



AMERICAN TAPESTRY ALLIANCE

TAPESTRYTOPICS

A QUARTERLY REVIEW OF TAPESTRY ART TODAY

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## Honoring Tradition



## Inspiring Innovation

**Honoring Tradition, Inspiring Innovation**

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**Cover Image:** Marzena Ziejka, "Roses - Still Life" (Unknown Artist), 34 in x 42.5 in, 10 epi. 1999. Hand-dyed wool, linen.

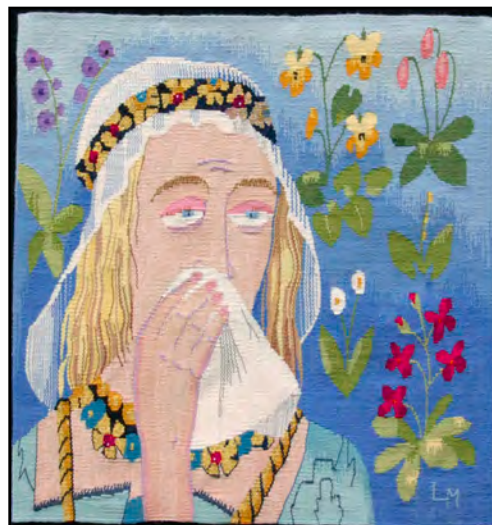
**Theme Editor's Introduction**

**by Lynn Mayne**

The seven writers expressing views on ATA's tagline, "Honoring Tradition, Inspiring Innovation," all respect tapestry's long history. Several reflect traditions from Canada, Poland, or Scotland. All discuss tapestry making today. Candace Adelson looks at three artists from a historian's perspective. Joan Baxter, who "loves wool," is looking for a more experimental weaving vocabulary. Line Defour talks about the visual geography of feelings in her work. Alex Friedman is pushing boundaries in construction. Jane Kidd has curated an exhibition of former students' contemporary practices. Ruth Jones follows a haunting ancestral trail. Marzena Ziejka tosses aside former methods for new horizons. The authors included came by way of suggestion, invitation, or voluntarily. Read their words and revel in their tapestry images.



**Lynn Butler Mayne** attended HGA's Convergence in 1976 as a new weaver and was blown away by the Fiber Structures exhibition at the Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, PA, with its many tapestries. It started her on a life at the loom, many workshops, and several college level art classes. She weaves in Florida and in Michigan during summer months. She is an active member of tapestry organizations TAOS, TWS, and ATA.



Above: Lynn Mayne, "Mille Fleurs Misery," 23 in x 22 in, 8 epi, 2005, Ben Mayne: photo. Wool, cotton, metallic thread.

## Co-Directors' Letter, Winter 2012

It is with great pleasure that we feature the excellent articles guest editor Lynn Mayne has collected for our Winter issue of *Tapestry Topics*. We extend a b-i-g thank you to our writing and weaving contributors. The theme of this issue, *Honoring Tradition, Inspiring Innovation*, our ATA tagline, while dear to our hearts, certainly challenges us to re-examine our use of technique, intention and storytelling in tapestry.

As we go to press, many of our membership have just finished networking and attending the variety of lectures, workshops, and tours at the Textile Society of America biennial conference, *Textiles & Politics*, in Washington, DC. The ATA exhibition committee headed by volunteer chair Margo McDonald is in full tilt to make **ATB10** gallery connections for the next TSA meeting in Los Angeles, September 12-14, 2014. If you have exhibition contacts or venue ideas in the LA area, please contact Margo. If you are simply eager for a wonderful textile experience, mark your calendar for this conference and save your pennies.

The long anticipated opening of the **American Tapestry Biennial 9, ATB9**, was two weeks prior to the *Tapestry Topics* publication, at the [Dairy Barn Arts Center](#) in Athens, Ohio and is on exhibit until December 16, 2012; if you are unable to see it in Ohio, this strong and compelling body of contemporary tapestry will open at the [Fort Wayne Museum of Art](#), January 12 to Feb 23, 2013. Can't make it to either venue? The new [exhibition catalog](#) is available on the ATA website. Add it to your collection.

With an ATA sponsored exhibition happening every year, there's really no longer any time not to weave! **Small Tapestry International 3, STI3**, entries are now closed. Good luck to everyone who submitted work for jurying for this show and thanks to our esteemed curator, Hesse McGraw, a young new voice and face, hailing from the art exhibition worlds of New York City, Kansas City, and the internationally acclaimed Bemis Center for Contemporary Art in Omaha.

The new ATA membership directory is being published soon, and there is space for advertisements; if you teach, have goods or services of interest to members, contact Diane Wolf: [membership@ameircantapestryalliance.org](mailto:membership@ameircantapestryalliance.org). We love our hard copy directory and thank Diane for making it magically appear in our mailboxes each year.

The longer days of late fall and early winter are compelling times for productive weaving and offer an enticement to cocoon into our studios and creative routines. We hope you all enjoy the change of season and celebrate with family and friends over many a full plate during the holidays.

Your co-chairs,

Mary & Michael



## Tradition Implicit in Innovation

by Line Dufour

The word tradition evolved from the Latin verb, tradere, meaning to transmit, hand over or to safeguard. Cultural practices and skills endure the test of time and continue to be practiced by a significant number of people and societies despite or in spite of wealth. A tradition often connotes a set of beliefs, rituals, rules and often cultural practices. The concept of tradition presumes the maintaining of practices or skills that hailed from the past and strict adherence to them. Traditions offer certainty and stability in changing times, by defining and outlining certain rules that apply to it.

Consequently, tradition is often thought of as a rigid structure: "...those who see value only in tradition or versions of it, deny a human's ability to adapt to changing circumstances." (Stephen Bayley) I see it more as valuing the practices, knowledge and people who went before us and allowing their practice and beliefs to speak through us and inform us.

There are many platforms from which we can plunge into the well of our creativity. Traditional practice of a media or technique is one of them. It is a source of knowledge from the past available to us in the present. We can use it as a springboard for our creativity and self expression. We need to decide for ourselves if we want to use it to shape our artistic vision and endeavours. Whatever we decide to do and where to go with our weaving, we are influenced and inspired by what others are doing.



Line Dufour, *Well Being Series*, 60 in x 42 in, 6 epi, 2007-2011.

What makes tradition so tenacious despite the social pressures and influences that tell us that it is ill adapted to the pragmatic concerns of corporations and government? Enter into the mix the human being who has feelings and still holds within her/his genetic makeup the need and instinct to make and create, to use one's hands for physical manifestation. Some fundamental part of us is unchanging and values practices that society might want us to discard. Somehow these practices resonate with us, have meaning, are portals to our authentic self, our past, our collective conscious, our soul and those that have preceded us.

What comes to my mind when I think of "Honouring Tradition": a respect for and mastery of the technical considerations of the art/craft practice, in this case, tapestry weaving. By continuing to practice in the present day the manner in which tapestry has been woven for centuries, we are paying homage to historical and traditional practice. That alone is a worthy pursuit and still, in my mind, admirable. In the same breath, "Inspiring Innovation" seems to contradict tradition, but it links creativity to the historical practice. Tradition and Innovation are analogous and intertwined in all art, design, science, and engineering. The definition of analogy as described in Webster's Dictionary is "a resemblance in some particulars between things otherwise unlike." Clearly, the two – "Honouring Tradition" and "Inspiring Innovation" have some common ground. How are inspiration ignited and creative ideas developed if not for what has been done in the past or by others. Traditional practice is reconfigured, as though looking through a kaleidoscope. All the pieces, the information, can be endlessly rearranged, giving you a new design, a new way of recombining the information. Thus, it can be endlessly reinterpreted and presented in a new way, a way that someone else might not have thought of formulating before. That is innovation. That is creativity.

Tradition is like a parent, in that it keeps us safe within the bounds of its practice and precepts. Eventually we may look to explore beyond its boundaries, or perhaps expand its boundaries. At some point in our development, we may find ourselves asserting our independence of thought and action and find novel ways to make the past and traditions useful to us. The same holds true for tradition if you are an artist. In order to be creative and innovative, one has to depart from the boundaries of the traditional, popular and approved. There is a history, a tradition of innovation in tapestry, as much as one finds it in art and architecture. Innovation is an attempt to modernize and adapt current practice, skills and traditions. It involves seeing tradition from a new perspective, to adapt it to the changing times, technologies and discoveries as well as integrating into the mix one's ongoing growth and development.

