



AMERICAN TAPESTRY ALLIANCE

The Tapestry Diary: It's About Time

Janette Meetze



Ruth Manning; "This Takes Time"; 1"x13";10 epi; 2013; wool and cotton; Ruth Manning, photographer

In the fullness of time tapestries grow. It is not surprising that the theme of time, the effects of its passing and the numerous opportunities it presents flow through the works of many tapestry weavers. [Ruth Manning](#) wove to the heart of it with brevity and wit in her recent small tapestry, "This Takes Time." Perhaps this common occupation with time as integral to their work is one reason why many tapestry weavers start a daily practice like the tapestry diary. Though there are many points of common experience expressed by those that undertake the task, the resulting work is as individual as a diary. Momentum for the weaving of tapestry diaries seems to be growing. Consider the lively and wonderful YouTube video, [Senior Year Tapestry Diary](#), in which high school senior Maeve presents her experience with a tapestry diary, complete with musical accompaniment. Maeve comments that it was a great learning experience. Discussions

of tapestry diaries have been ongoing at the [Mirrix Looms group on Facebook](#) and host Elena Zuyok [posted about her experiments](#) with a tapestry diary in January 2013 on the Mirrix blog. At the beginning of 2014 an enthusiastic group of about 37 tapestry weavers began a tapestry diary weave-along on the Tapestry Weaving group at Ravelry (this [link](#) requires a Ravelry login), with a separate Flickr group specifically for the [progress photos](#).

Recently, I learned of a call for entries to a show titled *The Art is the Cloth* presented by the New Hampshire Institute of Art, juried by Andrew Lucas, Patrick McCay and Micala Sidore. The artists were asked to explore the various ways that their tapestry making reflects on the nature of hand-woven tapestry as a piece of cloth. All the entries were to meet one of six requirements, and the last one was particularly applicable to the tapestry diary experience, “attention to the process of weaving: pieces where the story they tell develops in the order in which the tapestry is woven.” It will be fun to see if there are tapestry diaries in the exhibit.



Tommye Scanlin; "Once Upon a Time"; 34" x 24"; 8 epi; 2012; wool and cotton; Tim Barnwell, photographer

Where did all this interest in a daily practice of tapestry weaving arise? Daily practice in the arts is nothing new. Many of us can relate to the daily ritual of practicing a musical instrument, and in the visual arts a long-standing history of daily practice in painting and sketching is also seeing a revival. Yet, it would be hard to imagine using the phrase *tapestry diary* without considering the work of Tommye Scanlin. She has documented her path of daily tapestry practice on her blog, [Works in Progress](#), since 2008. In November of 2012 she wrote an article for the [British Tapestry Group](#) publication, "[Threads of Time—One Day at a Time](#)," and she also contributes to a private blog, Tapestry Days, inviting others to share their individual paths of daily tapestry diary practice.

Tommye's interest in exploring time is evident not only in her tapestry diaries but also in her "normal" tapestry work. Consider the second piece in her *Fiddlehead* series, "Once Upon A Time," where she weaves a half pass of red orange weft after each day's weaving, blending the marking of the passage of time and the accumulation of each day's work with a visually exciting design element.

Her journey with the tapestry diary work began in May of 2008 when she decided to "devote a small, discrete amount of tapestry weaving to each day for a month, creating a small tapestry made of individual, yet related parts, and with each day's design being determined when it was woven." (Photo at left: Tommye Scanlin; "Month of May 2008"; 4" x 40"; 8 epi; 2008; wool and cotton; Trevor Morris, photographer). She began, hoping that she could sustain the discipline necessary to complete the 31 days of the month across the 4" width she had chosen. At the end of May 2008, she was rewarded by achieving her goal with a 40" long tapestry. She has continued to weave yearly tapestry diaries from 2009 to 2013. Currently she is weaving her sixth year long tapestry diary adventure for 2014.



left: Tommye Scanlin; "Month of May 2008"; 4" x 40"; 8 epi; 2008; wool and cotton; Trevor Morris, photographer.
center: Tommye Scanlin, "Year 2009"; 43" x 12"; 8 epi; 2009; wool and linen; Trevor Morris, photographer. right:
Tommye Scanlin, "Year 2012"; 89" x 12"; 8 epi; 2012; wool, cotton, linen, silk, metallic; Tim Barnwell, photographer.

