AMERICAN TAPESTRY ALLIANCE

CODA

A BIENNIAL CELEBRATION OF TAPESTRY ART TODAY

Table of Contents

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

Mary Lane, Editor, CODA 2022
Dianne Chicoine, Design and Layout

Credits: Cover image: Jane Kidd, "Wonderland Series: Folly," detail, 2016.

CODA

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

Welcome to our newest edition of CODA, ATA's biennial publication of tapestry-related articles. Some of these have previously been published in editions of ATA's quarterly publication, Tapestry Topics. We hope you will also enjoy the article by Runa Boger, commissioned specifically for this edition.

In Ellen Ramsey's article, "Finding Meaning Through Process," the artist alludes to how intention married with the unexpected laid the foundation for the blending of inspiration and technology to create her tapestry, "Satori." For Ramsey, as for many, design doesn't materialize fully formed, but is a process specific to the artist and the piece.

Shelley Socolofsky shares her reverence of, dedication to, and love affair with the art form known as "tapestry," in her article titled, "Naming and Reframing; Tapestry in the Virtual." She pays homage to the "classic as well as the "faux" Jacquard tapestry" that forms her own practice.

In "Philosophical Musings on Tapestry-weaving and Contemporary Art," Deborah Forbes leads us on a deep dive into the work of three contemporary Canadian tapestry artists, Murray Gibson, Jane Kidd and Ann Newdigate.

And, what a gift it is to have Mary Lane's compilation of her prior articles on the art, practice, and biographical overview of Archie Brenan. Her beautifully rich portrayal of Brenan's work includes a discussion, and comprehensive understanding of the arc of the artist's life and practice, as well as of his influence on modern tapestry.

Finally, ATA is proud to print the article commissioned specifically for this edition of CODA, "Do what you want and stick to it!" by Runa Boger. Boger discusses the long-standing tradition and importance of tapestry practice in Norway. She introduces some of the prominent and innovative artists currently working in the field, helping to bring tapestry to the fore as an artform in its own right.

From musings on process, to the philosophical discussions of the evolution of tapestry, this edition of CODA is rich in inspiration, information, and an overall appreciation and respect for the art of tapestry and its practitioners. We hope you will enjoy what follows!

It is with our deepest gratitude to Mary Lane, former Executive Director of ATA, that we recognize and thank her for serving as Editor of this issue of CODA.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the American Tapestry Alliance,

Sue Weil, Director at Large

“Do what you want, and stick to it!”

Norwegian visual artists using textiles as their medium and the loom as their tool

The importance and status of textile art have changed over time. Today we are experiencing an upsurge in contemporary art using textile modes of expression. Norway has a large number of professional visual artists who use textiles as their medium. There is a rich variety and, not infrequently, a strong feminist impetus is linked to the choice of this art form.[1] Within an on-going investigation of theme, technique and material, these artists are also influenced by the context within which they live. Work processes and the many levels of abstraction offered by the medium develop and change in relation to society and culture.

In Norway, modern textile art began in the 1960s and 1970s, inspired by ‘the Polish wave.’ This was an important period for recognizing textile art as a part of contemporary art. At the same time female emancipation and feminism cleared the way for female artists. Poland was a power centre for Eastern European avant-garde art. The Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930-2017) had a number of exhibitions in Norway. The influence of foreign artistic tendencies in Norway was of importance, but Abakanowicz became, first and foremost, a model for female artists because she represented a new, free attitude to an art form traditionally associated with women. She went beyond what was considered a female sphere of activity within the field of art, setting a standard for what it means to be an artist.

At the same time, an innovation took place within the Norwegian weaving tradition that was to be of lasting influence and significance. Two weavers who stood out during this time were Hanna Ryggen (1894-1970), who made expressive and socially critical statements in her weaving, and Synnøve Anker Aurdal (1908-2000), who became a key figure within the group of artists using modern abstract imagery.

The focus of this article is artists who are prominent in the Norwegian art scene today. All of them are innovative in their use of the medium and are highly expressive. They employ a wide range of formal idioms and they explore different themes. What they all have in common is that they use the loom as their tool, as their means of expression – either an upright loom[2] or a horizontal loom – and that they dye their own yarn.

Runa Boger

Runa Boger was born in Oslo, Norway. She attended The National College of Art and Design, Oslo, and the Academy of Fine Art, Lodz, Poland. Runa studied both studio art and art history. Mostly known for her spacious textiles in large formats, Runa has lately worked with installation art. In the last few years, she has immersed herself in theoretical matters by means of her studies in art history. She seeks out new knowledge and passes this on as editor of the magazine “Textile art”, published by Norwegian Textile Artists. Constantly in motion, whilst all the time collecting knowledge.

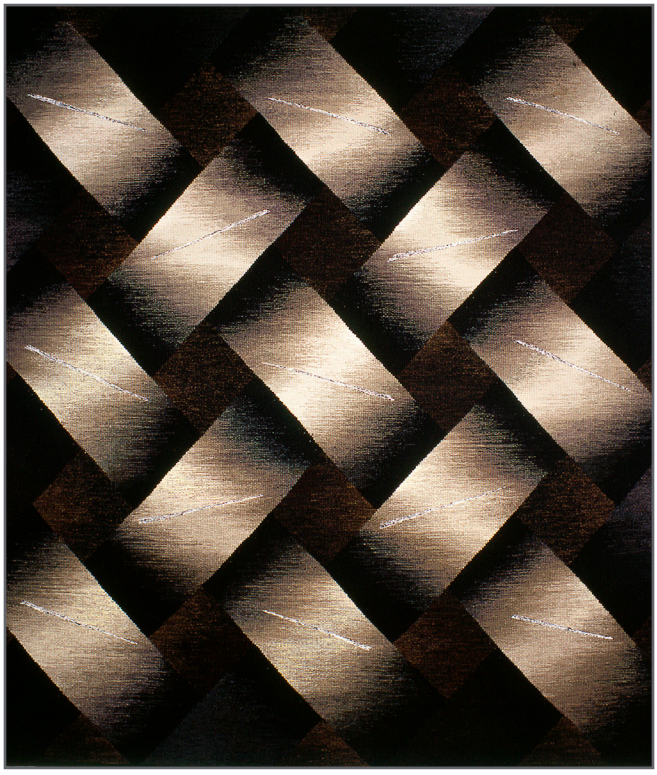
Marianne Magnus (1943)

The classic weaver. Tapestry weaving technique (Gobelin) at its best. Dependable, perfect craft combined with a great knowledge of materials and colours, employed with strong artistic vigour. A fascination with ornamentation is a formal visual element in her abstract compositions. Magnus has developed an independent visual imagery in which ornament and drawing contribute to bringing out and emphasizing a dynamic presentation.

Characteristic of her artistic expression are movement and rhythm, as well as an illusion of depth. Ornamentation and repetition are her starting point for the formation of patterns and themes in her woven textiles. Magnus has been inspired by the patterned ornamentation of ceramic tiles in architecture, specifically from Italy. Fine small-sized patterns are manipulated, enlarged and drawn full scale as maquettes for tapestries.[3]

The use of intense colours presupposes the use of quality materials. Magnus uses woollen yarn for both warp and weft. Wool from spælsau[4] (sheep) results in long, lustrous fibres that, when spun, acquire a glossy look. A precise combination of yarn, technique, colour and, in particular, the subtle shading of the colours results in a surface that appears metallic and shiny. Stylised, geometrical forms are repeated, creating an illusion of depth and movement in space. It is this movement that reminds me of the futurism of the 20th century, a forward-looking art in which speed and technology were key themes. In her most recent works she has been moving towards a more cubist expression, where the motif is broken up into individual forms, while still moving within the compositions.