To be innovative, one has to take some risks. Try new things. Explore possibilities. To be innovative means also to risk that the average person may just not "get" what you are doing, or like your work, or maybe put you in a position of even being ridiculed. Praise, admiration and respect may come infrequently if at all. To be daring creatively certainly can lead to an innovative idea. It means not being an imitator. It means going where no one else has thought to go before to the best of your knowledge.



Line Dufour, "Torment," 8 ft x 8 ft, 6 epi, 1998.

My tapestries explore through shape, colour and form, the visual geography of feelings supported by extensive research on colour in art, craft, religion, psychology, spirituality and scientific studies. The series that employs bright colours is called the *Well Being* series. The dark, large, three dimensional pieces are part of the grouping called *Turbulence*.

The two distinct groups of weavings are united in their theme and in their technique. The colours found in the *Turbulence* grouping are ponderous and heavy, and they incorporate black as the dominant colour. These tapestries explore the shadow side of emotion and thought, and in doing so lead us to transformation, represented by the tapestries being able to hang in different configurations. The colours in the *Well Being* series have been inspired by the seven physical focal points called chakras, where psychic forces merge, each chakra associated with a colour among other things. Coincidentally, many of these colours are found in the colour wheel. Chakras, in relationship with each other, are a body/mind paradigm. Bright and intense colours and simplicity of composition convey the lightness and buoyancy positive feelings bring to our spirit, body and energy.

“Gravity”, featured in the ATA exhibit and catalogue in 2007, conveys the feeling of grief. When we feel grief, we feel torn apart. We feel we are coming undone. When grief inhabits us, we feel heavy. Pulled down by gravity. The weight of the moment. The word gravity describes the seriousness of the situation concerning us as well as a scientifically described force on this planet.



Line Dufour, “Gravity,” 3 ft x 9 ft, 6 epi, 2007.



**Line Dufour** is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art, the University Guelph and the University of Toronto. She exhibits her work and teaches weaving to adults. She has received awards, grants, and scholarships to pursue her weaving.

## Hip to Weave Square

by Ruth Jones

Some contemporary tapestry weavers are politically opposed to industrialization, promoting the inimitable beauty of unique handwork while experimenting with unconventional imagery. Some try very hard to distance themselves from traditional themes and format.

In my studio I weave tapestries as an interpretation of my painted original designs, each referencing a reversed working drawing on a low-warp Aubusson loom, using French tapestry yarn through Seine twine warp. Regarding this, I have heard mutterings of Luddite, derivative, traditionalist, even copier. Hip art collectors have suggested I try to add shock value to modernize my work, perhaps by adding elements of pornography or violence to gain some critical respect. Though respectful of this critique, I must admit that my tapestry oeuvre is begotten from reverence to tradition. I will try to explain this to you.



Ruth Jones, "Good Shepherd," 48 in x 84 in, 12 epi, 2010. Cotton warp, silk and wool weft.

The obscurity of my origins has always formed the condition of my self-understanding. For instance, Mom and Dad loving each other just doesn't cut it; instead early inklings of order in the universe furnish my experience of tradition, because matter follows laws. Systems that stay relatively stable – the rotation of the solar system, the seasons, the circadian rhythm, and the laws of physics – inspire my cosmology as much as change does. Artists/ thinkers that acknowledge universal stability intrigue me.

Art records our spiritual history and provides proof that we can create something beyond survival, something about our souls. Just as human emotions and predicaments are universal, the central themes of art don't change through time. If art can be an erotic interpretation of the universe, then tapestry weaving surely can express a longing to participate in its creation.

Along our time-space continuum, some traditions are born from faith: methods that functioned in the past will work again in the future. Others stultify through fear of change and so must fade by revolutionary necessity. I think it's worth making a distinction between intelligent cohesiveness and repetition by fundamentalist imitation.

The kinds of traditions that inspire me are nurtured by humility and respect for elders, by ritual learning in a spirit of anonymity without craving recognition. Think of students learning everywhere, of stone carvers' apprentices on the roof of Notre Dame, of weavers working on the backs of tapestries for years without seeing the front.

Traditions, when hard to master, test moral fibre, and come to express steadfastness and hope. Through shared symbolic language a tradition can create collective celebration or ease the

experience of tragedy or loss. Art traditions are disturbed by greed and envy. They can be lost through neglect or abandoned for ambition.

The Subversive Stitch (Rozsika Parker, 2010) is an occidental history of women working cloth (some for money, some 'kept'). Ms. Parker suggests that the power of beauty universally increases the self-esteem of the maker, and hints that social and genetic imperatives inform how and why we express ourselves the way we do.

Her research into British women a century ago reveals that the Royal School of Art Needlework (RSAN) was established in London with help from Queen Victoria on a mission: to train women in textile arts so that they might earn a living should they remain unmarried. Three of my great-aunts attended the RSAN where they learned, among other skills, how to design and weave tapestries. One, Edith Isabel, became Manageress. Another, Winnifred Jones, did not marry. As an émigrée in San Francisco, before the advent of fashion photography, she transformed her skills and made a living as fashion illustrator for newspapers and magazines.

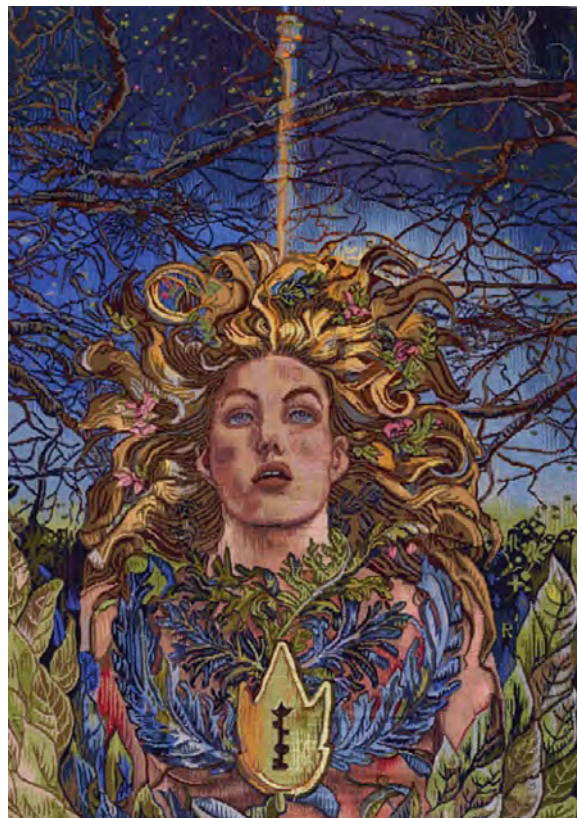
A hundred years later, my choice to practice traditional tapestry is sustainable due to a fortunate harmonization of personal and societal landscapes. Endangered indigenous cultural practices are increasingly protected. Many people suffer from future shock and take pause by reflecting on the past. My husband works in a

museum as an exhibit designer and his work blends conservation with innovative ideas. As a non-commercial paradigm, our life together is surpassing beauty and delight, our backwater not subject to much external action. My loom and practice attract clients, colleagues, and conscious community members committed to social and environmental conservation.

### Tradition Has its Influence

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while attending a piano salon in Nanaimo, on Vancouver Island, my maternal grandparents met by singing together, recognizing one another through shared songs of their ancestral homes in Lancashire and Scotland, much the way birdsong attracts a mate. My life began in the communion woven by those traditional ballads.

As a young child in Ottawa, I wandered through rooms of ancient and modern art in the National Gallery, without making distinctions between them. Open to tradition and innovation, I became a passionate student of Classical Mythology and Mathematics, spending one summer working in prehistoric caves in Dordogne, France and studying prehistoric art from a base camp on a 17<sup>th</sup> century farm. I noticed that all art is derivative of the generations before, extending back to those first painters who spread ochre with sticks on cave walls to witness to the beauty and power of their lives.



Ruth Jones, "All-Sufficient," 31 in x 40 in, 12 epi, 2011. Cotton warp, silk and wool weft.



My first traditional métier was historical art techniques with Professor Lionel Thomas, who ground his own paints in the Fine Arts Department at the University of British Columbia. As he was retiring, he bequeathed me priceless jars of natural pigments – carmine, lapis lazuli, umber, and ochre – that I still use to this day. His encouragement sparked enrollment in 1980 in the Painting Department of the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI). One powerful memory of that time is mixing rabbit-skin glue gesso in a rice cooker on the rooftop of SFAI to coat wood panels. I had trusted Ralph Mayer's advice (*The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques*, 1940) thereby achieving luminosity in my paintings that could not come with store-bought acrylic gesso.