Each year Tommye starts with a new set of self-determined rules and for that first attempt she started with three: use remnants of weft from past tapestries; weave the date in a simple way; and top each day with a pass of black weft. For her first year long diary in 2009 she increased her warp width to 12" in order to weave the days side by side and employed the use of white weft shapes to indicate the days she was away from home. By the end of the year, it had grown to be 43" long! (Photo at right: Tommye Scanlin, "Year 2009"; 43" x 12"; 8 epi; 2009; wool and linen; Trevor Morris, photographer)

In 2010 she used literal "blanks" for her time away from home and by weaving thin strips of Bristol board into the warps for the number of days away and employing half hitches at the top of the strips she was able to give support to those areas during the weaving. At the end of the year the strips were easily removed leaving empty warps in their place.

2011 was a busy year filled with teaching obligations and other activities so Tommye decided to employ a small frame loom that she could take with her when traveling and work on each month separately. She explored various ideas that year and, in June through September she cast a die each day to make random choices for the colors of backgrounds and shapes.

The following year Tommye's tapestry diary was once again based on a continuous warp because she found the visual impact of the entire year in one piece, with its accumulation of parts satisfying. (Photo at right: Tommye Scanlin, "Year 2012"; 89" x 12"; 8 epi; 2012; wool, cotton, linen, silk, metallic; Tim Barnwell, photographer). She indicated the number of days away in 2012 with the number and an "X", for example 8X indicated 8 days away from home. That year she was also working with the weather, the time of day and the seasons. She would often find inspiration in her morning walks. For example, finding a feather might translate as a simplified feather shape as part of the day's entry. In her last completed yearlong tapestry diary of 2013 she continued with the whole year in one piece once again and used a collection of weft dye samples made years before. Each month she changed the rules a little as she worked through the year.

Tommye feels that persistence and dedication are two qualities she admires and can demonstrate in her own life through her daily commitment to the tapestry diary. She feels that this simple daily practice is available to any who care to start. "I just really want this process to be something that is encouraging rather than intimidating... My working with this simple process has helped me to enhance my tapestry skills." In 2010 she started sharing with a group of friends as she wove her diary and offered a quote from a poem by Rumi, "The Sunrise Ruby," as particularly motivating to her.

*Submit to a daily practice.
Your loyalty to that
is a ring on the door.
Keep knocking and the joy inside
will eventually open a window
and look out to see who's there.*



Janet Austin; "Tapestry Diary 2010"; 49" x 13"; 8 epi; 2010; wool and cotton with small amounts of other fibers;

Janet Austin, photographer

In February of 2010 Tommye [remarked on her blog](#), "New rules to what's becoming an old game now that I'm over a month into a second year of weaving a small bit daily as an ongoing exercise. I continue to be intrigued by what can happen and look forward to sitting down at the loom and making small decisions each day." By that time, another tapestry weaver, Janet Austin, had taken up weaving her first tapestry diary and responded, "I love what you say about making small decisions every day. That's what I've been enjoying about my Tapestry Diary too." Janet continues to enjoy weaving tapestry diaries to this day.

In a January, 2013 post on her blog, [Tangled Web: Tapestry Weaving and Other Stuff](#), Janet [commented](#) that her tapestry diary practice had become a way to give new meaning to the New Year's holiday and explained that making her own rules and a simple choice each day "takes away the intimidation and uncertainty that can keep me away from the studio." The rules for her first tapestry diary in 2010 were: "1. Choose a color scheme for each month. 2. Change direction each month. 3 Weave everyday unless I can't. 4. If I miss a day or more, make it up later. 5. When I feel like it weave an image or text relating to special occasions. 6. I make the rules, so I can break them. "In that first diary Janet explored parallelograms and observes, "I realized that the repetition, and yes boredom, of weaving the same thing every day drove me to experiment and explore, to seek out challenges, so the final product is a treasure trove of new ideas for future reference. As a mother, I always felt that boredom was necessary to encourage children to develop their creativity, and I can see that it works for adults too."



Janet Austin; "Tapestry Diary 2012, 3rd Quarter" and "Tapestry Diary 2012, 4th Quarter"; each 15"x 12"; 8 epi; 2012: wool with small amounts of other fibers; Janet Austin, photographer

In 2011 Janet decided to pursue a sketch diary instead, which she also found rewarding, but by the year 2012 she had another tapestry diary under construction. She was still using the

parallelograms from 2010 but decided to explore adding color to the black and white she had been using in her recent tapestry work. She wove the first half of the year and then split the second half into two separate quarters. By the time she started her tapestry diary for 2013 she was headed in a new direction, as she says, “because the diary has to be about exploring new territory!” In 2013 she explores new territory with the use of squares, weft interlock and the five day work week! She is also working with brown and white as her base colors and exploring low contrast colors and values in 2013. The journey continues for 2014 with yet another direction taken in her tapestry diary practice.

