

# C O D A

## The New Nowness of Tapestry



*CODA: Celebrating the work of artists who design & weave contemporary tapestry*

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AMERICAN TAPESTRY ALLIANCE



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**CODA** is a biennial publication by the American Tapestry Alliance that celebrates the work of artists who design and weave contemporary tapestry.

Ellen Ramsey, Editor, CODA  
Sara Figal and Nicki Bair, Design and Layout

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Credits: Cover image: Fiona Hutchinson, "A Line of Water (detail)," 6ft 2ins x 1ft 2ins (186 x 36cm), cotton weft, linen warp, 2015. Photo: Norman McBeath. Image top right: Pat Taylor, "6704-13 (detail)," 133 cm x 112 cm x 2 cm, cotton warp, linen, silk, wool weft, 2017. Photo: Peter Jones.



We proudly welcome you to the fourth volume of CODA published by the American Tapestry Alliance (ATA). This issue of CODA highlights a selection of articles from the previous two years of ATA's quarterly, Tapestry Topics, along with a commissioned article by Emily Zaiden, Director and Curator for the Craft in America Center in Los Angeles. This compelling article explores some of the directions currently being pursued by artists in the tapestry field. While stressing the experimental, expressive, spiritual and political nature of tapestries, she focuses on seven artists whose work displays deep passion. We thank Zaiden for her insights.

We thank guest editor Ellen Ramsey for all of her work on this project. She carefully curated this selection of articles for inclusion to demonstrate the variety of ways artists are approaching the tapestry making process: Shelley Socolofsky, chosen for her diverse, experimental approach; Pat Taylor, representing a more academic style, with a timely theme of identity politics; Fiona Hutchison, for her process driven, deconstructive approach to tapestry which Ramsey sees as a dominant trend; and Dance Doyle, who represents emerging artists and new mythologies. The content of this issue is enhanced by the beautiful layout done by volunteers Sara Figal and Nicki Bair.

ATA, devoted to the promotion of contemporary work in the field of tapestry, developed this publication to partially fulfill that goal. A generous donation, by Christine Laffer, supports this effort and allows us to distribute

a glossy print edition to a select audience, in addition to a widely distributed full-color PDF version of CODA. Our membership will enjoy revisiting the articles from Tapestry Topics in a new context, and be offered a thought provoking look at tapestry by our guest author.

In print, online, or in person, seeing tapestries that speak to us with a passionate voice is emotionally moving. Viewing the work by the artists in this issue of CODA will let you enter their world for a few moments, appreciate their visual voices and be enriched by the experience. We know that tapestry is a viable art form and will continue to thrive as committed artists discover the intimate and expressive nature of weaving through which they can share their worlds.

On behalf of the Board of Directors,

Susan Iverson, President  
American Tapestry Alliance







Christina Forrer, "Untitled (green background)," 119 x 80 inches, cotton, wool, linen, silk, and watercolor, 2018.  
© Christina Forrer; Courtesy of the artist and Luring Augustine, New York.

# The New Nowness of Tapestry: Weaving Current American Narratives

Emily Zaiden

Director and Curator, Craft in America

*There is no such thing as rigidly defined art-- in its tendencies, its impulses, its forms and its means. There can only be living art. Living.*

-Jean-Pascal Delamuraz, President of International Centre of Ancient and Modern Tapestry in the catalog for the 8th International Biennial of Tapestry, 1977

Outside of the dedicated circuit of practitioners and supporters who have made tapestry a lifelong pursuit, tapestry is very much alive right now in art and design in a bigger way than in the past forty years. There has been a steady increase of fiber-based exhibitions at major museums and respected art galleries from the Tate to the Hammer with catalogs to boot. Tapestry is luring artists from various disciplines and backgrounds who are imbuing their weavings with political messages and new perspectives. In the broadest sense, tapestry is also popping up in interior design magazines and shops with regularity. As perhaps the ultimate sign of the tapestry-trending times, the Irish tourism board in 2017 helped initiate a hand-embroidered Game of Thrones Tapestry that outsizes the Bayeux tapestry, and it has successfully bumped up tourism in Northern Ireland. Beyond its reverberations in popular culture, the renewed interest in tapestry is indicative of a larger shift in focus of the art world towards fiber as a whole. It has crept into the canon of contemporary American art with vigor and heft.

Tapestry has always been a political medium in Europe, historically reflecting the views of those commissioning the works, i.e. the

nobility or the church. In the late 19th century, design reformers and leaders of the Arts and Crafts movement recognized the potential for articulating ethical and democratic values through the making of tapestry and cloth overall. This demarcated a new incarnation of tapestry that shifted from reinforcing ideology of an elite power to openly advocating for more democratic social aspirations, at least in theory. Morris and his peers expounded on the ways that textiles could serve a social purpose of rebelling against history, the damages of the industrial revolution on workers, and the superficial, inferior quality of the material world. This progressive outlook provides a foundation for the political work of many recent American tapestry weavers.

The mid-20th century was another fertile era for textile experimentation and expression. Artists used fiber to construct strong, independent environments and monumental, multidimensional, self-supporting structures. These fiber forms were unprecedented, yet tied to historic tapestry through their massive scale and formality. Nourishing this movement, UCLA held a landmark exhibition of visionary, tapestry-based art in 1971. Curator and professor Bernard Kester wrote in his



introduction to *Deliberate Entanglements* several tenets of contemporary work that remain guiding elements today. These include: the limitless employment of traditional and invented constructions within the same work, structure and process as content, visual and tactile sensory appeal, and textural contrasts along with relief surfaces. These elements infuse fiber production today and they have taken root in recent tapestry specifically.

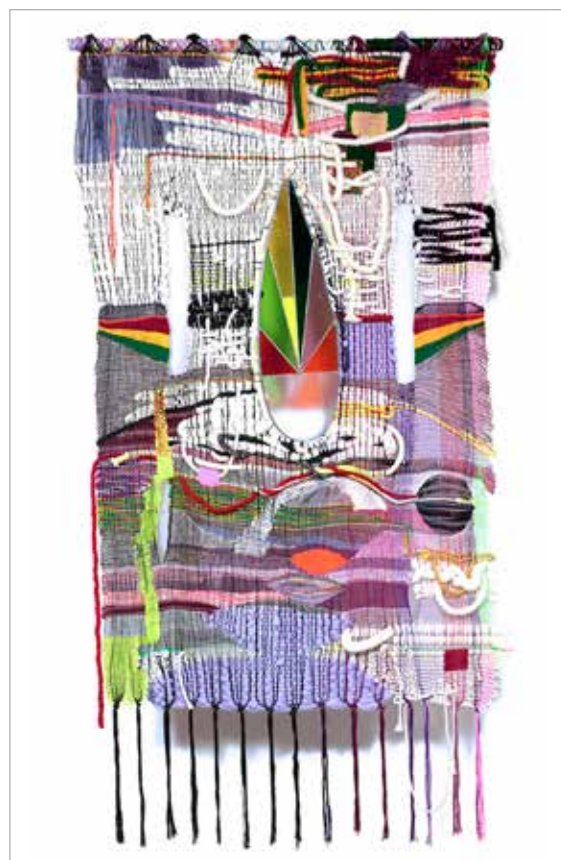
Kester also noted that the act or reclamation of authorship brought about heightened understanding and therefore, more inspired and meaningful results. In the artists he noted that, “their intimate involvement at every stage of the process has brought about a unity of materials, concept, and form absent from tapestry history perhaps since the Gothic period.” This revolutionary spirit continues through recent works by artists from various backgrounds across the US who use tapestry to form a new social discourse.

