

CODA
CONTEMPORARY



2017
TAPESTRY



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RACHEL HINE
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ATA
AMERICAN TAPESTRY ALLIANCE



AMERICAN TAPESTRY ALLIANCE



AN ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF TAPESTRY ART TODAY

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American Tapestry Alliance, “Honoring Tradition, Inspiring Innovation”

The mission of the American Tapestry Alliance is to:

- promote an awareness of and appreciation for woven tapestries designed and woven by individual artists
- encourage and recognize superior quality tapestries
- encourage educational opportunities in the field of tapestry
- sponsor exhibitions of tapestries
- establish a network for tapestry weavers throughout the world
- educate the public about the history and techniques involved in tapestry making

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Cover

Yasuko Fujino, “In the Garden,” 2012, Silk, metal thread & mohair,
250 x 410 cm, Photo: Makato Yano

Contemporary Tapestry Redux

Welcome to the third volume of CODA published by the American Tapestry Alliance (ATA). In the spirit of celebration with which ATA initiated this biennial publication, CODA 2017 brings together four articles selected from the last two years of ATA's quarterly, Tapestry Topics, chosen for their authors' clarity, as well as captivating images. And, for the first time, CODA includes a commissioned article from a Curator and writer respected in the field of contemporary fiber art, Lesley Millar, with her essay "Tapestry – a private passion," a dynamic view into recent developments in this particular artistic medium.

CODA promotes the field of contemporary tapestry as it is practiced around the world. This year, ATA is committing more resources to fostering gallery, museum and collectors' interests in contemporary tapestry. A generous grant supports this effort and allows us to distribute a glossy print edition of CODA 2017 to a select audience, in addition to a much wider distribution of a full-color PDF.

Rachel Hine's article, "Inspired by the Unlikely," (Fall 2016) outlines many of the more personal reasons that younger artists diverge into new visual territory. Rebecca Mezoff's contribution, "Sand in my Shoes: The Influences of a New Mexico Childhood," (Summer 2015) relates how a contemporary tapestry artist responds to place, history, and an ongoing sensibility of time. Alice Zrebiec's review of the exhibition "Creative Crossroads: The Art of Tapestry" (Fall 2015) offers a Curator's perspective on an exhibition launched in the Denver Art Museum's textile galleries. The masterful juxtaposition of historical and contemporary tapestries offers a unique perspective and skillfully asserts the strength of Southwestern artists. Lise Frølund's review of ARTAPESTRY 4 (Winter 2015) gives a concise and insightful view into the extraordinary contemporary works of European tapestry artists, bringing the arc of this issue to a full circle.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This issue would not have been possible without the creative inspiration of Dorothy Clews who envisaged a way to collect highlights of the developments in tapestry as reflected in ATA's quarterly publication, Tapestry Topics. Further, without the energy of former Tapestry Topics Editor, Linda Rees and her boundless belief in documenting contemporary tapestry, ATA would not have uncovered a dedicated contingent of writers and reviewers. I would like to deeply thank Mary Lane, ATA's Executive Director, and Anna Kocherovsky, our graphics designer whose aesthetic guidance carried this project to completion.

Christine Laffer, Guest Editor
San Jose, California
July, 2017



Ai Ito, "Jalan jalan BALI," 2014, Wool & cotton,
110 x 195 cm, Photo: Daishinsha Delight Inc.

TAPESTRY – A PRIVATE PASSION

Lesley Millar

My work for the past 20 years has been one of disseminating the textile art of others through exhibition curation, writing and teaching. My intention has been to place the breadth and depth of contemporary textile practice before as wide an audience as possible. I wish to evidence its impact on creative thinking and its innate ability to communicate across geographical, cultural and material borders. This is my public passion. But my private passion is weaving, and more specifically tapestry – both as maker and as audience. The setting up of the warp, choosing of the yarns, mixing of the colours, the hours, days, weeks of weaving as the translation of the idea takes on a material form, building shape on shape, the anxious unwinding of the completed textile and judging if it has worked, this is where my heart lies. These moments are ingrained in my bodily memory – my arthritic fingers are testament to my weaver's life. I don't do it anymore, but I only have to walk into a studio and smell the yarns, hear the clicking of the bobbins as they dangle from the loom, to feel a longing so powerful that I sometimes have to sit down and let my private passion carry me back to other times.

That is my story, and I began this essay thinking, again, about the importance of storytelling. The stories we tell about ourselves and our lives are the means by which we try to make sense of the past and the present, and perhaps test out our hopes for the future. The traditional relationship between woven tapestry and narrative has been rehearsed many times, underlining its importance and its direct connection with the viewer. However it can still take us by surprise. In 2012, in Kyoto, Japan, I had just such a surprise when I attended an exhibition of young Japanese tapestry artists and was captivated by the fresh energy contained in their work. Whilst in the gallery, I watched the response from their audience, and it was evident to me that narrative connections were being achieved, alongside a recognition of a material truth. The approaches were highly personal: direct, poetic, sometimes urban, sometimes rural and always reflecting their lives, now, in Japan. It was a joy to discover the excitement of these young Japanese artists in their chosen medium. This despite, or perhaps because of, tapestry not being a traditional Japanese craft. How had this come about? As with so many such movements, at the centre is a charismatic teacher. In this case it is the tapestry weaver Yasuko Fujino, who for many years has championed the discipline and slowly built a cohort of young tapestry weavers inspired by her example.



