

David Johnson, "CityGrid Fragment Series: Vent"
14" x 24" x 2", 2003, Photo by the artist
See article on page 5.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED. **Can you help?**

We need members to research tapestry collections in museums in your locale, specifically to find out the nature and size of the holdings, any restoration work being done, and what documentation is available to interested persons.

Please contact Priscilla Lynch, P. O. Box 340,
Saugatuck, MI 49453; 269-857-5614
jplynch@iserv.net

Letter from the Directors

By Alex Friedman and Christine Laffer

As the signs of spring are beginning to appear we hope you have had a productive winter with time and inspiration to complete new work.

If you have not had a chance, check out the new website. Web Editor, Christine Laffer, with the help of Jeanne Bates and Michael Rohde, has put a lot of energy into making it an attractive and informative site. You can look up coming events and exhibition opportunities, check membership information, and also read online articles. The best part is seeing more tapestry in color. If you do not have a computer there is ready access at your local library or possibly a good friend who will share access with you from time to time.

The newest feature is the Artist Pages. You are able to check out the tapestries of other American Tapestry Alliance members here. Our new membership program, which has come into effect this year, entitles each Circle Member to a web page where up to three images can be posted. Not only can we enjoy each other's work but this will be another way to show off your work to a broader public without a personal website. The site will grow as more Circle Members post slides to Michael Rohde [rugweaver@aol.com] who is in charge of the Artist Pages. Circle members will also be able to update these images from time to time. Check to see the latest posting.

continued...

Plans for the Tapestry Biennial 5 are taking shape. The jury process is completed, preparations for a printed catalogue are under way and the press kits will go out soon. The exhibit will be open from June 10th until August 7th at the Center for Visual Arts, Metropolitan State College, Denver. We are planning an opening on the evening of Friday, July 2nd to coincide with Convergence dates.

On Saturday, July 3rd, there will be an Annual Meeting of ATA followed by a Critical Forum that has been organized by Mary Lane and Michael Rohde. This Forum, detailed below, will consist of a panel of speakers who will address the issue of presentation and marketing of tapestry, its role within the broader art world and strategies to propel contemporary tapestry in the current state of affairs. The panelists should provide a very insightful morning at the Convention Center. Please plan to attend if you are in town.

In addition to the Tapestry Biennial 5, on July 2nd there will be a reception for the Small Format Frontiers at the Museum of Outdoor Arts in Englewood, Denver. This is the unjuried show that is usually a source of some very interesting and often experimental ideas. There will be several other exhibits going on in Denver in addition to Convergence so plan to spend a few days to take it all in and to meet other American Tapestry Alliance members. More information will be published in the next Newsletter.

American Tapestry Alliance is a volunteer organization and needs committed people to make it run smoothly. If you have some extra time to write, design, promote, proofread, educate, administrate, archive, fundraise, or even just help generally from time to time, this is a perfect time to contact us. We are already working on ATB6 and we want your enthusiasm and energy to make this project another success. Contact Alex Friedman at AQSF@aol.com with your suggestions. There are both big and little jobs available so be brave; we have a great team to work with and it is all for a good cause.

Happy weaving,
Alex and Christine

ATB Jury Process

By Monique Lehman

This year we selected 39 artists for ATB5 from the several hundred entries. The overall quality of the tapestries was very good. Only two artworks were rejected because they were not handwoven tapestries.

When I volunteered to be the exhibit chair to help ATA create this incredible exhibit, I didn't know that I had taken on the most difficult job I've ever had. I always admired those who organized past Biennials--Barbara Heller, Ann Clark, Kathy Sporing. Now my admiration is doubled!

Our three jurors from two different continents: Alice Zrebiec, Wlodek Cygan, and Tomas Osinski, represent three separate art-related professions, and distinctly individual tastes. They all took their assignment seriously, paying close attention to technique, proportions, and style.

Choosing our finalists was a complex process. Each juror received a list showing the dimensions and titles of all the tapestries. No artists' names were given to the jurors. Kathleen Waln, who had one set of the slides at her home, talked to the jurors, acting as a kind of intermediary. Each juror used the following grading system on each submission:

A -should be in the show

B - could be in the show

C - should not be part of the show

Every tapestry that did not receive any C's was accepted for Biennial5. At first, only 16 tapestries met this requirement. So when a tapestry received one "A", one "B", and one "C", we asked the juror who gave the "C" grade to take a second look at the tapestry. We truly appreciate the jurors' open-mindedness and flexibility in doing this, enabling us to go from 16 to 40 works to be exhibited. Our next Newsletter will include the jurors' statements and you will understand why it was so difficult for them to select who will be included in Biennial 5.