One new common point of departure is the infusion of cartoonish color. Christina Forrer is one such artist who creates traditional, weft-faced weavings of expressionistic caricatures interlocked by intense conflict. Dance Doyle also uses a depth of color and shock of synthetic colors to amplify the effect of her pieces. Doyle originally worked with ceramics but shifted gears in 2005 while taking a class at San Francisco State University. She makes tapestries that are revealing, free form readings of the urban condition. Forrer and Doyle both adapt the pictorial and figurative-friendly nature of European tapestry, in addition to the monumentality of scale, which lured artists to depict epic scenes of struggle, redemption, and valor. Their tapestries instead express a critical sense of disorder, depravity and disruption. Terri Friedman, who made a mid-career switch to tapestry in 2014, similarly refers to her palette as “radioactive.” Friedman uses the transcendent power of color to “mirror the unraveling.” Friedman’s colorful, agitated panels are “protest banners” in the vein of Sister Corita Kent melded with the formal innovations of Magdalena Abakanowicz, Lenore Tawney, Hannah Ryggen, or Sheila Hicks.

She sees the metaphorical aspects of her weavings--order, continuity, strength and connectivity-- as aspirational values for these uncertain times. Scale is important because she seeks immersive experiences that make the words, narratives, and colors more visceral. Friedman’s gestural construction choices of loose ends and imperfections mirror the destructive impulses of our society as it comes “unhinged.” “The threads are like chin hairs as we age or after you give birth. They just show up at inconvenient times in inconvenient places.”



Dance Doyle, “3 AM (detail),” 90 in x 36 in, hand dyed wool, wool, cotton, silk, linen and mixed media, 2019. Photo: Dance Doyle.



Terri Friedman, “Eudaimonia,” wool, acrylic, cotton, metallic fibers, stained glass, 2018. Photo: Josef Jacques

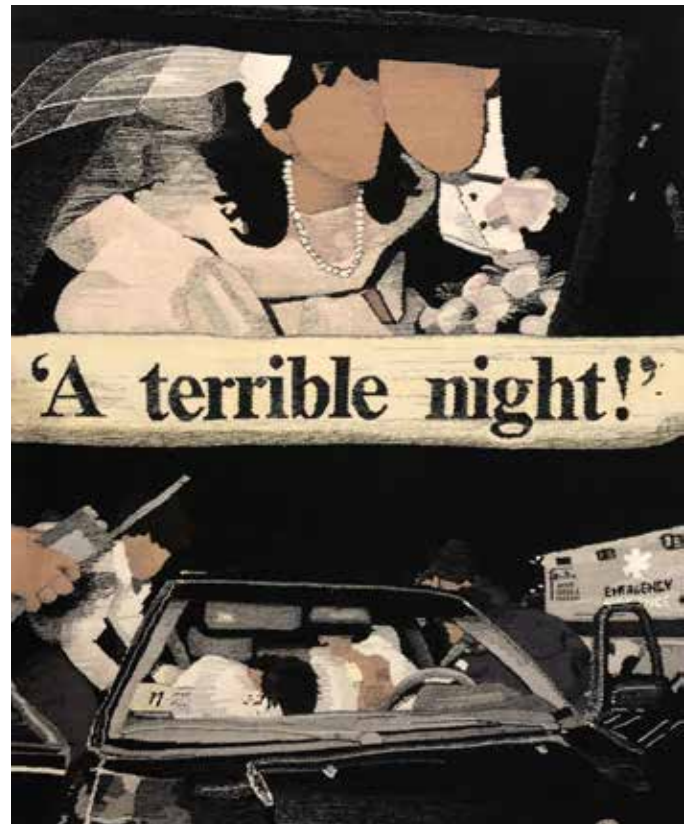
Friedman deliberately weaves holes and gaps in her work to highlight the unstable and uncertain. To her, these openings represent that, as Leonard Cohen wrote, “there is a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in”. Personally and spiritually they signify eyes, mouths, vaginas or other body parts. In addition, she frequently incorporates glass elements that provide a textural juxtaposition, inspired by ethereal stained glass windows of iconic churches.

In her 2015 curatorial project, *From Back to Front*, textile scholar Jessica Hemmings wrote about international artists who “expose the construction of weaving” and “deconstruct the weave to communicate.” In American tapestry, these formal choices resonate in the context of the fractured national and social atmosphere. Artists including Friedman are now revealing the warp more than ever and using these deviations to imply decay, unfinished business, gaps in communication, and lapses in values and systems. In Friedman’s works, the warp and weft have equal weight as realms for interpretation.

Artists have used tapestry to record social history, religion, and morality since its origins. Many new pictorial woven mythologies magnify individual or untold stories rather than addressing collective allegory or documenting epic moments in time. Erin Riley creates outspoken works about subjects so deeply personal that they have never been directly, nor explicitly, portrayed in tapestry. Riley flips the heroic, historic tradition by monumentalizing private glimpses into intimate moments that reveal addiction, violence, shame, and pain through a feminist filter.

As a testament to the vitality and constant evolution of this artistic medium, American artists are challenging the status quo through innovation in content and technique. They draw from a range of worldwide weaving practices spanning beyond Europe to Central and South America to Africa, melding together to reflect the diverse strands that form our composite American culture. In some cases, their reinvention of tapestry narration takes the form of pictorial imagery, and messages are also conveyed more metaphorically through structural choices, color, and symbolism. These artists are broadening the definition of tapestry and its currency as an artistic and expressive medium.

Diedrick Brackens engages European tapestry, West African weaving, and American quilting in his large wall hangings. Drawing on the narrative nature of tapestry, Brackens weaves stories that have not been represented in prior chapters of tapestry history, and these allegories relate to his identity as a black queer American. Brackens’ creates triptychs and diptychs with sparse, high-contrast figures and silhouettes that are rich with symbolism. Threads of his woven imagery are left hanging, seeping down the surface like dripping paint. These panels are conjoined imperfectly at mismatched seams to form a whole, and the idea of the difficulties that lie in blending together separated elements is evident. Brackens leaves knotted warp ends hanging in asymmetrical portions of each composition, which call further attention to the isolated segments of each piece.