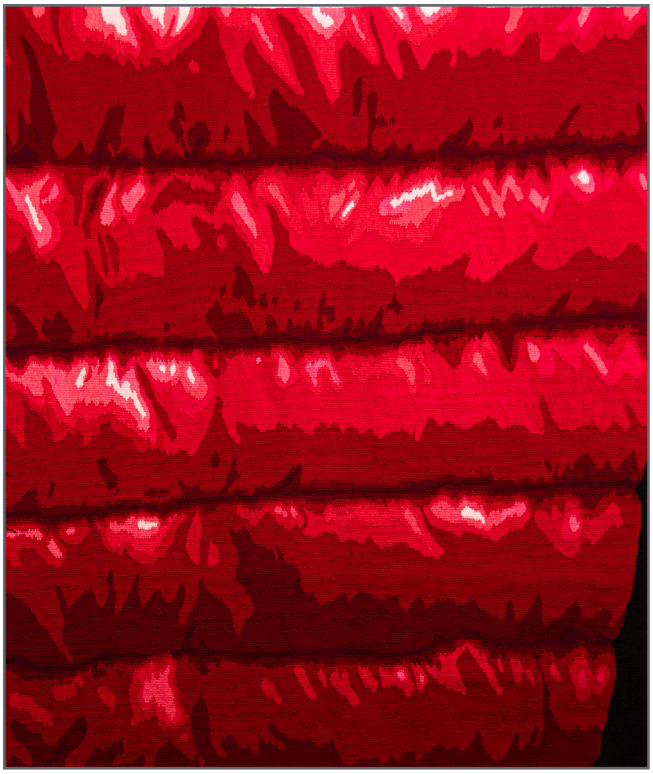
Marianne Magnus, “Django,” 134 x 117cm, 2020, tapestry, wool. Photo: artist.



Marianne Magnus,”Dialog,” 220 x 200cm, 2006, tapestry, wool. Photo: artist.

Kristin Sæterdal (1963)

Sæterdal also works with pictorial weaving using the Gobelin technique. She employs a varying set of motifs, often taken from popular culture, science fiction and animated cartoons. She thematises technological development and questions the relationship humans have with technology. Her drawing of the motif has a quick, sketch-like feel to it, as in graffiti art, which contrasts starkly with the laborious, time-consuming work at the loom. The work "Katroom 2" has a space-like, science fiction feel to it. The universe explodes and the motif draws the viewer into the monumental world of images. "Space Debris" is a warning against space junk, detritus from human activity in outer space. It is an interesting set of motifs that activates us and raises our level of awareness, while also creating an interest in an old weaving technique. Sæterdal has made a film about how the work came into being.[5]



Kristin Sæterdal, "The Red Jacket," 180 x 155cm, 2021, wool and linen.

Sæterdal also gives courses in tapestry techniques and has thereby contributed to a new renaissance of interest in pictorial weaving. One of her most recent works, "Red Jacket," is a detailed picture of a red down jacket, realistically and photographically represented in all its simplicity. An expressive motif that seems to grow out of the flat pictorial format, it demonstrates the vast range of potential that exists within the weaving technique.

Kristin Sæterdal, "Space Debris," 200 x 260cm, 2018, wool and linen. Photo: Anders Elverhøy.

Ann Cathrin November Høibo (1979)

November Høibo has a varied artistic formal idiom which breaks with simple norms. Her work can be viewed as part of the diversity integral to this time period and the many possibilities and platforms that today's art opens up. Her installations are based on weaving and textile works, often combined with objects and items of consumption. In the coupling and contrasting of materials and objects new images arise. November Høibo makes use of the gallery space as a studio, developing works that are site-specific.

In line with her generation, November Høibo includes informational images of mass culture into her idea-bank. Her works can be defined on the basis of material, form and popular culture, but they also contain historical references. Apart from her formal education as an artist, November Høibo also studied under Else Marie Jakobsen (1927-2012), a striking textile artist who made visible her political and religious attitudes in her weaving and who practised in November Høibo's native city of Kristiansand.

Ann Cathrin November Høibo's tapestries have been created with an open warp and weft of various materials with rich textures. Her visual imagery is abstract and expressive. Organic colour surfaces of various sizes combined with an open warp and bold execution create a dynamic surface. Complexity, vitality and playfulness mark her work. She has a strong intuitive feeling for composition and materials and her experimental mode of expression is both intimate and exposing. The mounting is distinctive. At the top edge of the tapestry the warp threads are casually knotted around a strip of wood. At the bottom edge the warp threads hang down in large knots, or have been fixed with stones that could be interpreted as a reference to the Stone Age the origins of upright weaving.

Ann Cathrin November Høibo, "Fluft Forover," 2017. Photo: Thomas Tveter.

Aurora Passero (1984)

Passero is the poet. Her delicate, light, fragile, imaginative and picturesque expression is like an abstract landscape painting. At the same time, the weaving has been roughly and sculpturally carried out in nylon yarn, often combined with rope and braiding. Ephemeral colours merge into each other, like spreading watercolours. The shimmering textiles remind one of Claude Monet's water-lily pictures – bright and airy, light and liquid in a dream scenario.

The synthetic, smooth and shiny nylon material enhances the abstract artistic idiom. Passero exploits the softness and flexibility of the material to form sculptures that relate directly to the architecture of the gallery space. Constructions with monumental qualities float freely in a dialogue with the space of the room. The architecture forms a framework for the installation and the work is not complete until it has been installed in the interior.

Passero weaves on a flat loom, using simple plain weave - horizontal and vertical threads that cross each other. The nylon canvases are then dyed, or dipped in a dye. The unpredictable dyeing method adds a sensual dimension. The precisely planned weaving is carried out at a slow tempo, unlike the quick, intense process in the dye bath. To achieve various textures she has recently begun to vary the thickness of the thread, combining it with closely woven and open surfaces.

Passero gains inspiration from ethnology, fashion and abstract paintings, and her work motto is *"Do what you want, and stick to it!"*

Aurora Passero, "Positions," 50 x 280cm, 2013, hand woven, hand dyed nylon. Photo: Øystein Thorvaldsen.

Brynhild Slaatto (1959)

Slatto is one of the textile artists who works on outdoor projects. Her installations are often knotted to heritage buildings, museums or church ruins. She is deeply interested in, and strongly influenced by, architecture. Her textiles move more in the direction of building constructions than pictorial associations.

Slatto weaves long, narrow strips of textiles, which remind one of panels in old houses and walls of timber. And, as in old timber, Slatto's woven panels have a rich interplay of shades of colour. When the textiles are mounted outdoors, a symbiosis arises between the dull, hard timber and the rich texture of the soft textiles.

Slatto uses advanced horizontal loom techniques and experiments with weave constructions. Woollen and nylon yarn are combined with coarser rope material and she twines and mixes the threads to gain the desired surface texture. Different weave structures and various materials produce varying structures, which in turn can provide associations to the location or the building where the project is going to be shown.

Brynhold Slatto's outdoor projects started as an investigation and a testing of materials and colours. A kind of hardening process gave the textiles a new dimension and inspired her to undertake new experiments and installations. This has gradually turned into an architectural project which has caught the interest of both open-air museums and municipal agencies. Her next project is the church ruins in Maridalen, the Margareta Church from 1250. The ruins lie in open countryside 20 km outside Oslo. The artist's wish is for the project to show how architecture and textile art can team up with each other – and that past and present can throw each other into relief.

Brynhild Slaattto, "Outdoor on timber," 300 x 170cm, 2019, hand woven, hand dyed wool and nylon. Photo: Ragnhild Halland.

Brit Fuglevaag (1939)

A textile artist who belongs to both past and present is Brit Fuglevaag. Fuglevaag was the first Norwegian textile artist who went to Poland to study in 1963. Although she did not know of Magdalena Abakanowicz's work, other artists who set the standard for avant-garde art, attracted her attention.

One of the most important things that Fuglevaag learned in Poland was that textile art was on an equal footing with other art forms. The dismissive attitude to the profession that was usual in Norway was not found in Poland. At least as important was that one should be proud to be an artist. When Fuglevaag started to teach at the Norwegian National Academy of Craft and Art Industry (now Oslo National Academy of the Arts) in 1970, she brought with her the positive attitudes from Poland and added new perspectives to the teaching of the subject. She was a breath of fresh air from the international world, with new ideas as to what textile-based art could be. Her productivity and enthusiasm influenced her students, including myself. Now, at the age of 82, she retains her strength and ability to experiment and last autumn had two solo exhibitions in Oslo. Brit Fuglevaag is still an inspiration for female artists.