This Biennial marked a milestone in ATA's efforts to broaden tapestry recognition and stature throughout the greater art world. Having representation from three different disciplines instead of just

our own tapestry discipline should benefit our art in the long run. The diversity of viewpoints opens new doors for us as well as for new or unknown artists whose work deserves to be recognized. However, it also presents new challenges in the process of putting together a cohesive exhibit. To meet some of these challenges, I would recommend that in future Biennials each juror select a specified number of works. We would then show all the tapestries selected by all the jurors. This approach would respect each juror's professionalism. It would build inter-media understanding and support, rather than spoiling them by asking these people to change their choices so many times.

This report would not be complete without again expressing heartfelt thanks to all the tapestry artists who sponsored artists from Eastern Europe. Four of those sponsored artists were selected for the Biennial 5. I hope that next time we will have even more sponsors and that we can include the whole world in our exhibits.

Exhibits to See at Convergence

By Kathy Spoering

The retail galleries, educational venues, and museums of the greater Denver, Colorado area are going to be filled with fiber this summer. Many of them will be of particular interest to tapestry weavers and enthusiasts. Here are a few of the exhibits you'll not want to miss: (NOTE: All exhibit addresses and directions will be included in a gallery guide at Convergence, and many of the following exhibits will be included on the various tours Convergence will be offering.)

Totally Tapestry:

American Tapestry Biennial 5: ATA's juried exhibit. Metropolitan State College of **Denver** Center for Visual Art

Silver Threads: Twenty-five Years of the Fibre Art Studio: Barbara Heller's tapestries. Spark Gallery, **Denver**.

Small Format Frontiers : ATA sponsored unjuried small tapestry exhibit. Museum of Outdoor Arts, **Englewood**.

Woven Journeys: Invitational tapestry exhibit, featuring bodies of work by Mary Dieterich, Karen Benjamin, James Koehler, Lisa and Irvin Trujillo, Sarah Swett, and Kathy Spoering. Foothills Fine Arts Center, **Golden**.

Some Tapestry: (known tapestry artists are listed)

Best of the West: Convergence Teacher's Exhibit, **Denver** Convention Center (See conference schedule - all workshop and seminar leaders are invited to participate)

Flight Patterns: Butterfly tapestries and quilts of Charlotte Ziebarth. Auraria Library Gallery, Auraria campus, **Denver**.

Navajo Chief Blankets: **Denver** Museum of Natural History.

Current Cloth: Colorado Textile Art Invitational: Invitational exhibit of Colorado artists. Canyon Gallery, Boulder Public Library, **Boulder**. (Kathy Spoering)

Life's a Tapestry: The Middle Fish Gallery, **Boulder**.

California Fibers: The Gallery of Contemporary Art, University of Colorado at **Colorado Springs** (Michael Rhode) also in same venue, *Rebecca Bluestone* Tapestry exhibit.

Sacred Lands Exhibit of Rio Grande and Navajo Rugs and Baskets: **Colorado Springs** Fine Art Center.

(NOTE: The following juried exhibits have not yet selected works, but some tapestry inclusion is hoped and assumed)

Small Expressions 2004: Juried HGA exhibit of small pieces. Metropolitan State College of **Denver** gallery.

Mountain Majesty: Juried HGA exhibit with theme of mountains. **Denver** Convention Center.

Queen of the Plain: Juried HGA exhibit with theme of plains. **Denver** Convention Center.

Spirit of the West: Juried exhibit with theme of spiritual faith. Jefferson Unitarian Church, **Denver**.

Rocky Mountain Weaver's Guild exhibit: **Denver** International Airport

Fiber Celebration: Juried exhibit hosted by Northern Colorado Weavers' Guild. Loveland Museum Gallery, **Loveland**.

Art From the Loom: Juried exhibit, Sangre de Cristo Art Center, **Pueblo**.

Interlaced, Interwoven: Exhibit of Colorado Guilds; Shuttles, Spindles, and Skeins yarnshop, **Boulder**.

Still to enter:

CORE - New Art Space (retail gallery):
Open juried exhibit. Entry deadline May 15th.
\$10/1 piece; \$25/3 pieces. Prospectus available at:
www.corenewartspace.com.

Small Format Frontiers

The tapestries for the unjuried Small Format Frontiers show at The Museum of Outdoor Art in Englewood, are arriving daily. If you have applied, don't forget to send your completed piece by the end of April. The mounting boards are prepared and plans are underway for what promises to be an interesting exhibit. It will open on June 14th and close on July 9th. The opening will be during Convergence on Friday, July 2nd, 5:00 to 9:00 p.m. **THE MOA IS NOT OPEN ON THE WEEK END.** Be sure to attend during the week or the opening!