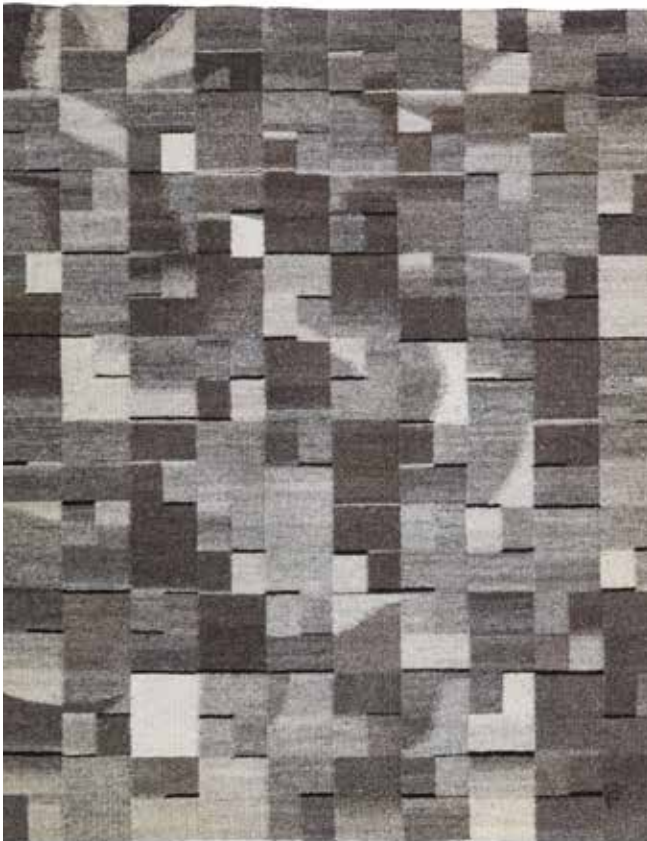


Erin Riley, “A Night,” 63 in x 48 in. wool, cotton, 2019.  
Photo: Erin Riley

Simultaneously, as some artists deconstruct and disavow formal perfection, others strive for flawlessness. Their work attests to the constructive power of art. Porfirio Gutierrez, a native of Teotitlán del Valle who splits his time between Ventura, California and Oaxaca, is dedicated to the totality of every aspect of tapestry creation.



Gutierrez weaves Zapotec cultural myths that have passed between generations. He views this ancient history and his spiritual practice through an American lens and he seeks to continue the traditions of Teotitlán through his work in the U.S. During this era of climate crisis, he spotlights the Zapotec perception of the natural world as a sacred, living being that produces wool and natural dyes, is incredibly current and resonant.



Porfirio Gutierrez, "Storm," 120 x 120 cm, undyed wool.  
Photo: Javier Lazo Gutierrez

Although his techniques, story, and spirituality have been categorized as folk art in the past, this is shifting as contemporary art boundaries blur. Gutierrez asserts the comfort and strength that exists in materials that are traditional, pure, and honest. He correlates the meditative simplicity and geometry of both mid-century modern Californian architecture with the ancient Zapotec temples and sites such as Mitla and Monte Albán, all of which are presented as patterns in his pieces.

"My weaving is an expression of the two worlds that I live in." One of his worlds has endured for millennia and his second is modern America, which is in need of a "tactical sense of order" that he feels can be imparted through the natural fiber and clear imagery of Zapotec tapestry. For Gutierrez, the inspiration for navigating life in the complex modern world comes from within indigenous culture.

Biculturalism is also central to the weavings of Wence Martinez, who is shaped by his indigenous cultural heritage and academic foundation in Mexico City, although he lives in the Midwest. His work over the years draws equally from Gobelin weaving, Navajo beadwork patterns, and Bauhaus. Working in collaboration with his U.S.-born wife Sandra, he uses pattern-driven design with symbolism that departs from Zapotec tradition through nuanced color, tone, composition and pattern.

Martinez's amalgamation of diverse sources parallels the multicultural, multiracial world we live in today. As he assimilated into American life, Martinez began to develop his own weaving designs and distinct voice. As an example, Ojo de Agua reflects his normally straight stripe patterns bending to represent his American home, surrounded by Lake Michigan on the Door County peninsula. In his words, "Ripples of water are all around us." The effect of his subtle, symbolic weavings, like those of these other visionary artists, is to carry the most ancient of artforms into the present and towards the future. Tapestry has waxed and waned over the centuries, and we are in a wave of resurgence, reinvestigation, expansion and renewed appreciation.

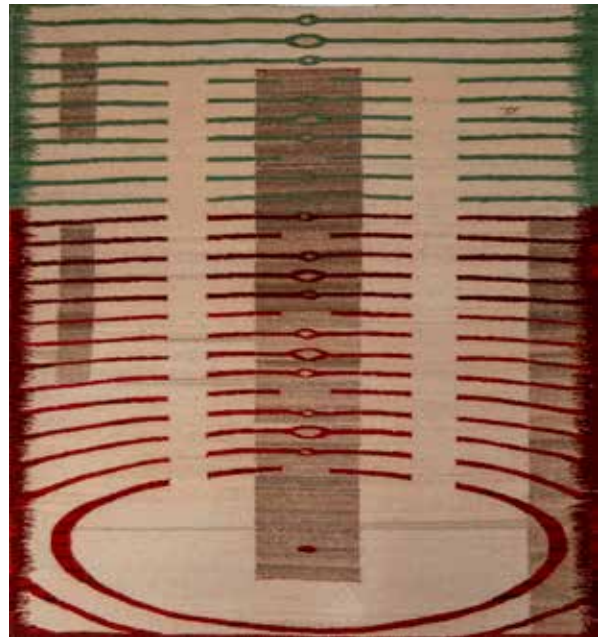
"Does this not say that one of the oldest  
of arts has become the newest?"

-Frederick S. Wight  
Director, UCLA Art Galleries  
Deliberate Entanglements catalog, 1971



## NOTES

1. ICA Boston 2014-2015 Fiber: Sculpture 1960–present; Leap Before You Look: Hammer Black Mountain College 1933–1957 Oct 10, 2015 – Jan 24, 2016, and countless galleries from Hauser and Wirth to Spruth Magers are examples.
2. <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/gallery/timeless-tapestries-wall-decor-ideas>, <https://www.vogue.com/article/game-of-thrones-tapestry-ulster-museum-belfast>, <https://www.sunset.com/home-garden/design/tapestry-wall-hangings#tapestry-wall-hangings-woven-wall-hangings>, and more.
3. Bernard Kester, *Deliberate Entanglements* exhibition catalog, organized by the UCLA Art Galleries, 1971-1972.
4. <https://www.ellenramseytapestry.art/blog/tapestry-in-the-galleries-christina-forrer>
5. Terri Friedman email interview 6/20/19 and statement from January 2017 “Unraveling”.
6. Susan Iverson, Erin Riley- *Public/Private Moments* exhibition text, [https://americantapestryalliance.org/exhibitions/tex\\_ata/erin-riley/](https://americantapestryalliance.org/exhibitions/tex_ata/erin-riley/)
7. Brackens had a recent solo exhibition in Los Angeles: *Unholy Ghosts at Various Small Fires*, Los Angeles, March 16 - May 11, 2019.