Brit Fuglevaag (left) "Varagerfjord portrait," 70 x 22 cm, 2021. (right) "From The Varangerfjord," 70 x 22 cm, 2021, sisal and nylon. Photo: Runa Boger

Notes

1. *http://www.norwegiancrafts.no/articles/magdalene-abakanowicz-and-the-norwegian-art-scene-style-creator-or-liberating-role-model*
2. *Upright weaving is done on an ancient type of loom known from archaeological finds in all of Europe. The most typical form is where the loom is upright and the warp is tensioned using weights. It is assumed that looms such as this have existed since the Stone Age.*
3. *Randi Nygaard Lium, foreword to the catalogue Marianne Magnus 2012.*
4. *Spælsau (Norwegian Short Tail Landrace) is an ancient Norwegian sheep race. The wool is characterised by having two layers: an outer longhaired, glossy undulating layer of wool that protects the underlying layer against wind and rain, and an underlying layer which keeps the sheep warm.*
5. *"Space Debris" - How it was made: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvOjv4CTAa0&t=9s*

Gallery 1: Hannah Cofer

Hannah Cofer, “Woman at her Vanity,” 24 x 40 in, 8 epi, 2019. Silk cording, 20-ply cotton thread, silver metallic thread, quote, “I’ve got other people’s eyes inside my head.” Double-woven on an A-frame tapestry loom, combination of slit and interlock techniques.

Gallery 1: Minsun Kim

Minsun Kim, “Out of Joint 2,” 130 x 80 cm, 2018, Lambswool. Techniques: plain weave, twinning, interlock, slit. Photo: Myoung Studio.

Gallery 1: Ruth Manning

Ruth Manning, “Adolfo Gets His Glasses,” 14 x 10 in, 10 epi, 2017.
Photo: Radlund Photography.

Naming and Reframing: Tapestry in the Virtual

one

I am a maker of objects
that are embedded with images, that are not installed on the floor, that are vertically mounted,
that are pliable,
handmade,
tied to histories of power & prestige,
and commemorative representation.

Such a list follows the logic of Tapestry.

Continuing on with this game:
I am a maker of objects
that are associated with a lineage of monumentality,
that are historically linked to narrative documentation...

What if we take this same list—but change our lens? We might then recognize it as following the logic of painting. Or of sculpture. Or video projection. At what junctures do the differing media categories depart from the list? I use such naming strategies to pull, knead, and expand the conceptual framework of my thinking. For it is true that contemporary tapestry has the capacity to encompass a logic that is not of painting, nor sculpture, nor photography, nor the digital image, yet engages them all simultaneously.

While Gobelins tapestry is my first language, introduced on the heels of 2nd wave feminism, my current practice embraces both the analogue and the digital collaboratively. My introduction to tapestry predates the digital and was intentionally chosen as a strategy in opposition to the academic machismo departments of painting and sculpture. The process, coupled with my pastoral leanings towards the commune, delighted me. I was geared for the handmade.

two

My friend, a renowned Jacquard hand weaver, talented designer, and maker of fine 'faux' tapestries of photographic accuracy, recently told me she was worried about the future of tapestry. Recounting being brought to tears when meeting up with a medieval tapestry on her recent trip to France, she encountered, what I call "the bumping up against tapestry's aura."

Shelley Socolofsky

Shelley Socolofsky is an artist living and working in Portland, Oregon, USA. Informed by long histories of textiles, pattern, and decoration, her work memorializes natural and constructed systems through a digital and haptic practice. Concepts range from examining complexities between built and natural environments to questioning historical and authoritative narratives surrounding colonial and domestic othering. A recent Fellow of The Civita Institute, with a forthcoming residency at Civita di Bagnoregio, Italy, Socolofsky will create a series of data embedded tapestries from sensory data collected during her stay.

As a designer and fabricator of both classic and “faux” Jacquard tapestry, I am well aware of their differing superpowers. Inaccurate to compare the two with the same measure, the genuine tapestry stands apart due to its intrinsic relationship and reference to the body.

It is through the classic tapestry’s sheer density—its materiality, its mass, its underlying physical demands which speak directly of time, its organically shaped surface and edging, and the earthiness of its woven matter (being of the body: wool) the true tapestry emits a presence that the faux cannot. Nor can the other image embedded media from our list above.

three

In a recent essay published in Art Journal, “Laboring Under Globalization: Tapestries by Contemporary Artists,” K.L.H. Wells, Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, attempts to contextualize the contemporary artist’s interest in utilizing the medium of tapestry as a distinct practice and interprets this work through the lens of globalization by examining how these “tapestries” are produced. She argues that the appeal of “tapestry” for these artists, curators, critics, and collectors rests in the medium’s

Shelley Socolofsky, “Concubine” (in progress), 104 in x 89 in, 10 epi, 2019, wool, cotton, silk thread, linen, glass coated thread, deconstructed woman’s sari, Disney child’s sleeping bag & designer scarves, hand dyed silk with onion skins and fruits, grocery vegetable netting, peacock feathers, contractors mason twine, survivalist’s twine, chain, Gobelin tapestry, soumak, Swedish knotting, assemblage. Photo: © Shelley Socolofsky.

Shelley Socolofsky, “Trade Blanket (hybrid bride),” 8 x 7.5 ft, 10 epi, 2012, wool, cotton, horsehair, human hair, silk handkerchiefs, thread, marker, Kevlar trim, Gobelin tapestry, rya pile, piecework, crochet. Installation: Bellevue Art Museum. Photo: © Shelley Socolofsky.

insistent materiality, which counters the relative immateriality of globalization. Tapestry is thus constructed in terms of its authenticity, as a traditional craft or as an auratic presence that "militates against globalization's erosion of authentic culture."

It is important to note that Wells uses the word 'tapestry' to include piecework, embroidery, and industrially woven Jacquard, in addition to one example of Gobelin tapestry. While none of these artists have fabricated their own "tapestries," but rather have outsourced their production, Wells argues that these works—by virtue of their materiality or hand labor, carry an aura of authenticity. The Gobelin work, a William Kentridge designed tapestry, "The Porter Series: Egypte," (2006) was outsourced to the Stephens Tapestry Studio in South Africa. The labor of this work is exploited in the promotional and exhibition materials as a way to authenticate, romanticize, and brand the work by paralleling the weaver's labor to that of farm labor and rural life. Conflating the labor of dyers and weavers in favor of bringing attention to the loss of farmland in South Africa, Wells states, "Here, tapestry weaving becomes romanticized as a rural cottage industry that, like traditional farming, is in danger of extinction under the forces of global capitalism." The other projects outlined in the essay work in similar post- colonial/imperialist framing, creating the spectacle of authenticity as a global marketing strategy.

Shelley Socolofsky, "Hermetica" (Phoenix) (Hindu Kush mountains, Afghanistan/ 36°14.45"Nx71°50'38"E), 45.5 x 28 in, 52 epi, 2018, Jacquard hand woven/ metal, cotton, silk. Photo: © Shelley Socolofsky.

Shelley Socolofsky, "Hermetica" (Ursa gave way to digital Major) (Mount Shasta, California, USA/ 41.4099°Nx-122.1949°W), 35 x 29 in, 52 epi, 2018, Jacquard hand woven/ metal, cotton. Photo: © Shelley Socolofsky.

four

In the beginning my maquettes were realized through crude paper collage. Paper eventually gave way to digital collage, allowing for transparency and nuance. Increased meaning resonated between the spontaneity of digital design and the slow pace of tapestry weaving, an ethereal connector between past and present.

Eventually, I desired a deeper relationship with the warp. Complex warp/weft structures spoke of new conceptual possibilities: binaries, opposing systems, systems of hierarchy, to name a few. My interest of embedding image into cloth remained, as did my surprised delight in the digital. Jacquard weaving was the natural next step, offering up an alternate voice to the larger, classic tapestries. Propelled by the process of the digital hand loom, ideas surrounding algorithms, surveillance, GPS mapping, sacred geometry, and data driven information arose. A new link between the antiquity of classic tapestry and the hyperreal relics presented by the Jacquard works surfaced; their processes, while diametrically opposed, spoke to one another in a call and response fashion.

As woven objects, classic tapestries conjure prayer rugs while the thinner Jacquard works call up warning signage and prayer flags. Together they form bodies of work consisting of one monumental classic tapestry as the Mother Ship with a dozen or so supporting Jacquard works. Jacquard weaving allows for the opportunity to work through ideas and woven images more quickly, editing for clarity and importance, while classic tapestry is reserved for the monumental overarching narrative.

In the studio the high warp and TC-2 looms stand side by side; the old wise woman and her troublesome little sister. With the multitude of crafting and DIY popups abounding, our need to experience the aura of authenticity is alive and well.

I reassure my friend that genuine tapestry is here to stay.

