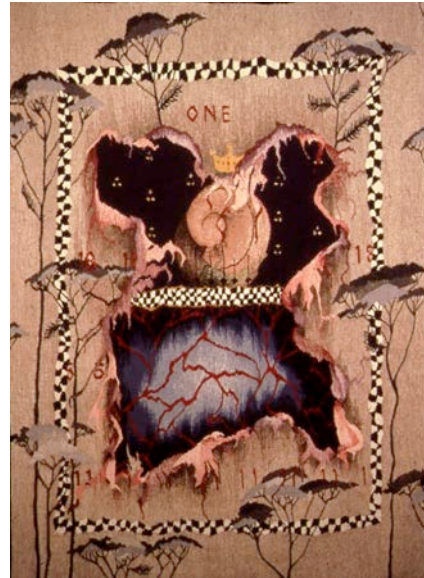


Linda Wallace: Journeys in Art and Tapestry

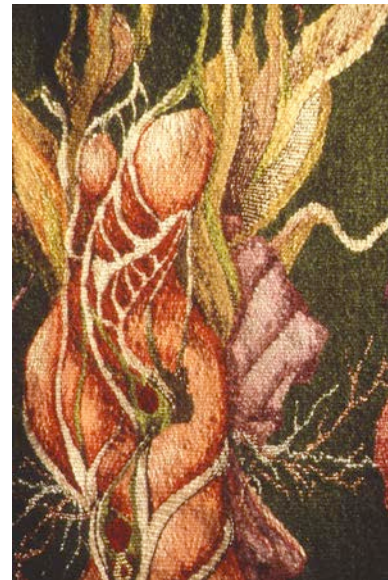
Long before I became an artist, a feminist, or a health care practitioner, I developed a passionate interest in textiles. Their colour, pattern and texture delighted my senses. This enjoyment was deepened as I learned about their pan-global, historical significance. Like painting and sculpture, fibre and cloth embody particular historical and cultural references. They participate as active components in our social interactions. Yet the hierarchies of the “fine art” world have systematically undervalued textiles’ significance.

The medium of woven tapestry marries the world of traditional, image-based fine art with the tactile world of cloth to create a complex and multi-layered voice difficult to achieve in other media. Additionally, the technical realities of the loom and weaving, the binary combinations of warp and weft, over and under, have served as a model for the language of computers, the “1s” and “0s”. Hand-woven equals digital. By creating my imagery within the structural grid of a woven tapestry, I strive to blend the cultural potency of cloth with its power to represent visually the complex issues of contemporary critical theory. Within this context, I strive to communicate my own, feminist response to patriarchy.

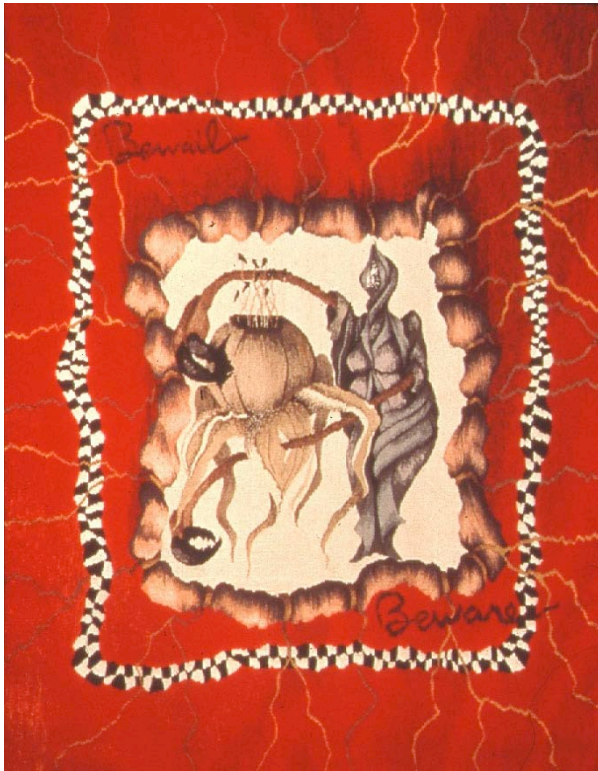




The actions of spinning thread and weaving cloth by hand are historically and cross-culturally connected to both the world of women and, symbolically, to the creation of life. The twisting, organic imagery present in some of my tapestries relates to these elements, but it has also evolved from a deep-rooted awareness of cyclical patterning in the natural world. In particular, I am fascinated by the passages of birth and death.