Wence Martinez, “Ojo de Agua,” 44 x 41 inches, hand spun churro wool, un-dyed and aniline dye, 2018. Photo: Wence Martinez.



**Emily Zaiden** is Director and curator of the Craft in America Center in Los Angeles, where she has curated more than forty exhibitions focused on contemporary craft, art, and design for the Center and outside venues. Zaiden has published exhibition catalogues and written articles and reviews for journals including *Archives of American Art Journal*, *Metalsmith*, and *Antiques and Fine Art*. After completing an M.A. at the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture, Zaiden served as Research Associate to the Decorative Arts department at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Prior to becoming Craft in America Center Director in 2010, she was a research editor for *Architectural Digest* and she consulted for private collections and institutions focusing on historic American and European decorative arts, material culture, architecture and design.

# Notes on Feeding, Nurturing and Sustaining an Art Practice

Shelley Socolofsky



Shelley Socolofsky in her studio, 2019.  
Photo by Joaquin Socolofsky

word bank/ My Studio Practice:

*an evolution, a path, a journey,  
unexpected turns, a dance, a  
dialogue, dead ends, flowing  
rivers, a relationship, a love affair,  
calls and responses, a black hole,  
mountain tops, snares,*

*a wide listening sky with thousands  
of candles*

In 1979, as a nineteen-year old music major studying abroad, my life changed course. During a weekend escapade to Paris, I ventured into the Cluny Museum and was confronted by the magnificent La Dame à la Licorne tapestries. Stunned by their daunting physical presence, their beauty, and their grace, I was overtaken with a feeling of déjà-vu and an all encompassing clarity or “knowing.” It was as if I had entered a portal both with views into the past and crystalline

visibility into my future all at once. From that moment forward my life was forever altered. The years that followed were consumed with goals and aspirations involving the honing of tapestry-weaving skills in the effort to craft something beautiful and precise. This journey led me through an academic textile program, a Gobelins apprenticeship abroad, and endless hours of practice in pursuit of weaving perfected graduating hachures, a flawless surface, immaculate turns, clever technical



devices, and clean edges. Narratives were important and reflected, inspired by those works that initially impressed me.

I reached a fork in the path, years in, fueled by those common yet un-educated spectator remarks “that’s an expensive beach towel,” and also by boredom, having finally accomplished those initial technical goals. This fork presented a choice: continue weaving technically centric, narrative work or dig more deeply into what it was I was doing. Questions had arisen: Am I making a picture? Is it a cloth? Is it dimensional? then why is it flat? does its history attach unintended meaning to the work? is this important? what am I trying to say through the investment of time and hand labor? does any of this matter? is it culturally relevant? aesthetically relevant?

Gunta Stozl, one of the leading figures of the Bauhaus weaving workshop during the 20th century, described her early work in tapestry as *Bild aus Wolle* or “pictures made of wool.” She concluded that tapestry was fundamentally problematic in that it was easily misunderstood and dismissed by critics as stilted copycat versions of the more direct and immediate image making processes of painting or photography. I found myself wrestling with similar demons and, not particularly interested in dimensional or construction possibilities within weft-faced weave structures (the Bauhaus solution to this problem), I began stretching to find other solutions.

As a lover of documentaries and biographies, I posited these questions alongside ongoing investigations into histories of weaving production, the Feminist Art Movement of the 1970’s, and various other art historical readings of personal interest. Admittedly, what I was attempting to do in my studio practice was not painting, not photography, not sculpture, and not architecture; I challenged myself to find other strategies that might help me address this conundrum. As an aid, I revisited Rosalind Krauss’ groundbreaking



Shelley Socolofsky, “Cornucopian Broadcloth,” Gobelins tapestry, 7 ft x 3.5 ft, 10 epi, wool, silk, cotton, 1998. Hand collaged maquette, private collection. Photo by the artist.

1979 essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” in which Krauss tracks the evolution of early site-specific monuments to the expanded versions of sculpture produced as Earthworks during the mid-20th century. Using her model of diagram and inversion, I began to deconstruct the process and object-ness of Tapestry. During this exercise, words began to appear in my brainstorming suggesting new possibilities and direction: blueprint, ritual, mapping, manuscript, rhythm, analogue, gesture.

I decided it necessary to take a hiatus from tapestry weaving and presume a playful and experimental approach to making. This self-imposed celibacy proved useful in that it helped me to disentangle from any reliance on technique as a main focus, a problem deeply rooted within the art vs. craft discourse. Rather than approaching “making” from a technically centered position (tapestry), I was now able to focus solely on concepts, distilling the most important points, then working to find affective ways to communicate them. If, for example, I wished to speak about “ritual” (a crucial component within the weaving of a tapestry, at least for me, yet one that gets buried within the final woven object), I sought to find a more direct way to articulate it. These experimental exercises set up surprisingly open-ended lines of thought that allowed multiple avenues worth exploring. The result became a “call and response” format of project making where projects themselves began to

have conversations with each other. In other words, one project presents thoughts and questions that subsequent projects followed up on with answers and more questions. These conversations always involved projects not worked in tapestry, with follow-up projects often being answered in tapestry, but only if I had discerned that the best response warranted being woven.

*word bank/ Stretching the definition of tapestry  
luxury item, one off, pattern, information,  
coding, systems, control/chaos, mundane,  
memorial, inequity, mass production, labor,  
exploitation, value, worth, commodity, text,  
notation, trade, ancient universal craft*

One such “conversation” began with a word bank surrounding issues of ritual, value, labor, and worth within an economy of production. “Piecework”, 2008, (an installation performance made of decomposed silk, thread



Shelley Socolofsky, “Fata Morgana (detail),” 5 ft x 6 ft, 10 epi, wool, silk, cotton, rayon, 2008. Digitally designed maquette, private collection. Photo by the artist.





Shelley Socolofsky, "Piecework" detail 1, MM installation, dimensions variable, decomposed silk, thread, wire, dulcimer tuning pegs, shellac, ink, wine, reclaimed lumber, metal, paper, 2008. Photo by the artist.

wire, wine, shellac, ink, reclaimed lumber, dulcimer tuning pegs, paper) involved aspects of tapestry making (repetitive hand labor, the framework equipment, threading) as a means to examine histories of art, craft, labor, and the objectification of goods and their relative position within a spectrum of value. This project

enabled me to think through the conceptual ideas I was working to locate without getting bogged down in technical prowess and preoccupations inherent in weaving a tapestry. This exercise also intensified my desire to return to tapestry weaving afterwards with renewed intentionality. The tapestry project developed in response was "Paper Towel." 2015; a work also inspired by the use of a similar word bank.



