



HONORING TRADITION, INSPIRING INNOVATION



ATA

AMERICAN TAPESTRY ALLIANCE

HONORING TRADITION, INSPIRING INNOVATION

2013

CODA



AN ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF TAPESTRY ART TODAY



Michelle Driver, Australia *Goth Deathrock Subculture No. 1* 2012
19 in x 26 in 9.5 epi tapestry: wool, linen, badges.



TAPESTRY art TODAY

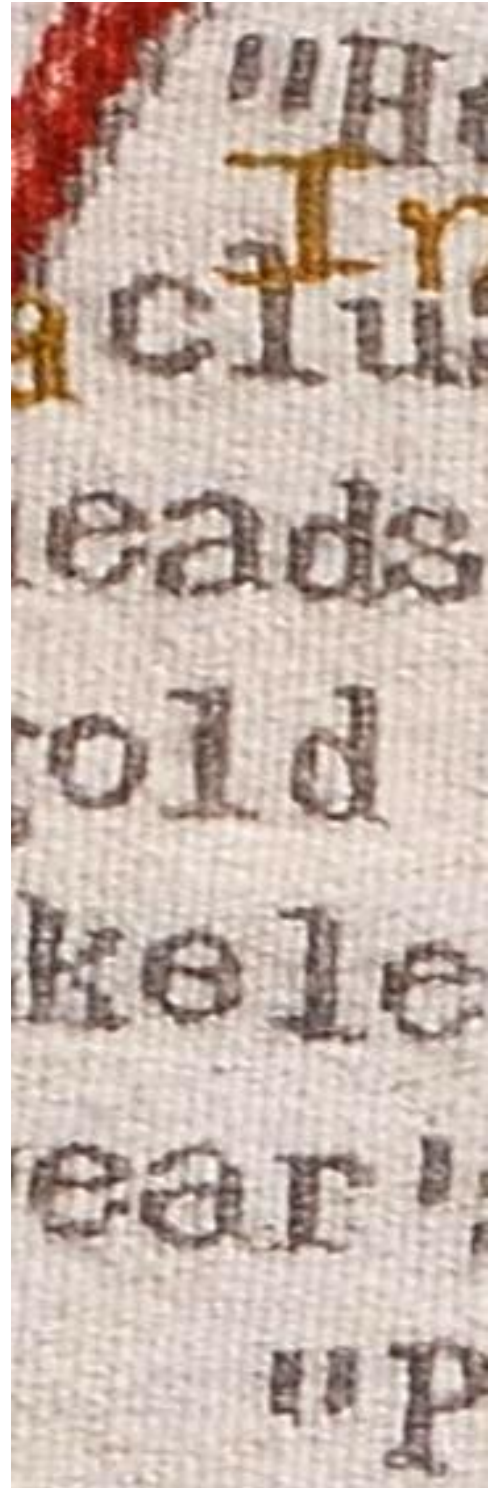


AMERICAN TAPESTRY ALLIANCE

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Sarah Swett, USA *Rough Copy #9* detail

Introduction

Michael F. Rohde

Co-Director, American Tapestry Alliance

The American Tapestry Alliance is comprised of over 600 international member artists, who design and create their own hand woven tapestries. Every year we produce travelling exhibitions and catalogues of recent tapestries, selected by noted scholars. The organization also produces *Tapestry Topics—A Quarterly Review of Tapestry Art Today* as a member benefit. We have come to recognize that the quality of the research and reporting deserves a wider audience.



Therefore, the first annual digest was conceived and realized, more a kind of online coffee table book full of luscious images of tapestry with well considered articles. The goal of the Digest is to showcase some of the best writing and tapestries that have graced the virtual pages, heretofore only available to members

In view of your professional role, we hope you will find this publication enlightening and we freely give permission to share with your colleagues or anyone else who you think might be interested. We welcome your comments and questions.

board@americantapestryalliance.org *Honoring Tradition, Inspiring Innovation*



Michael Rohde, USA Pattern 2011 38.5 in x 36.5 in tapestry: wool, natural dyes.

Photo by Andrew Neuhart

Portrait photo by Rod Carrol

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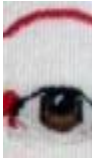


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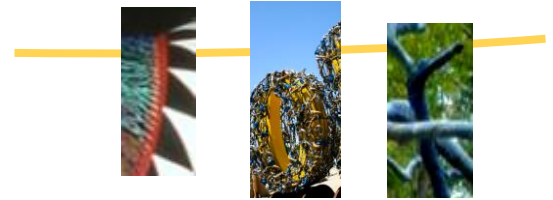
Gallery: a selection of works from *Tapestry Topics* 2012-2013



Gallery notes

Social Fabrics

Mary Zicafoose



I have been involved in three public art projects in my career as a tapestry weaver. My participation in each of the projects was prefaced with a jurors comment that read something like, **“Because you are a tapestry weaver, we know you will approach the parameters of this project quite differently than other artists.”**

How does one embrace a call to create public art in a *weaverly* way? This article is my attempt to highlight my response to three public art projects in the Midwestern United States that summoned greater crowds and more public interest and exposure to my work as a tapestry weaver than any gallery show I had participated in prior to that time.

The J. Doe Project Omaha, Nebraska 2001

Textiles are a beautiful reflection of the daily breath of a civilization. Man and his relationship to cloth go back a very long way. J.Doe & the Magic Carpet is a culturally blended, universal soul. The Doe and the flying carpet mirror each other, reflections of centuries of symbols and patterns found in woven handwork from around the globe.

— artist statement



J.Doe & the Magic Carpet detail



J. Doe & the Magic Carpet 2001 8 ft x 6 ft
painted fiberglass and aluminum

This public art project, similar to other fiberglass sculpture projects in American cities, was an effort to raise public awareness of the arts by placing sculptural human-like forms on the streets of Omaha, NE. The Does took the town by storm, surpassing anyone’s wildest. A local art critic wrote: “Like many Omahans and visitors, I’ve been chasing Does and all over town enjoying the conversations they invite.”

My response to the incredible hulk of fiberglass that took over the family room of our home from February–May 2001, was to transform it into an agent for carrying coded designs derivative of textile patterns, bolting the figure astride a magic “woven” carpet I shaped from heavy gauge aluminum sheeting. I spent several weeks sanding the rough form. Then I drew on it, much like the renderings for a tapestry cartoon. In this case my medium wasn’t dyed wool, it was acrylic paint, over 50 large tubes, and rolls of masking tape. The fiberglass drank the paint and I wove *and un-wove* the patterns many times, changing this, adding that... a slow



process, even for one wedded to slow process. I drilled ¼ inch spaced holes at either end of the painted aluminum flying carpet and half-hitched color coated telephone wire through the holes to replicate carpet fringe. Carpet and Doe were then bolted together on a custom mount.

My Doe was installed in the outside entrance of a popular neighborhood public library. It, along with a selection of the sculptures, went up for public auction at a gala event at the project's end. It was purchased by a local art collector and resides as a navigational landmark overlooking the water at his family's summer home on Lake Okoboji, Iowa.

The O! Public Art Project Omaha, Nebraska 2007



the author at work on wO!ven

The **O! Public Art Project** involved another fibreglass sculptural form, the mandate being to re-interpret the logo of the city of Omaha, **O!** as a three-dimensional, six-foot letter O with an accompanying exclamation point.

I knew that this encounter with fibreglass was not going to take place in my family room. What would a unique weaverly response to the logo of the city of Omaha look like? As often happens, the name of the piece came first, leading the charge towards the concept. The name was **wO!ven**. And for this project I needed to literally

weave. But what? And how? The light went on. I would weld a warp-like encasement of steel rebar around the **O** and the **!** shapes and then weave in assorted large scale materials, revealing the sculptural forms within the armature.

I had a plan. Now I needed the right man. A friend who owned a construction and crane company came to my aid. Liking my idea, he agreed to partner with me on the technical aspects of turning concept into public art. We set up my studio in his company's construction yard. The blank **O!** was hauled in and flanked by scaffolding and ladders. The form was spray painted a signature deep yellow, the color I often use in my tapestries. Measurements were taken and the warping process began. This entailed heating and bending long lengths of steel rebar to exactly mirror the shapes and welding the warps together. This took two men, a master welder, and several weeks.

Meanwhile I scavenged and purchased materials for the weft: thick lengths of colored industrial ropes, strips of industrial materials from salvage yards, two cast off heavy steel abutments from a nuclear power plant for the base, and willow saplings from the Missouri River.