Erin Riley, "Self Portrait," 2015, Wool, cotton, 48 x 72 in, © Erin M. Riley, Photo: Erin Riley



Barbara Heller, "Ozymandias," 2004, Linen warp, hand-dyed commercial and hand-spun wool, cotton, and miscellaneous bird bones, 158 x 168 cm, Photo: Ted Clark/Image This

I carried the experience of the works with me back to England, wondering where the energy for tapestry that burned so brightly in my country from the 1970s to the turn of the century had gone. Was anybody interested after the closure of all the tapestry courses in English art universities? A situation underlined by Jessica Hemmings when she suggested that 'it is fair to concede that tapestry is a road far less travelled these days.'¹ It was maybe a year or so later that I encountered the work of Erin M. Riley. It was her work which demonstrated to me, in the clearest terms possible, that tapestry does have a dynamic role in the translation and reflection of life now. As our lives become more and more dominated by digital technology, and the written word has less currency than the image, the possibilities are opened up for a re-encounter with narrative tapestry. In my Introduction to the catalogue accompanying the exhibition I curated, 'Here & Now: Contemporary Tapestry,' I wrote that 'there is a potent space for woven tapestries

to occupy, to hold and to tell the story of our times.² Equally, there is a palpable hunger, with all of us, for a balancing material engagement, which Erin M. Riley so pointedly explores in her tapestries. The translation from the digital to the haptic brings the compassion of touch, making the connection between object and subject, viewer and maker. It is worth remembering that, as tapestry artists, we are not only creating the image, we are also weaving ourselves into the fabric of the cloth. No matter how fantastic or abstract the image and the story may be, there is an essential, reflective truth in the work achieved through our bodily engagement with the materials over time.



Marcel Marois, "Espace-combustion," 1994-1995, Wool (weft) & cotton, polyester (warp), 57 ½ x 103 in, Private Collection, Photo: Yvan Binet

It is this haptic truth that has been rising to the surface of my thinking as we are confronted with the daily deluge of information. Facts through which we must navigate our way to discover what is true or not true. The writer Arundhati Roy said recently³ that fiction is truth. In this she is not referring to Fake News, but that it is possible to describe a fact, an actual event, within a story in order to reveal the truth. And suddenly the tapestries of Norwegian artist Hannah Ryggen are called into the sharpest of focus. Woven in the 1930s and '40s when her country was under occupation, her courageous and deeply moving tapestries revealed the truths about persecution and death at a time when to speak of such things could have meant her own death. We are not at that point today. However, as we are confronted on our doorsteps with a reality that tells us there is no action without reaction, the eloquent tapestries of Barbara Heller help us to understand and negotiate between the claims and counter claims.



Aino Kajaniemi, "Golden Rain," 2015, Linen, wool, cotton, hair, viscose, acrylic & gold thread, 164 x 164 cm, Photo: Aino Kajaniemi

Equally, when the impact of climate change is refuted, the denial is countered through the work of Ann Naustdal, who won the 2015 Cordis Prize for her tapestry 'Arid Landscape II' or Cecilia Blomberg's 'Rising Tides.' Or further back by Harumi Isobe who, between 2001 and 2003, wove exquisitely beautiful tapestries using fishing line to spell out the names of endangered or recently extinct flowers so that when the light was shone on the tapestry the names appeared as shadows in the wall. Or by Marcel Marois who brought a clarity of vision to the truth behind the lies about logging. His textural translation of newspaper photographs into tapestries allowed the viewer the space to feel the truth within the facts. As tapestry artist Aino Kajaniemi has said: 'I feel that even sad things are more easily approachable in textile because the material in itself holds optimistic and soft values.'⁴ The textile materiality brings an accessibility, we are familiar with the convention of narrative and tapestry, we are open to the story and the medium becomes the message.

There is no imperative that the narrative must be of a political nature, the work of Norwegian artist Tonje Høydahl Sørli is playful, it makes us smile as we recognise ourselves and our time. Which brings me back to the young Japanese weavers who are so very much in their own moment. Saori Sakai's neon coloured tapestries combining manga, abstraction and urban imagery seem to vibrate with the experience of modern Japan. While Misao Watanabe's monumental colour field, semi-abstract tapestries drawn from nature become a metaphor for what is projected and what is the truth beneath the surface. This quality of truth is also present in the work of Sara Brennan. Her tapestries are an accumulation of how it is to be immersed in a particular landscape, a definitively Scottish landscape. In 2016 I wrote of her work: 'As the viewer looks, the viewer feels; we experience a somatic response to what, if rendered in a different medium, could seem to be an austere place. Instead, we hear the silence, and we feel the stillness.'⁵



Tonje Høydahl Sørli, "Explode in a Flirtatious Mood," 2007, Wool, linen, and frame in steel, 75 x 30 x 84 cm, Photo: Stein S. Fredriksen



Saori Sakai, "parade! parade!!," 2013, Polypropolene, wool, cotton, acrylic, 260 x 160 cm, Photo: Shiyo Kawai

I have been told that textiles have magical powers to enrich life and expand space, which is how I feel when looking at Sara Brennan's work and that of many other tapestries too numerous to mention here. Tapestry as an expressive art holds a precious heritage of connection through the personal narratives and life histories of those who commissioned the works and those who have woven them. This is a form of cultural capital that we hold in trust and from which we draw in order to tell the stories of our time, outside restrictive structures and the boundaries of cultural particularity. This is perfectly evidenced by Yasuko Fujino's highly contemporary, delicately drawn and mysterious evocations of memory and