Shelley Socolofsky, "Paper Towel," Gobelins tapestry, 66 in x 89 in, 10 epi/ wool, cotton, horsehair, correction fluid, 2014. Photo by the artist.

Another example of this type of project conversation stemmed from the word analogue. Understanding that to know something requires that we get to know its opposite, I began to investigate the digital image. Initially exploring the digital realm as a design tool, I sought information through digital imaging workshops followed by lots of experimentation, eventually discovering useful strategies for producing layered-like tapestry maquettes. Much later, this line of inquiry demanded that I confront tapestry's nemesis: the woven image

produced through digital Jacquard. Returning to graduate school, I reacquainted myself with complex weave structures, took some Jacquard workshops domestically and abroad, and felt both excitement and guilty... as if I were engaging in some sort of an extramarital affair. Colleagues wondered if I were intent on abandoning the labor-intensive tapestry weaving in favor of a more time efficient process to create image-based cloth. What I discovered, however, was that the intuitive language that digital hand Jacquard weaving provided was quite distinct from the word bank language that occurred when brainstorming concepts suitable for tapestry. This reinforced the differing potentials between the two image making systems.

word bank/ Scroll, 2017, digital Jacquard *landscape, landscape as lived experience, landscape as surveillance, voyeurism, warning flag, prayer flag, digital, material meaning: light reflective and metal thread, contemporary, futuristic*

Currently I am working with the polarities of matter and the immaterial. Ghosts, energetic poles, magnetic fields, sound waves and virtual realities are some of the ideas circulating a recent digital project. In response, I am left with feelings of loss and the need to find meaning in the material, inspired to reinforce the necessity of Matter.

Tapestry, with its density and weight, seems the perfect answer.



Shelley Socolofsky, "Scroll," digital handwoven Jacquard, 29 in x 79 in, 30 epi, cotton, glass, resin, aluminum, metal thread, daylight (unlit) view, 2017. Photo by Guy L. Heureux. Photos under two light conditions.

**Shelley Socolofsky** is an artist/educator living and working in Portland, Oregon. Informed by long histories of textile production with its orientations to pattern and decoration, her work explores the material, conceptual, and poetic nuances of 'craft' through a hybrid practice incorporating both digital technology and analogue hand processes. Currently on the faculty at Oregon College of Art & Craft, Shelley received her MFA in textiles jointly from the University of Oregon, JacqCad Center (North Carolina), and the Fondazione Arte Della Seta Lisio in Florence, Italy (Jacquard hand weaving.) She held apprenticeships in Gobelin Tapestry weaving at Les Manufactures des Gobelins in Paris and Uzes, France. Exhibiting in numerous museums and galleries including the de Young Museum, San Francisco; Bellevue Arts Museum, Seattle; and the Farrell Collection, New York City, Shelley is a recipient of several artist fellowships including grants from the Oregon Arts Commission and Ruth & Harold Chenven Foundation of New York. Her work is in several public collections and in print in *FiberArts*, *Artist magazine of Taiwan*, and *Interior Design*.



# Continuing Thread: A Conversation with Fiona Hutchison

Interview by Jenny Ross-Nevin



Fiona Hutchison in her studio, 2017. Photo: Norman McBeath

Tapestry artist Fiona Hutchison has been designing and weaving tapestry in her Edinburgh studio for over 30 years, dividing her time between developing her own work, working to commission and teaching.



**Where do you see yourself in terms of your career?**

I consider myself a mid-career artist, simply because my learning process is still very much ongoing. Although I have been weaving for thirty years, I still feel excited to learn about new materials, facing challenges and finding new techniques to use in my work.

**What has been the greatest influence on your work?**

My most enduring inspiration is my love of the sea and sailing. I go sailing on the water three times a week, for nine months of each year. I sail on both east and west Scottish coasts, which have very different characters. The Forth is an industrial estuary, whereas the west coast is more rural. I rarely get the opportunity to take photographs because we are racing, but I am always looking, thinking and remembering.

**What has influenced the evolution of your work and kept it fresh?**

It is networking with other artists from all disciplines, travel, residencies and studio visits. I have travelled widely within Europe as part of the steering committee of the European Tapestry Forum. My residency in Norway in 2008, for instance, challenged me to explore and play with new materials and techniques within textiles, paper and stitch. One of the most exciting experiences, both culturally and creatively, was my visit to Lithuania in 1992. This was not long after Lithuania became independent from Russia. I met many other artists, visited studios and went to the Art Academy in Vilnius. A formative visit to Japan in 2000 made me consider making work for specific spaces rather than to hang in a gallery. What inspired me about the Japanese artists was their working with, and being true to, their materials. Their colour choices, particularly blues, and their sense of space and composition have been an enduring influence on my own work. As a result of my Japanese travels, my work became lighter in character and more delicate. My earlier work, by contrast, was much more traditional in weaving style and richer in colour.





Previous page left: Fiona Hutchison, "Over the Falls." 8 ft x 1ft 6 in. (240 x 50 cm), woven tapestry with cotton warp (8epi) with a weft of cotton, linen, paper yarns and monofilament yarns, acrylic paint and PVA medium, 2007. Photo: Michael Walchover.  
Above: Detail.



**Can you describe how you stimulate your creative process to develop new ideas?**

A major stimulus for my work is drawing and sketching, in combination with experimentation with non-traditional implements. Recognizing the value of play and the role of chance in the evolution of ideas is of paramount importance. I have investigated using thread as a drawing tool, along with twigs and sticks to make the unexpected or uncontrolled mark.

Key to my work is developing a sense of surface with tissue paper and collage, using papers of various textures and absorbent qualities. In the past I have mainly used tissue papers, but designs for my recent work are made using Lokta paper from Nepal. This particular paper has a very fibrous surface that can be manipulated and stained.



Fiona Hutchison, "Shifting tide" (miniature), 10 x11 in. (25 x 28 cm), Cotton warp (8epi) with 1/2 bleached linen weft, 2017. Photo: Michael Walchover





Fiona Hutchison. "Tide II," 5 ft x 4 ft 1 ins (150 x 125 cm), cotton warp (8epi) with 1/2 bleached linen weft, 2017. Photo: Michael Walchover



**What place does research have in your practice?**

Research can take many forms, including primary research from sketchbook drawing, photographs and in my case, being out on the water. Making connections between areas of interest, reading widely and researching anything and everything helps to conjure up images that then join together to produce new ways of thinking. Knowing your subject in depth is invaluable and brings a greater context to the work. Looking at my work in relation to that of other artists, who do not necessarily work within the field of textiles, is also important.