Ruth Jones, "Summer," 21 in x 28 in, 12 epi, 2009.  
Cotton warp, silk and wool weft.

Upon arrival, in 1982, in Aubusson, France at The National School for Decorative Art (l'ENAD) I tasted the spirit of innovation born in the days that Picasso and Lurçat roamed its streets. The teachers were excellent and in agreement that all graduate students should first understand techniques and methods to guarantee quality, and then employ them for strength of expression, not to please convention.

At l'ENAD, besides studying cartoon-making from M. Janot, I learned tapestry technique directly from a great *faiseur-de-chair*, M. Saintrapt. *Faiseur-de-chair* means one who masters weaving hands and faces in the Aubusson style, from the reverse. A humbling experience: ancient rules were handed down through the master, who stood patiently beside the loom, guiding each pass. I remember how he balked when I first asked how to use the old rules. Perhaps he wanted me to innovate like the others. Perhaps his instinct was to hold the guild secrets as promised. I loved counting in mathematical progressions that translated into smooth curves.

After Aubusson, I established my own studio in Vancouver. While I retain some medieval weaving principles – for instance, the use of light forms on dark indigo grounds – I still experiment with these principles to see what will happen. My individual discernment is retentive and fulfilled by inclusion of ancestral code. I'm convinced that bespoke craft can maintain purpose and offer wonder to a harried culture revving on mass-production. When asked, I design for clients, encoding in tapestry their personal symbols and tokens of tradition.

### Tradition Has its Rewards

To poke fun at my image as a goody two shoes of the tapestry world, last year I designed an exhibition at Circle Craft Gallery in Vancouver. I wove nine small tapestries reflecting aspects of courtly behavior. The show was called "Selvage" (the word refers to the thicker edge of tapestry), and served as a metaphor for 'courtesy,' the protective, respectful, 'self-edge' that serves as the workable interface for an individual rubbing up against the outside world. These works were named for aspects of etiquette such as table manners, bully-proofing, care for the environment, and cheerfulness.

I bought up the remaining Article 478 wool stock in North America, which was discontinued by French producer Broder Medici, challenging myself to stick to the same medium of expression (I may be set for life, depending how long my warp is). I received the ATB9 exhibit Teitlebaum Family Trust Award, first place as selected by curator Lee Talbot, for my tapestry “Sunia”.



Ruth Jones, “Woad Deva,” 16 in x 20 in, 10 epi, 2009.  
Cotton warp, wool weft.

I was offered a post as lead weaver in Stirling Castle Tapestry Studio in Scotland through 2013, working with West Dean-trained weavers in the village my grandfather, John left, at the age of seven, to emigrate to Canada. The project’s inspiration is to replace some of the 100 tapestries (including two Unicorn sets) that existed in the Castle’s inventory during its heyday. We are working towards renovation of the palace apartments, enjoying the beauty of early architecture and historical resonance of the place. This year, we will interpret a cartoon reconstructed from two remaining fragments of “The Mystic Hunt of the Unicorn,” a tapestry that was lost after the French Revolution, when peasants overtook the de La Rochefoucauld family château of Verteuil in 1793. Looted tapestries were used to cover espaliered trees and protect potato crops in barns. (Adolfo Cavallo: *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 1998)

We work from the front on an upright loom. For me, this is non-traditional practice, and I must forget pedals to open the shed, and let bobbins dangle down rather than lie flat and ready for engagement. Instead of loose ends hanging raggle-taggle over the weave (as I am used to in my ‘from the back’ practice), I can see the image as we advance. These revolutionary changes may be project-specific, or they may become the new traditions I pass along to future students.

Only time and experience will tell. Pascal Boyer (*Tradition as Truth and Communication*, 2006) divides the study of tradition into repetition and cohesiveness. If I change the way I weave, it will be to create cohesion between technical virtuosity and freedom of visual expression, not to repeat without question an alternative method. I cheerfully acknowledge that the ‘from the front’ view allows a new dialogue: a gaze into the face of the beloved tapestry instead of fondling it from behind.

I celebrate fine work by all textile artists. Expressions that combine mastery of traditional skill with unselfconscious originality heighten my respect. In addition to ATA excellence here are examples: [Frederique Morrel](#), [Shauna Richardson](#)’s crocheted lions, [John Nava’s jacquard masterpiece](#) at “Our Lady of the Angels” Catholic Church in Los Angeles, and [West Dean Tapestry Studio](#).



**Ruth Jones** has a studio practice in Vancouver, British Columbia and enjoys weaving personal and commissioned tapestries. This year she joins West Dean Tapestry Studio weavers at Stirling Castle to weave the last in a set of Unicorn Tapestries for Historic Scotland.

## Pushing the Boundaries

by Alex Friedman

For over thirty five years I have been weaving tapestries, and I still find it fascinating, challenging, and very fulfilling. It often seems a conundrum that a process so basic can provide so many different possibilities.

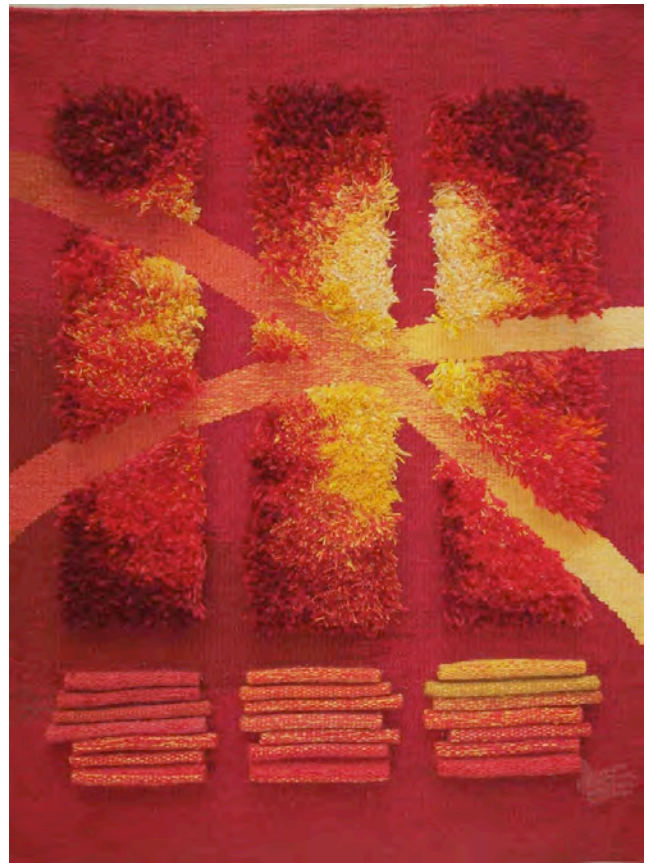
My first weaving classes concerned the traditional multi-harness techniques. I loved weaving at once because it was so tactile and there was a certain formal aspect to the structure. I could apply my art background with regard to color, shape, value, line, but now texture would be an especially appealing area to explore. I borrowed a loom and spent a year trying all kinds of weaving: double weaves that could be padded and waffle weaves, and I used unusual materials to make wild, non traditional shapes. It was the 1970's after all!

My first experience in weaving tapestry was working for Michelle Lester who had just received a major commission. She hired me despite the fact I had no specific tapestry experience. On day one she gave me her own cartoon and a table full of graduated green colored yarn and explained her design idea. I was happy solving small design problems as they arose. Apparently I passed her test as I was then started on the commission project. I supplemented my meager knowledge of tapestry in this early experience by looking at tapestries, studying books, attending workshops and visiting as many tapestry weavers as I could (which I continue to do even now). I was intent on learning the best ways to weave tapestry. Over time I realized for each issue there are often several solutions, and I have evolved a few of my own.

My first tapestries were made on a homemade 5' x 7' frame loom that leaned against the wall. These early abstract tapestries gave me the opportunity to explore many techniques with traditional materials on a rather coarse sett.

Feeling that my skills were better honed, I ordered a 60" tapestry loom so I could make realistic tapestries. My first attempt was "Summer Shadows." It sold quickly and that started me on a journey of trompe l'oeil pieces. I loved trying to figure out how to make a three dimensional detail appear natural in the flatness of a tapestry. Everywhere I went, I found myself making a lot of mental notes about shadows and noticing how 3D shapes could compress into a two dimensional image. The designs for these trompe l'oeil tapestries were taken not from photographs but rather the result of compiling design elements from my observations. But after a while restlessness set in.