I began my professional career working as a registered nurse. Nursing had appealed to my 18 year old self. I grew up in a different era from young women today. Many women of my generation had the courage to stand up to the patriarchal world around them and to demand entry to the world of academia. I wasn't one of them. I bought into the 1950's dreams of marriage, children and living happily ever after. After graduating from high school, I furthered my education "just in case" disaster might strike and I might have to support my family. For me, that education choice was limited to nursing, teaching or secretarial work. I loved science and was fascinated by the workings of the human body so I chose nursing. No wonder, that as time went by, I became a feminist.

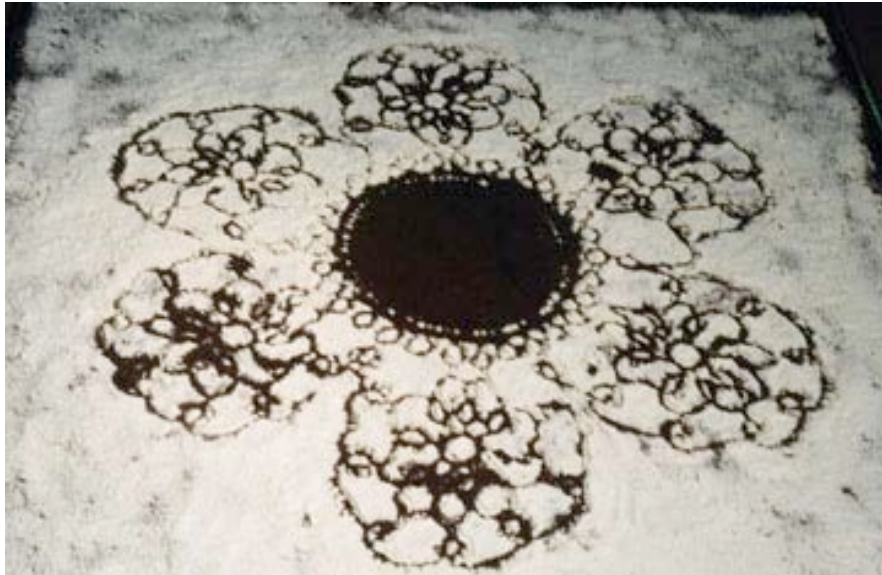


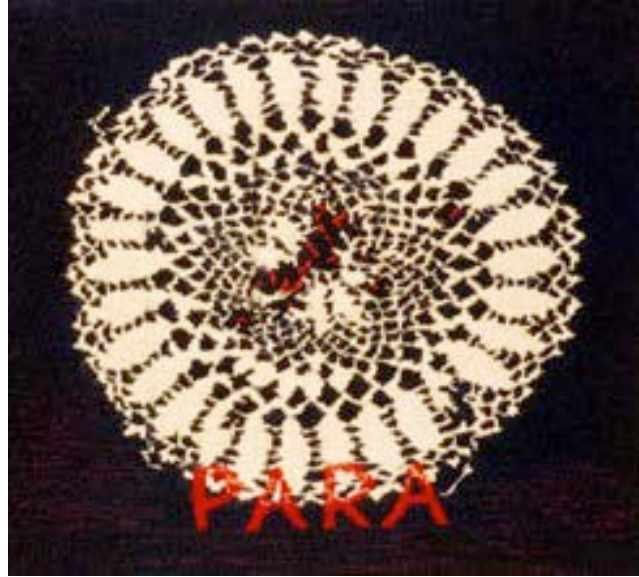
Despite the challenges it presented, the nursing profession was not one that fulfilled my personal need to learn, understand and correlate information and concepts. The one role I embraced and at which I excelled was that of patient advocate. My belief in myself as a spokesperson came from the years I spent on the front lines of health care. I still feel it is one of the most important, yet often overlooked, aspects of the nursing profession. I frequently attempted to break away from nursing and spent those times either traveling or in business. My passion for researching ideas and scientific concepts

followed me through all these endeavors. The need to make a living continued to draw me back to the nursing profession.