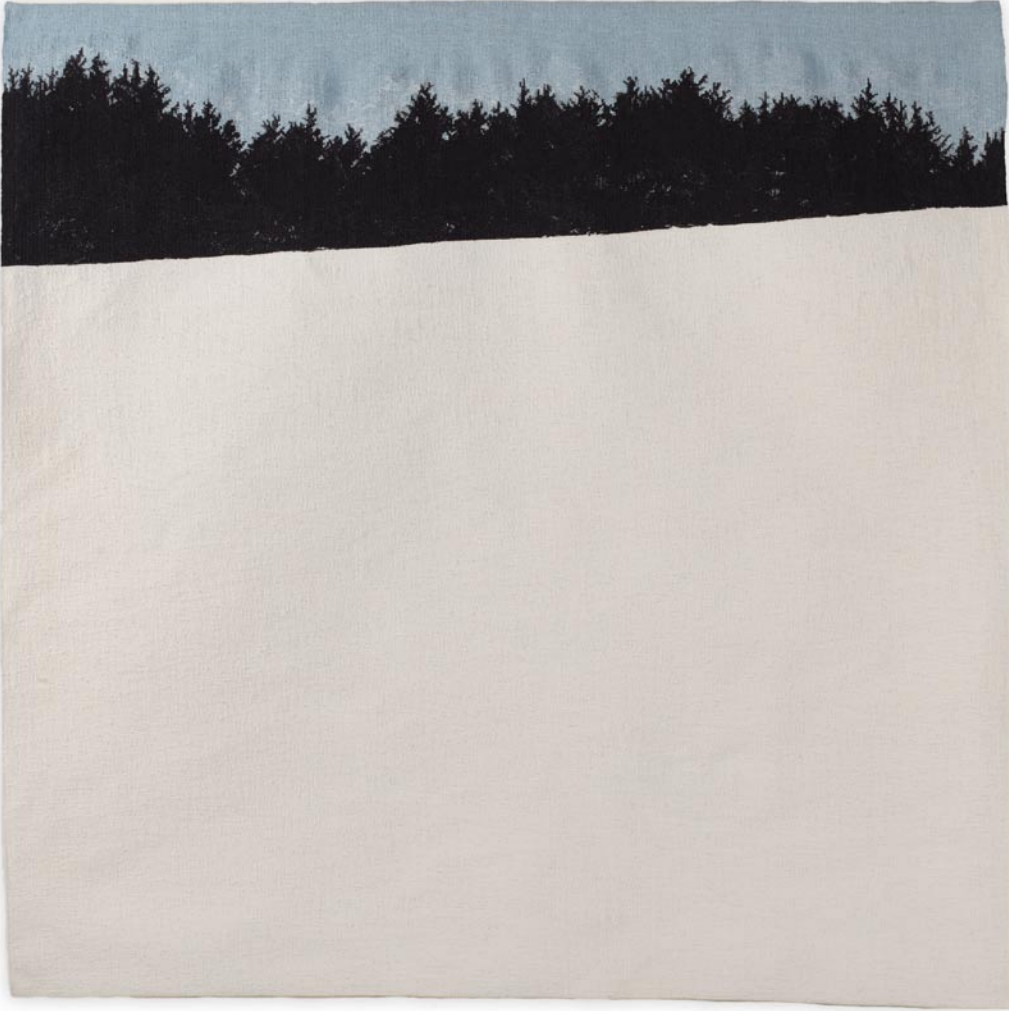
Misao Watanabe, "Red Scenery," 2011, Wool, cotton,
195 x 400 cm © Misao Watanabe, Photo: Makoto Yano

landscape. They may resonate with the Japanese aesthetic of the Floating Garden, but the narrative is not bounded by that cultural specificity. Contemporary tapestry is as important as it ever was when it described the medieval fears about the Apocalypse, or fantasies about Ladies and Unicorns. Audiences connect to tapestries, they are moved by their material integrity and narrative truth. And so am I.

June 2017



Misao Watanabe, "Happiness" (detail), 2012, Wool, cotton,
100 x 500 cm, Photo: Makoto Yano



Sara Brennan, "Hill Forrest," 2015, Linen, wool, cotton,
140 x 140 cm, Photo: Shannon Tofts

References

¹ <http://www.jessicahemmings.com/jon-eric-riis-tapestries> Visited 2.8.15.

² Lesley Millar 'Here & Now: contemporary tapestry' (2016) pub. National Centre for Craft and Design.

³ Arundhati Roy in interview on The Today Programme, BBC Radio 4. 3rd June 2017

⁴ Aino Kajaniemi in Lesley Millar 'Here & Now: contemporary tapestry' (2016) pub. National Centre for Craft and Design.

⁵ Lesley Millar Selvedge Magazine. Issue 73. November 2016.