Once the rebar warp was completed I was on my own. But the project was too

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*wO!ven installation day 2007
12 ft x 12 ft*

compelling to keep under my hat. An artist friend from Iowa came to weave as my assistant. Then other friends, construction workers, interested citizens and folks I had never met joined in. A group of regulars began stopping by the site each day to weave a bit, offer advice and enjoy being involved in a public art project.

wO!ven was to be installed in a city park off the busiest street in Omaha. The installation day was set for the first Saturday in May, requiring a variety of city permits. Power lines had to be taken down, the street closed, and the police force contracted to assist in transporting the massive structure on a flatbed truck to its new home. It took a crane and a crew of seven men to hoist and plant **wO!ven** on the lawn of Memorial Park.

I lost count of how many people were involved in the making of "my" project... hundreds. The welder and rebar crew signed their names on the warp, the moving crew drew their initials in the wet concrete on the base, the guys at the rope shop and salvage yards came to watch the installation, the park crew got in on the champagne. It had become everyone's project. Technical terms like *warp* and *weft* were being tossed around like folks were members of the local weavers guild.

Word of wO!ven spread as one involved person told another. TV stations picked up the story and amazingly the Omaha community was talking about weaving in the same sentence as sculpture and public art.

Elements Environmental Sculpture Invitational Fontenelle Forest, Bellevue, Nebraska 2007

In 2007 I was invited to respond sculpturally to the theme *Elements* within a city forest preserve. The guidelines encourage exploration of environmental art issues through the creation of site-specific, temporary installations. Once again, I needed a weaverly idea. On a late spring walk through the forest

with the Park Director an idea broke through as he was taking note of tree fatalities, listing who had made it through the harsh winter and who had not. We discovered several favorite trees standing stark and leafless at prime locations off the trail and eulogized their long lives.

I heard myself saying, "Imagine if we could give them just one more incarnation?"



wO!ven on site
Memorial Park, Omaha
Nebraska 12ft x 12 ft
10,000 lbs painted
fiberglass, steel rebar,
acrylic and hemp
roping, scrap metals,
willow saplings,
on a steel base



Dyed & Wrapped Elements Sculpture Installation 2007
indigo wrapped dead fall in ravine



And voila, the plan proceeded to unfold. It involved bed sheets, natural dyes and dead trees. Specifically, wrapped selected stands of dead timber throughout the forest in brilliant cloth. The idea was to completely wrap each tree with strips of naturally dyed cotton, from the base to the top most branches. As one walked through the forest suddenly they would come upon stands of magnificently robed colored trees. The concept was environmentally harmless and visually very compelling. The forest staff loved it so much they offered to send volunteers to my studio to assist in the dying of 250 pounds of fabric.

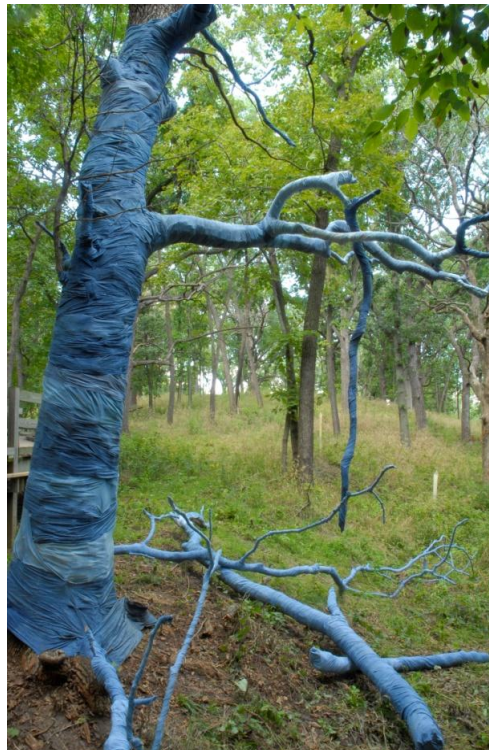
Suddenly I had a dream, and a team. The early stages of "my" public art project was doing what public art does best: involve the public. That summer a random group of forest volunteers got a crash course in natural dying, hand ripping 300 recycled hotel sheets into strips, dying them with brews of osage orange, cochineal and indigo. The dyed fabric strips multiplied, signaling that I needed to get some first-hand tree wrapping experience. Selecting a newly departed tree on our property I tracked the number of hours, number of dyed strips and number of staple guns and ladders it took for an amateur to wrap one rather modestly sized dead pine tree. The numbers were staggering but the result was spot on.

The Fontenelle Forest tree wrapping was scheduled for the first week of August, the hottest week of the summer.

My rebar bending friend once again came to my aid, surrounding trees with armatures of metal scaffolding to rival the painting of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Opening day a small crew of us toted giant plastic bins full of dyed and rolled cotton strips deep into the forest. We were on a mission, perhaps not from God, but one that captured the excitement and imagination of many.



Dyed & Wrapped installation tree wrapping, the author and daughter, Kale Zicafoose



Dyed & Wrapped faded indigo wrapped upright tree before de-installation



The wrapping at its best was a slow go. At its worst, we battled nettles, mosquitoes, fear of heights and long, hot days. All in all, we fared well, logging in only one case of poison oak and one episode of heat stroke. Bites, stings, rashes and staple wounds went undocumented as part of the experience. The tree wrapping was completed in 7 days.



In their six month lifespan the wrapped trees were viewed by thousands of visitors. Some came specifically to see the reborn trees hidden in the forest, others just stumbled upon them on an afternoon hike. The community feedback was joyful and affirming.

This project was about inserting the unexpected in a familiar environment, doing something unusually surprising with a very familiar object(s). It was done on a shoestring budget involving many dozen people who didn't do art.

I am a tapestry weaver. I have spent the last 25 years seated behind a loom, weaving stories with brightly dyed yarns. I have decided that I would like to spend the next 25 years criss-crossing this planet, doing things like wrapping trees....

I love the challenge of working outdoors on a huge scale with "inside" materials, specifically, cloth.

I love what happens to a dead tree when it has been wrapped— how it is resurrected from crumble and decay and is given new life, how it is pulled from the forest shadows, and how the naturally dyed cloth collects and reflects light. I love the dressing of a tree, the sense of crazy couture as you gather darts and pleats around a limb, smooth the fabric across a trunk, and fit and flair a knothole. This is satisfying and liberating work for tapestry weavers and forest lovers alike....

This is a time sensitive art installation. It will never look more brilliant than the moment the wrapping of the tree is completed. Instantly the hand of nature comes into play. The sun will begin fading the natural dyes from the cloth, the dew and rain will have their way, and the insects, birds and animals of the forest will beg, borrow and steal threads and bits of fabric for their own creative endeavors.

—excerpts, artist statement in the forest

My participation in public art involved taking on some personal risk. It asked that I step away to make art a bit differently. No longer alone in my studio, my process also became very public. The projects drew in many, many people eager to assist in the creative process and thousands more who were delighted to simply enjoy the view. It is through these projects that my work became much more widely known in my community and region, not as a sculptor or as a tree wrapper, but as the artist that I am, a tapestry weaver.



Mary Zicafoose has done a lot of weaving in 30 years. Lately she spends more time behind the computer than the loom giving what she can to ATA, GoodWeave USA and Omaha's Union for Contemporary Art.

Photography by Kirby Zicafoose

On the Many Historic Threads in Contemporary Tapestry

Candace Adelson



Over the course of the twentieth century, under the influence of Jean Lurçat, Friedensreich Hundertwasser, and others, the model of the designer-weaver artist revolutionized the history of tapestry. Prior to that, long tradition had required a cartoon created by an often specialized artist, which was then rendered by a highly skilled (and often equally artistically trained and gifted) weaver. After watching several Vienna painters follow Lurçat's example and weave from their own full scale cartoons, their friend Hundertwasser set out in 1952 to weave just from small scale designs. He felt that this freedom would produce more expressive and artistically compelling artwork, (*Hundertwasser Tapisserien*, Exhibition, Vienna, Museum für Angewandte Kunst, 1978–79).

Today, although some professionals still translate the art of others, tapestry artists are recognized and sought out for their creativity. With relation to the small design versus cartoon debate, approaches vary considerably, as ATA members' methods attest. But whether working from a full cartoon, a reduced scale model, a sketch, totally free-hand, or a combination of these, artists still find a variety of inspirations in historic tapestry of the fourteenth through nineteenth centuries.

A case in point is the trio of very different tapestries, all by ATA members, in the Handweavers Guild of America's 2011 Small Expressions exhibition: Barbara Burns's **Little Spinner Girl**, Sidsel Moreb's **Geisha**, and Jennifer Sargent's **Intimations**. Presented at the Tennessee State Museum in Nashville, the exhibition was juried by Jeanne Brady, head of the fiber program at Tennessee Tech's Appalachian Center for Craft in Cookeville. Among 38 pieces selected from a field of more than 200 international entries, the tapestries comprised less than 8% of the show. But in the final judging, they received two of the top six prizes: Moreb's work took second place and Sargent's, third. The disproportionate honors, in my (admittedly perhaps biased) opinion, were no surprise. Tapestry, with its long history and dedicated and subtle-minded devotees, has evolved to arguably the most refined and diverse of today's many fiber art forms.