Shelley Socolofsky, “Stars & Stripes,” 6 x 3.5 ft, 12 epi, 2011, wool, cotton, repurposed wool serape from Mexico, ink, paint, and wax on board, Gobelins tapestry, textile construction, drawing. Photo: © Shelley Socolofsky.

Gallery 2: Katia Paroczi

Katia Paroczi, “Four Trees,” 17 x 41 in, 10 epi, 2015, handspun wool weft over cotton warp. Photo: K. Paroczi.

Gallery 2: Marilyn Rea-Menzies

Marilyn Rea-Menzies, “Extinction is Forever - Stitchbird (Hihi),” 62 x 48 in at bottom and variable to top, 8 epi, 2017/18, cotton warp, wool weft. Collection of Barry & Diane Ramsay. Photo: M. Rea-Menzies.

Gallery 2: Joanne Soroka

Joanne Soroka, “For Irena Sendler,” 48-51 x 73 in, 2016, 7 epi.

Philosophical Musings on Tapestry-weaving and Contemporary Art

overandunderandoverandunderandoverandunder...

In 2016, Joanne Marion, Director/Curator of Exhibitions and Collections at Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre in Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada, had an idea about a contemporary tapestry exhibition. She approached me to act as guest curator.

What resulted, in 2018 and early 2019, was **overandunderandoverandunderandoverandunder... Three Contemporary Canadian Tapestry Artists: Murray Gibson, Jane Kidd, and Ann Newdigate**.[1] These names are well-known to tapestry weavers and aficionados. Ann Newdigate's ongoing artistic and educational practice spans four decades and multiple continents, earning her the Saskatchewan Lieutenant Governor's Lifetime Achievement Award. The Saidye Bronfman Award, part of the Canada Council's prestigious Governor General's Awards, recognized Jane Kidd's lengthy, varied, and continuing contributions to the fine craft of tapestry in 2016. Murray Gibson, himself an alumnus of Alberta College of Art and design (now Alberta University of the Arts), who studied with Jane Kidd, exhibits internationally while teaching in Nova Scotia, and was named a Master Artisan by Craft Nova Scotia in 2015.

As a teenager, I dropped down a rabbit hole in the millefleur[2] of the Unicorn Tapestries (1495–1505 CE) at the Cloisters in New York City. Later, I learned to weave tapestry in Edinburgh from Archie Brennan, internationally renowned tapestry artist. Although my art practice has moved away from tapestry, I remain curious about the breadth of contemporary contexts and content that make their way into tapestry weaving. Somehow, it just does not get old.

Time

The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once. ~ Albert Einstein

Deborah Forbes

Deborah Forbes is an artist, post-secondary instructor, community educator, and published writer. Her work has been exhibited across Canada and the USA. Forbes has taught art history, critical theory and art education for 25 years. Forbes' research and practice interests include the history of contemporary notions of "princess" and decolonizing art history.

In trying to write words with meaning about contemporary art and tapestry weaving, it has been difficult not to talk about everything at once. Ideas run away into collisions at intersections, everything is talking simultaneously and colliding, so that only fragments of meaning audibly surface at any time. In deep frustration, I began to realize that the troubles I am having in keeping discreet sections in writing is very much akin to the processes of weaving tapestry; you cannot weave the intersection, then the vehicles, then the shouting people with their mouths open, in a tidy sequence. These all have to be woven at the same time.

What makes tapestry weaving a pursuit so distinct, and so grounded in a continuum of history, is its ability to construct meaning in ongoing contemporary worlds. Even in current times, the history of tapestry is present in tapestry weaving, sometimes as subject, always in process. Tapestry weaving has been practiced for hundreds of years in diverse cultures, almost exactly as it is practiced today. The exquisite mystery, however, is how an archaic process can comfortably carry content contemporary to every age in which it has lived. Nova Scotia tapestry artist, Murray Gibson, writes of the incorporation of history as subject and content:

The "Drapery Series" is a collection of tapestries inspired by women of myth and legend, poetry and prose who are textile practitioners; with their practice, they control the lives and deaths of others, and at times, of themselves. These tapestries share a common aesthetic of an abstracted background overlaid by a delineated image. The abstracted background is derived from images of gowns these heroines wear in other, historical artistic depictions.[3]

Murray Gibson, "Drapery Series: Ariadne," 57 x 47 cm, 2018. Wool and cotton.

Murray Gibson, "Babel," 157 x 155 cm, 1991, wool. Photo: Jeffery Parker.

When Gibson writes *overlaid*, he means *overlaid* only in a visual sense, in how it appears. Creating this appearance of overlaying is a complex journey that requires the physical integration of images. This is a singular potential of tapestry weaving which changes both the visual impact and the transmission of content. (Ed. note: also see p. 28, “Arachne.”)

Divided and Undivided?

Interestingly, the history of tapestry is filled with anonymous makers and viewers. Often, only the commissioner of the work, and sometimes the designer (usually a rockstar painter of the day), are recorded for posterity. The weavers, however, remain present in their extended physical contact with the object. It delights me to think their DNA might still be detectable in the threads. Artist-weaver, one and the same, describes the practices of our three contemporary Canadian tapestry artists: Murray Gibson, Jane Kidd, and Ann Newdigate. Given tapestry’s deep historical roots and laborious production, why would a 21st century artist choose tapestry as a medium, over other media, to express many kinds of content? If the answer is that the artwork could only be tapestry, then it has everything to do with the perfect alchemical concoction of subject, process, and content, which Gibson, Kidd, and Newdigate seem to consistently and adroitly mix.

Text, Affinities, and History Intertwined

In an age in which nearly anything can be communicated in code of zeros and ones, there is a strange binary affinity in the ubiquitous and rapid flight of digital information and the slow production of tapestry in its overing and undering; meaning the weaving of weft thread over and under the warp yarn that is held in tension by the loom. Endemic to the binary nature of the human brain, neurons have two states: fire, don’t fire. I see the binary system of overing and undering in tapestry weaving as aligned with both digital communication and the functioning of the human brain. West Coast based Ann Newdigate, whose decades-long practice inextricably links drawing and weaving, writes:

...drawing can intersect freely with the warp of the unconscious. In contrast, the pixeled grid, which is shared by medieval style woven tapestry (ends per inch) and digital prints (dots per inch), dictates a taut saga between old and new technologies.[3]

This excites me; whenever I see processes that are nested and aligned, I suspect they are connected to larger alignments in the universe that speak to larger ideas. In tapestry weaving, at its highest artistry, process is always honoured in both subject and content of the image. This has something to do with technical virtuosity, but much more to do with the sensitivity, intelligence, and connected creativity of the maker.

Ann Newdigate, “Colonial Gents series (#9): Henry Settler,” 28 x 23 cm, n.d., cotton warp, weft: silk, linen, cotton, wool and synthetics.

Jane Kidd, “Wonderland Series: Folly,” 182 x 121 cm, 2016.

Jane Kidd writes:

The history of tapestry as an object created for the elite to express their power and prestige is of interest to me. It brings me a certain amount of subversive pleasure to use this process to explore issues that have come about largely through greed and abuse of power. As artist- weaver, I wander into areas of contemporary environmental politics; my approach is always personal in reflecting my own confusion and uncertainty and what I find to be an increasingly bewildering world.[3]

The title of this exhibition, **overandunderandoverand under... Three Canadian Contemporary Tapestry Artists**, comes from an intention to consider tapestry as a semiotic text with codes, a text that has endured over the course of time. Tapestry’s conventions likewise have deep roots. Gibson notes, for instance, *“I have frequently used decorative borders in my designs alluding to a long history of tapestry aesthetic and functionality.”*[3] In one of the early seminal works on tapestry, Helen Churchill Candee writes, *“For a long time there had been gropings, the feeling that some sort of border was needed, a division line between the world of reality and the world of fable.*[4] In looking at tapestry as text in a semiotic sense (while not going as far as textual determinism, in which the form and content of a text very prescriptively determine how it is decoded by the viewer), tapestry carries codes before we even get to content. If tapestry is to be considered more than an anachronistic and very labour intensive way of illustrating ideas, thoughts, feelings, and telling stories, one must consider tapestry as text expressed in a variety of codes. John Berger, noted art critic and author of Ways of Seeing, which revolutionized art criticism, writes, *“Appearances, at any given moment, are a construction emerging from the debris of everything that has previously appeared.”*[5] These words could not be more true than when applied to tapestry. Tapestry seems to carry its past with it in mysterious ways, and each of the three Canadian contemporary tapestry artists in **overandunderandoverandunder...** carries history into the present to investigate distinctly different contemporary content. Gibson writes about the influence of

the *Devonshire Hunting Tapestries* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London) on this work:

It is these noble men and women and their costumes that are inspiration for much of my tapestry practice for the past many years. What interests me is the shorthand approach the weaver uses to drape the clothing over the body beneath it. The complex silhouette of the garment—the actual shape and surface area it would take up in a tapestry—is decorated with a flat rendering of pattern. The garment is flat: there are neither layers nor drapery—only illusion.[3]

The *Devonshire Hunting Tapestries*, woven in a studio in Arras, France (mid 15th century), are excellent examples of designer-weaver collaboration, an integrated approach that brings together the particular demands of the medium and the imagery that is depicted therein. That is, it is about the tapestry weaving depictions of woven textiles.