From college days I found Abstract Expressionism and Color Field painters inspiring, especially the work of Mark Rothko, Richard Diebenkorn, Barnett Newman and Helen Frankenthaler. More recently, I find the work of Agnes Martin fits with the contemplative, quiet quality of my more minimal pieces. Looking at the different ways in which other artists work, their processes and how they approach things has a direct influence on my practice. One of the most important things is that you never stop looking, experimenting and being inquisitive. I continue to ask questions such as 'What will happen if?' and 'How does this work?'



Fiona Hutchison, "Tide," 5 ft x 4 ft 3 in. (150 x 130 cm), cotton warp (8epi) with 1/2 bleached linen weft, 2016. Photo: Michael Walchover

Interviewer **Jenny Ross-Nevin** is studying Textiles at Norwich University of the Arts.

# Engaging with Society through Tapestry: Pat Taylor

Interview by Cande Walsworth

Pat Taylor (UK) has worked with the potential opened up by drawing and its relationship to woven tapestry since the 1970s. Engaging with emotional memory, using spontaneous mark making and classical techniques, travelling from monotone to bright colour, Pat Taylor creates images where past, present, and future collide in a space devoid of landmarks.



Pat Taylor, "Boris," 40 cm x 30 cm x 2 cm, cotton warp, linen, wool weft, 2016. Photo: Colin Rundle.



Pat Taylor, "Mitsuko Utchida," 111 cm x 116 cm, cotton warp, linen, wool weft, 2007. Photo: Steve Spiller.

Preoccupation with physiognomy has been a constant theme, stimulated by current and sometimes physically distant events.

Turning the European tapestry model on its head, these works are personal and intimate, speaking about the 'have nots' of this world and their relationship to the powerful and wealthy in society. These stories vary from the poignant, to the sad, to the humorous. They are intentionally accessible and easy to read and, by using physiognomy as the linchpin for each work, the stories are expressed through the landscape of the face.

**You've been a weaver for more than 30 years; can you describe your current practice and, briefly, how it has changed over the years?**

Since my student days I have been an admirer of John Berger. He has popped up at different points in my life, often during periods when I felt dismay at world events. This man of such sensitivity, whose words never strayed into sentimentalism, offered antidotes to the world's loudest and most powerful voices. He always felt current, a man who wrote with hope, a good citizen to have by my side.

He knew very well that writing has its limitations, that, by itself, writing cannot rebalance the inequities of the present. But he had a sensitivity to how the long view, the narrative of history, comes alive. He wrote "close-up" stories of human relationships, retelling the narrative but from a different angle. I found that very inspirational.

In Portraits: John Berger on Artists, he wrote about Frida Kahlo's compulsion to paint on smooth, skin-like surfaces, suggesting that it was Kahlo's pain

and disability (she had spina bifida and had gone through treatments following a bad road accident) that "made her aware of the skin of everything alive – trees, fruit, water, birds, and naturally, other women and men."

I do not put myself in the same category as Frida Kahlo, but I do say I have looked at the long view, the narrative of our time, and then tried to create 'close up' stories from different angles. I choose tapestry weaving as the means to express those 'close-up' stories. I use that slow, painstaking act of weaving to try to demonstrate my intensity, my 'lack of proper distance' from events.

I think that my work has developed, not changed, since I first started weaving in 1974. In essence, I am still trying to concentrate on that which captured me intensely in the first instance, and importantly, I focus on not losing my way. The means is now second nature and if I question woven tapestry at all, it is how to use its particular and unique language effectively.



Detail of work in progress: Pat Taylor, "6704-13"





Pat Taylor, "6704-13," 133 cm x 112 cm x 2 cm, cotton warp, linen, silk, wool weft, 2017. Photo: Peter Jones.

**Where do you find inspiration, and are there influences outside of the visual arts that you use when designing?**

I don't think my work is only a purely aesthetic experience. It engages with society, with people, with the social, political, and cultural issues of our time. Whether it is valid as a series of stories is not for me to say. That judgement lies in the hands of the viewer. I can only reiterate the strength of my intention and give some insight into the hinterland of the work I make, by demonstrating some of the ideas in the work.

Over time I have begun to understand more deeply the environment in which I am based, aware of how that shapes, colours, and limits my perception: a white, middle-class woman, located in the countryside of the south of England. This awareness gives way to the question of how I belong in the world, and makes me want to challenge my conventional understanding of place and people.

This leads on to my subject, the meat of my work, which arises out of specific locations and points in time, but they are not directly articulated in

the finished work. I look at homes, both near and remote, but there are no homes in my work. I look at borderlands, territories, boundaries but none of these are in my work. I notice contradictions, that we desire a border free world, with the Cloud and the Internet, but physically we are building walls; psychologically we are in retreat. Nationalism is on the rise. Suspicion and estrangement sometimes feels as if around every corner. Ebb and flow has been displaced by fragmentation. The haptic world is dominated by the digital. All these things are present in the work but not manifest.



Pat Taylor, "Portrait of a Man," 111 cm x 114 cm, cotton warp, linen, wool weft, 2008. Photo: Steve Spille.

**When looking at your pieces about identity, some of the faces remind us of the goodness of humankind and other faces jerk us back to reality with the darkness that is also present. How much do you take into account the affect your tapestries will have on the viewer?**

I follow 'the faces;' everywhere I look they are there, multitudinous. Some stare back, others do not see. Faces are with us from birth and, hopefully, with us till death. They express universal emotions, yet each is unique. Faces express the here and now, this very moment, and they also express deep time, and they hold me under their spell, as weft builds upon weft.

**Composition and color are key to a successful tapestry design. What advice can you give on approaching composition and color theory for weaving?**

Both composition and colour should support, reflect, and intrinsically tie themselves to the original concept. The key elements reflect whatever it is you are trying to say. Don't use a colour just because you like it, use it because it works.

**Are there any books you can recommend about color theory for tapestry weavers?**

There are so many good books, it is hard to choose, so instead I suggest a word, 'coalesce'; everything in a work of art coalesces, whether in harmony or through tension.

**Do you have a favorite tapestry tool, what is it, and why? (Apart from your loom, of course.)**

My beater; the photo tells it all. We have been together since my student days.



**Can you offer any parting words of wisdom for new(er) tapestry weavers?**

Love what you do, and let the result be what it is.

Interviewer **Cande Walsworth** lived in London for three years, where she participated in a tapestry study group led by Pat Taylor. She recently returned to her permanent home in Kingston, Washington.

# Weaving on the Wild Side: Dance Doyle

Interview by Deborah Corsini

Dance Doyle is an Oakland, California, based artist, born and bred in Oakland during the 80s and 90s. She studied ceramics, sculpture and textiles at San Francisco State University.