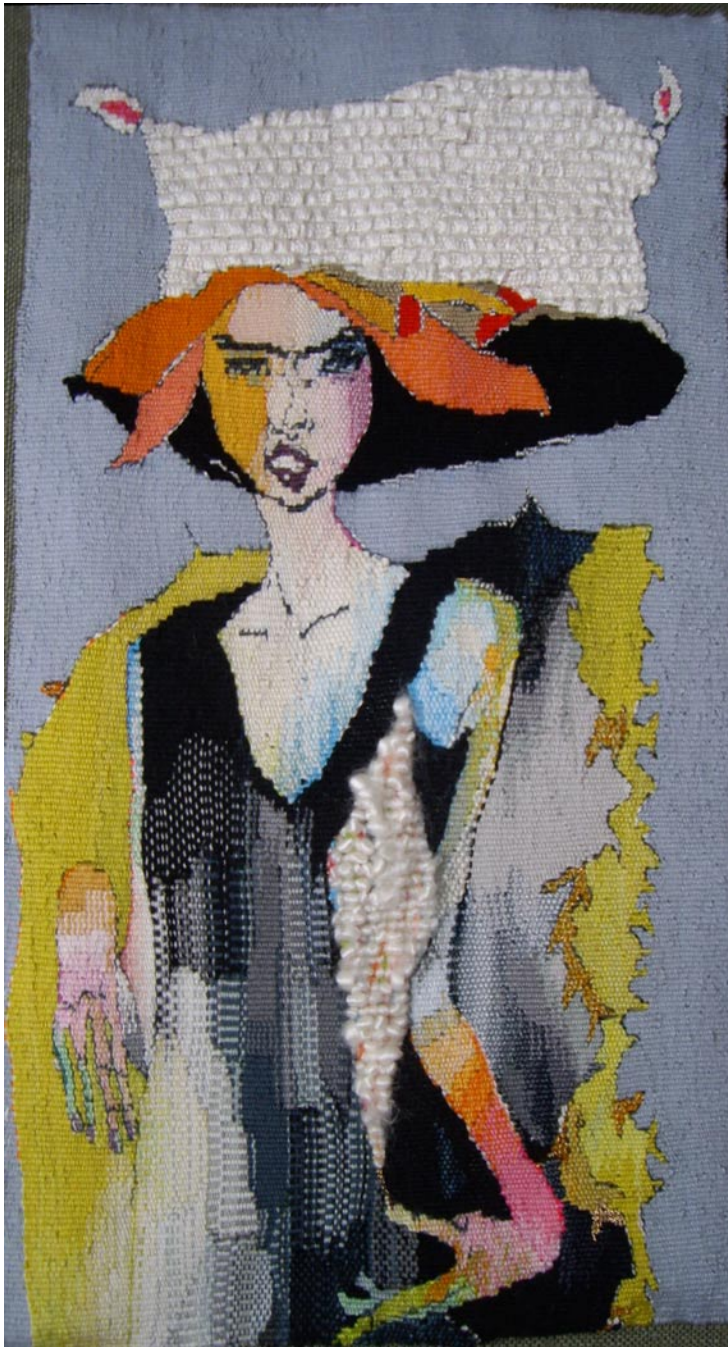


Yasuko Fujino, "In the Garden," 2012, Silk, metal thread & mohair,
250 x 410 cm, Photo: Makato Yano

Lesley Millar, Professor of Textile Culture, Director of the International Textile Research Centre at the University for the Creative Arts, ran her own weave studio for over 20 years before becoming an exhibition curator specialising in textiles. These have included 10 major international touring exhibitions: 'Revelation' (1996–98), 'Textural Space' (2001), 'Through the Surface' (2003–05), '21:21 – the textile vision of Reiko Sudo and NUNO' (2005–7), 'Cloth & Culture NOW' (2008), 'Cultex' (2009–11), 'Lost in Lace' (2011–12.), 'Cloth & Memory {2}' (2013), and 'Kawaii: crafting the Japanese culture of cute' (2015). Currently she has curated an international exhibition of contemporary tapestry 'Here & Now' touring the UK 2016–17. She was Principle Investigator for the EU project 'Transparent Boundaries' (2012–14) with partners in Denmark, Greece and Italy. She writes regularly about textile practice in Britain and Japan and is currently co-editing, with Alice Kettle, the book 'Erotic Cloth' for Bloomsbury Publishing (to be published Spring 2018). In 2008 she received the Japan Society Award for significant contribution to Anglo–Japanese relationships and in 2011 was appointed MBE for her contribution to Higher Education.

INSPIRED BY THE UNLIKELY

Rachel Hine



Rachel Hine, "Sneer," 28.5 x 15 cm,
Woven tapestry, cotton, silk, wool, Photo: Rachel Hine

My approach to tapestry weaving has taken many different turns over the last twenty years. I learnt to weave during a time when tapestry kind of wanted to be painting. The surface was very smooth.

At art school, it was a natural progression to draw and paint to develop ideas—create a body of work, and then weave a tapestry. Often, I was striving to replicate the drawn line or the way the paint sat on the paper. This mode of weaving was amplified in 2000, when I was invited to weave and undertake a traineeship at the Australian Tapestry Workshop. It was there that I really learnt the “nuts and bolts” of weaving tapestry. With thousands of combinations of colours available, and endless nuances of blending, it was overwhelming and extremely technical. Colour theory was taken to new levels. I felt privileged to be surrounded with so many master weavers and to learn their subtle tricks and skills. However, being a production tapestry weaver is not an easy job. I often felt as though there was only one way to interpret the artworks, and I felt frustrated that I was using up all my physical strength weaving other artists’ work.

In 2006 I left the Australian Tapestry Workshop to have my first child, and then a second child in 2009. During this time I barely wove anything. I actually didn’t think I wanted to be a tapestry weaver anymore. My incentive to weave again came when the Kate Derum Award for Small Tapestries exhibition was announced. I was taught by Kate, and I felt a great loss when she passed away. I really began weaving as a tribute to her. I wanted to make a very confrontational and un-tapestry-like work, because she liked that kind of thing. I wove “Rumble.” It’s looking for the most unlikely thing I can weave that keeps me inspired. I still start all my tapestries with drawings and



Rachel Hine, "Wild Ride,"
28.5 x 21 cm, 2015,
Woven Tapestry, cotton, wool, silk,
metal and hand made paillettes
Photo: Rachel Hine

paintings. Some drawings seem incomplete in comparison to the tapestries; often I work outside of the right angles found in the regular picture plane.

When I came back to tapestry after the break, which was about six years, I felt as though I had to revisit all my old references and books. It was quite coincidental that my local second-hand bookshop had the same book I would flip through at university (it belonged to Kate Derum), "Grau Garriga," by Arnau Puig. The other was "Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric" by Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larsen. It was these two books that allowed me the freedom to break out of all the surface constraints that had held me back in the past. While looking over my shoulder and noticing that maybe this would not seem so out of place these days, I have just kept going, trying to be free of the concerns of "taste" and "fashion."