At a Convergence lecture I attended in the 1990's, I heard a conversation that "tapestry should be about textiles." That phrase, while not really new to me, now strongly resonated as I was searching how to make my trompe l'oeil art be more true to the woven medium. I was uncomfortable that my hyper realistic images could be created in paint or photography. How could I make something that would be uniquely tapestry; that could not be replicated in any other medium?



Alex Friedman, "Harvest," 34 in x 24 in x 2 in, (87 x 60 x 5 cm), 6 epi, 2003. Wool, cotton.

The answer it seemed to me is that I must explore its “textileness.” Traditionally, tapestry has been more about image; medieval pieces tell narratives and later tapestries through the 19<sup>th</sup> century retain strong links to paintings. For me weaving is a construction process, and I wanted to use that very physical aspect as a part of my next pieces. By taking tapestry from the traditional two-dimensional format and exploiting its fiber aspects, I could push boundaries and still honor the tapestry tradition.

An early exploration on this journey was my *Flip* series (2002) which required a lot of planning with paper maquettes and then manipulation of the weaving after the cutting off. These were fun to do but were limited in scale because of the long term effects of gravity on the flip part.

Another attempt to move away from the flat narrative format was “Harvest” which included a lot of texture with rya knots in specific areas of the tapestry design. Still another piece with unusual materials was “Iraq: War Collateral” (2009) woven with torn gauze bandage strips. It is a small piece commenting on a very disturbing war story. I enjoyed making these pieces, but they did not seem to be the direction I was seeking for now, so back to the drawing board to find another pathway.



Alex Friedman, “Bound,” 45 in x 35 in x 2 in,  
(115 cm x 90 cm x 5 cm), 8 epi, 2007.  
Cotton, wool, cotton floss.

I was looking through some of my sketches and wondered about that phrase again, “tapestry should be about textiles.” I thought it would be interesting to weave an image of yarn that on one level was really about textiles! The result was “Flow 1.”

I was excited about this one as it could be abstract, realistic and dimensional all at once. When I cut it off the loom it buckled in some of the areas, and this provided me a new direction to explore. I liked the sculptural aspects with the sense of movement and depth. Several more like this have followed.

My current project is yet another new variation where I have left long slits in the eccentric part of the design. When it is cut off from the loom I expect it to buckle and bend in those specific areas adding more relief and dynamism to the textile surface. (Watch Facebook for my post when it is completed.)

I strongly feel that tapestry is a rich art form, and fertile ground for exploring all its many attributes. It is important to master the traditions but not to be restricted by them. For me the image is only one part of tapestry; the other aspects of construction, format, materials, surface design are open for discovery. I am pleased to see more artists moving in this direction because it shows that they too appreciate all that tapestry can offer.

A native Californian, **Alex Friedman** has been an artist weaver since 1975. She has created many tapestries including numerous commissions for corporate, liturgical and private clients. Her award winning tapestries have been exhibited internationally. Alex is a former co-director and board member of the American Tapestry Alliance. See [alexfriedmantapestry.com](http://alexfriedmantapestry.com) for more.



## Negotiating Tradition: Five Approaches in Contemporary Tapestry

### Curatorial Statement by Jane Kidd

Negotiating Tradition: Five Approaches brings together five artists working with the demanding process of tapestry weaving, Jolie Bird, Murray Gibson, Judy Brown, Melissa Wong, and Linda Wallace. Throughout their post secondary education these artists negotiated the use of the traditional materials and processes associated with tapestry weaving within the context of contemporary art and craft. I was able to work with each of these individuals during their undergraduate studies at the Alberta College of Art and Design, and have watched the evolution of their careers with great pleasure. Each has developed a dynamic contemporary practice that embraces the material identity of tapestry and acknowledges tapestry's narrative traditions. Narrative or story telling is central to the European tapestry tradition; these contemporary artists employ narrative with both literal and psychological intent.



Jolie Bird, "Jolie," 60 cm x 60 cm, 2012.



Murray Gibson, "Visitation," 60 cm x 60 cm, 1999.

Jolie Bird weaves stylized figurative images with strong colour and bold outlines reminiscent of comic book graphics. Friends, pets, pop culture heroes inhabit her tapestries surrounded by the detritus of the everyday and kitsch emblems of current North American culture. She is interested in the contrast between the perception of tapestry as a medium of permanence and tradition and her own choice of transient and personal imagery.

Murray Gibson's tapestries are the synthesis of extensive research. Mythical and fictitious weavers, Greek mythology, medieval art, textile history are a few of the sources that inform his work. In his practice he has made a commitment to mastering the traditional techniques of Gobelin Tapestry. In the *Drapery* Series he fluently uses this technical language, unique to tapestry, to structure works in which textile references create an allegory of intimate and nuanced allusions to female characters from myth, religion and history.

Tapestry weaving is a material process invested in skill that draws on a long and well-established tradition of material sensitivity and technical ingenuity. It is through this engagement with materiality that the tapestry maker has the opportunity to personalize skill and vision to communicate the authenticity of original experience. Judy Brown uses the sensual nature of materials and process as both an aesthetic language and as a means of engagement between maker and viewer. Her works are small in scale, drawing you in to explore the richness of surface texture and illusive imagery. She uses imagery, pattern and text in compositions that suggest the traces of remembered experiences.



Judy Brown, "Found," 30 cm x 29.5 cm, 2011.



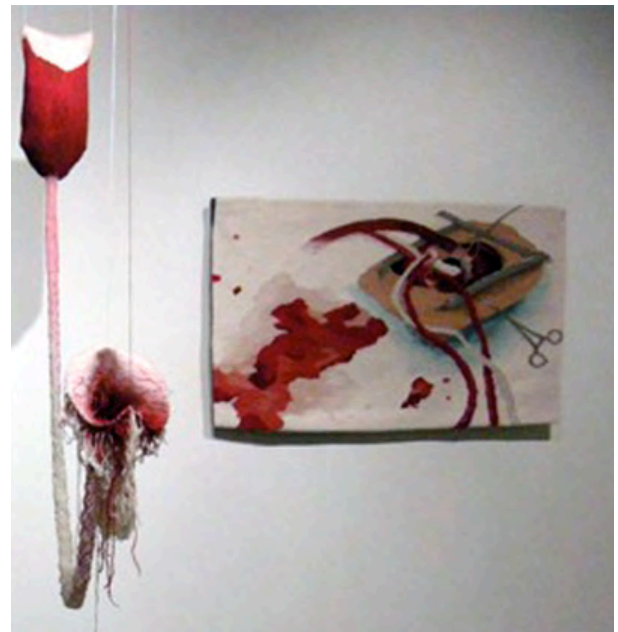
Linda Wallace, "Infertility Series, detail is 'Diminishment'" 55 cm x 40.6 cm, 2007. Six panels.

Throughout its history tapestry has been a dynamic means to represent the world through representational and abstract imagery. For contemporary artists the process and structure of tapestry can also offer metaphoric associations, acting as a signifier for many things including the accumulation and passage of time, skillful handwork, the web of life.

Linda Wallace and Melissa Wong draw on metaphoric connections to reference and represent the human body and connective and reparative processes. Melissa Wong's tapestries provide a visceral representation of invasive medical procedures. Wong's work slips between illusion and reality in "Repository" as she structures the tapestry into a three-dimensional object connected by a frail tube of dimensional needle lace. In *Infertility Series* Linda Wallace wove six small tapestries then buried or implanted them in the ground, left them for a period of time, then exhumed and carefully repaired and conserved each piece. The disintegrating and vulnerable structure of the tapestry is stabilized by the maker's reparative stitches. These works are layered with symbolic meaning suggesting loss, regeneration and the hope of preservation.

The five artists in this exhibition all tug on the threads of history and tradition, yet each has forged a distinct approach to tapestry. Through their hands the woven form reflects a contemporary vision of the world – even as they reference traditional tapestry practices.

Right: Melissa Wong, “Repository,” 110 cm x 22.5 cm x 15 cm, 2011; and Melissa Wong, “Spill and Mend,” 42 cm x 80 cm, 2010.



Jane Kidd, “Land Sentence: Zoo,” 40 in x 80 in, 2011.



**Jane Kidd** taught at the Alberta College of Art and Design from 1980 to 2011. She currently lives on Salt Spring Island in B.C., Canada where she maintains an active studio practice.

## Beyond Mastering Craft

by Marzena Ziejka

I should have started my story right from its beginning: as a kid I wanted to be an artist. In my mind it meant challenging boundaries of the known on a daily basis. When the first time to choose the path came, a teacher from our town's art high school visited my class, advertising what students are taught there: making furniture and weaving. She showed a rather unappealing Gobelin (tapestry) that presented sunflowers. It seemed banal; I'd seen it many times before; everybody then was echoing Van Gogh. I was disappointed and afraid this was all that I would learn there.