Her focus is creating contemporary narrative tapestries with her unique style and techniques. The tactile quality of tapestry, the structure, and color allows her to express her vision as she designs on the loom. Her work is exhibited in galleries throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and most recently in an exhibit at the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles in January 2017 and a solo exhibit in Berkeley, California, in May 2017.



Dance Doyle at the loom.

**Why tapestry? What is it about the medium that is significant to your imagery?**

I already had 15 years of ceramic sculpture in my background before I entered the world of textiles. I had to take another studio arts class in college, and the only class open was textiles. It was over from there, and I switched majors.

Textile was a whole other language, which excited me to the core. I was learning fashion patterns and card weaving, but when we got to the tapestry weave, I just stopped there. With the tapestry art form I have complete control over my textures, colors, and lines. I get lost daily in my studio, blasting old school hip hop and jazz while painting, but just with thread. My favorite sound on earth is the shed changing. It calms me.

**Your imagery is personal and unique. Where does it stem from? (Please give an example of one specific tapestry and how you developed the imagery.)**

Okay, “Grenada,” a recent, large-scale piece of mine, was a design I never even wrote down. I just saw the image in my warp. Periodically I use sharpies to make dots on some of the warp threads just for spacing.

“Grenada” is a flash shot of a woman losing her shit—not her mind—and tearing about town ready to blow everything up. Figuratively, this work is about a woman or any human being finally expressing their emotions in an immeasurable way. I feel like doing this on a daily basis and the only way I can blow shit up is through my work. Also, I’m an Oakland native so I had to weave the Tribune Tower, couldn’t resist.



**In your exhibition, I enjoyed seeing the collection of pencil and pen and ink drawings. How do you design your pieces? Do you work with a full size cartoon or develop the image as you weave? What is your process?**

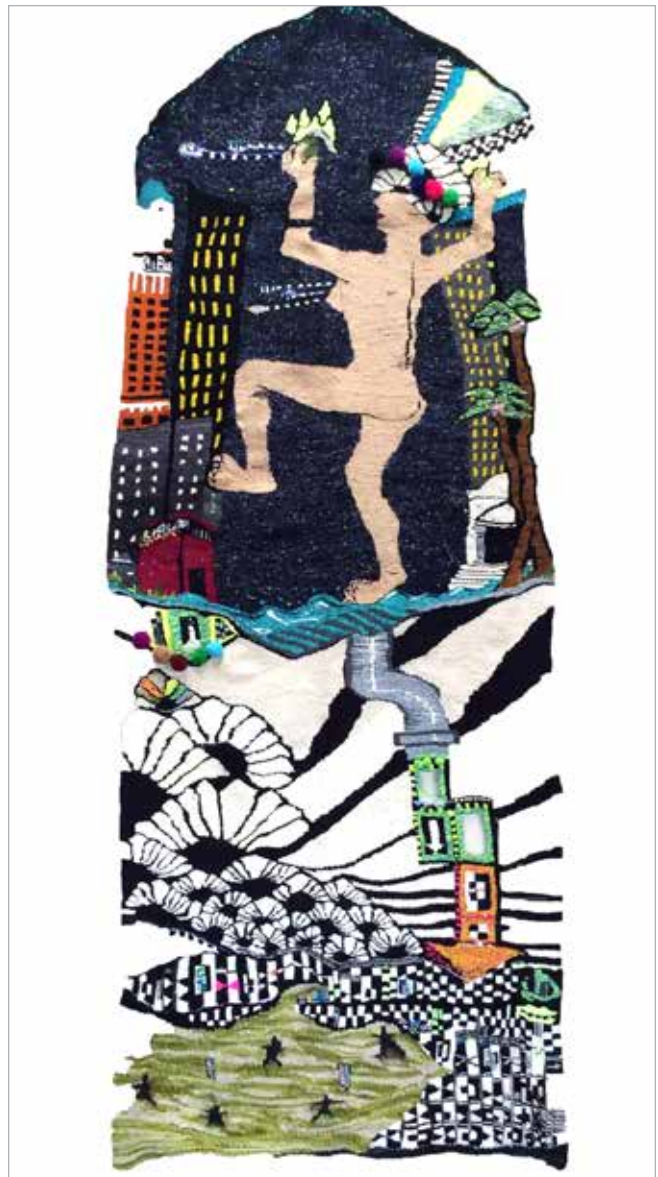
I've never used a cartoon. With my work, I'll jot down one single part of a story, mainly the focal point. Then the rest of the designs that I add in are based on that image with the spirit of urban mysticism behind them. Many of my designs are spontaneous, I'll be weaving and I'll see this insane design, and I quickly think to myself, "Can I translate that image?" Then I'll just do it.

For instance, in my piece, "The Witness," I wrote down a face which is a portrait of the way I see myself. The story was me, in a trance-like state, looking down on a murder I witnessed in downtown Oakland in 2008, and feeling the electricity that evening in the air. I weave from bottom to top. The designs in the background, like the lines in the sky weren't planned until I finished the buildings downtown.

**You add some funky and unusual tokens and embellishments to your tapestries. How do you select these?**

I found them in the old basement of the now gone Pearl Arts on Market Street in San Francisco. I don't use any embellishments now, but 10 years ago I was obsessed with adding solid, non-woven things into my work. I mean obsessed. I still have like one hundred or so little plastic babies stashed away in one of my bins.

I've also used mardi gras beads, fresh water pearls, hella tinsel, pillow stuffing, little plastic skeletons, plastic netting, foam, stockings and sequined blouses I shredded with a rotary cutter. It just kinda appealed to my wild side.



Top, right: Dance Doyle, "Grenada," 87 in x 35 in, hand dyed wool, linen, cotton, silk and mixed media, 2016.  
Bottom, right: Detail "Grenada"  
Photos: Dance Doyle

**Are there other tapestry weavers or artists that inspire you? Or other influences?**

I have a background in street art, and it is everywhere I look in my world, so my brain arranges images in that style most of the time. There are so many weavers that I worship, like Olga De Amaral—especially with her Woven Walls #42 & #79, Sheila Hicks, Magdalena Abakanowicz, Mary Zicafoose’s explorations and mastery of ikat, and Ritzi Jacobi. These weavers are like gods to me. Their skills are my goal.

**What are your three favorite books?**

That’s hard: *No Disrespect* by Sistah Souljah, *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran, and Naomi Wolf’s *Promiscuities*.



Right: Dance Doyle, “Martyr From the Lower Bottom,” 96 in x 20 in, hand dyed wool, merino wool, silk, glass beaded silk, cotton, linen and mixed media, 2015. Photo: Victoria Remler.

Above: Detail, “Martyr From the Lower Bottom”







Dance Doyle, "Six Feet High," 103 in x 35 in, hand dyed wool, wool, cotton, silk, linen and mixed media, 2018. Photo: Dance Doyle



Dance Doyle, "3 AM," 90 in x 36 in, hand dyed wool, wool, cotton, silk, linen and mixed media. 2019. Photo: Dance Doyle.