I am thinking about Marshall McLuhan's famous quote, *"The medium is the message,"*[6] which presages the deconstruction work of semiotics. Julia Kristeva proposes that a text is intelligible only through *"a mosaic of references and quotations that, in many cases, have lost their origin."*[7] Kristeva uses mosaic in a sense that is very similar to the popular use of the word tapestry. Woven tapestries, as works of art that are texts in a semiotic sense, and in their materiality, are mosaics of implied references and responses that have endured in some form for roughly 12,000 years. **overandunder andoverandunder...**, as a title, recognizes the importance of this. In the words themselves, there are implications of the layers of history, process, ideas, and developments in different bodies of work. The exhibition title acts metaphorically, as well as literally; it acts in linear progression as well as in manners layered and webbed. John Berger has famously noted, *"Metaphor reconnects that which has been separated."* In considering tapestry as a text with codes that has endured over the course of time one has to wonder—why has tapestry weaving endured as a process to express, interrogate, connect, and communicate in the 21st century? One has to wonder why tapestry weaving has not been reduced to merely an historical process to which we cling through fear of loss. Tapestry weaving, however, simply continues to speak to us about itself over millennia, while at the same time talking about the ongoing present, the contemporary. Kidd writes:

I use a compartmentalized composition to collect and juxtapose historic and contemporary tools, [making] reference to botanical drawings, taxonomy, diagrams and mapping. I also reference historic textiles emphasizing those that show evidence of colonialism and cross-cultural exchange, drawing parallels between the human urge to transform the natural world into material culture and the West's preoccupation with accumulating and possessing other cultures.[3]

Newdigate's small woven portraits flow, in part out of an archaic tradition of woven Coptic portraits from the 4th–5th centuries CE in Egypt. Large, soulful eyes were particular features of fully developed Coptic art,[8] in both painting and tapestry. Newdigate's "Sad Little Coptic Ancestor"[9] stares inside its own little head. Inward-looking eyes focus on hurt and pain that is visible to the

Ann Newdigate, "Familiars Series: Carrie A. Cross inherited considerable property provided that she did not marry certain people." 28 x 23 cm, n.d., cotton warp, weft: silk, linen, cotton, wool and synthetics.

viewer through the constructed tears. The tears themselves are created before the eyes are woven, which sets up particular import to the tears. It is as if the tear determines the eye rather than the eye determining the tear. These woven tears appear so very intentionally built of experiences. The overing and undering performed by the artist to build each tiny tear of the "Sad Little Coptic Ancestor,"[9] "Henry Settler," and "Carrie A. Cross," has allowed time for contemplation and ritual as part of the text. Newdigate writes:

I find tapestry to be a natural extension of drawing. Drawing, which preceded writing, is a basic method of communication. Tapestry adds a dimension of ritual for the maker and for the viewer because it can signify the presence of time and convey the drama of mythology through its physical presence.[3]

Illusions of three dimensions on a two-dimensional plane are built, not applied; these illusions are accomplished in real time and at the same time, as evidenced by the strands of thread that appear to overlay the folds of fabric beneath in Gibson's "Arachne." The strands and the folds occupy the same space. Illusions are rampant and structural. The artist-weaver focuses, dreams, meditates, and then returns to hard decisions along the way, dropping in and out of frontal lobe consciousness to a dreaming brain state.

Tapestry, and its potential for integrating disparate content provokes intertextuality, because of the physically integrated manner of the construction of images. This greasy quality of time seems to incite the kind of intertextuality of which Kristeva speaks. Differential and historical traces, and tracings of other texts, are manifested in the process of making. There is time for the

Jane Kidd, "Land Sentence Series: Zoo," 99 x 200 cm, 2012.

tapestry artist, in the slippage of doing, for drifting into webs of connection and interconnection over time and space, into texts of every kind. The sensory intimacy of sitting with a tapestry, in connection, for sometimes months at a time (and over the course of years), situates the weaver in an unusually sustained relationship to the work. It is one in which their experience of the present is both functional and metaphorical. I have come to realize that the time spent in the meditative ritual of the genre code[10] of tapestry should not be minimized. Speed has become of such value to us at this time in history, that anything deeply time consuming, which has time invested in it, seems to almost shock!

Kidd writes:

In our contemporary culture, which is dominated by the reproduced object and the mediated and appropriated image, handmade objects such as tapestry can stand for authentic experience. Their material presence provides a direct link to the original act of making that circumvents anonymity for both maker and viewer.[3]

For me, good art is worth spending time with. It shows me something—some way of looking at life in the universe. It makes me tilt my head a bit, it provokes questions, it inveigles curiosity, it catches me off guard, it delights in a prickly sense, and it disperses energy. Tapestry can do this in a very particular way: the integration of form and function has to be so intimate if it is to hit this exquisite point of "art worth spending time with." Gibson, Kidd, and Newdigate achieve this in their work and each does so very differently. I urge you to dive deeply into their work! They each honour the poetry of the imperfect language and history of tapestry weaving to explore contemporary experience.

Notes

1. *Forbes, Deborah (Ed). overandunderando- verandunder ... Three Contemporary Canadian Tapestry Artists; Jane Kidd, Murray Gibson, and Ann Newdigate. Medicine Hat, AB: Esplanade Art Gallery, 2018.*
2. *Millefleur is a kind of tapestry characterized by a background motif of many small flowers.*
3. *Quotes come from correspondence between Deborah Forbes and each artist in 2018.*
4. *Candee, H. C. (1912). The Tapestry Book. New York: Frederick Stokes and Company. p. 203.*
5. *Berger, John (1973). Ways of Seeing. London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books.*
6. *Marshall McLuhan, Canadian professor, philosopher, and public intellectual. His work is one of the cornerstones of media theory that essentially predicts the World Wide Web 30 years before it was invented.*
7. *Julia Kristeva, Bulgarian-born French psychoanalyst, critic, novelist, and educator, best known for her writings in structuralist linguistics, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and philosophical feminism. Kristeva, J. (1980) Desire in language: a semiotic approach to literature and art. Columbia University Press, New York. p. 31.*
8. *The term Coptic was originally the Arabic term for the native Egyptians but came to refer to the practicing Christians in Egypt. Coptic art is art produced by the Copts.*
9. *An image of Ann Newdigate's "Sad Little Coptic Ancestor" can be seen at http://annnewdigate. ca/archives/pages/FAMILIARS/familiars%20 details/familiars_detail_12.html*
10. *Genre codes are systems of signs, which create meaning. Genre codes for movies could be comedy, thriller, horror.*