Considering the reinterpretation and expansion of the various historic roots in these three tapestries gives a glimpse into the many directions that artists are exploring. It also opens a window on the fascinating question of conscious versus subliminal referencing.

Barbara Burns's **Little Spinner Girl** is a sample detail for a larger historical composition intended to convey a social-historical message. She writes that it was inspired by a visit to the Museum LA in Lewiston, Maine. "The focus of the museum is the people who worked in the mills in the two towns [Lewiston and Auburn]." Discussion of a painting there of mill workers, copied from an old photograph, led to projecting a related tapestry for the museum—now awaiting financing.

For the design, Burns explored the work of Lewis Wickes Hine, whose photographs of early industrial working conditions helped reform U.S. child labor laws. "His photos made their way to the Smithsonian where they were put into public domain, and that is where I found the image for this tapestry," she says. "I used Photoshop on the original photograph, changing the colors a bit and simplifying the



image. I also created a border with words. I used the ABC's; instead of A is for Apple, B is for Boy, I used A is for Accident, B is for Bobbin, etc." She also explains, "the face of the girl... is a detail of a larger composition that would be 5–6 feet wide." In the cartoon detail, "the shapes in the background are the two rows of spinning machines this girl was responsible for." Finally, Burns explains a conceptual reference to historic tapestries.

"My intention with this tapestry is to remind people that life was not easy in the mills, especially for children. Similar to the tapestries in medieval Europe, when the majority of people were illiterate, this is a *billboard* with a message that is read through the image. *A picture is worth a thousand words says it all*" (ATB9 catalogue, p. 49, and e-mails to the author). As a historian, I also see this work as part of the centuries-long tradition of monochromatic tapestry—both as entire compositions and for individual areas like sculptural elements and skin gradations. Recognized for its difficulty, this type of rendering commanded top wages per square measure among eighteenth-century weavers.

The **Geisha's** personality was foremost in Sidsel Moreb's initial writing about her work. "I think of this geisha as being in rebellion: one eyebrow slightly raised, and the threads of the weft and warpscape in a disorderly, ungroomed fashion... I wanted to weave a face of subtleties and force, of softness and courage. Her perfectly appointed makeup is a façade through which her eyes watch and her mind churns. I wanted to make her appear compelling. I chose a geisha because they are trained to present themselves so perfectly to the world, and I wonder what goes on behind their faces!" (Tapestry Weavers South Newsletter, Summer 2011, cover). Later (emails to the author) she added more about her process, "**I can say that my weavings emerge as a journey...** Usually the weaving is well under way by the time I have the whole thing sorted in my mind... My first and only thought was that I wanted to weave a face, and as this was my first face, I initially thought that the traditional make-up used by geishas would simplify the face; but she emerged with such strength, she surprised me!...Then it seemed



Barbara Burns Little Spinner Girl cartoon detail



Barbara Burns Little Spinner Girl 2010
13 in x 13 in 7 epi cotton



that to use very fine threads was appropriate to the Japanese theme.... I made a cartoon—pencil, then paint, then Xeroxing the image and laminating it with thin (3 mm) laminate. I had not decided how to tackle the neck when I began, but it worked itself out as I wove....



Sidsel Moreb Geisha 2010
10.75 in x 8.75 in 30 epi sewing thread

I wove it on a very small 4 in x 6 in wooden loom, and wove the whole thing sitting on a little wooden kindergarten chair in the utility room, away from all noise and disturbance so no one could find me there. The juxtaposition of her still, immaculate beauty and the chaos of the utility room, I feel, produced her fierce internal rebellion...."

The fine threads specifically hark back to ultra-fine silk *kesi* tapestry weaving—an early Chinese tradition that spread to Japan after China's Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) had revived it and also re-established trade between the two countries. My historian's eye notes how the highly graphic face derives—perhaps subconsciously—from Japanese wood block prints, but its individuality and emotional force is absolutely modern.

Jennifer Sargent's experiential artist's statement for **Intimations** is similarly totally contemporary: "This Gobelins tapestry **Intimations**, uses pattern and disruption in exploration of my notion of a safe life.

The fetishistic, repetitive quality of pattern brings order to the looming chaos of life.

When interruptions intrude, new possibilities are created from the collapse of an illusory stability." However, because she had mentioned previously that **Intimations** was an experiment with a new direction for her work, its obvious technical departure from previous work prompted further inquiry.

When asked how her virtuoso slit-work related to Medieval and Renaissance tapestry, she revealed an extremely specific source. "Probably the early tapestries that I have looked at most often and am most enthralled by are from the **Apocalypse of Angers**. When I worked at the Scheuer Tapestry Studio in NY, I had access to Ruth Scheuer's amazing collection of tapestry books, and many focused on this series, including one that showed the



Jennifer Sargent Intimations 2010
12 in x 10 in hand-dyed cotton, linen, silk, wool



the back of these tapestries. For **Intimations** in particular I had in mind a figure of the lamb in **Tapestry no. 47** which is woven in shades of white with the curly coat accentuated through the pattern of the slits. "Of her process she says, "I work from a cartoon placed behind the tapestry. I use it as a guide and will change things in the tapestry if I judge that the design is not working in the weaving. Personally I would become disengaged from the process if everything was pre-planned" (emails to the author). The use of a cartoon directly behind the warp follows centuries-old tradition—particularly in low-warp tapestry weaving. However, like Moreb and Burns (whose cartoon and subtly changed final work can be compared here), Sargent is a Modern creative artist, rather than the rendering master-weaver of times gone by.

These three very contemporary creations reference a broad range of centuries-old tapestry traditions and history—from pictorial messages and ethnic style characteristics to specialized weaving strategies and techniques. And although all three artists used full scale cartoons, not one followed her model slavishly.

They all revel in the freedom of expression that being an artist-weaver affords and that Hundertwasser sought to enhance by theorizing a different technical approach. Common to all—Hundertwasser included—is an understandable reverence for and broad inspiration from the weavings of the past. **How could this not be the case when working in one of the oldest, structurally simplest, and yet most potentially subtle and infinitely diverse textile techniques known to man?**



Jennifer Sargent Intimations detail



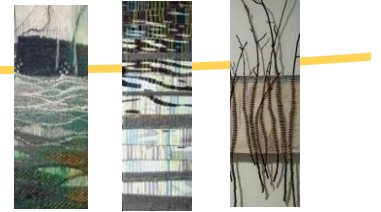
Candace J. Adelson, Ph.D., is Senior Curator of Fashion and Textiles at the Tennessee State Museum in Nashville. She has written extensively about the history of European tapestry.

The author and artists featured in this article live and work in the USA.

Photo of Intimations by Alan McCoy

Honoring Tradition, Inspiring Innovation, what it means to me

Joan Baxter



Everyone who weaves tapestries addresses the first part of the new ATA tagline. You can't weave without honouring traditions because they are so inextricably linked to the making. I mean you can't even make the structure unless you understand the traditional form. It's the craft that provides the technical building blocks of all contemporary woven tapestries no matter how far they travel away from what we might think of as classical tapestry.

In the past tapestry was most easily defined by its mode of manufacture, in a studio setting with several skilled weavers working together to produce large scale tapestries that were usually designed by a non-weaver. It is much harder to define where the boundaries of contemporary tapestry are. . . especially since most people don't even know what tapestry is. In the English language the word has an extremely elastic set of meanings, most of them having nothing to do with weaving. If tapestry is defined purely by the classical technique or by particular materials, then it runs the risk of discouraging experimentation and perhaps even innovation. If defined so broadly that it does not need to contain any weaving, then what is the point in calling it tapestry at all.

For me tapestry is more accurately defined by an approach to design that is informed and shaped by the making process, rather than being defined by the technique itself. My own craftsmanship is like breathing, an essential background for for my brain and my subconscious to fashion ideas. A successful tapestry is the perfect marriage between old and new, with **concept and making so inextricably linked that the piece could not be made in another medium.**

I see my own tapestries as part of the of the contemporary link in a long chain of knowledge and skills passed down from a time before history. Because the development of tapestry has been cyclical rather than linear and because modern technology has had surprisingly little impact on our pleasingly low tech equipment and processes, we have a great deal more in common with our historical and pre-historical



predecessors than in most other professions. Tapestry reinvents itself through the ideas expressed in the medium rather than technological innovation. All tapestry weavers bring their own unique ways of thinking to an ancient technique. Within the simple strictures of warp and weft we have a freedom of expression limited only by our technical ability and our creative curiosity.