Interviewer **Deborah Corsini** has pursued a lifelong interest in weaving and textiles. Known for her dynamic wedge weave tapestries, her work is exhibited in national and international venues and her tapestries are in U.S. Embassies and in corporate and private collections. Although tapestry is her primary art, her multi-faceted career has included teaching weaving, designing fabrics for the quilt market, and curating. As the former curator of the San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles, she is well regarded for her provocative exhibitions and remains an advocate for contemporary textiles.



# Gallery

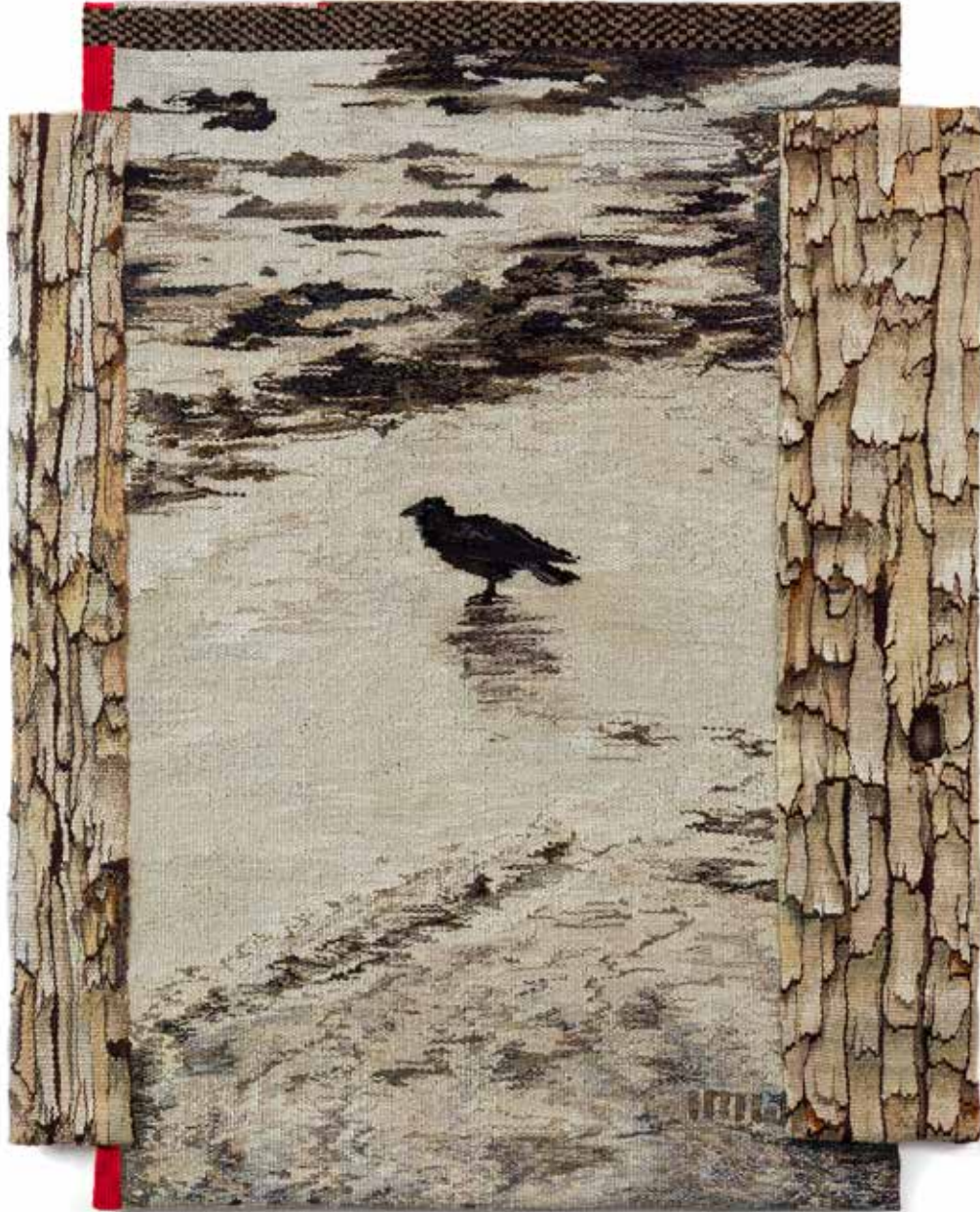
## Selected Works from Tapestry Topics 2017-2019



**Máximo Laura** (Peru) "Ritual Eterno del Wirachochea"  
323 cm x 119 cm, photo: Humberto Valdivia. Alpaca and mixed fibers.



**Rebecca Mezoff** (USA), "Displaced: Refugee Blanket"  
10 in x 10 in x 5.5 in, 2018. Hand-dyed wool, cotton.



**Linda Wallace** (Canada), "One is for Sorrow"  
Irregular width: 24 in maximum w x 30 in h, 10 epi, 2017, photo: Terry Zlot. Warp: cotton seine twine; weft: wool, linen, rayon, silk, and cotton, with synthetic sewing thread.





**Valerie Kirk** (Australia), "Floating Fossil"  
1m x 1m, photo: Valerie Kirk. Wool, cotton.





**Susan Iverson** (USA), "Distant Boundary"  
47 in x 44 in x 10 in, 6 epi, photo: Taylor Dabney.  
Wool and silk tapestry on linen warp with embroidery, 2013.



**Barbara Heller** (Canada)  
"Tzintzum Transcendence"  
96" x 48," photo: Ted Clark.  
Linen warp, wool, cotton, rayon,  
and silk weft, some handspun,  
some hand-dyed.



**Margaret Sunday** (USA), "Penelope Dissembling in Frackutopia"  
35 in x 32 in, 2015, photo: John Blake. Synthetic and natural fibers, ribbon, cotton, and linen  
warp, strip weaving and improvisational tapestry.





## **American Tapestry Alliance Honoring Tradition, Inspiring Innovation**

The American Tapestry Alliance was formed in 1982 by artist/weavers Hal Painter and Jim Brown to foster communication and collaboration among isolated tapestry weavers. ATA is a 501(3)(c) nonprofit organization supported by grants, memberships, donations, and run by a broad base of volunteers. In addition to providing educational programming and exhibition opportunities for weavers, ATA also promotes contemporary tapestry to the general public.

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

Currently ATA has over 1,000 members from twenty-five nations around the world. Membership is open to anyone interested in tapestry. We welcome weavers, curators, academics and architects, all of whom add valuable perspective to the work of the organization.

### Contact Information:

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Back Image: Fiona Hutchinson, "Over the Falls (detail)." 8ft x 1ft 6ins (240 x 50 cm), 2007. Woven tapestry with cotton warp (8epi) with a weft of cotton, linen, paper yarns and monofilament yarns, acrylic paint, and PVA medium. Photo: Michael Walchover