Rachel Hine, "Space Oddity,"
59.5 x 70 cm, 2016,
Woven Tapestry, Wool, cotton,
vintage crystal chain, acrylic rod
Photo: Rachel Hine

I weave for myself, and as a rule, I weave without deadlines. I follow my instinct with what and how I weave tapestry. Sometimes I feel as though I jump from one subject and style to another, but over time I can see that there are commonalities that tie everything together.

I also try to make and dye as much wool as I can for each project. Spinning wool was a craft I learnt as a child, and I didn't take it up again until fairly recently. I live about an hour away from a source of tapestry wool I like to weave with, and even though it is beautifully consistent, sometimes I want something with a lot more character, and I want it as soon as possible. Financially it makes a lot of sense as well. It also ties back into the headspace of "Grau Garriga" and "Beyond Craft." Strong robust materials woven into tapestries look great, there's something un-fussy about the look that I adore.

Something that is important to me is a sense of narrative. Almost all my tapestries have a sense of the figurative. For me, it's a fundamental element of tapestry. Because I draw, a lot, and my main focus is the human form, I like to include faces, expression, and mood in my works. Animals are also a nod to tapestries of the past, and whenever I can, I enjoy the connection of weaving something like a rabbit or a bird.

Constantine, Mildred and Jack Lenor Larsen. "Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric." New York: Van Nostrand, 1973.

Puig, Arnau. "Grau Garriga." New York: Rizzoli, 1987.

Rachel Hine has a Masters of Fine Art, from Monash University, and worked at the Australian Tapestry Workshop from 2000 -2006. She has participated in solo and group exhibitions in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Rachel works from her studio in Geelong most days, and is currently updating her book on tapestry techniques, called "Tapestry for Beginners, A practical guide for basic tapestry weaving, using the high warp method". Rachel is looking forward to having a solo exhibition as soon as she has enough work.



Rachel Hine, "Rumble," 13 x 19.5 x 1 cm, 2013, Sewing cotton warp, cotton, polyester weft, Finalist, Kate Derum Award 2013, Photo: Rachel Hine

SAND IN MY SHOES: THE INFLUENCES OF A NEW MEXICO CHILDHOOD

Rebecca Mezoff



Rebecca Mezoff, "Lifelines," Hand-dyed wool Tapestry, 70 x 24 in
Photo: Gregory Case

I have lived most of my life somewhere in the southwestern United States. I should say right up front that I check the "white caucasian" box on federal forms. I'm half Dutch and the other half is a mix of other European descent. My family has been in the U.S. for a scant four generations, mostly in Michigan. I grew up in New Mexico because my parents chose it as the place they most wanted to live. For this I am grateful. New Mexico is a place of stark contrasts: brilliant blue skies and red rock cliffs, tall snowy mountains and white sand dunes, deep poverty and lots of tourism, cultures based in spirituality and art and casinos at every freeway exit.

Time often runs slower there in the land of mañana. Many cultures converge in this part of the country, including the three prominent ones I grew up with: Native American, Hispanic, and Anglo (pretty literally everyone else). This mingling of cultures can cause conflict but it also creates a rich mix of understandings about the way the world works that influences the art created in the region.



Chinle Windmill, Chinle, AZ, Photo: Rebecca Mezoff

I spent much of my childhood trying to figure out how I fit into this mix. I was a little blond girl attending a largely Navajo boarding school as a day student. I took away some understanding of the Navajo culture from that experience, but it wasn't until I returned to New Mexico years after college that I really started to listen to the voices of the native people in the area. I have much more listening to do.

In the land of tomorrow, time has a different feeling. Europeans tend to have a very linear experience of time. In contrast, among the native peoples in the American Southwest, it moves in circles and at a slower pace. What happened hundreds of years ago is important and as time spirals on, what was once important will become so again. This view of time affects how things run in this land of mañana. As an anglo living in the rural towns of that curvy-lined world, it did me good to attempt to live within this different construct. When I finally learned to sit still for a while, I could listen beneath the slower pace of conversation and watch for what is really important to others.

Tapestry is a time-intensive medium. Growing up in a place with cultures that understand time as a circular path fits well with the experience of weaving tapestry. This medium is one where a large piece can take months or years to complete and it takes a great deal of faith in yourself to continue when the linear world is zooming by outside your window and Facebook and Instagram are demanding the next iteration of your work.

I lived in larger cities during college and afterward. But when the threads of my life started to pull apart a bit, I left Reno, Nevada, and moved to the tiny villages of northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. I lived there for the next ten years, treating rural populations as an occupational therapist and learning to weave tapestry.

Rebecca Mezoff, "Emergence VI,"
Cotton warp, wool weft, 16 x 49 in, Private collection
Photo: Rebecca Mezoff





Rebecca Mezoff, "Emergence VII," 2014, Cotton warp, hand-dyed wool weft, 45 x 45 in
Photo: Cornelia Theimer Gardella.

I found myself, rather unexpectedly, moving to a petroglyph preserve north of Espanola, New Mexico, about the time I became James Koehler's apprentice. I didn't know, when I rented the straw bale house perched above the Rio Grande, that it was surrounded by one of the densest collections of petroglyphs in this part of the world. I soon began wandering up the mesa and it became a game to search the black basalt boulders for new glyphs every day. The form that I found repeated over and over was the spiral.

The spiral motif was especially important to me in this time of change in my life. I was trying to forge a new identity as an artist and the spiral is said to be a symbol of the journey the native peoples made from prior worlds into this one.

My memories of trips to trading posts as a child and the rugs I saw being woven there by Navajo artists merged with my exploration of ideas brought by these spiral petroglyphs most likely left by the ancestors of the current Pueblo people. They became inspiration for my own tapestry designs. I began using the spiral form in my designing and soon was weaving the first of what would become the Emergence series of tapestries.