*Leaving 2004 2 m x 95 cm 3.5 ends per cm
cotton, wool, digital images, laminated text strips, pebbles*



Each of my tapestries is innovative since each piece explores something new to me. This is the root of my impetus to weave. The innovations however are incremental, with each new idea a progression rather than a flash from nowhere. **My working process is a continuous loop of ideas building on ideas**—drawn not only from my own observation and experience but from that of previous generations of tapestry weavers and all those who have contributed to our collective culture.

My main aim is to keep that which is beautiful in tapestry whilst pushing the boundaries of what is possible. For me the intrinsic qualities of tapestry are the beauty of the textile itself, its ability to absorb rather than reflect light, the possibilities of rich and subtle colour, the ability to create any shape, size or surface. All the technical aspects of tapestry are simply a language to express ideas—to weave them into existence.

I'm tired of the expectation from critics and galleries that one's work should always be innovative—in the sense that it should be novel, shocking, like nothing else. This is a facile concept

in a world where the new is old in the blink of an eye. Tapestry, being slow to produce, is not capable of addressing these kinds of values even if it wanted to. It can only turn its back on such ridiculous demands and keep faith with its own slower and more considered truths. **In taking this course however, we do not address the fundamental lack of understanding of our medium by those who are in the best position to promote it.**

The widely held perception of tapestry as an imitative rather than an innovative language is a serious barrier to our advancement as artists. This inaccurate view ignores the vigour and inventiveness of medieval tapestry and, worse, also ignores the emergence during the past century of individual artist-weavers whose work has been as cutting edge as work in any other medium. I have tried throughout my working life—through teaching, lecturing, writing, demonstrating and exhibiting—to change attitudes in any way I can, and that is all any of us can do.

My own struggles both to honour and innovate through tapestry illustrate what I hope is the ethos embodied in our tagline. As I get older and my pace of production slows, I am increasingly interested in finding quicker and simpler ways to realise ideas. I will never turn my back on tapestry; rather I'm searching for a more experimental vocabulary within it.

As a former Studio weaver I have found it hardest to relinquish traditional materials. Quite rightly one should always be mindful that tapestry is capable of surviving for many hundreds of years, so I feel a responsibility to use materials that will last. Historic tapestries tell us that of all the materials that can be used, wool is the most durable—at least in the cool and damp climate of north-western Europe. Cotton, linen and silk are less robust in the long term, but they are still likely to outlive the weaver. We have no long-term knowledge of how well synthetic fibres will last. Although I have always used small quantities of other fibres to create specific effects, I am totally in love with wool. Nothing can approach its beauty, flexibility, durability, and its renewable and ecological credentials are excellent. It also takes and holds dye better than any other fibre.



Joan Baxter Leaving detail



My first serious experiments with other materials came about because my core yarn, a high quality, high lustre, naturally white, tightly spun worsted, was no longer available. This is unfortunately part of a general loss of quality wool products worldwide. Unable to find an acceptable replacement, I started to try out hemp and linen which, mixed with strands of finer wool, gave me something approaching the handle I was after. I was also interested in the much harder surface that can be achieved with linen mixes and the subtle textural contrasts of linens against wool.



Winter Skyline 2004 woven area
 30 cm x 30 cm 3.5 ends per cm
 cotton, wool, aspen twigs

More recently experiments with non-standard materials were set off by a search for something to represent the qualities of snow. Wool was not white enough, cotton and linen too hard, creating too beady a surface. Eventually I lit on using torn up strips of the old sheets I use to wrap my tapestries in. This gave the perfect qualities I was after—a lumpy, clotted sort of surface caused by the slightly different widths of the sheeting strips, a blurred quality created by the frayed edges, and of course white sheet was exactly the right kind of white for snow. This use of recycled textile opens up a whole new area of possibilities.

This period of experimentation was also a cynical strategy to see if the art world would pay any more attention to my work if I used non-classical materials. Depressingly but predictably this proved to be true, especially if I used digital media. In my piece, **Leaving**, made in 2004, I used scanned texts (from the Sutherland Estates record of the infamous Highland Clearances) which I laminated and cut into strips and used as part of the weft, alongside strips of digital photographs. This led to a series of more recent works using digital photographs and then on to tapestries that incorporate twigs as part of the weft.

These more experimental works were greatly facilitated by finding a new woolen warp that can be tied and dip-dyed—something not possible with my usual cotton warp. The possibilities of being able broadly to control the colours in my warp allow me to expose parts of it. The warp becomes a more active part of the composition, allowing the developing tapestry to be informed by the patterns and colours in it. In some pieces dyeing the warp has become the design stage.

Recently my lifelong interest in dance has involved me in a collaborative installation that will have its world premier in October 2012. The project takes the form of a dance video projected onto a tapestry backcloth and is inspired by a short story, "The Weaver" by Orcadian writer George Mackay Brown. Although many of my tapestries are informed by music, movement and literature, I have never actively collaborated across art forms before, and I found the new challenges very inspiring. How to create a tapestry that will meld with the dancer so she appears to swim through the surface of the weave? How to make a tapestry that will be viewed in near darkness?

This project has made me realise that there is another dimension that can be added to tapestry through collaboration with individuals working in different art forms but pursuing



similar themes. I'm also excited by the ability of video to extend the range of expression and widen audiences, especially since it is very comfortable in virtual spaces. Perhaps this is where tapestry can address contemporary art on an equal footing: Alchemy Film Festival.



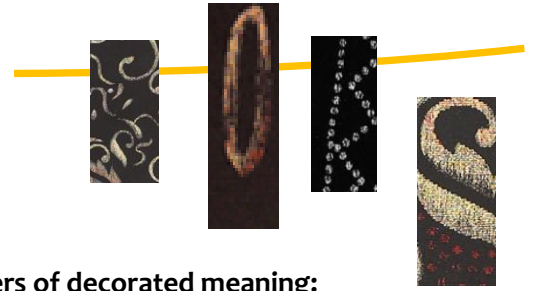
LOOM 1 *dance installation (work in progress) 2012*
4 m x 2 m 3.5 ends per cm double warped with
tie dyed worsted wool, hemp rags, lurex



Joan Baxter has been weaving tapestries since 1973, first as an art student in Scotland and Poland, then as a professional weaver in the UK and Australia. Her work deals with landscape, its echoes of history, its legends, its atmospheres and moods. She is particularly inspired by the rich cultural heritage and wild beauty of the landscapes of the far North of Scotland where she lives.

To Be or Not to Be Art

Anet Brusgaard



Generally speaking, **tapestry is a hanging with added layers of decorated meaning: stories, political comments, colors, lines, texture or ornamentation**, because you want to express something particular. There is a tradition for this, and the history of tapestry has a lot to say, especially about the interplay between the tapestry as an art form and as decoration. There are quite a lot of tapestries which have communicated throughout time, and the woven art form has been given its own space in the history of art, precisely due to this peculiar phenomenon.



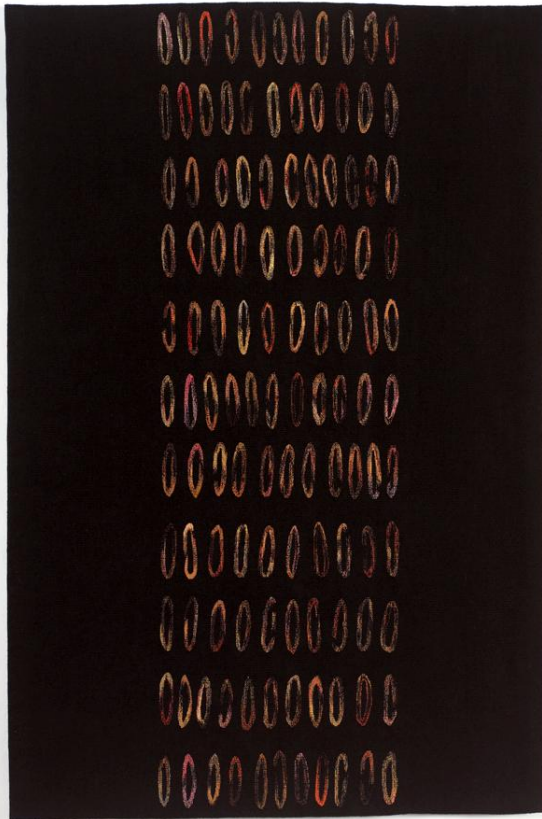
Arabesque detail cotton / wool, gold, silver and silk

Each time I enter a room decorated with monumental woven tapestries, old as well as contemporary, I am seized by a curious formal feeling and fascination. The old historic tapestries are overwhelming in their beauty and patina, sublimely worked using techniques that have been perfected through centuries of working on the loom and which to this day remain the basis for weaving tapestry. I have been fortunate enough to experience and learn this traditional craft, so rich with all its rituals, during my studies in Aubusson, which for centuries has been one of the most important centres in France for the manufacture of tapestries.