Dissatisfied, the re/forming woman I had become entered the Alberta College of Art at the age of 44. When I left the medical world for the art world, I took with me my curiosity, my fascination with science, medicine and issues of women's healthcare and my sense of myself as "mediator". My feminist beliefs became grounded in learning, as well as instinct, adding yet another layer to my work.

Initially, I intended to pursue a major in sculpture. I imagined making short-lived installations, art without the more precious implications of permanence. However, education is based in questions, exploration and a quest for understanding, and the investigation of new concepts caused a shift in my thinking. In my third year at the Alberta College of Art, I was faced with a pivotal statement. My instructor, who was a new technology/conceptual artist, looked through my portfolio, listened to me talk about my work and what I was trying to say with it and told me I must make a decision. I must decide what was more important to me, the "object" or the "polemic". After much soul searching, I finally concluded I was equally interested in both. That year I was introduced to the medium of woven tapestry and everything fell into place. I graduated from art school with, first a diploma, and then a BFA in Textiles.



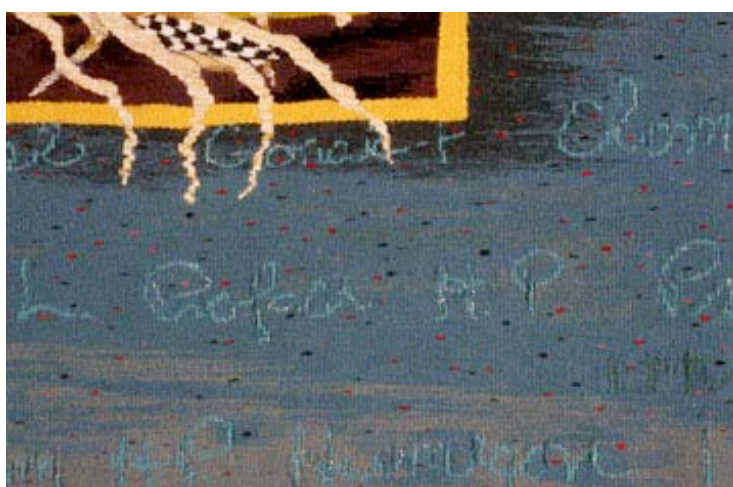


I create my work primarily in the medium of woven tapestry. That's my "object". In creating "the object", I strive to make work that is technically skilled. However, I also want my work to compel the viewer to stop and spend time exploring it. For me, "art" involves a type of ephemeral energy that animates and energizes the space between the object and the viewer. If I create work that is technically skilled but without compelling content, no one will linger, no energy will bridge the gap between the object and the viewer and thus, no "art" will be made.

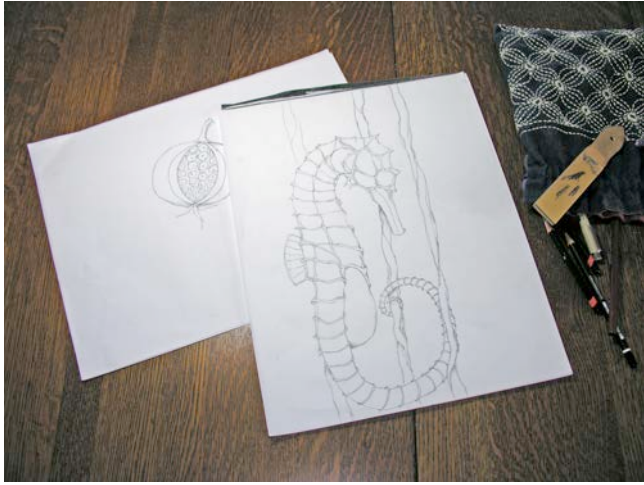
In a world caught in a vortex of ever-increasing speed, where multi-tasking is a prerequisite to survival, I create my work with time, thread and thought. The viewer senses the presence of the hand of the artist and of the many hours of the artist's life invested in the work. Time itself becomes part of the content.

The materials and techniques of tapestry also influence the form and meaning of my work. The image is built row by row, embedded within the surface of the cloth. The object and the image are one. The underlying grid structure of the warp and weft, the reality of the interlacement of threads, becomes a voice, a "mark" that carries subtle signifiers absorbed by the viewer. The tapestry artist must consider, throughout the design process and the weaving, how this structural grid impacts the image. In addition, the fibres themselves have a personality that influences the content of my work. I usually employ a cotton warp sett at ten warp threads to the inch. I select from a wide variety of fibres for my weft, supplementing wool with silk, linen, cotton, rayon and even metallic.