Although I was not allowed to join the furniture program for boys, which sparked more of my interest, I decided to obey and to learn, and then to find my own path in the weaving. My teachers foresaw my abilities of producing highly detailed pieces and directed me to making the Gobelins. One piece after another... I wanted to feel a free spirit, quickly oversee my creation, but in weaving tapestries it was impossible.

After five years of weaving in high-school, I graduated and was appointed by the Regional Employment Bureau (keep in mind this was under the communist regime in Poland) to a company that produced tapestries, Krakow Association of Work of Folk and Artistic Crafts, branch in Tarnow, my hometown. At that point in my life I was newly married and the only bread winner, and knowing my strengths and the demand from the Western World willing to pay for tapestries, I decided to turn it into my advantage. For the next decade I was turning artists' paintings or cartoons into flawless, painting-like pieces. My goal was to diffuse hatchings of colors into subtle changes of values characteristic only for paintings. It was to produce smooth, bulk-free wool surfaces, graced by perfectly straight edges of rectangles. I became a master, able to produce tapestry that perfectly followed cartoons, and moreover - to repeat the same piece over, and over, and over again.

Poland underwent political changes and the Krakow company collapsed. I found employment at a private company that was producing tapestries. I made my first piece and the owner gave me a solemn reprimand - it couldn't stand up by itself while leaning against their fireplace chimney wall. I know that you probably can't make much sense of it. I couldn't either. Maybe it was a dishonest trick to pay me a lower salary. That nonsense requirement threw me into rebellious thoughts, and thanks to this, I started thinking again of what my weaving should be.



Marzena Ziejka, "Judith II" (Gustav Klimt 1909), 14 in x 53 in, 10 epi, 2000. Wool, cotton, linen, mohair, boucle, viscose, nylon, polyvinyl.



In response I made a replica of Gustav Klimt, "Judith II," full of joy expressed by the use of different textures. No longer smooth surface, no longer all one fiber piece. I applied relief using supplemental wefts, floating wefts, sumac, leaving hatchings and salt-and-pepper effect of contrasting threads of wefts to bring much more interest. My approach changed back towards what I was missing terribly and what should be the essential.

At the very beginning I could accept and internalize and then further perfect the basic rigid rules of tapestry. Surely, it is the first stage of learning the craftsmanship. When I had achieved it, I became bored of it. Then the first step of my rebellion began. "For, what is the point of setting to work with some preconceived ideas, with ready-made phrases, with worn words, with all that is considered officially beautiful?" (Antoni Tàpies)

A long time ago traditional tapestries carried out images, illustrations of happenings and events, something greater than tapestry itself. But time passed by, and culture and arts and we ourselves changed our views of what art is and what it could represent. The idea of the necessity that illustration be the core of art vanished. Now every artist has the freedom of using his/her own tools and preferences; the preconceived has died. This is why I want to try various fibers, negative space, combining fiber techniques, assembling objects; see how they would work, how they interact, how they answer my questions. Will I be satisfied, will I be eager to search more after facing disappointments and technical challenges? Will I be able to stay within the tapestry medium's very technical description and requirements? I should not have worried: everything is the past and everything is the present. We are preserving and creating tradition at the same time.



Marzena Ziejka, "Sendai," 14 in x 8.5 in x 1 in, 10 epi, 2011.  
Flax, hand-spun silk, hand-spun wool, horse hair.

For years I used ten warp threads per inch; it should influence no one's perception - for it's not a competition for density - but it did. Adhering to technical specifications and high technical skills might bring much of rapturous moments of appreciation, but it is true that even a very primitive painting can move our soul more than works of highly skillful masters.

My use of experimentation with different fibers changed the content and meaning of my weaving. It shifted my intention from executing an illustration to building layers of meaning by various tensions. Seeing the use of textures in painting made by sand, dirt, stones, objects, grass, ropes etc. fascinated me, as such works always spark an avalanche of inspiration for me. My first approaches toward fibers were rather mechanical and soon died. I should have focused on the idea itself that I would like to materialize while using the fiber. Thus formations of textures by employing new fibers became a trap for me, fortunately not for long.

We cannot be artists if we stop growing at the moment of mastering our craftsmanship. Mastering the copying of our cartoons doesn't lift the tapestry medium to the level of art. It is only trying to imitate reality by switching the core of the artistic practice from creation

to recreation, or even worse - to reproduction. Weaving is not, it cannot be submissive to painting, serving only the purpose of mimicking. I feel that the solution cries out to explore the very fiber itself at first.

Painting allows strokes to follow imagination, release impulse, let the layers of power explode. Tapestry is opposite - once decided and woven it cannot be changed and therefore has to be preceded by careful contemplation that results in the final decision. Painting is, at least can be, an "active" medium: it participates in its own creation when a brushstroke triggers new decisions by revealing its unique, unrepeatable appearance that the painter might decide to follow. Painting stays in constant dialogue with the artist, while weaving doesn't. In order to follow a cartoon, I have to follow every detail of it, and eventually I face the loss of its original free spirit. It's a trap. "Analysis hinders rather than helps our vitality" (Antoni Tàpies). And so here is the problem clearly and precisely: traditional weaving is rather like an endless analysis of the cartoon of an otherwise brilliant dynamic idea, but the constant, tedious necessity for precision of following the cartoon kills it.

Why does the need to control and assemble in order take over so easily? I have to open myself to the medium, free from preconceived ideas of what tapestry is, and start truly listening to it. I must find and follow its unique qualities, characteristics, nature, capacity... that's most important, and the separation of the preconceived is a burden to overcome. Today I want to find a pure creation while weaving. I want to open myself to what fiber has to offer, notwithstanding my ability to follow the call. In painting it is very widely recognized and practiced by many; in tapestry, we weavers are still finding our path of how to do it. Everything is the past and everything is the present.



Marzena Ziejka, "Beautiful Story of a Broken Family," 27 in x 27 in, 6-4 epi, 2012, K. Breslin: photo. Hand-spun wool, mohair, porcelain, wire, mono-filament, wax, linen.



**Marzena Ziejka** was born and raised in Tarnow, Poland, and immigrated to Chicago in 2000. She worked for 11 years as a professional weaver in Krakow after studying drawing, painting, sculpture and tapestry. She has been pursuing tapestry full-time since she shipped her loom to Chicago in 2009.

## On the Many Historic Threads in Contemporary Tapestry

by Candace Adelson

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

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

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

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

Barbara Burns' "Little Spinner Girl" is a sample detail for a larger historical composition intended to convey a socio-historical message. She writes that it was inspired by a visit to the Museum LA in Lewiston, Maine. "The focus of the museum is the people who worked in the mills in the two towns [Lewiston and Auburn]." Discussion of a painting there of mill workers, copied from an old photograph, led to projecting a related tapestry for the museum—now awaiting financing. For the design, Burns explored the work of Lewis Wickes Hine, whose photographs of early industrial working conditions helped reform U.S. child labor laws. "His photos made their way to the Smithsonian where they were put into public domain, and that is where I found the image for this tapestry," she says. "I used Photoshop on the original photograph, changing the colors a bit and simplifying the image. I also created a border with words. I used the ABC's; instead of A is for Apple, B is for Boy, I used A is for Accident, B is for Bobbin etc." She also explains, "the face of the girl...is a detail of a larger composition that would be 5–6 feet wide." In the cartoon detail, "the shapes in the background are the two rows of spinning machines this girl was responsible for." Finally, Burns explains a conceptual reference to historic tapestries. "My intention with this tapestry is to remind people that life was not easy in the mills, especially for children. Similar to the tapestries in medieval Europe, when the majority of people were illiterate, this is a 'billboard' with a message that is read through the image. 'A picture is worth a thousand words' says it all" (ATB9 catalogue, p. 49, and e-mails to the author). As a historian, I also see this work as part of the centuries-long tradition of "monochromatic" tapestry—both as entire compositions and for individual areas like sculptural elements and skin gradations. Recognized for its difficulty, this type of rendering commanded top wages per square measure among eighteenth-century weavers.



Barbara Burns, "Little Spinner Girl," cartoon detail.



Barbara Burns, "Little Spinner Girl,"  
13 in x 13 in, 7 epi, 2010. Cotton.