A characteristic feature of my approach is my consistent way of working up a monochrome surface with added decoration—design. My tapestries are quite black—a firm surface with a traditional woven, structured covering/armour, with a minimal expression.

In Tapestry Topics Summer 2007

(*Celebrating 25 Years*) I showed my work **Répétition**, a tapestry with a minimal design. The motif in this work is, as the title indicates, a sign, a simple sign, an oval circle, with different graphic, ornamental fragments, repeating and changing the expression all over the surface of the tapestry. I used a technique I have perfected through a series of three “renaissance” tapestries, with motifs of flowers and foliage in gold, silver and silk.



Répétition 2005 200 cm x 132 cm cotton / wool, gold, metal threads and silk



Tatouage I 2008 290 cm x 200 cm

My recent tapestries **Tatouage I** and **Tatouage II** are also designed over a simple sign, a *spot* and the theme is body art from the continent of Africa. The human being has always had the impulse to decorate the body with either body painting, tattoos, jewelry or textiles.

The African scarifications—tattooing made with spots or lines, are incredibly fascinating and specially well known in the region of Kuba. These fascinating spots are used in my latest two works—these simple signs in a varying colour mix, adapting themselves in a string of pearls and drawing up the contours, creating a minimalistic tapestry expression.



back of Tatouage I 2008 cotton and silk

It is a dramatic *métier* to create and weave a tapestry, a task of “almost unbearable” responsibility.

For me it is a passion and a privilege to make tapestry, and every time when I begin to prepare a new work and mount my loom, **it feels suitably dramatic and risky, because the result is important evidence about images and ability.** The art of tapestry is very much present for me; every day I am occupied in activities concerning tapestry matters. Tapestry weaving is an art form that insists upon attention. It



deserves much more exposure; it shines and touches the spectators. **The critics should celebrate our métier in all its exuberant diversity.**

For centuries tapestries have swept in and out of history. From a cursory glance at contemporary tapestry art in Denmark, I can say that tapestries seem to be quietly on their way back to the wall.



Arabesque 200 cm x 240 cm 2004 cotton / wool, gold, silver and silk



Anet Brusgaard lives and works in Copenhagen, Denmark. She trained at the École d'Art Décoratif, Copenhagen and the École Nationale d'Art Décoratif d'Aubusson, France. She is one of the founders of European Tapestry Forum. She exhibits widely across Europe, and in the US and Australia.

the author at work on Tatouage I

Photography by Eric Brahl
Back of Tatouage I, photo by Dan Svarth

ATA, the Textile Society of America and You

Christine Laffer



In the fall of 2010, a number of ATA members attended the 12th TSA Symposium in Lincoln, Nebraska. **Textiles & Settlement: From Plains Space to Cyber Space** covered a broad range of topics. To give just a few examples, among them were “Negotiating the Handmade in a Cyber World” put together by Mary Lane, “Tapestry: Voices from the Past Lead into the Future” organized by Susan Iverson, and “Mapping Textile Landscapes” moderated by Mary Zicafoose. At the same time, over thirty exhibitions took place across the city, generating a certain gallery-crawling frenzy in the few short days we were there. All of us found multiple reasons to move, stimulated by what we saw, heard and encountered.

When TSA announced the next symposium for the fall of 2012, it generated a cascade of excitement. **Textiles & Politics** would take place in the nation’s capital, at the heart of political maneuvers. All of us wanted to go. At the same time, we were all exhausted and could not contemplate another round of whirlwind activities in another two years.

The theme really grabbed me, however, since I had run an ATA focus forum on just that topic a year earlier. We had, in a few short months, tried to cover political threads in tapestry from the **Bayeux** to **Los Honores** and on through to contemporary work. It was a daunting first attempt to grapple with our history, one that often concealed its politics behind maidens of virtue and heroes displaying their triumphs. Partially because of that program, ATA offered to sponsor an organized session for 2012 and asked if I could submit a proposal.

Struck by the huge number of possible approaches, I was almost at a loss for words. Some of the discussions from the focus forum had not reached any kind of resolution. It was difficult to grasp where we stood in our own time, a time that was not yet packaged as history. How did politics affect us personally? How many of us acknowledged that politics played an important role in our practice? Did political content have to be overt or could it speak more effectively as a nuance of one’s personal expression?

More importantly, was our work being seen as political—indeed, was it seen at all? Were we participants in our visual communities and were politics a factor in that or not?



*Dorothy Clews For the Season of 2007-2012
(work in progress) diameters various 15–90 cm x 5 cm
tapestry, coiled and stitched: handspun cotton*

Four people agreed to write papers and speak in DC. I want to give you some insight into their points of concern because several important discussions took place afterwards. Those discussions should continue and include you, the ATA membership, as we go forward. The papers will be available through downloadable .pdf files both on the ATA website and at the TSA’s publication host, the University



Linda Wallace *Implantation Series, Diminishment of Hope: Nongravid 22 July 2006*
20 in x 16 in x 1 in
tapestry, earth burial, cleaning, stitching, abrasion: wool, linen

of Nebraska Commons. As soon as those links activate, we will send them out to all of you.

Two of the four writers originated from the political focus forum: Linda Rees, USA, and Dorothy Clews, Australia. With restrictions on travel costs, Dorothy sought a collaborator who could make the trip to DC. She is fortunate to have a long working relationship with Linda Wallace, Canada, who agreed to take on the project. As it evolved, the paper, "On the Edge—the artwork of Linda Wallace and Dorothy Clews", revealed a story in two parts. Wallace relates the successes and failures of collaborative ventures that take place on the edge of known practice, from an international traveling exhibition, FindingHome@tapestry.au/ca, to an experimental engagement with tapestry as base material that produces liminal, emergent meaning. The act of burying a tapestry, then exhuming it and making repairs that restore it to a new life: are they personal acts or do they participate in a larger world frame? Does the fertility of a human being become entangled with issues of fertile or sterile land? How do politics enter into these repeated,

seasonal and earthly concerns of sustaining life.

In her turn, Linda Rees sought to find the source of the tenuous position that tapestry occupies as a field today in "Towards a Proactive Outreach". She narrowed the problem down to "two factors that directly affect the status of the medium: tapestry's place in the current academic climate and the field's response to shifting realities in the digital age." (Rees, p.1) Without the support of academic institutions and with a new focus on digital means of visual expression, can tapestry sustain its own life through our efforts? By describing the choices that one artist, Muriel Nezhnie Helfman, USA, made during her career, Rees sees paths that were taken and those that were not. Nezhnie's bold imagery and textile sensibilities brought her to the fore just as her health began to fail. And simultaneously, many tapestry artists began turning away from those same tactile and textilized manipulations, reaching instead for a quality and fineness of weave that Rees attributes to French



traditions. In other words, the struggle between large, rough surfaces versus sophisticated imagery that played out in Europe played out in America as well. And the theaters included the halls of academia where tapestry simply could no longer fit.



visitors view woven works by Consuelo Jiménez Underwood, solo show: Undocumented Borderlands, Fresno State University, September 2011





Consuelo Jiménez Underwood, USA, weaves tapestry among other fiber techniques. You would never know this, however, since most of her work that gets covered in articles and essays does not include it. Her medium is fiber and her expression reaches beyond any one technique by speaking through many of them. Clara Román-Odio, professor of Hispanic Literature at Kenyon College, wrote "Colonial Legacies and the Politics of Weaving in Consuelo Jiménez Underwood's Fiber Art" in order to link the life of a young migrant worker to her mastery as a mature politically aware artist. The language of post-colonial critique applies to the cloth she pins and stitches, the barbed wire she weaves, and the stenciled images roughly imprinted on beautiful textile surfaces. These weavings merge textile languages and politics for us to encounter in the same way that we might encounter clashes along the long border that divides many of our nation's families, including her own. The work gains strength from the textile itself as it pulls together threads of divided cultures.

Stanley Bulbach, USA, also spoke of two cultures that meet across a huge divide of time and space, from the cradle of civilization in ancient Assyria, Sumer and Babylon to modern New York City. Using handspun yarns and kilim techniques, his carpets speak in gentle rhythms. As a community advocate, he daily brings difficult questions to different levels of power structures in the political life of New York and finds ways to solve crucial problems. These experiences inform his woven work as well as his writing. He willingly asks difficult questions about the status of hand woven art forms in today's art world, and he asks them of people in different positions of power. Knowing well the standards set for professional research during his doctoral studies, he has pointed out to a wide range of experts the consistent lack of research and examination of artwork done in our field. How can they make determinations of quality and value without looking at any of the work?