Dorothy Clews was also among the small group of weavers who started a tapestry diary in 2010. Her interest in exploring time is apparent in her “normal” tapestry work as well. ([Dorothy Clews Tapestry](#) Facebook page) Dorothy’s tapestry diary was inspired by her garden, and during her first month of weaving she wrote, “ I keep hearing Susan and Archie’s voices in my head – tapestry is a journey and what you do today depends on what you did the day before.” How true this observation rings for a tapestry diary and a garden. She writes, “These detail shots come from a section of the garden that I was weaving while we were having record floods. The garden was not flooded but I wanted to record the event.”



Dorothy Clews; “Tapestry Diary February 2010, St George”; 39” x 6”; 8 epi; 2010; wool and cotton; Dorothy Clews, photographer (detail to the right; full image on the left)



Lydia Kendrick; "March through July 2012 Tapestry Diary"; 31.5" x 11.5"; 8 epi; 2012; wool and cotton; Lydia Kendrick, photographer

By the time my tapestry diary journey started in June of 2012 there was a small group of weavers who were corresponding regularly about weaving the daily entries including Tommye Scanlin, Janet Austin, Lydia Kendrick and Cathie Beckman.

Lydia started a tapestry diary practice in January of 2012, and by mid-March she remarked that she was already seeing an improvement in her tapestry weaving skills. ([Kendrick Kreation's](#) blog) In July she completed her first tapestry diary. She was also inspired by her garden and trying out new techniques to improve her skills. She comments that work on the tapestry diary forces her to slow down a bit each day, "It's a kind of meditation, even relaxation, contemplating the next block of weaving or a particular thought for the month or day."

In May of the same year Cathie Beckman started her own exploration of tapestry diary practice. Cathie explains her experience with the tapestry diary as "a daily discipline where I could safely

explore and study tapestry without pitfalls. I didn't have to worry about results. It also actively engaged me in my studio, often acting as a springboard to other weaving endeavors. It is a primer." Cathie made one- or two-month studies in which she explored a different technique, in May it was spirals, June was pick and pick and in July and August she worked with principles of color, using Itten as inspiration. She was inspired by African themes September through November and in December she wove a cone of yarn.



Cathie Beckman; Tapestry Diary March 2012", Pansies; 9" x 8"; 8 epi; March 1- March 31, 2013; wool and cotton;

Cathie Beckman, photographer



Cathie Beckman; "Tapestry Diary April, Stargazer Lily"; 8" x 7 7/8 "; 8 epi; April 1-April 30, 2013; wool and cotton;

Cathie Beckman, photographer

The following year she started on a study of flowers, a different one each month but by April she was feeling stuck. Spending four to six hours a day on her diary studies wasn't leaving much time for her other work and that is when she shared her three point mantra: *show up* (this is a recurrent theme with all of us, just go to the studio every day); *simplify* (when things aren't working as planned, get back to things that do); and *big changes* (move in a positive direction). In Cathie's case she changed back to the kind of projects that really excited her and went on to complete two wonderful color studies.



Deborah Behm; "Prairie Sky Diary 2013"; 14" x 8"; 8 epi; 2013; wool and cotton; Deborah Behm, photographer

While doing some online research for this article I discovered other blogs where tapestry diaries were being woven and commented on. Both Nancy McRay and Deborah Behm were kind enough to answer my inquiry and send photos.

Deborah's blog is [Heart Like a Wheel: Spinning and Fibre Arts as Meditation Practice](#). In [an entry in April, 2013](#) she explains, "A tapestry diary is the weaver's way of sketching and note taking. Rather than scribbling in a journal, tapestry weavers track their days by weaving small

segments of a larger piece over a given period of time.” Her self-made rules included the primary importance of weaving every day, not using a cartoon, allowing a theme to develop over time, not unweaving after a day is over and not attaching judgement to the work completed.



Nancy McRay; "July- November 2013"; 13" x 13"; 10 epi; July-November 2013; handspun wool, wool and cotton;

Nancy McRay, photographer

Nancy McRay also keeps a blog, [Knit Crochet Weave Spin Dye](#), and [wrote on October 5, 2013](#), "I believe I have begun a tapestry series, working title: The Tapestry Diaries." The rules she starts with include: either spinning the yarn or using remnants; no unweaving; and allowing the image to develop as the work happens. She finished the first one in November 2013 and the second was finished in February 2014. Reflecting on the two tapestries completed in the diary series so far she says, "I work hard to set aside judgement, and just show up in my studio every day. And it is working. I am working."