Rebecca Mezoff, "Awakenings I," 2005
Cotton warp, hand-dyed wool weft, 40 x 40 in, 8 epi
Private collection, Belgium, Photo: Rebecca Mezoff

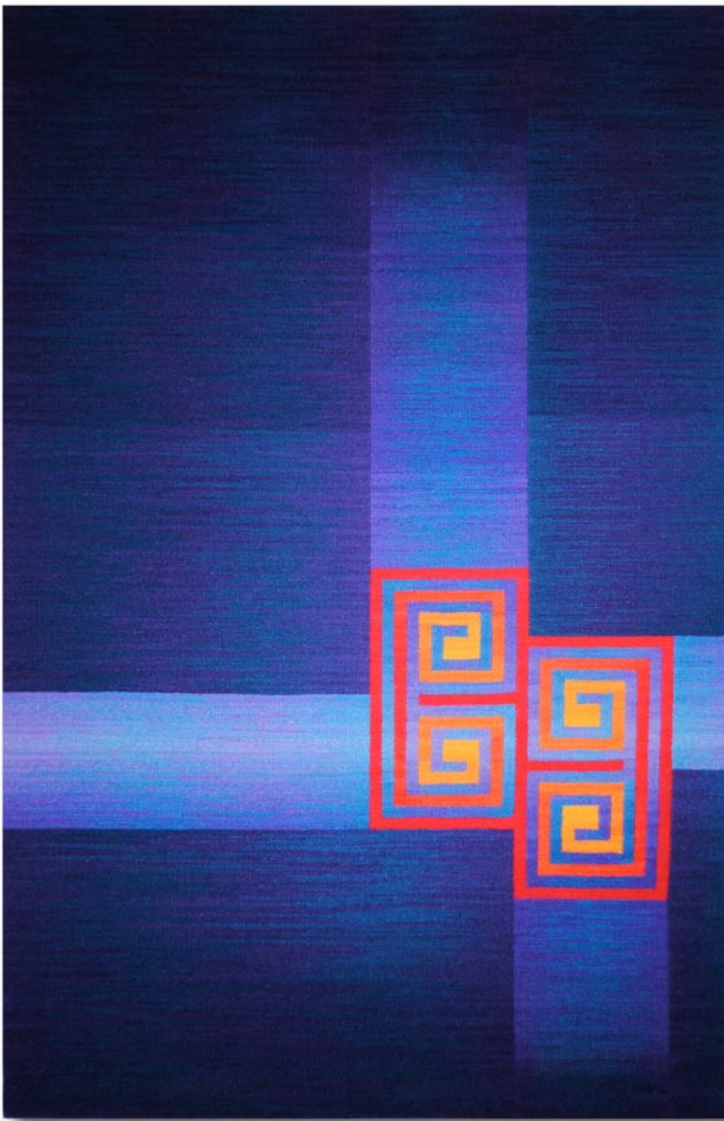
Some of the most important places to me are the canyons and ruins of the Puebloan world. The mysteries presented by Chaco Canyon surrounded me the weekend my tapestry teacher James Koehler died and "Emergence V: The Center Place" was the tapestry that came from that time and place. Starkly remote, windy canyons full of massive great houses surrounded by mysteries still argued over by archaeologists, Chaco is a starting place for my thoughts about native weaving traditions, art, and the use of these forms by non-native people.

I have a continuing fascination with Navajo weaving and love to imagine the grandmothers weaving outside their hogans and hearing the thunk of their hand beaters. But I know this is not my tradition and I can't ever fully understand it. I cannot weave in this way myself because I don't have the necessary traditional and spiritual background. In much the same way as when I was a little girl sitting outside the circle of a group of Navajo classmates, I remain on the outside looking in while I create my own weaving traditions. I can sit and talk to my Navajo friends and respectfully watch their creative process, but it isn't my way.

My weaving traditions are less defined than the Navajo way. Perhaps so many anglo people are drawn to Navajo traditions because we lack or don't understand our own. There is a blank spot in the past that should be filled with a long tradition of family, and many

of us have lost that in the jumble of living in an entrepreneurial, capitalist society. We often don't have roots anymore and we long for the stability of a tradition that does.

Perhaps what is most important, though, is the spirit of the weaving. Beauty and harmony are important concepts to native peoples and I believe they are important to humanity. Weaving is one of the earliest human technologies and the prevalence of metaphors in our languages that reference weaving is a good indication of the importance of fiber, cloth, and creating with it. Perhaps the distinctions between weaving cultures is unimportant after all. We are humans. We create. We can use the joy of this creation to connect with each other across cultural barriers. And I can take the stories my Navajo colleagues tell in yarn and feel heartened by the historical and spiritual place from which their tapestries spring.



My family visits Canyon de Chelly in eastern Arizona frequently. As I stand and watch the shadows change while the sun moves around Spider Rock, I wonder about the grandmother who is herding sheep at the base, and think about life long ago in the canyon and the changes experienced today on the rez. I leave a rug auction at Convergence in Providence, Rhode Island, because I feel sad at the amazing work being sold for so little money in a place so far from where it was created, and I wonder if the sale is a good thing or a bad thing for the artist who is not there. And I watch the struggles with poverty and culture swirling on and around the reservation and hope against hope that somehow the old ideas can be preserved. Perhaps in a weaving and in a new generation of weavers.

I gain a great deal of psychic space from the open skies and landscapes of New Mexico. I think inspiration comes not just from the act of seeing a beautiful landscape, but from understanding a place... from getting a sense of place in the current moment and in layers built up over time. You get to know a place after you have explored it repeatedly, heard its sounds, lived its challenges.