Stanley Bulbach

*September Passages: NYC 2001
a flying carpet approx. 3 ft x 6 ft
handspun Lincoln wools, vegetal dyes*

The result of these words, spoken passionately by people who feel that woven tapestry is a viable medium with masterful work that unjustly lingers unseen, remains unclear. First, in discussions that happened immediately after our session, it is obvious that **we have goals still unmet and urgent questions left unanswered.** Can we talk among ourselves openly and share our knowledge effectively? Can we agree to set a course that would be more proactive, as these speakers asked of us and showed was possible? Would you like to see some changes happen in these areas of contention that affect our sustainability? Join the dialogue so that the American Tapestry Alliance continues to be a part of that important process.



Christine Laffer is a tapestry artist who believes in the power of communities while living and weaving in San Jose, California, USA.

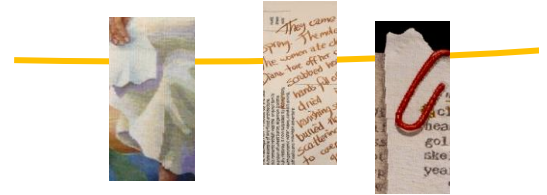
Papers referred to in this article are available at:

<http://americantapestryalliance.org/education/educational-articles/political-strings-tapestry-seen-and-unseen/>

Photo of Diminishment of Hope: Nongravid 22 July by Terry Zlot

Exhibition Review— Sarah Swett: Weaver of Tales

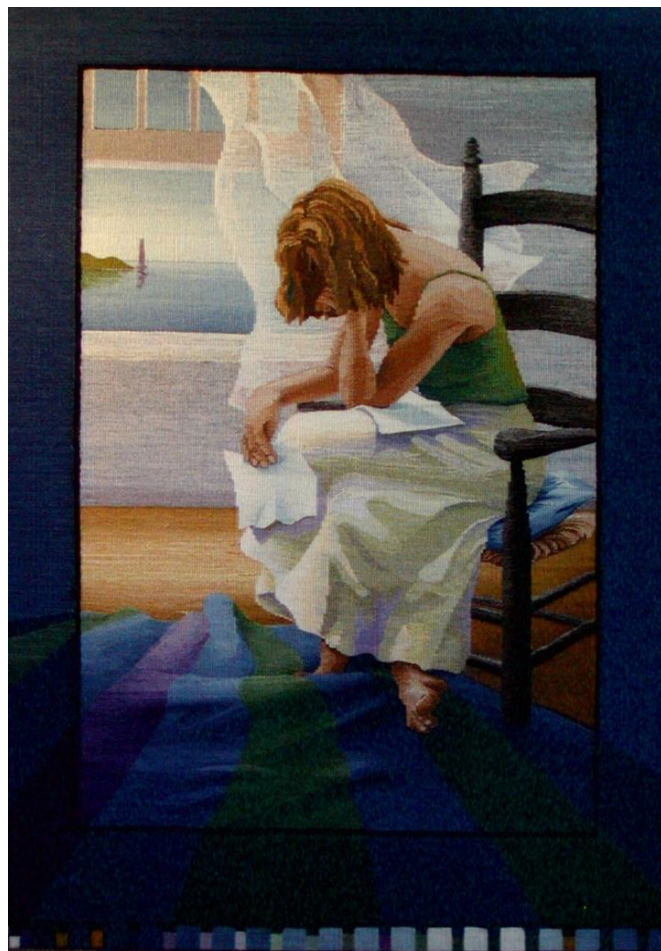
Kiki Dembrow



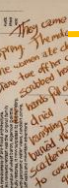
The Latimer Quilt and Textile Center was a very appropriate venue for an exhibit of Sarah Swett's tapestries. It is located in an unassuming turn-of-the-last-century white School house on a quiet, rural street in Tillamook, Oregon. In her artist's statement Sarah Swett, USA, writes, "**My job is to tell stories with yarn** and this exhibition, part of a body of work I call Slow Literature is the result." The exhibit was in what had been the school's small auditorium. The 19 tapestries covered the walls and the stage, and were divided in two very different ways to tell a story.

The tapestries on one side of the exhibit consisted of 6 brightly colored images and one monochromatic. Those familiar with Sarah's work know her designs have a strong narrative quality. They capture a moment: the tranquility and joy of a quiet afternoon, an evening roasting marshmallows and making s'mores. The voice is female and the subjects often female: a young girl knitting, a woman on an old fashioned dial phone with the cord wrapped around her leg. Sometimes the central image is framed, sometimes part of the scene is cut off, incomplete.

But both are scenes in the middle of a much longer story, very rich in detail, often with a touch of whimsy. The scene of a couple roasting marshmallows includes only some of the legs and hands of the couple, only half of a large bar of Hershey's chocolate, and half of a plastic bag of marshmallows that are also scattered on the carpet. The viewer looks at the tapestry of a solitary woman seated on a chair next to an open window and wonders what she is thinking and doing. These colorful images engage the viewer to interpret the story, to complete it. Our brains fill in, complete what is suggested, which is also how a line can suggest a foot

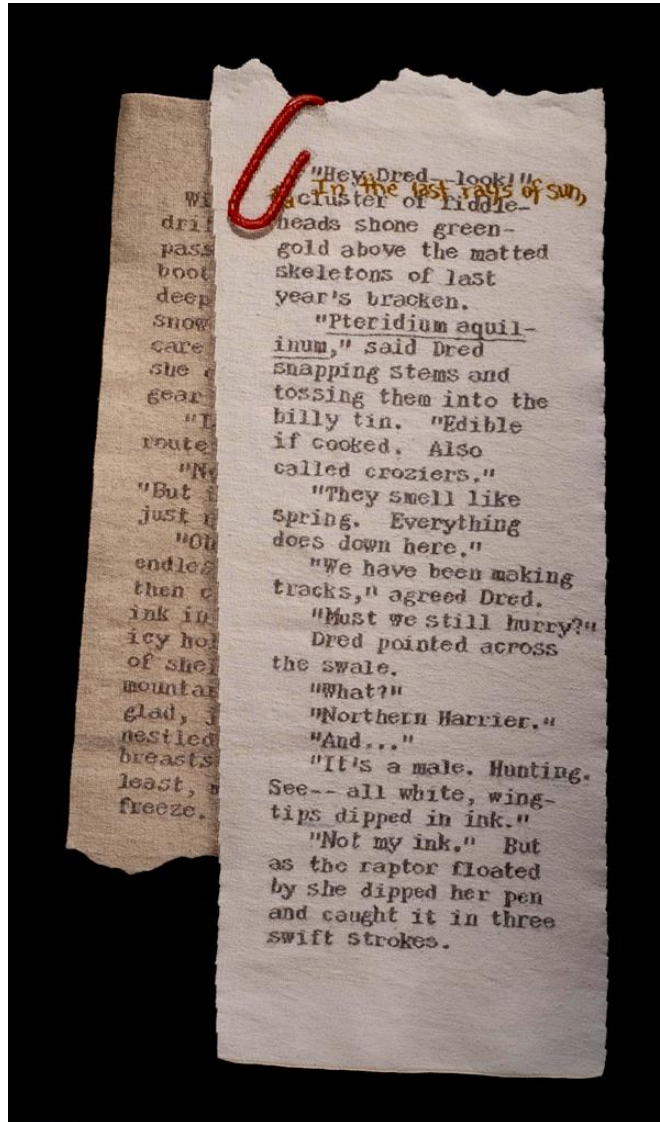


*Sarah Swett Blue Day 2007 48 in x 36 in
wool warp and weft*



and slits a leg as in the tapestry of the woman on the dial phone.

Sarah Swett has also been writing a novel. The other half of the exhibit consisted of tapestries of parts of that story, words woven from the novel. The novel looks like it was written on scraps of found paper. The story appears to have been written in bits and pieces, on whatever was at hand, and whenever



Rough Copy #9 2011 52 in x 28 in wool warp and weft

there was an opportunity to write in an otherwise busy life. One tapestry/segment of the story has a "burnt" edge, another is on the back of a grocery receipt, another is on the stationary of a fictitious motel, and another looks like two scraps of paper held together by a paper clip. One has coffee stains, and another is a "postcard" with print and handwriting as well as fanciful stamps.

