach myself tapestry through books and magazine. Then, by searching the internet for tapestry resources, I became aware of ATA as a wonderful source of information about contemporary tapestry weaving.

Describe what you do for ATA.

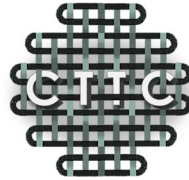
As the Volunteer Coordinator, I reach out to potential volunteers to fill specific needs. I am greatly assisted in this by the many members who make their skills and interests known by filling out the volunteer questionnaire (skill survey) which is linked on the ATA homepage.



Nancy Nordquist, "North Sea at Night, II," 6 3/4 in x 5 in, 2020, 8 epi, cotton, wool, silk, linen, metallic



Nancy Nordquist lives and weaves small tapestries in the Woodlands, Texas. Her background is in art history.
Instagram: @nordquist_studio



Canadian Tapestry and Texture Centre

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August 7-10

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FALL

October 9-12

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designing & weaving
4-Day workshop

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Instructed by Ixchel Suarez

Ixchel Suarez has been in the Tapestry field for 37+ years. She holds a History of Art Diploma, MBA in Museum Studies and extensive studies in textiles, natural dyes and patterns. Her work has been presented internationally. Docent at the textile museum of Canada for 10+ years. Her work is inspired by nature, photography and the use of non-conventional materials.

Founder of the Canadian Tapestry and Texture Centre

For info & bookings visit canadiantapestryce.wixsite.com/cttc/weaving-workshops

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ATA Appreciates Having YOU as a Member!

We know that you have many ways to spend your money and we are very thankful that you value a membership in ATA. We also hope that you take advantage of the many benefits of membership.

Individual Membership Benefits:

- Promote your work and workshops!
 - Listings in ATA's monthly **eKudos**
 - Listings on ATA's **Tapestry Instructors** webpage
 - Social Media Spotlights on member instructors
- Get inspired!
 - **Tapestry Topics**, ATA's triannual newsletter
 - Digital files of ATA's **Digislams** and out of print **catalogs**
- Connect!
 - **Let's Talk Tapestry**, members only Facebook Group
 - Subscription to ATA's monthly **eNews**
 - **ATA-Talk**, members only email list
 - **Membership Directory**
- Save money!
 - Reduced entry fees for ATA's exhibitions
 - Reduced registration fees for ATA's **workshops**
 - Discounts on exhibition catalogs
 - Discounts on advertising
 - Discounts on tapestry equipment and supplies from selected businesses

Studio Circle Benefits:

- All Individual benefits listed above, plus:
 - Your own Artist Page on ATA's website
 - Social Media spotlights of your Artist Page
 - Free Mentoring Program
 - **Donor recognition** in ATA catalogs

Curator's Circle Benefits:

- All Individual and Studio Circle benefits listed above, plus:
 - **Early registration** for workshops

Collector's Circle Benefits:

- All Individual, Studio Circle and Curator's Circle benefits listed above, plus:
 - **Complimentary catalogs**



ATA News

Small Tapestry International 7: Elements: Deadline for Entry is August 15, 2020!

This year, the deadline for entry is a bit earlier than usual due to a wonderful opportunity to expand our audience through a partnership with the American Association of Woodturners Gallery of Art. The exhibition will be held in St. Paul, Minnesota. Thanks to a generous donation from the Teitelbaum Family Trust, ATA offers awards to two selected artists. The juror for the show bestows the awards on tapestries that (s)he considers to be of exceptional aesthetic and technical quality. The First Place Award is a \$300 cash prize and Second Place is a \$200 cash prize. Go [here](#) to enter now.

Renditions: Unjuried Small Format Show is Now Virtual!

In light of Covid-19, ATA transitioned the in-person exhibit that was supposed to take place in conjunction with Convergence to our on-line format. We received nearly 250 entries from around the world! While we are sad that we will not get to experience this exhibition in person, it is an honor to display the work of so many wonderful small format tapestries. A catalog will be available and can be purchased any time after August 1, 2020. Details are [here](#). The exhibit became live in July 2020, so please check out our website [here](#) to view the work at your leisure.

Congratulations to Marge Allik, 2020 International Student Award Winner!

ATA is pleased to announce the winner of the International Student Award is Marge Allik. Marge will receive \$750 and complimentary membership of the ATA. Successful applications were received from Maryliis Teinfeldt-Grins, Liisi Anderson, Claire Pixie Aunison, Helen Kangro from Estonia, and Yun Shen from Taiwan, who will receive a complimentary membership.

Marge Allik says of her work are inspired by the present time. "The situation in the world forces us to spend more time in nature and enjoy the spectacle it offers. Nature is a wonderful artist who paints beautiful patterns on land, water and air with a playful ease. One just has to notice. The current forced withdrawal from the daily carousel brings simple, natural things and needs into focus. Nature teaches us to enjoy and appreciate the process of creating again." View Marge Allik's work [here](#) and read more about her in our Educational Articles [here](#).