Growing up in New Mexico was about landscape and cultures and questions that will never be answered. What is the effect of place and culture on creative endeavor? Could I make the same art if I lived in Fairbanks or Seattle or Copenhagen? Would I be an artist at all if my parents hadn't moved to the sandy desert when I was a little girl?

Rebecca Mezoff, "Contemplative Garden," 2006, Cotton warp, hand-dyed wool weft, 26 x 40 in, Private collection, USA
Photo: Rebecca Mezoff



Rebecca Mezoff, "Emergence V: The Center Place,"
Cotton warp, wool weft, 45 x 45 in, Photo: James Hart

In 2014 I moved to Fort Collins, Colorado, so my partner could attend graduate school. And though I love being so close to the biggest mountains, I am continually watching for opportunities to return to my friends and the land that shaped me... just a ways south on I-25. The day I have to dump the sand out of my shoes again, I know I am home.

Rebecca Mezoff is a tapestry artist and teacher who currently lives somewhere in the southwestern United States. She teaches workshops in person and online. Her favorite thing besides pepperoni and mushroom pizza is the moment she hears a new tapestry weaver shout, "Eureka!" You can find out where she is at www.rebeccamezoff.com.

CREATIVE CROSSROADS: THE ART OF TAPESTRY

Denver Art Museum

May 31, 2015 – March 5, 2016

Alice Zrebiec



Creative Crossroads, Installation May 2015

Creative Crossroads: The Art of Tapestry displays more than twenty tapestry-woven wall hangings, rugs, furniture covers, garments, and sculptural forms that illustrate the creative possibilities of this technique. The selection includes historic European tapestries made by large ateliers, twentieth-century collaborations between artist and weaver, and works by solo artist-weavers who use tapestry as their creative medium. While some designs are culturally specific, others borrow from, transform, or transcend tradition. Contemporary tapestries join historic weavings from Europe, Turkey, China, Peru, Mexico, and the American southwest in the main gallery, complemented by a selection of smaller tapestry-woven objects from China, Japan, the Netherlands, and Hungary in the Nancy Lake Benson Thread Studio.

One of the mandates of the textile art gallery, which opened to the public in 2013, is to explore and celebrate the permanent collection. All the tapestries on view save one, a loan from the Berger Collection, are part of the holdings of the Denver Art Museum. Some have been in the collection a long time and were conserved for this exhibition. Others are recent acquisitions, several of which were acquired within the last few years and have never been on view. Frequent museum visitors will spot favorites that have



Ason Yellowhair (Navajo, 1930–2012), “Bird and Flower Pictorial Rug,” 1983. Wool.
The Gloria F. Ross Collection of Contemporary Navajo Weaving of the Denver Art Museum

appeared in other exhibitions. The selection of tapestry weavings chosen for **Creative Crossroads** takes the visitor from the expected to the surprising, around the world, and across a thousand years.

Entering the gallery, the first three tapestries encountered are large pictorial weavings made in Europe in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. “The Birth of the Prince,” possibly made in Tournai about 1510–30, is an allegorical tapestry that includes attendant women who personify virtues to be embodied by the prince and his reign. The “Five Senses,” also represented by women, decorate an English table carpet made at the Sheldon Tapestry Workshop about 1610, while a riotous “Kermesse,” or village festival, based on paintings by the Flemish artist David II Teniers displays festive peasants dancing, drinking, and cavorting. It was woven around 1705–47 in the Brussels workshop of Urbanus Leyniers.

The lavish tassels that adorn a brilliant red Chimú tunic (900–1400) part to reveal a merman or, alternatively, pairs of birds woven in tapestry. Also from Peru is a large eighteenth century table cover that merges European and South American motifs. A double-headed eagle appears in the center surrounded by parrots, viscahas, and mythical fire-breathing beasts.



Irvin Trujillo (American, b. 1954), "Saltillo Shroud," 98.5 x 52.35 in (with fringe), 2014, Wool, silk, and metal thread. Photo: Jeff Wells and Christina Jackson, Neusteter Textile Collection: Funds by exchange, 2015.57

The art of Chinese tapestry weaving during the late Qing Dynasty (nineteenth century) is illustrated by a splendid imperial robe woven in silk and metal thread as well as a set of pockets woven à la disposition, uncut and just as it came off the loom.

A dated khilim (1755–56) woven as a prayer rug near Erzurum in Eastern Turkey has the bonus of wonderful natural dyes.

Several examples of Navajo tapestry weaving are in the exhibition: Ason Yellowhair's spectacular and very large pictorial rug with flowers and birds, woven in 1983; a "servant" or "slave" blanket influenced by Saltillo and Rio Grande weavings but made around 1855–75 on a Navajo loom with lazy lines by an unknown woman who was probably part of a Spanish household in what is now New Mexico; and a collaboration between Kenneth Noland, commissioned by éditeur Gloria Ross to provide a design (also in the show) for "Reflection" which, in turn, she entrusted to Sadie Curtis to weave (1983).

Other artist–weaver collaborations are represented by "Flight of Angels" (1962), designed by Mark Adams and woven by Paul Avignon in Aubusson, France, and "Composition with Three Elements," woven at the workshop of Jacqueline de la Baume–Dürbach in Cavalaire, France, before 1951, but after a painting made in 1924–26 by Albert Gleizes.

Historic and contemporary tapestries from the Southwest include a complex Mexican Saltillo sarape from the first half of the nineteenth century; Irvin Trujillo's "Saltillo Shroud," a prize winner at Spanish Market in Santa Fe, NM in 2014, and his earlier work from 1991, "Mexican Killer Bees"; and Don Leon Sandoval's updating of the traditional five stars or Vallero pattern (1999). Contemporary artists working in or near Santa Fe are represented by Ramona Sakiestewa's "Katsina 5" (1987), Rebecca Bluestone's "Four Corners/8" (1997), and the late James Koehler's "Chief Blanket with Blocks" (designed 1991, woven 2002).