These woven words and sentences are not what we expect from tapestry. Sarah seems to be challenging our assumptions. To fully appreciate this newer body of work, one needs to take the time to read the different tapestries, each a different segment of

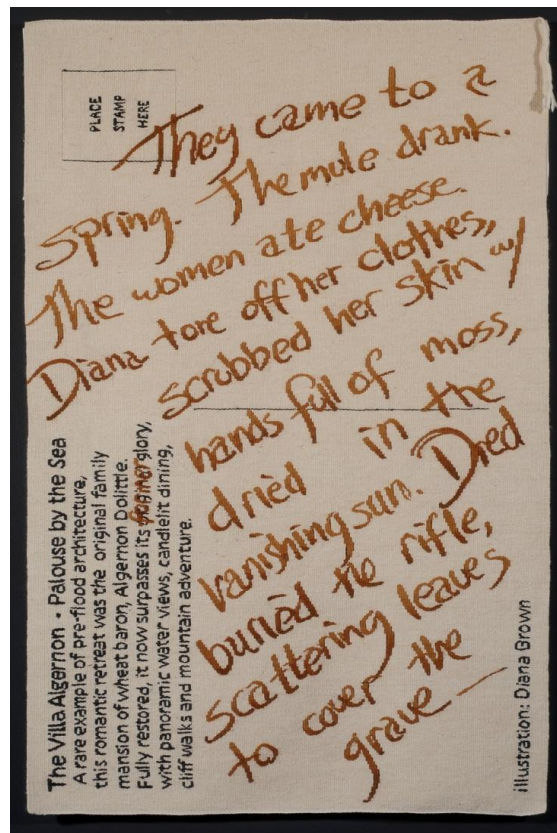
the story, and to examine the detail. Someone with an understanding of weaving can appreciate the skill they require. In these tapestries as well there is an incredible attention to detail: in the appearance and choice of the words, as well as in the creation of the fictional setting of her novel. For example, for her tapestry of the library card she researched the Dewey decimal system to come up with a fictional but realistic classification for the imaginary setting for part of the story. To weave the words, she used an epi of 9 because it worked better for weaving letters. The letter M, for example, consists of five warps. The model for her printed letters is the type face of an old manual typewriter whose letter e is always slightly raised compared with the other letters. The handwritten words are woven in different shades of "blue ink". With the exception of the stamps on one of the postcards, these tapestries are not rich in color, but the story is compelling. The language is rich and descriptive. There is drama and tension; the words and subtle details in the tapestries engage our imagination, creating vivid images in our minds. As four of us sat on the bench in the middle of the room and read the story, we talked about what we imagined. We had first assumed the main protagonist, Dred, was a man, but upon learning it is an old English name for a woman, we realized that we had been too casual in our reading, so we read the tapestries again and worked to decipher the story. Why did Dred bury the rifle? Whose grave is it? Where is she going?

Although the brightly colored tapestries on the other side of the room seem more accessible, they too deserve our attention and time to be fully appreciated. With its uneven floors, the old school house takes us back to a slower era. Sarah Swett's tapestries remind us to slow down and exercise our imaginations.



Kiki Dembrow is a weaver at Damascus Fiber Arts School, Damascus, Oregon, USA.

Photography by Mark LaMoreaux

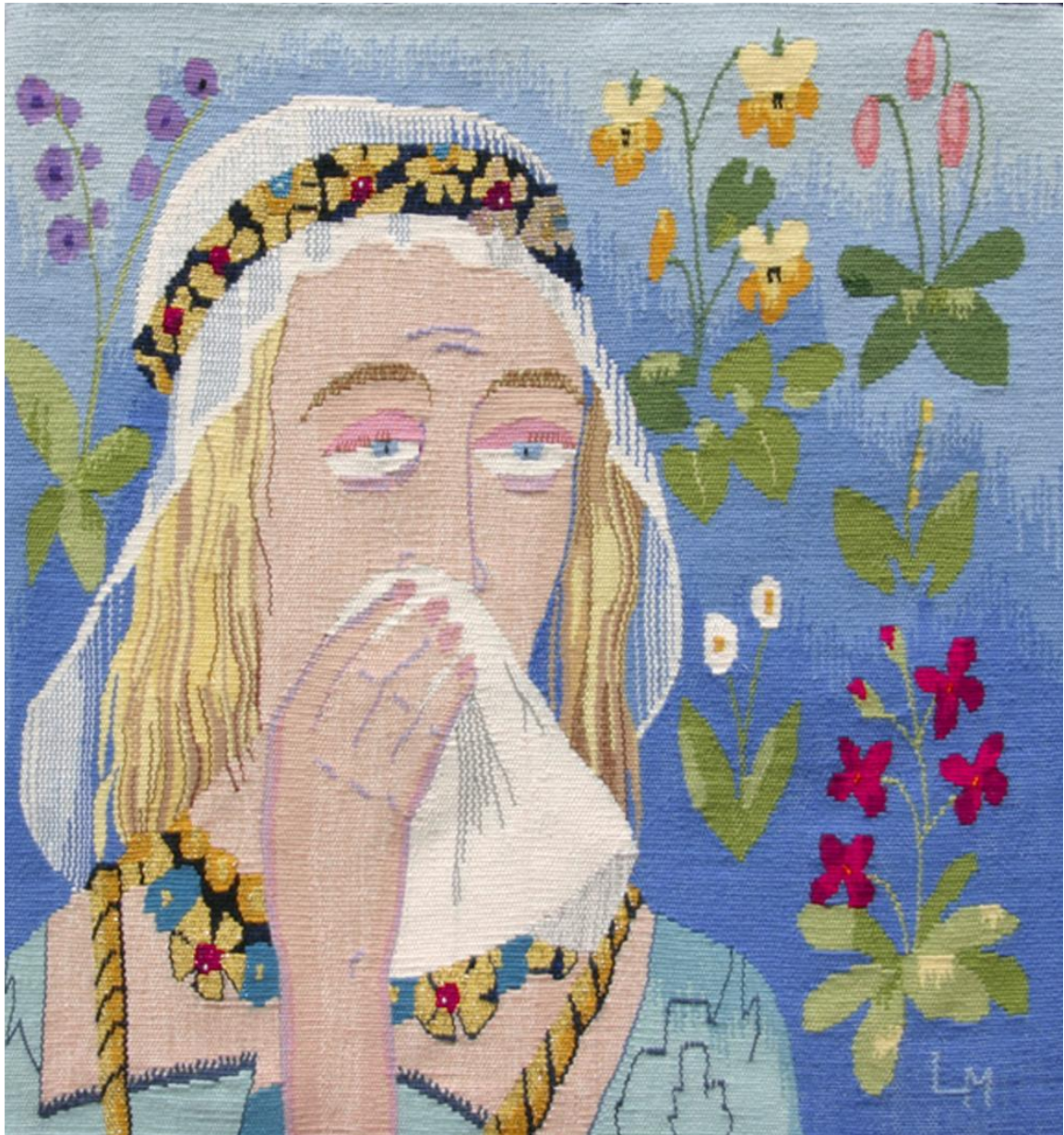


**Rough Copy #11 2012 44 in x 30 in
wool warp and weft**

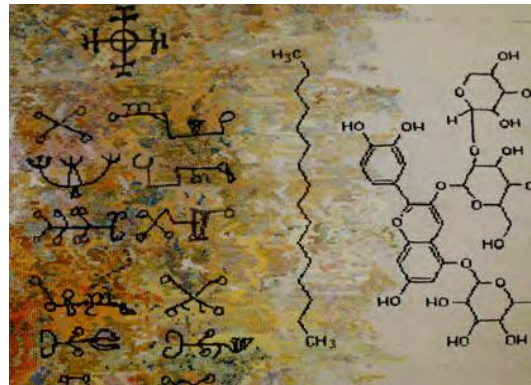


Gallery

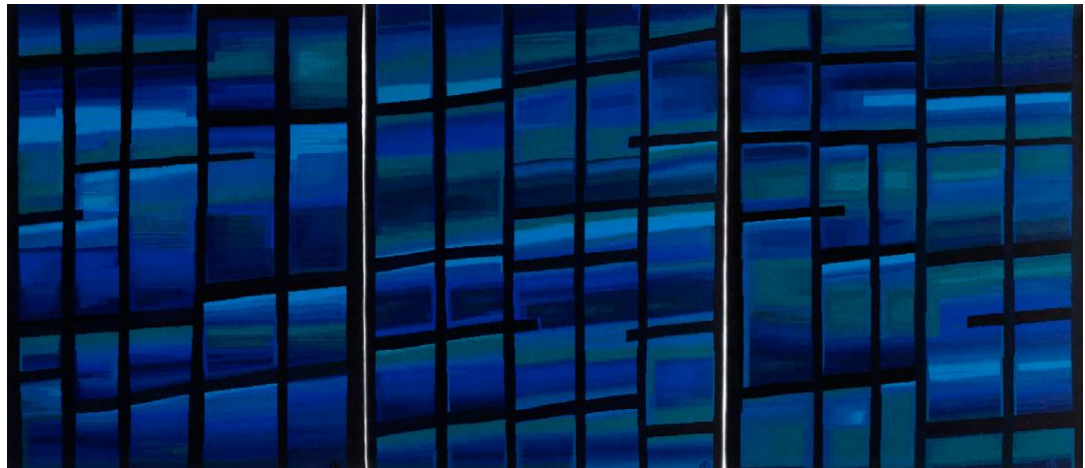
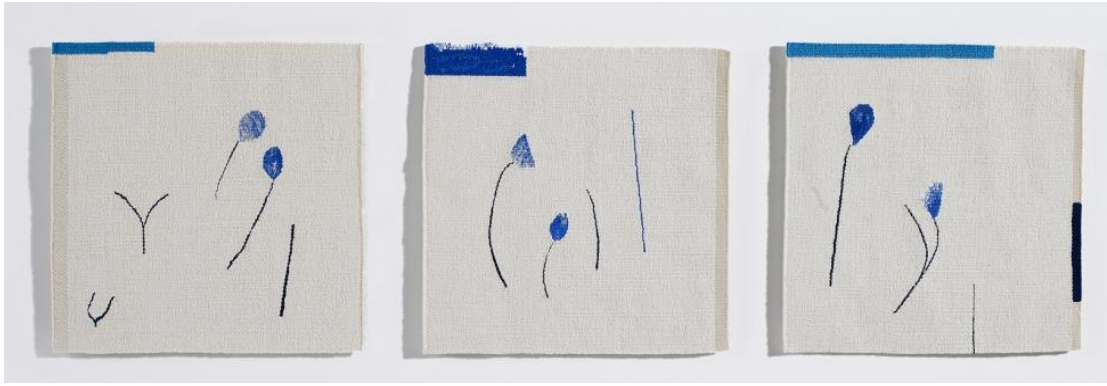
a selection of works from *Tapestry Topics*:
A Quarterly Review of Tapestry Art Today 2012-2013