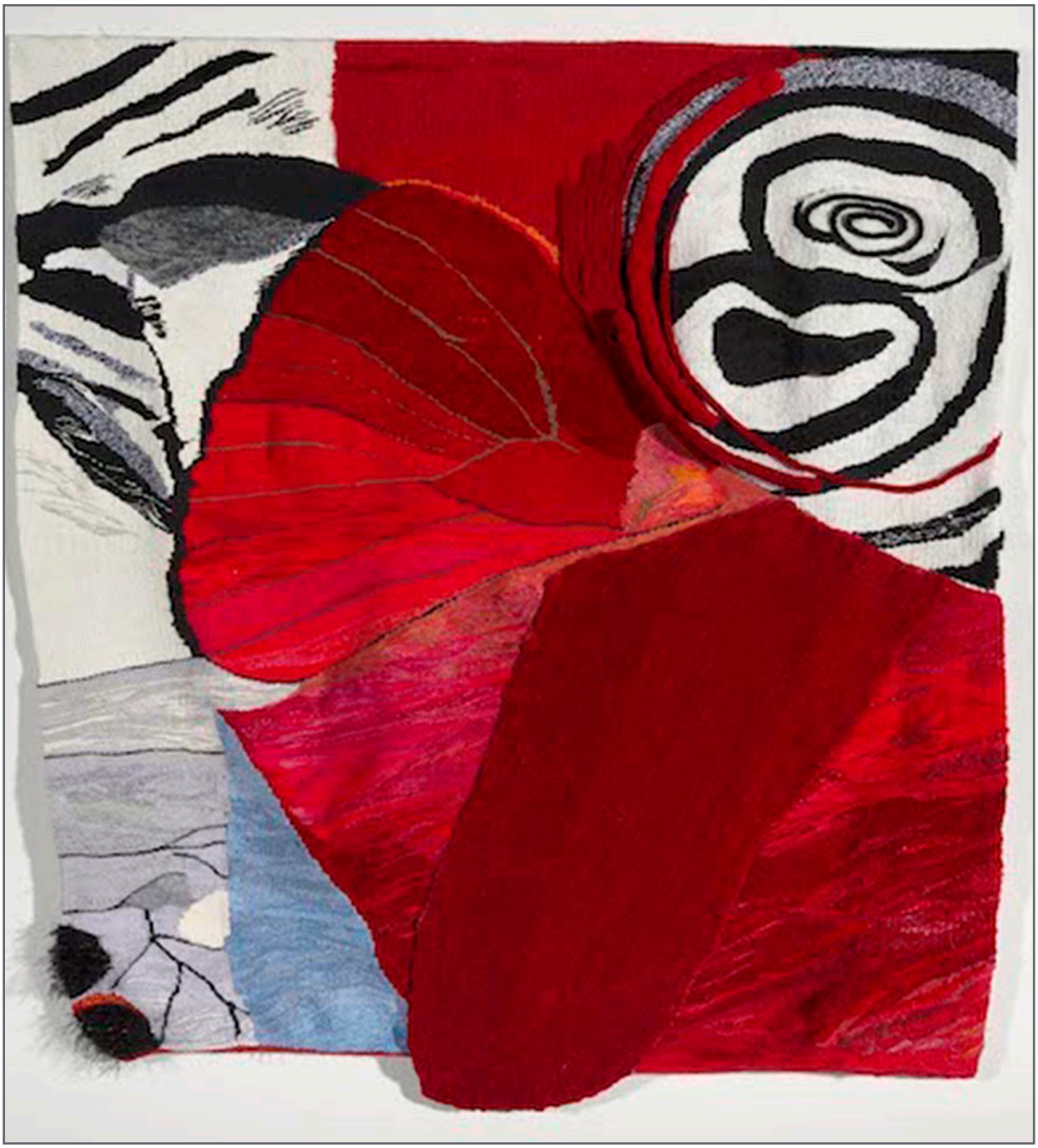
Gallery 3: Line Dufour

Line Dufour, “Fate, Destiny and Self Determination/Le Sort, Destin and l’Auto-determination” is a tapestry installation co-created by people all over the world. Composed of three sections, it is designed and managed by Line Dufour. Dufour wove the first panel, which measures 5’ x 3’ and exemplifies the contemporary practice of tapestry weaving, in which the artist and weaver are one and the same. The second panel, measuring 5’ x 18,” was woven by a variety of weavers, ranging from the inexperienced and amateur to the professional. This second panel references traditional tapestry conventions in which many weavers work on a tapestry, but are not involved in the designing of the piece. The final section is composed of irregular shapes positioned at varying heights between the two aforementioned panels. They seem to float freely, as though the tapestry is pulling apart or coming together. Thus far, 864 woven shapes have been received from 43 countries. About 519 people have participated in the project.

Gallery 3: Mary Jane Lord

Mary Jane Lord, “Flight Dreams,” 40 x 30 in, 2019.

Gallery 3: Rowen Schussheim-Anderson



Rowen Schussheim-Anderson, “Crimson Prelude,” 52 x 48 in, 6 epi, 2015, linen, cotton, wool, rayon. Photo: Ogy Blazevich.

Finding Meaning through Process

A number of people have asked me to explain the inspiration behind my tapestry "Satori," the piece that is included in the World Tapestry Now exhibition. It is influenced by travel, my background in art history, and personal reflection. Let's start at the finish; this is where I ended up:

This tapestry references the experience of time. Time flows like water, each moment passing quickly, unnoticed. But occasionally time reveals itself, just long enough for one to realize that what once was, is now fundamentally changed or gone. The black and white section represents a dramatic shift in perspective, seen with unusual clarity as if by x-ray. Satori is a Japanese word meaning "sudden comprehension."

So how did I get to that endpoint?

My tapestry designs don't just arrive in my mind's eye "whole," in a flash of inspiration. Each one comes out of a fairly long process. Sometimes I am looking for a way to express a specific idea or feeling in visual form, and the design develops in a brainstorming like fashion from there. Sometimes I get attached to a visual inspiration that I discover by chance and then I look for ways to transform that visual into something that has a layer of meaning. Once I have an idea that resonates, visual or otherwise, I devote a large sketchbook to the project and spend months collecting ideas, writing, drawing, etc. in that sketchbook until the "thing that must be woven" emerges. Designs marinate in their sketchbook for a good long time before I take the leap, and I have numerous project sketchbooks going at a time. If I'm going to spend months weaving something, it has to have meaning to me.

The Germinating Experience

The image and ideas within Satori stem from an experience I had in Japan in 2014. When I arrived it was peak cherry blossom time and every temple garden, and every city street, was awash in pink and white trees. It was really spectacular! At one garden there was also a lotus pond, but in stark contrast to the glorious garden all around it, the pond was almost black, slimy, and completely lifeless. Looking into that pond, I was very moved. My mind could imagine the beauty of the pond's

Ellen Ramsey

Ellen Ramsey lives near Seattle, Washington and is a member of Tapestry Artists of Puget Sound. You can follow her tapestry journey on Facebook at Ellen Ramsey Tapestry, and on Instagram @ellen_ramsey_tapestry. She publishes a blog on her website http://ellenramseytapestry.art.

past, but not in any detail. Over time, as more stems would fall and dissolve into the mud, it would just get harder to piece that beautiful past back together. New growth was as yet undetectable, and seemingly impossible given the thick muck. To my eye, that pond was a visual metaphor for loss.

I found the pond to be absolutely arresting in its decay. I couldn't resist the visual web of crossing lines and their reflections. Fallen cherry blossom petals puddled around floating forms. I took a lot of pictures with my phone, and my friend, who had a fancy SLR camera, took a few as well. As I had no history of designing tapestries from photos, I had no intentions regarding these images other than recording the moment.

The following summer, I began to see potential in the pond imagery. I was inspired to try playing with the photos in Photoshop. I had no experience designing on the computer, so I went at it with no expectations.

Nancy Wickstrom, Original pod photo, 2014, used with permission.

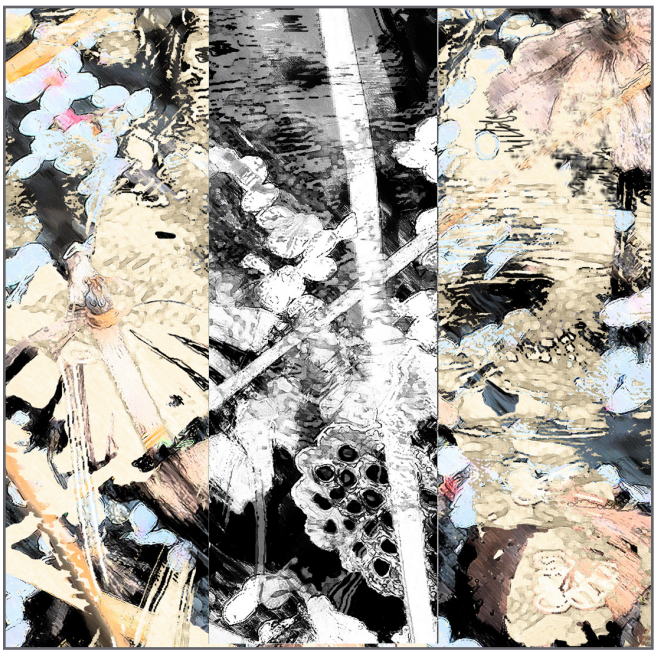
The Happy Accident

I started out manipulating a close up shot of floating pods. This was a picture my friend took, so I asked her permission to use it, and she was happy to share her file with me. It was a raw file, so the resolution was far superior to my iPhone pictures. The most surprising thing that happened in Photoshop was the miraculous appearance of color. The color palette of "Satori" is not a flight of fancy; it is a faithful rendering of how the computer interpreted the monochromatic browns, blacks, and whites when I applied several filters to the photo over top one another. It was a shock to see the blues, pinks, and oranges appear on the screen, but they obviously had a basis in the data of the actual photo. In a sense, the colors represent an unseen reality! I was blown away. It was at this point I was inspired to keep going. I bought a large sketchbook and devoted it to developing work inspired by manipulated lotus imagery.