The "Geisha's" personality was foremost in Sidsel Moreb's initial writing about her work. "I think of this geisha as being in rebellion: one eyebrow slightly raised, and the threads of the weft and warpscape in a disorderly, ungroomed fashion.... I wanted to weave a face of subtleties and force, of softness and courage. Her perfectly appointed make-up is a façade through which her eyes watch and her mind churns. I wanted to make her appear compelling. I chose a geisha because they are trained to present themselves so perfectly to the world, and I wonder what goes on behind their faces!" (Tapestry Weavers South Newsletter, Summer 2011, cover). Later (emails to the author) she added more about her process, "I can say that my weavings emerge as a journey.... Usually the weaving is well under way by the time I have the whole thing sorted in my mind.... My first and only thought was that I wanted to weave a face, and as this was my first face, I initially thought that the traditional makeup used by geishas would simplify the face; but she emerged with such strength, she surprised me! ...Then it seemed that to use very fine threads was appropriate to the Japanese theme.... I made a cartoon—pencil, then paint, then xeroxing the image and laminating it with thin (3mm) laminate. I had not decided how to tackle the neck when I began, but it worked itself out as I wove.... I wove it on a very small 4" x 6" wooden loom, and wove the whole thing sitting on a little wooden kindergarten chair in the utility room..., away from all noise and disturbance so no one could find me there. The juxtaposition of her still, immaculate beauty and the chaos of the utility room, I feel, produced her fierce internal rebellion...." The fine threads specifically hark back to ultra-fine silk "kesi" tapestry weaving—an early Chinese tradition that spread to Japan after China's Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) had revived it and also reestablished trade between the two countries. My historian's eye notes how the highly graphic face derives—perhaps subconsciously—from Japanese woodblock prints, but its individuality and emotional force is absolutely modern.

Jennifer Sargent's experiential artist's statement for "Intimations" is similarly totally contemporary: "This Gobelins tapestry, "Intimations," uses pattern and disruption in exploration of my notion of a safe life. The fetishistic, repetitive quality of pattern brings order to the looming chaos of life. When interruptions intrude, new possibilities are created from the collapse of an illusory stability." However, because she had mentioned previously that the "Intimations" was an experiment with a new direction for her work, its obvious technical departure from previous work prompted further inquiry. When asked how her virtuoso slit-work related to Medieval and Renaissance tapestry, she revealed an extremely specific source. "Probably the early tapestries that I have looked at most often and am most enthralled by are from the *Apocalypse of Angers*. When I worked at the Scheuer Tapestry Studio in N.Y., I had access to Ruth Scheuer's amazing

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

These three very contemporary creations reference a broad range of centuries-old tapestry traditions and history—from pictorial messages and ethnic style characteristics to specialized weaving strategies and techniques. And although all three artists used full-scale cartoons, not one followed her model slavishly. They all revel in the freedom of expression that being an artist-weaver affords and that Hundertwasser sought to enhance by theorizing a different technical approach. Common to all—Hundertwasser included—is an understandable reverence for and broad inspiration from the weavings of the past. How could this not be the case when working in one of the oldest, structurally simplest, and yet most potentially subtle and infinitely diverse textile techniques known to man?



Sidsel Moreb, “Geisha,” 10 ¾ in x 8 ¾ in, 30 epi, 2010. Sewing thread.



Jennifer Sargent, “Intimations,” 12 ½ in x 10 in, 2010, Alan McCoy: photo. Hand-dyed cotton, linen, silk, and wool.



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

## Honoring Tradition, Inspiring Innovation, what it means to me.

by Joan Baxter

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

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

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

I see my own tapestries as part of the contemporary link in a long chain of knowledge and skills passed down from a time before history. Because the development of tapestry has been cyclical rather than linear and because modern technology has had surprisingly little impact on our pleasingly low tech equipment and processes, we have a great deal more in common with our historical and pre-historical predecessors than in most other professions. Tapestry re-invents itself through the ideas expressed in the medium rather than through technological innovation. All tapestry weavers bring their own unique ways of thinking and looking to an ancient technique. Within the simple strictures of warp and weft we have a freedom of expression limited only by our technical ability and our creative curiosity.

Each of my tapestries is innovative since each piece explores something new to me. This is the root of my impetus to weave. The innovations however are incremental, with each new idea a



Joan Baxter, "Winter Skyline," 30 cm x 30 cm (woven area), 3.5 ends per cm, 2010. Cotton, wool, aspen twigs.

progression rather than a flash from nowhere. My working process is a continuous loop of ideas building on ideas - drawn not only from my own observation and experience but from that of previous generations of tapestry weavers and all those who have contributed to our collective culture.

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

I'm tired of the expectation from critics and galleries that one's work should always be 'innovative' - in the sense that it should be novel, shocking, like nothing else. This is a facile concept in a world where the new is old in the blink of an eye. Tapestry, being slow to produce, is not capable of addressing these kinds of values even if it wanted to. It can only turn its back on such ridiculous demands and keep faith with its own slower and more considered truths. In taking this course, however, we do not address the fundamental lack of understanding of our medium by those who are in the best position to promote it.

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

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

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

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

More recently experiments with non standard materials were set off by a search for something to represent the qualities of snow. Wool was not white enough, cotton and linen too hard, creating too 'beady' a surface. Eventually I lit on using torn up strips of the old sheets I use to wrap my tapestries in. This gave the perfect qualities I was after - a lumpy, clotted sort

of surface caused by the slightly different widths of the sheeting strips, a blurred quality created by the frayed edges, and of course white sheet was exactly the right kind of white for snow. This use of recycled textile opens up a whole new area of possibilities.

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

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



Above: Joan Baxter, "Leaving," detail.

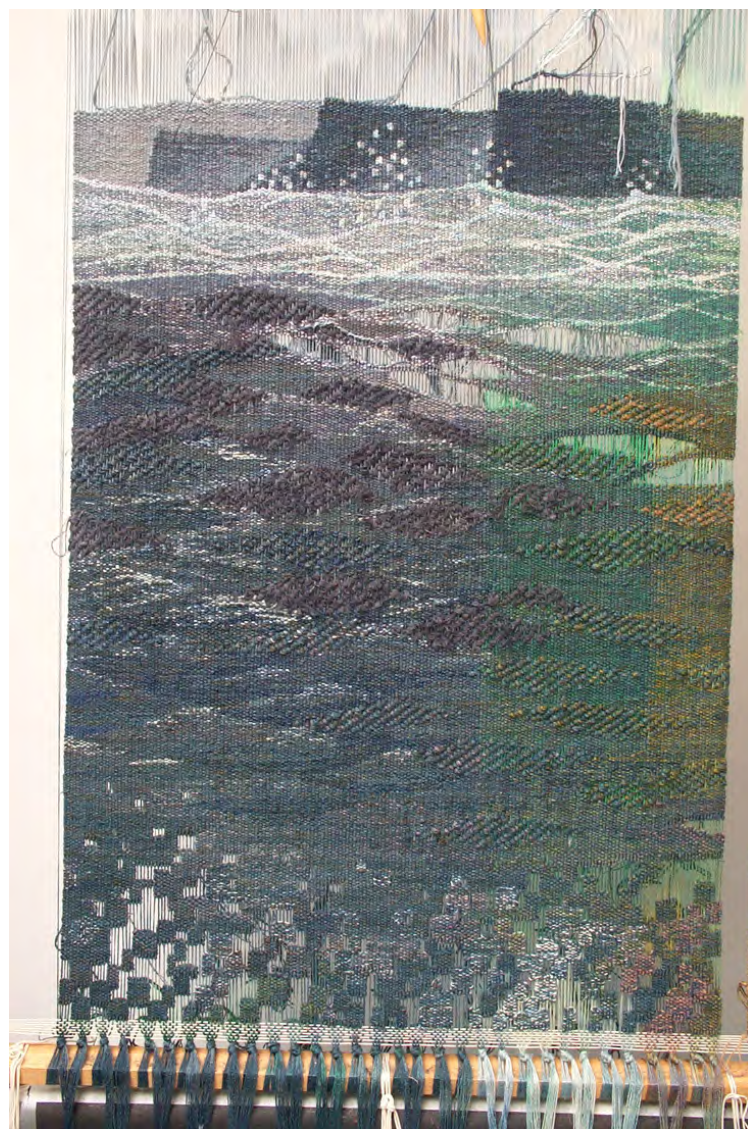


Above: Joan Baxter, "Leaving," 2 m x 95 cm, 3.5 ends per cm, 2004. Cotton, wool, digital images, laminated text strips, pebbles.