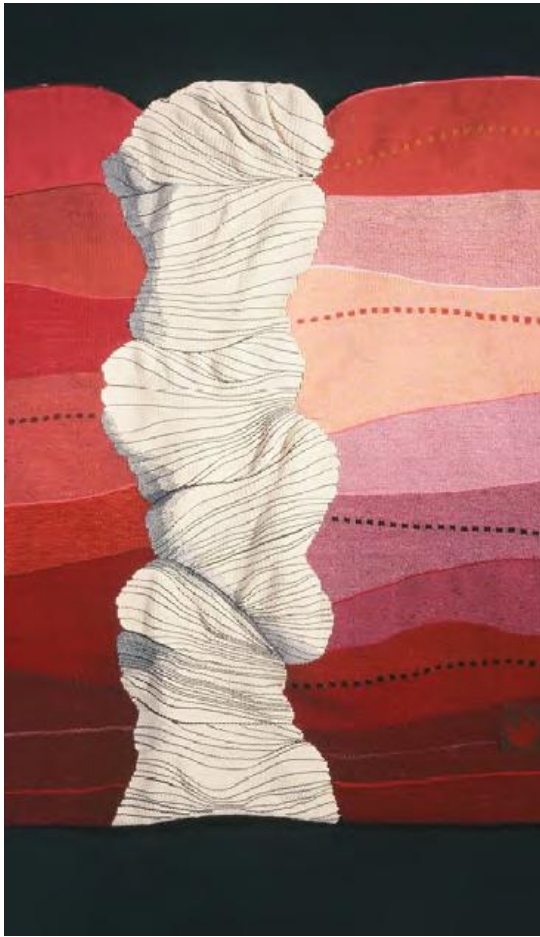


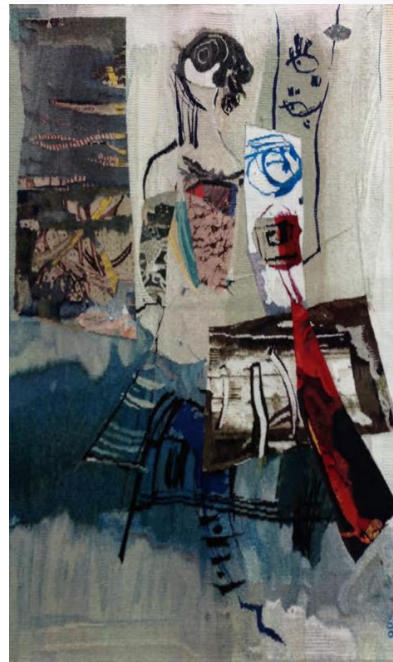
Lynn Mayne, USA *Mille Fleurs Misery* 2005
23 in x 22 in 8 epi wool, cotton, metallic thread. photo by Ben Mayne. TT38.4















GALLERY notes

1

Jon Eric Riis, USA Sacred Heart Coat 2005

8 layers, in all 22 in x 44 in x 3 in tapestry: woven silk and metallic thread.

Photo by Janette Meetze. TT39.2

Tommye McClure Scanlin, USA Life Force 2010

24 in x 60 in wool and cotton. TT38.4

Sara Lindsay, Australia Cargo detail 2009

11 parts, overall size approx. 100 cm x 360 cm mixed media construction:

cotton, rayon, silk, wool, paper, cinnamon, china tea cinnamon ticking. TT38.3

Anne Jackson, UK The Witchcraft Series: Alchemists 2011

90 cm x 70 cm knotted tapestry: cotton, linen, synthetic yarns. TT38.3

2

Linda Wallace, Canada DisConnect 2006

32 in x 48 in wool, silk, linen, cotton, rayon, metallic yarns. TT39.1

Cresside Collette, Australia A Trio of New Horizons 2011

100 cm x 65 cm wool, cotton, synthetics. Photo by Tim Gresham. TT38.3

Cresside Collette, Australia Twenty four Evocations of the Wet/Dry Landscape 2011

90 cm x 90 cm wool, cotton, synthetic fiber. Photo by Tim Gresham. TT38.3

3

Fiona Rutherford, UK Haiku 123 2010

34 cm x 34 cm cotton, linen, silk, sewing thread. Photo by David Lawson. TT38.3

Tori Kleinert, USA Semblance of Generational Passage: Listen to Us! 2010

8 in x 4.25 in cotton weft on linen warp. TT38.4

Mardi Novak, Australia Blue Envelope Library Betty Composition 2011

29 cm x 27 cm wool, cotton, linen and silk. TT38.3

Marie-Thumette Brichard, France Rhyme 3 2006

125 cm x 165 cm x 3 cm wool. TT38.3

4

Alex Friedman, USA Bound 2007

45 in x 35 in x 2 in; 115 cm x 90 cm x 5 cm 8 epi cotton, wool, cotton floss. TT38.4

Melissa Wong, Canada Repository 2011

tapestry components 9 in x 6 in x 4 in, lace 44 in

tapestry, hand-dyed cotton needlepoint lace. TT38

Ariadna Donner, Finland Seisoin Rannalla/ By the Waterfront

(An interpretation of a poem by Bo Carpelain) 2011

180 cm x 240 cm wool, cotton, linen. Photo by Ilkka Hietala. TT38.3

Jiang Zhenqing, China Snowberg

200 cm x 100 cm TT38.4

5

Ariadna Donner, Finland *Muistiin Kudottu/ Woven Notes (Because I could not hold your hands. . . O, Mandelstam)* 1997

220 cm x 200 cm wool. Photo by Ilkka Hietala. TT38.3

Susan Iverson, USA *Verdant* 2010

4 ft, 3 in x 7 ft, 4 in x 6 in wool and linen on linen warp, glass.

Photo by Joan Griffin. TT38.4

Brigitta Hallberg, Denmark *Mouths*

122 cm x 123 cm TT38.4

Khatia Dzidzikashvili, Georgia *Dark Blue Trees*

75 cm x 75 cm TT38.4

6

Ruth Jones, Canada *All-Sufficient* 2011

31 in x 40 in 12 epi cotton warp, silk and wool weft. TT38.4

Ann Naustdal, Norway *Resonance I detail*

linen, grey hair, gold leaf. Photo by Kim Müller. TT38.3

Line Du Four, Canada *Gravity* 2007

12 ft x 3 ft 6 epi handwoven haute lisse tapestry: wool. TT38.4

Maximo Laura, Peru *Inner Cosmos* 2010

122 cm x 217 cm alpaca wool, cotton, mixed fibers.

Photo by Humberto Valdivia. TT38.3

7

Joy Smith, Australia *My Toolset* 2010

43 cm x 55 cm x 3.5 cm wool and cotton. Photo by Doug Willis. TT38.3

Thomas Cronenberg, Germany *Patchwork Identity, Identity Patchwork* 1999

2 panels, each 30 cm x 50 cm linen warp, wool weft. Photo by Christian Bruch. TT 38.3

Anton Veenstra, Australia *Sad Clown* 2012

24 cm x 17 cm 8 epi wool, cotton, silk, polyester. TT39.2

Kathryn Pannepacker, USA *Ignite Our Hearts for Peace/U.S.A/ Iraq* 2007

36 in x 36 in jute, mixed fibers, aluminum foil and papier-mâché. TT38.4