American Tapestry Biennial 13 Opens October 11, 2020 at San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles

We are fortunate to have Highfield Hall work with us to re-schedule the installation of ATB 13 to February 9, 2021 due to the constraints that Covid-19 created. In the meantime, we look forward to seeing the 37 works of art in October by the following artists:

Don Burns, Martha Christian, Jean Corder
Clarke, Gabriela Cristu, Ariadna Donner,
Bernard Foucher, Helena Figueiredo,
Joaquina Marques, Carla Tavares,
Gisela Figueiredo, Lurdes Branquinho,
Heather Gallegos-Rex, Joan Griffin,
Janette Gross, Birgitta Hallberg,
Louise Halsey, Mette Hansen,
Peter Harris, Barbara Heller,
Stephanie Hoppe, Susan Iverson,
Ruth Jones, Karen King, Lis Korsgren,
Lialia Kuchma, Tal Landeau,
Margo Macdonald, Marni Martin,
Sonja Miremont, Julia Mitchell,
Patricia Nelson, Judy Ness,
Suzanne Paquette, Christine Pradel-Lien,
Michael Rohde, Tommye Scanlin,
Kathe Todd-Hooker, Alta Turner,
Dorothea Van De Winkel, Sue Weil,
Cheri White, Patricia Williams

Congratulations to our New Board Members!

This year, ATA is delighted to have the following join the board:

Shelley Socolofsky, Board President

Shelley says, "Having been a member of ATA and a tapestry weaver spanning four decades, I was thrilled and excited by the possibility of working more closely with my colleagues to steward an organization that has held steady my passion for so long."

Sue Weil, Director at Large

Sue writes about her nomination: "ATA is a special organization—one that creates and supports community among tapestry weavers around the world. I am so grateful for the many opportunities I've been afforded through ATA sponsored workshops and exhibitions and the many ATA artist members who have become personal friends and whose work I admire. It would be an honor to give back to this community through volunteering my time and skills."

David Heustess, Director of Exhibits

David is interested in serving on the ATA board in order to "assist with exhibition opportunities for ATA members, to meet and work with other tapestry artists, to share with and give back to the tapestry/fiber arts community, to learn more about the various approaches to this medium, to gain experience and learn from being a board member."

Janette Gross, Director of Finance

When asked why she is interested in serving on ATA's board, Janette said, "I believe I have the expertise to be Finance Director. It is important to give back to an organization I believe in and one that supports me in my artistic pursuits."

Molly Elkind, Director of Volunteers

Molly is passionate about teaching elements and principles of design for tapestry and other fiber arts. Now based Santa Fe, NM, she travels nationwide to teach. She is excited to act as our board liaison to help guide the many members who offer and provide so much support to ATA!

Murray Gibson, Director of Awards

Murray Gibson has been a tapestry artist for more than 35 years. He first studied with Jane Kidd at the Alberta College of Art, Calgary, Alberta and graduated with honors in 1985. After 10 years of studio practice Murray returned to university and received his MA in Textiles studying with Janis Jefferies at Goldsmith's College, University of London, UK. He continues his studio practice and teaches an introductory level tapestry course at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, NS.

Important Dates

August 15, 2020

Small Tapestry International 7: Elements Call for Entry Closes

September 15, 2020

Emerge Award Materials Due for Southern Hemisphere

October 1, 2020

Tapestry Topics Deadline for "...a bit of weaving: Archie Brennan's Legacy

October 11, 2020

ATB 13 Opens at San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles

***Tapestry Topics* Themes and Deadlines**

“ ... a bit of weaving”: Archie Brennan’s Legacy October 1, 2020

Archie Brennan’s passing in 2019 marked the end of a productive, creative and influential career that encompassed many roles – from artist weaver, to studio director, to dedicated teacher. Archie’s influence is felt by most of us, whether directly or indirectly.

This issue of *Tapestry Topics* will be a chance for you to share how Archie’s work and teachings have influenced your tapestry making. Submit a nifty trick you learned from Archie; techniques that have become the bread and butter of your practice (or perhaps are applied less frequently, but of special power); ideas that influence the kind of imagery you explore in weaving; principles that guide your choice of loom, loom preparation, weaving methods, etc. Please contact Mary Lane, Theme Coordinator, if you would like to submit to this issue. Short submissions are welcome. marylane53@mac.com

Call for Theme Coordinators

Do you have an idea for a theme? Would you like to be a Theme Coordinator?
Email: newsletter@americantapestryalliance.org

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The Back Page



"The Falcon's Bath"

South Netherlandish, ca. 1400–1415

137 1/2 in × 145 1/2 in (349.3 cm × 369.6 cm), tapestry with wool warp and wool wefts.

The Cloisters Collection, 2011.93

The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Retrieved 31 March, 2020.

www.metmuseum.org

This recently discovered tapestry depicting courtly figures training a falcon is in remarkably good condition.

At the center of the tapestry, four luxuriously dressed figures are gathered in front of a rose trellis and flowering turf bench. The lady and the gentleman in the foreground, attended by courtiers behind them, are encouraging the falcon to bathe in the basin of water between them. Four additional figures at the corners, set against a flowering, or millefleurs ground, are also busy training falcons.