Ellen Ramsey, Base layer Pod photo, manipulated Photoshop file, 2014.

Finding Connections

I began designing, as I always do, by journaling in my sketchbook. I did word associations regarding the imagery and my feelings at the pond; how it was moving to me and why. It was the contrast between opposites – the colorful garden vs. the lifeless pond – that caught my attention in the first place. My memory of the experience felt overwhelmingly bittersweet – a duality where two opposites co-exist to create a feeling. Could there be bittersweet experiences without a sense of time passed? – of time lost? My ideas were starting to gel. I researched the symbolism of the lotus in eastern art and philosophy and found that it was associated with the cycle of life and change over time. This could work, I thought.



Ellen Ramsey, Maquette for “Satori,” manipulated Photoshop file, 2014.

Ellen Ramsey, “Satori,” 60 x 60 in, 2018, wool, silk, and rayon on cotton warp. Photo: Jean Kercheval, Kercheval Photography.

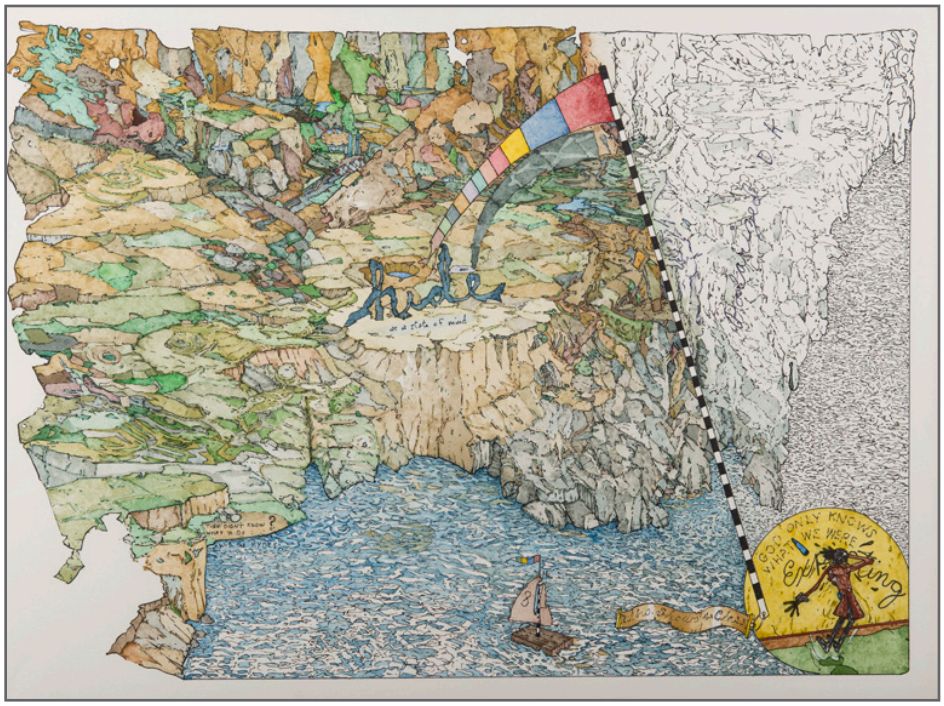
Stealing like an Artist

The manipulated pod picture was pretty, but it didn't say anything. First, I wanted to add a sense of time passing, and I thought layering an image of moving water over the picture would be a good place to start. I cropped out an area of one of my pond pictures that had lots of ripples on the surface. I thought about how Japanese painting so often used abstract fields of gold clouds to both reveal and obscure the narrative playing out behind it. I selected all the dark parts of the rippling water with the magic wand tool and deleted them. I applied a solid gold overlay to what was left. I then layered this abstract image over the pods to create a field of gold "water."

I still wanted to bring in the idea of one moment within the flow of time and convey some sense of loss, or at least importance, to that moment. Here I stole an idea from one of my favorite artists, William T. Wiley. In the 1970s my local art museum presented an exhibition of Wiley's work. As a teenager, I had a poster of Wiley's "Hide as a State of Mind" hanging in my room and I have followed his work ever since. Wiley's work frequently uses the contrast between areas of color and areas of colorlessness to denote loss. "Hide" employs a "polarized zone" in a map-like image of the USA to denote both environmental and cultural loss, complete with a Native American figure lamenting "God only knows what we were expecting."

I was influenced by Wiley's approach to insert a polarized zone of my own in the design. I divided the composition into sections, and made the center section black and white. That alone did not convey the mini-drama of an epiphany moment. When I inversed that selection, the call for examination fell into place.

I did not want to weave this piece as a triptych because I wanted the center to be seen as part of the whole, not a separate thing. I made the black and white band slightly wider than the color sections to emphasize that this section is the focal point, or subject per se. I had no idea what to title the tapestry until after it was done. I returned to my original journaling and research seeking ideas. I had a stuck a clipping from an article about Japanese art in my sketchbook where I had underlined a paragraph on the meaning of the word satori: sudden comprehension. It seemed exactly right.



William T. Wiley (American, born 1937), "Hide as a State of Mind," 1971, ink and watercolor on paper, Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collection; Purchased with funds from Dr. Maurice H. Noun, 1971.23, reproduced with permission. Photo by Rich Sanders, Des Moines.

Archie Brennan: *"a bit of weaving"*

Archie Brennan (1931-2019) embarked upon his journey with tapestry weaving at the age of 16. It was in that year that he began a six year apprenticeship at the Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh, Scotland, while simultaneously studying toward a degree at the Edinburgh College of Art. Brennan went on to serve as Director of the Dovecot, found the Department of Tapestry and Fibre Arts at Edinburgh College of Art and consult on the formation of both the Victorian Tapestry Workshop (Australia) and the National Arts School in Papua, New Guinea. In 1981 he was appointed Officer of the British Empire (OBE) by Queen Elizabeth II, for his contribution to the arts.

Brennan championed the artist/weaver approach, which broke with the European workshop model in which the design and weaving of a tapestry were carried out by different people. Through his long career he explored many themes as he searched for the perfect balance between the image that serves as a model for the tapestry, and the materials and techniques that tapestry weavers use to render images in cloth.

Many of Brennan's tapestries explore pattern, shading and perspective in the context of the human form. In "At a Window, Polka Dot" Brennan solves the age old problem of depicting three dimensional forms on a two dimensional plane by manipulating the shape of polka dots and chevrons (among other patterns) in order to suggest the woman's body under her dress, and the folds in the curtains. The curtains sit in front of the rest of the image, creating a theatre set. The lines of the rug and artwork on the wall recede deeply into the right background, drawing our eye to a space that we cannot see. The dark shadows covering most of the woman's face deepen the mystery.

In this tapestry, as in much of Brennan's work, textiles play a significant role. To weave a textile about textiles engages a meta level discourse about the relationship between the object (tapestry woven textile) and the image of a textile woven into the tapestry. The image of the rug is an illusion, and yet, as part of the tapestry, it is a textile, as well.

Mary Lane

Mary Lane is an artist and art historian. She began weaving tapestry in 1976 and in 1982 became a founding member of the Scheuer Tapestry Studio in New York City. Her tapestries have been exhibited internationally and have been collected by both private and corporate art collections. Her teaching experience includes Parsons School of Design, the University of Maine and The Evergreen State College. Lane's writing on contemporary textiles has been published widely. She is retired from her position as Executive Director of the American Tapestry Alliance.

Archie Brennan, “At a Window 1, Polka Dot Dress,” 78 x 48 in, 1973. Photo: Archie Brennan.

The narrow, vertical format of the tapestry mimics the hanging curtains in the image and results in the tapestry draping slightly when hung, thus emphasizing tapestry’s identity as cloth. The formal explorations with pattern and composition are combined with a conceptual investigation into the relationship between tapestry’s role in image making and its material nature as a piece of cloth.