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

This project has made me realise that there is another dimension that can be added to tapestry through collaboration with individuals working in different art forms but pursuing similar themes. I'm also excited by the ability of video to extend the range of expression and widen audiences, especially since it is very comfortable in virtual spaces. Perhaps this is where tapestry can address contemporary art on an equal footing: [Alchemy Film Festival](#).



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



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

## Exhibition Review - ARTAPESTRY3

by Joan Baxter

ARTAPESTRY3 is the third juried touring exhibition of tapestry organised by the European Tapestry Forum. I visited this exhibition in the Silkeborg Arts Centre in Denmark, the first of its five venues; it will tour to Finland, Sweden, France and Latvia.

Firstly, it is very clear from the outset that this is not an exhibition of work made by artists wedded to a particular weaving technique, but a selection of mainstream artworks that address a wide variety of contemporary issues and themes. The connecting thread is that the artworks happen to be made using the loose bundle of textile techniques we call tapestry, and the jurors' selection ranges from tapestries in the classical Gobelin style to work that incorporates more experimental approaches and techniques.

There is a fine line between work that absolutely must be woven to fulfill its meaning and work that could exist just as well in another medium (usually as a painting or print). Given that tapestry is generally a slow way of making art, it is important that we continue to ask the question "could this piece only exist as a tapestry?" and if not then why has the artist chosen this medium?

Walking around the exhibition with this question in my mind, I found myself responding most positively to the works that exploited their "textile-ness," works that showed their textile structure or played with surface and pattern or burst out of the confines of the normal flat-surfaced, rectangular form. I particularly enjoyed Katherine Lavocat's richly surfaced and lyrical "Memuar" and Dorthe Herup's "The Family of Great Grandmother."



Dorthe Herup (Norway), "The Family of Great-Grandmother," 140 cm x 200 cm, 2011.

There were also very fine examples of more or less traditionally woven tapestries where composition, colour, and concept were enough. Peter Horn's moving "Orion Nebula" and Iveta Vecenane's gloriously joyful "The Bowl" being my favourite examples.

For me the most important thing that a tapestry must retain, however far it travels, is its narrative nature, its ability to draw the viewer into its own story. Works like Anne Naustdahl's "Arid Landscape II" and Renate Rosivalova's "Face of a Shadow – Face of Death" do this superbly.

This exhibition is a great overview of where we are now, with examples of work from many of the very best tapestry artists in Europe. However it has to be said that the majority of the work is from Northern Europe and Scandinavia in particular.

The venue, in a lovely wooded park by a lake, was beautiful, but I felt the exhibition was too large for the space allocated. Many pieces were exhibited far too close together in narrow spaces where it was impossible to get far enough back to look at them properly, and several pieces were exhibited away from the main body of the exhibition in the foyer and a stairwell, with Federica Luzzi's piece some distance away in the café. Given the overall high standard of the work, I hope that the other venues are larger so that the tapestries can be displayed the way they deserve to be – all together and with enough space around them.



Iveta Vecanane (Latvia), "The Bowl," 170 cm x 210 cm, 3.1 ends per cm, 2011.



Peter Horn (Germany), "Orion Nebula," 220 cm x 220 cm, 2009, Renard Kiel: photo.

## Workshop Review - ATA 2012 Members' Retreat - Front & Back: A Hands-on Workshop with Jean Pierre Larochette

by Sonja Miremont

This year the ATA workshops were held at the Chapman University in Orange, CA, where we stayed in the dorms and had our meals in the communal dining hall. People of all ages and from various sections of the country were also there for diverse workshops and activities.

The University is a newer institute and beautifully landscaped. We were surprised to discover “domesticated” bunnies lived in the bushes near our dorms. They were delightful but rather persistent about begging for carrots.

This workshop comprised presentations, weaving, participants sharing images of some of their tapestries, and many little “tricks” to keep in mind while designing and weaving tapestries.

Jean Pierre’s introduction suggested when choosing to weave from the front or from the back, to think about finding efficient ways to manifest one’s expression of creativity. He weaves from the back but sometimes weaves a portion from the front when the weaving is critical for detail, like weaving a letter.

Yadin Larochette, a conservator of textiles and the daughter of Jean Pierre and Yael, gave a presentation on tips for the finishing, care, and maintenance of tapestries. She also brought samples of many of the materials she uses and a handout of materials sources.

Yael Lurie discussed approaches to designing for tapestries. It is important when creating the image and the background, to think about how best to explore the space, to see and draw the positive form or the negative form. Scale is also important. She illustrated these approaches for us to see and contemplate.

Jean Pierre gave lecture on tapestry design and conception throughout history. In the 1470’s the designs for tapestries were metaphorical. The royalty and the Church, to illustrate the life and glories of the royalty and biblical stories, dictated the “scripts” for these tapestries. Full cartoons were used. Most contemporary tapestries are designed and woven by the same person, rather than by guilds as they were in the past.



Jean Pierre Larochette's class at the ATA 2012 Members Retreat.  
Mary Lane: photo.

He gave another discussion on Mark Adams in Aubusson during the 1950's which highlighted Adams' learning to weave tapestries and his studying with Jean Lurçat. Lurçat used numbers on his cartoons to show where various colors were to be used. Mark wanted to be familiar with the tapestry weaving process to aid in his tapestry designs. Mark was interested in designing for tapestry but did not want to do the weaving. These short presentations were given in the afternoons, allowing the majority of this workshop to be devoted to the weaving segment, which dealt with creating an object and the space around it simultaneously. Some of our participants also drew from the positive and from the negative forms, explored other possibilities of creating a form and its background at the same time, or other techniques. We also had time to discuss our tapestry designs with Yael individually.

Since I have had experience with drawing from the positive and the negative form on my own and with Jean Pierre and Yael, I wanted to explore eccentric weaving similar to the way Silvia Hayden weaves her tapestries but to try to achieve a more balanced surface. I am excited about the possibilities.

The evenings after dinner were delightful and relaxing as many of us from both workshops met on a grassy area near the dorms. We enjoyed some wine and discussed the workshops as well as benefited from meeting with each other a little more informally. Renewing and making new tapestry friends from so many different areas was absolutely wonderful!

I came home stimulated, inspired, and ready to spend time in my studio working on my new ideas and excited to complete my current tapestries. Thank you ATA for making this tapestry retreat possible!

## **Workshop Review - ATA 2012 Members' Retreat - You Won't Know Where You Are Going Until You Get There! with Archie Brennan**

**by Cyndeth Allison**

What to do? The ATA 2012 members' retreat is by two people with whom I have always wanted to study. Which one to choose? I had taken a workshop with Archie Brennan several years ago and sworn I would follow him anywhere. But why not use this opportunity to study with Jean Pierre Larochette, whose work I have long admired?

It is true that every time I wandered into Jean Pierre's classroom, I was enthralled by the amazing work being created by his students. But I didn't regret choosing Archie's workshop, not one little bit.

While the students on the other side of the wall were busy learning wonderful-but-complex new techniques, on our side we had one directive – play! Create without thinking ahead, without the careful planning and cartooning that usually precedes the actual weaving of a tapestry.



Sonja Miremont weaving. Mary Lane: photo.



Archie Brennan demonstrating,  
Cyndeth Allison: photo.

Archie said his aim was not for us to go away with a weaving but with the idea of openness – an open journey up the warp. He wanted us to learn to design as we weave. For him, this method has more potential to become real tapestry, since you are not imitating another art like painting or drawing, but are creating directly in yarn. He said the way the light plays on wool is different than the way light interacts with other media, so, try as you might, you can't really copy drawings/paintings. He finds that way of working to be imitative, even though it is inextricably bound with the history of tapestry.

If you create directly with wool, on the other hand, the refraction of the light will be an integral part of the creation process. The piece will have authority and be truly original. He wanted us to follow where the weaving led, as a musician must follow the music, each note building on the last.

And for three delightful days that's what we did – each of us set aside our usual way of working in favor of following our imaginations one, or a few, picks at a time. Archie wandered among us, offering gentle suggestions, always urging us to simplify our ideas, expand the design until one or two elements took over the whole piece, selvedge to selvedge.

I found it challenging not to think too far ahead. "I think I'll do the yellow brick road – a journey – and I'll see what I find as I travel." But soon my mind was way at the top, deciding where the road would end, rather than down in the first third, where my fingers were still working. By the end of the workshop, I'd begun to relax, zen-like, into being fully at the fell line: a practice just as challenging as any new tapestry technique.



2012 ATA Members Retreat participants enjoying themselves in the evening, left to right: Bev Kent, Mary Cost. Martha Fulton, Tommye Scanlin, Cande Walsworth, Cheryl Riniker.