Tapestries that literally leave the wall include Gayle Wimmer's undulating "Parchment" (1981) made of rough fibers and hair, and Josep Garu–Garriga's "Tapis Pobre" (early 1970s) that is meant to be suspended and viewed in the round.

The basics of tapestry weaving are explored in the Nancy Lake Thread Studio where visitors may also try their hand.



James Koehler (American, 1952–2011), “Chief Blanket with Blocks,” 74.5 x 47 in, designed 1991, woven 2002; number 8 in an edition of 8. Hand-dyed wool; cotton. Photo: Jeff Wells and Christina Jackson. Neusteter Textile Collection: Funds by exchange from Claudia H. de Osborne and Louise Vigoda, 2002.117

The exhibition, curated by Alice Zrebiec, continues through March 6, 2016 in the North Building, on level 6, and is included with general admission.

Alice Zrebiec, a specialist in textiles and tapestries, is a curatorial consultant based in Santa Fe, NM. Former Avenir Foundation Curator of Textile Art at the Denver Art Museum and curator of textiles for the department of European Sculpture and Decorative Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, she has also worked as a consultant for other museums. In addition to her interests in contemporary, ethnographic, and ecclesiastical textile art, her research areas include a continuing investigation of American tapestry ateliers and their products from the 1890s to the 1930s, the subject of her doctoral dissertation. (NYU-Institute of Fine Arts, 1980)

ARTAPESTRY 4 – LAST STOP, DENMARK

Lise Frølund



Aino Kajaniemi, "I Stretch," 73 x 154 cm, photo: Aino Kajaniemi

Denmark was the last stop for the exhibition ARTAPESTRY 4. Before that it was shown in Finland, Austria, and Germany. As the name suggests, the exhibition is the fourth in a series which, since 2005, have been sponsored by European Tapestry Forum and shown all over Europe.

Silkeborg is situated in the middle of Jutland, Denmark. Here the old health resort, Silkeborg Spa, was given new life as Silkeborg Spa Art Centre. The beautiful and unique buildings from 1883 contain very large, as well as quite small, rooms. Consequently, the feeling of space and the light effects differ widely from room to room, making it possible to accentuate each wall-hanging. Silkeborg Spa Art Centre frames beautifully the tapestries of the thirty-one textile artists.

ARTAPESTRY 4 includes work from no less than twelve European countries and, at the well-attended opening in Denmark in September 2015, about half of the artists were present. The artists travelled considerable distance, partly to be part of the public opening, but also for the opportunity to meet colleagues and see one another's work, for



Sara Brennan, "Broken White Band with New Blue," 2010, Wools, cotton and cottolin, 115 x 115 cm, Photo: Shannon Tofts

textiles never have and never will be photogenic. The catalogue and website are helpful in providing a survey, but the photographs do not do justice to the actual works. If you really want to appreciate the exhibition, it must be in person. The travel undertaken by the artists also bears witness to the great work done by European Tapestry Forum in making these exhibitions possible.

The weavings in the exhibition are quite varied, but they are all large. Some are very intricate, like the classical Flemish tapestries of hard-spun wool and flax, others are made up of thin and thick yarns loosely interlaced. Scottish artist Susan Mowatt wove a number of thin striped strips which are placed directly on the wall with space in between, so that the wall and the bands comprise the actual work. Some hangings contain a profusion of colours, some only few, and Hungarian Marika Szaraz' bridge-shaped weaving is exclusively in black. Many works are flat-woven, others have complicated structures, and one is rya. What they all have in common are a skilled hand and a well-considered motif. They are works you would like to live with.



Ann Naustdal, "Straws and Scrubs," 135 x 145 cm, Photo: Kim Müller

Any visitor at any exhibition who takes his/her time to look closely will have favourites, albeit with all the subjectivity inevitable in a personal choice. And I have my mine. Norwegian Ann Naustdal studied in Scotland, and now in the middle of the Norwegian capital, Oslo, she sits at an upright loom where she can see the entire weaving in progress. Her golden brown "Straws and Scrubs" measures 145 cm x 135 cm and has been divided into three equally large cross sections. The two bottom ones have their own structures that convey the feeling of dry straw, leaves, and grass, whereas the top one is a woven image of many dry straws with white caps (Norwegian cotton grass) on a black background. This highly stylized form gives me the feeling of actually being outside, in late summer, smelling the dry grass and feeling it prickling the soles of my feet.

Another favourite is Scottish Sara Brennan's "Broken White Band with New Blue." She weaves with thin woolen yarn in black, white, and blue. The black section at the bottom of the weaving, and the blue at the top, intermingle with the white band in the middle section like clouds, smoke or steam. The colours seem to evaporate into the thin white air. A third favorite is Finnish Aino Kajaniemi's weavings "I Stretch" and "I Bend." They are both delicate and humorous. A fourth favourite would be... and a fifth... well, I could go on.

There has been a tendency to consider art tapestry as an art form that mainly belongs to the past. But here in Scandinavia it seems to be prospering again. Young art students are fascinated by the physical material and the craftsmanship. We now see students of both sexes who take a keen interest in the loom... which, I suppose, we all find very gratifying.

Lise Frølund has had her own workshop since 1979. After a couple of years with digital shaft shifting (in 1988), she got access to a handloom with digital jacquard. In 2004 the Norwegian TC-1 digital jacquard was installed in her old handloom, and since then the majority of her weavings have been carried out on this loom. For further information see: www.lisefrolund.dk

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