Tapestry has a long history. It has been woven in many cultures and used in many ways. As a wall hanging it has been used both in historic and contemporary times as a vehicle for narration. The narrative tradition works well with my desire to mediate and become a liaison between the worlds of science, medicine, technology, biotechnology and bioethics and the individual women receiving the benefits, or the tragedies, of those fields.

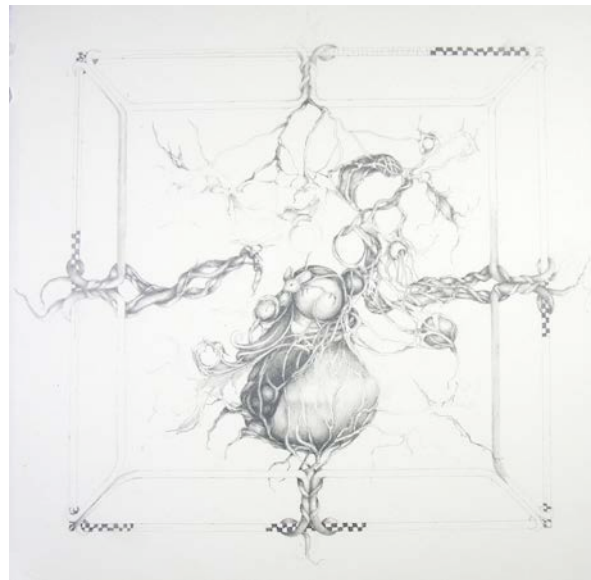


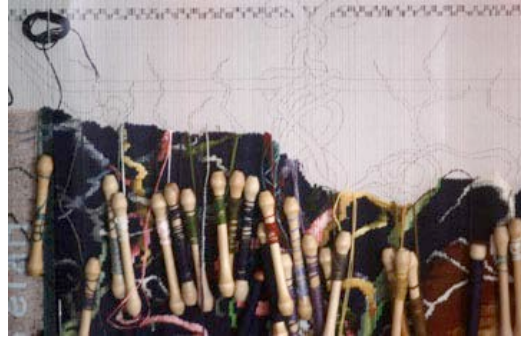
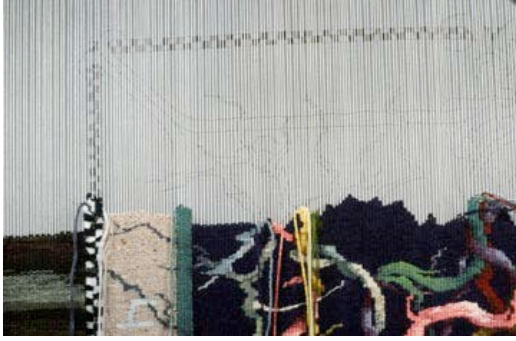
Medical and scientific research tends to discount the anecdotal. Individual stories and life histories are subsumed into statistical norms and projected percentages for successful outcomes. My goal is to represent the individual woman who might be part of the statistical ten per cent failure rate that is not mentioned when proponents claim a ninety per cent success rate. My work imagines her as a specific individual; it offers her voice and her questions an opportunity to be heard. In a world of specialization, where “new” is equated with “better”, in a world spinning faster and faster, I question doing something “just because it’s possible.” While excited by advances in technology, I am also often overwhelmed by a sense of worry.





I am an artist and a feminist. As an artist, I try to step back in order to find a slightly different angle, a different perspective. In presenting these vantage points I am not so much presenting definitive answers as I am asking questions and proposing alternatives. As I stretch the boundaries of my own knowledge and understanding, I communicate, through my art, my observations and thoughts. These concepts are filtered through the medium of woven tapestry, drawing on both its narrative power and its cultural and social potency.





Process and narrative illustration as concept...

Awareness of technique without being bound within traditional limits...

Object and polemic combined...

(This talk was originally presented on November 30th, 2007 at the Nordic Heritage Museum in Seattle, Washington, in conjunction with the opening of *Tapestry on the Edge*.)