## Tapestry at Convergence Review

by Becky Stevens

Long Beach 2012 was ATA's first time hosting a booth at Convergence. The ATA booth drew people in with a large banner, and a display of tapestries, catalogs, logo pins and membership information. Diane Wolf, ATA's Membership Chair, anchored the booth for the three day event assisted by a rotation of key volunteers and board members. Diane warmly welcomed everyone, answering questions, discussing tapestry fragments that were brought to the booth for examination and promoting ATA events. Nineteen new members were signed up, and many catalogs and pins were sold, making this a financial as well as networking success.

Co-Directors Mary Zicafoose and Michael Rohde presented the annual report at the members' meeting and symposium. The year's impressive accomplishments include rebranding ATA with graphic updates to *Tapestry Topics*, *eNews* and *Kudos*, the creation of a new website and upgrade of its systems, and an increase in membership to over 600. The complete report can be read on the website: <http://americantapestryalliance.org/about-us/>

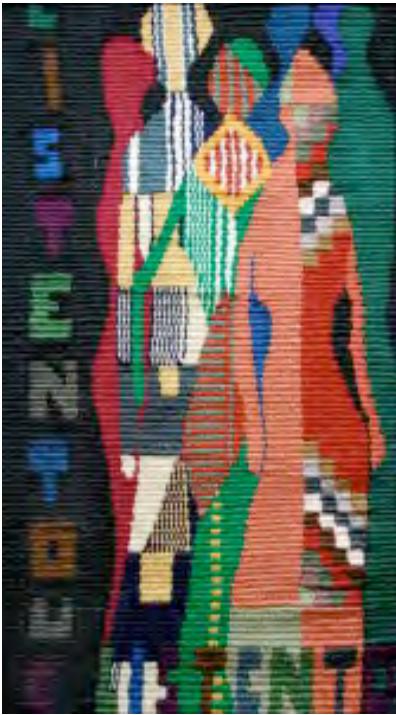
The much anticipated "Study with the Masters" slide talks by Master weavers Archie Brennan and Jean Pierre Larochette were personal and informative. Each spoke about his life-long commitment to studying, making and teaching tapestry. Participants in the members retreat, *Currents, Waves and Rising Tides*, were treated to three days of one on one interaction with these two generous teachers. (Reports by participants are elsewhere in this issue.) Fifteen members submitted five tapestry slides each to the Digi-Slam. Michael Rohde created a very professional power point presentation and read the artists' commentaries, delighting us with a bit of added humor.

The highlight of exhibits for tapestry aficionados was ATA's **Pacific Portals** on display in the nearby Long Beach Library. This popular small format show included 152 tapestries from twelve countries. There were exciting individual entries as well as twelve Challenge groups who worked from agreed upon themes. A beautiful catalog is available on the ATA website. Disappointingly, **American Tapestry Biennial 9** was not exhibited in Long Beach. No suitable venue was available.

There were other interesting exhibits in the area and in the Long Beach Convention Center. HGA's exhibit **Small Expressions 2012** included work in a variety of textile techniques. Tori Kleinhart's tapestry, "Semblance of Generational Passage; Listen to Us!" was selected for the ATA Award for Excellence. HGA also offered classes by three ATA members: Connie Lippert, Kathy Spoering and Nancy Hoskins.

Another HGA offering was the screening of *A Weaverly Path-The Tapestry Life of Sylvia Heyden*. This compelling documentary followed Sylvia for a year, revealing her influences from nature, music and the Bahaus, ideals which continue to inform her weaving. The filming takes place in Durham, North Carolina by the Eno River where Sylvia lives, and in her studio. Sylvia, a long time ATA member, participated in a lively question and answer session following the screening. More information is available about [A Weaverly Path](#).

Convergence Long Beach was a great opportunity to focus on textiles and meet with tapestry friends. Thanks to all who made this possible!



Tori Kleinert, "Semblance of Generational Passage: Listen to Us!"  
8 in x 4.25 in, 2010,  
cotton weft on linen warp.

## ATA Award for Excellence

Tori Kleinert received the ATA Award for Excellence for her tapestry "Semblance of Generational Passage: Listen to Us!" exhibited in *Small Expressions 2012*, which took place during HGA's Convergence at The Long Beach Museum of Art in Long Beach, California.

[Tori Kleinert](#) began spinning and weaving garments in her late teens. Under the guidance of Beverly Semmens at the University of Cincinnati and Lida Gordon at the University of Louisville, Tori concentrated on tapestry weaving and obtained her M. A. degree.

In the tapestry, "Semblance of Generational Passage: Listen to Us!," Tori explores the importance of past weavers who often had no voice, but spoke in woven cloth, expressing creativity, beauty and thoughts of their lives. As descendants of these weavers, Ms. Kleinert feels we should study their woven works of art and listen to the words of wisdom and knowledge. [Tori's page](#) on the ATA website.

## ATA Awards for Fall 2012

by Tal Landeau

The ATA inaugural Emerge Membership Grant for young/emerging artists award and ATA Scholarship for Tapestry Study award recipients are Jennifer Galliot and Carolyn Furnish.

With the Emerge Grant, Jennifer Galliot of Bonne Bay, Newfoundland, Canada receives Studio Circle membership in the ATA for one year. Jennifer was first introduced to tapestry weaving during her first year of university. She hopes to take advantage of connections through the ATA network to expand her exposure to contemporary tapestry weaving. During her membership year Jennifer will also spend some time volunteering for ATA.



Jennifer Galliot, "Summer Love,"  
18 in x 20 in, 2008.





Teaching herself tapestry through books and DVDs, Carolyn Furnish hopes that rubbing elbows with other weavers and learning in a class setting will help further her tapestry education. Carolyn is a retired English teacher from Canfield, Ohio. The scholarship will help cover Carolyn's tuition and related expenses for the October class "Weaving it Your Way: An Advanced Tapestry Weaving Workshop with Tommye Scanlin and Pat Williams" at the Sutherland Handweaving Studio in Asheville, North Carolina. Carolyn says that she "can't wait" for the class and is "thrilled with the opportunity" that ATA is giving her through this scholarship.

Left: Carolyn Furnish, "Rust Belt Ghost Dance," 30 in x 32 in, 8 epi, 2012.

## ATA News

### ATA Catalogs

Catalogs for ATB 9 and Pacific Portals are now available. [Order online](#). If you would like an order form mailed to you, please call, email, or write to Mary Lane, 360.951.2051, [marylane53@mac.com](mailto:marylane53@mac.com), 703 Foote Street NW, Olympia, WA 98502.

### Interweaving Cultures: The Meeting

ATA is excited to announce, in conjunction with Jean Pierre Larochette and the Museo de Textil Oaxaca, an international symposium of tapestry weavers in Oaxaca, Mexico. January 18-19, 2013. Read more about it on the [ATA website](#).

### Tapestry Topics Themes & Deadlines

#### Social Fabrics

**Deadline: January 15, 2012**

This issue will explore tapestries and related creative work that incorporates or encourages community involvement, for example, community tapestries, interactive installation work, work intended to motivate social, or political action. Articles might also explore ways in which tapestry artists could move their work out of the traditional gallery/museum setting into alternative modes of interaction with the public. Contact Theme Editor, [Dorothy Clews](#).

Do you have an idea for a theme? Would you like to be a Theme Editor? Lost a link to a Tapestry Topics? We would be happy to send it to you. Contact: [newsletter@americantapestryalliance.org](mailto:newsletter@americantapestryalliance.org). Send theme articles to the Theme Coordinator for the issue. Send other articles to: [newsletter@americantapestryalliance.org](mailto:newsletter@americantapestryalliance.org)

## Important Dates

**January 12, 2013** ATB 9 opens at [Fort Wayne Museum of Art](#), Fort Wayne, Indiana.

**January 18, 2013** Opening reception for ATB 9 at [Fort Wayne Museum of Art](#), Fort Wayne, Indiana.

**January 15, 2013** Submissions due: Spring Issue of Tapestry Topics. Theme: "Social Fabrics."

**January 15, 2013** [Interweaving Cultures: The Meeting](#), Museo Textil de Oaxaca, Oaxaca, Mexico.

**April 15, 2013** [International Student Award Application](#). Application deadline.

**April 15, 2013** [Emerge: Membership Grants for New & Emerging Artists](#). Application deadline.

**June 2013** STI3: Outside the Lines opens at The Handforth Gallery, Tacoma, WA.

**September 27, 2013** Outside the Lines opens at [Troy Hayner Cultural Center](#).

**October 31, 2014** Entries due for ATB 10.

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