Brennan revisited Muhammad Ali as a subject many times throughout his career using a variety of media. He would have seen the boxer on TV. TV was the image source for a number of Brennan’s tapestries and shows his interest in embracing popular culture and thereby questioning the divisions of high and low art, which

Archie Brennan, “Muhammad Ali,” 1973. Photo: Archie Brennan.

have vexed many media, including tapestry. Brennan attended art school during the late 1950s and early 1960s and the development of Pop Art, with its interest in consumer culture and the techniques of graphic art, did not go unnoticed by Brennan.

Brennan championed small format tapestries and he used the closer viewing associated with small works to celebrate the woven line and the materials used in weaving tapestry. Accurately woven shapes, whose series of steps coalesce into a smooth line, are spotlighted by the strong color contrast, demonstrating Brennan’s consummate skill as a weaver. The play of light on “San Diego Woman”s hair is represented by the dots and lines that are the basic marks of tapestry weaving. Slits between shapes create subtle lines that add definition to the faces.

Brennan maintained a life drawing practice throughout his life. He was an excellent draftsman and it was probably inevitable that some of those drawings would become maquettes for his tapestries. The relationship between the drawing and its rendering in tapestry is often one of push/pull. As the very large *Drawing Series* developed, the grid of weaving seems to have won. In “Drawing Series XVI, Yellow Door, Red Rug,” the figure is depicted by a thick black line in which the steps built

in the weaving process – a result of the grid created by the interlacement of the horizontal and vertical threads of the cloth - are clearly evident. The angled bottom edge of the open door opens up recessional space, but the parallel sides of the rug tilt the picture plane up. These perspectival "contradictions" call attention to the image as an artifact of a set of image making conventions, conventions that are not universal, but vary from culture to culture and across time. The imagery in Brennan's tapestries often engages with the philosophical issues surrounding representation.

Archie Brennan, "Drawing Series XVI, Yellow Door, Red Rug," 30 x 18 in, 1999. Photo: Archie Brennan.

In "This is a very small tapestry," Brennan expertly combines text and the shape of the tapestry in a manner that illustrates the meaning of the words. Is this trompe l'oeil or a literal depiction? Or both? Brennan poses questions as he entertains us. The question of what an art object is, and what it represents, takes a new turn in the postcards and packages that Brennan mailed throughout his career.

Archie Brennan, "This is a very small tapestry," 3 x 6 cm, 1986. Photo: Archie Brennan.

Archie Brennan, "Package III," 12 x 10 cm, 1988. Photo: Archie Brennan.

Brennan's intense study of historical tapestry shows up not just in the use of certain techniques or compositional devices, it also manifests in direct borrowing, an artistic tactic that became common during Pop Art and was also part of postmodern strategy. Borrowing pays homage to the source material. It also questions the need for the artist to produce something original, and offers an opportunity to reinterpret the past through the eyes of the present, to create an allegorical commentary. The mysterious maiden, copied from a tapestry fragment, eyes Princess Di, caught in a photographic snapshot. This tapestry shows that anything could become fodder for Brennan's creative and thoughtful investigations.

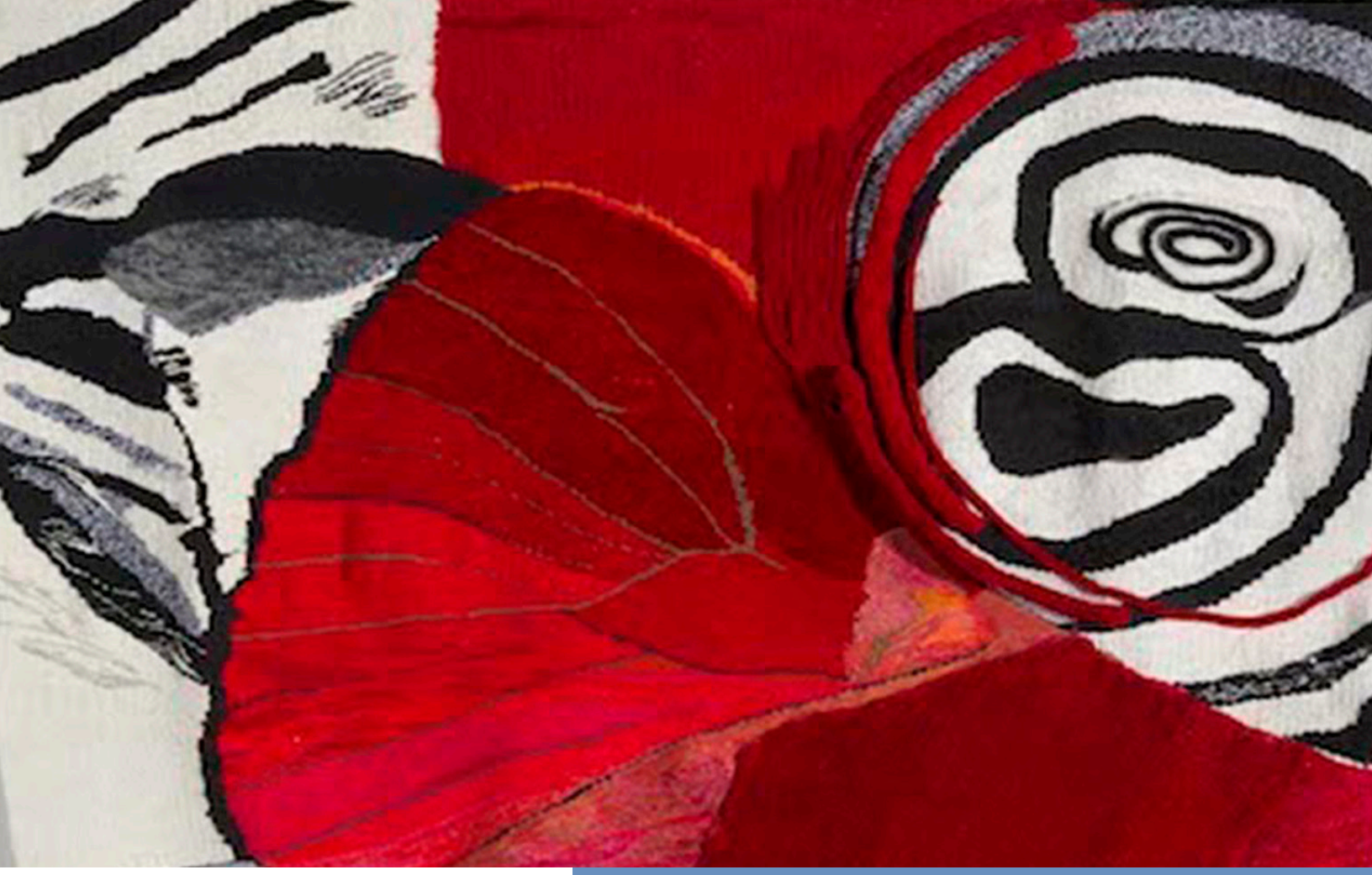
Archie Brennan, "Princess Di meets a Medieval Maiden," 38 x 42 in, 1987. Photo: Archie Brennan.

Some of Brennan's last tapestries were what he referred to as *Reconstructions*. In "The Lady and the Gypsy," Brennan took details from different sections of *The Devonshire Hunting Tapestries* and recombined them in a way that creates an intimate vignette. Brennan alters the women's expressions so that they seem to be sharing a secret, or gossiping.

Archie Brennan, "The Lady and the Gypsy: A Reconstruction," 72 x 36 in, 2008. Photo: Archie Brennan.

Brennan's thorough understanding of historical tapestry and the concerns of contemporary art is combined with a unique weaving style. That he would, at a later phase in his career, still be mining historical tapestries for what they have to teach us, and exercising his artistic authority to manipulate the originals for his own artistic aims, is a testament to an active mind and an enduring dedication to his chosen medium - handwoven tapestry.

Archie Brennan, "San Diego Woman," 4 x 3 in, 1989. Photo: Archie Brennan.



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.

Contact Information:
www.americantapestryalliance.org
director@americantapestryalliance.org

Back Image: Rowen Schussheim-Anderson, “Crimson Prelude,” 52 x 48 in, 6 epi, 2015, linen, cotton, wool, rayon. Photo: Ogy Blazevich.