Margaret Lee; "Woven Meanings 2013"; 23.5" x 8.5"; 10 epi; 2013; wool and cotton; Margaret Lee, photographer

In the tapestry weaving adventure it has always seemed to me that the gap between weaving the first couple of samplers and then moving on to use the medium to express your personal intentions is wide. That is exactly the place where Margaret Lee was when she started her first tapestry diary in January of 2013. She writes "I have completed exactly two samplers on my new Mirrix loom and am now in the process of warping my first tapestry diary as a way to focus my engagement with this art form and to discipline my weaving as a mode of personal reflection and expression. ... I have decided to commit to a tapestry diary as a way of embarking on a new contemplative journey, not knowing where it might lead but hoping for surprises!"

A newer member of those that share their progress on the Tapestry Days blog is Nancy Biggins, who began her daily practice journey in October of 2013. When posting her work in January of this year she explained, "...the wefts are a random daily pick from a rat's nest of embroidery thrums a friend found at some garage sale...The days are marked by a half pass of fatter weft. The months are also marked." She found that the 20 minutes spent each day gave her centering

time and assigned two titles to her work, “landscape of days (when I set the frame against the wall to look at it, it so reminded me of landscapes that I laughed)...equanimity”



Nancy Biggins; “Landscape of Days, Equanimity”; 9” x 4.5”; 13/14 epi; October – February 2013; two ply of 6 ply floss; Nancy Biggins, photographer

My own experience with the daily practice of a tapestry diary began in the last part of June 2012. I had started a blog and a tapestry related business, [J Meetze Studio/Common Threads](#), and wanted to grow my tapestry skills and discover the expressive possibilities that tapestry offered as a medium. On discovering a class with Tommye Scanlin titled “Weaving the Days of Our Lives,” I headed to Arrowmont School of Art and Craft in Tennessee the last week in June 2012. It was a great experience, and having an entire week to concentrate on tapestry weaving with Tommye’s guidance and the company of others with like interest was exhilarating. Diving into my diary with a few appealing colors and a couple of sketches from the days at Arrowmont, the “this takes time” message hit home. Completing the rectangles across my narrow warp in the same day they were started proved challenging. The challenge was exciting, though, and I just couldn’t stop weaving.

After returning home my first tapestry diary was completed with the last days of June and all of July. My second diary was the month of August, and this time I widened the warp and changed the sett from 8 ends per inch to 10. The year finished with a single weaving for September through December and back to 8 ends per inch. I chose to weave a synopsis when I returned from days away from home because I always felt the journey impressed me with so many interesting images that needed a home. For example, after attending a workshop with Kathe Todd-Hooker in Colorado Springs that October I wove my memory of Pikes Peak upon my return.



left: Janette Meetze; " Arrowmont – July 31, 2012"; 27.5" x 5" ; 8 epi; June-July 2012; wool and cotton; right: "September- December 2012"; 40" x 10.5"; 8 epi; September 1-December 31, 2012; wool, cotton and silk. Janet Meetze, Photographer

Working on the tapestry diary did get me into the studio every day and weaving every day and making that effort did improve my confidence and technique. There were other benefits as well, getting into the studio every day gave me momentum to finish and work on other things by creating a pattern of activity both mental and physical. Changing or establishing one habit can create quite a rift in the space time continuum.



Janette Meetze; "2013 Tapestry Diary Triptych"; 39.75" longest length x 19.75"; 8 epi; 2013; wool, cotton and silk:

Janette Meetze, photographer

By the time my first full year started in 2013 I was ready to establish some rules based on my experience in the previous months. Like Cathie, the need to simplify and change direction prompted some changes for 2013. Establishing a specific space for each day's entry was key, because my goal of keeping each day's work to one hour or less seemed to demand it. The idea of confining myself to a one by two-inch rectangle was not appealing at first, but by working through it I discovered that there are an amazing number of possibilities lurking in that rectangle. I wove my 2013 diary in three parts and combined them as a triptych in the finishing process.

Like most of the other weavers here, the conclusion that the accumulation of days must be respected, and that unweaving was not an option proved liberating. In making the commitment to give my time to daily weaving on a tapestry diary I assumed there would be benefits and I have received more than expected. I am now busy with my 2014 daily tapestry weaving practice and sharing the experience on my blog. As others before me have also discovered, it just keeps getting better.

Janette Meetze lives in Bixby, Oklahoma and is a self-employed owner/artist at Fiber Studio offering supplies and instruction for tapestry and bead weaving. She holds a BFA degree in Art History from the University of Florida. Her "2013 Diary Triptych," along with another of her tapestries, have been accepted into Fiber Celebration 2014 in Fort Collins, Colorado. She currently serves as Vice President of the Tulsa Handweavers Guild and has shown and won awards for past work in fiber and mixed media.