SFF Tapestry deadline: April 30
Opening: July 2, 5:00-9:00

Send to: Karen Crislip
651 Big Horn Dr.
Estes Park, CO 80517

Outside the Studio: Presenting Tapestry within a Broader Field

The American Tapestry Alliance will be sponsoring a Critical Forum during Convergence 2004 in Denver. Speakers will discuss the presentation and marketing of tapestry, tapestry's role within the broader art world and strategies to propel contemporary tapestry into the twenty first century. Speakers' presentations will be followed by a panel discussion, which will offer forum participants the opportunity to contribute to the conversation. An informal slide show will conclude the event.

The forum will occur on Saturday, July 3rd, from 11:30 am to 2:00 pm (you may bring your lunch). Convergence considers this event a special interest group session and participants need not be registered for the entire Convergence program. However, a one-day pass may need to be purchased. Anyone may submit slides of their work for the slide show. Mail up to five slides to Michael Rohde. Label the slides clearly with your name and an arrow indicating the top of the piece. Number the slides to indicate the order you wish them to be presented. The slides must be accompanied by a typed, annotated slide list on an 8.5" x 11" sheet of paper in the following format. List the slides in the same order that they are numbered.

Slide #1	Title	Dimensions
Materials		Date

On the same sheet of paper, below the annotated slide list, you may include a 100-word statement for the moderator to read. Slides will be included in the slide show on a first come, first served basis and will be returned the day of the forum. Please send your slides to Michael by June 15th, 2004.

Mail to: Michael Rohde
986 W. Carlisle Rd.
Westlake Village, CA 91361

Slides (along with the annotated slide list) may be submitted to the slide show on the day of the forum, if there is space available.

Saturday July 3, 2004

11:30 - 11:35	Introduction
11:40 - 12:10	Rebecca Bluestone
12:15 - 12:45	Helga Berry
12:50 - 1:20	Panel discussion - Rebecca Bluestone, Helga Berry, Kate Anderson
1:25 - 1:50	Slides
1:50 - 2:00	Concluding remarks

Questions? Michael Rohde rugweaver@aol.com
Mary Lane marylane53@mac.com

Themes Emerge in Reviews

By Linda Rees

If the number of exhibitions this past year is an indication, tapestry art is alive and well. We have reviews of three retrospective exhibits and several group endeavors. Despite our policy to have outside reviewers cover exhibits, I have included one review written by a participant in the show. The article shares information about a unique format for study, the Wednesday Group, offered by Archie Brennan and Susan Maffei. Their exploration of themes seemed apropos to this issue. Another review introduces us to a group that has formed in order to focus on conceptual themes. One review provides a discourse on issues the authors feel need be address by tapestry weavers. Other reviews feature weavers who explore religious subject matter.

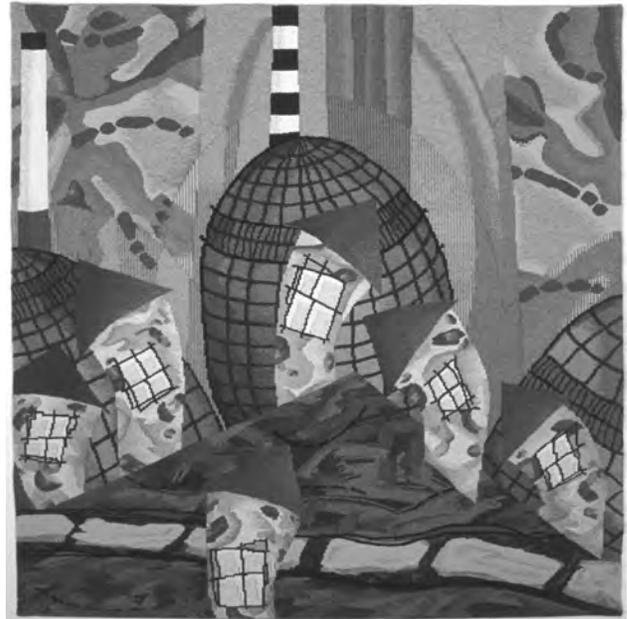
Be sure to browse on the ATA website for color images. Many very interesting tapestries were not easy to reproduce for black and white print or were installation images too small to capture detail.

The next issue, with its deadline on April 15, will focus on the human body, and particularly on nudes in tapestry. We are looking for images or articles. I have thought of it primarily in terms of contemporary work, but would be open to a historical approach or any other focus that seems relevant.

Place: Theme & Variation, "As for where one stays, one values the proper place" Lao Tsu

by Elyse Koren-Camarra

"Place: Theme & Variation," the latest enterprise of The Tapestry Group, was held at the good goods gallery in Saugatuck, Michigan, August 1-September 1, 2003. Rather than being mounted in the usual stark museum or gallery venue, each of the nine artists' work was submerged in its own environment. Elevated handcrafted renditions of traditional furniture, funky contemporary folk art and Americana, or luscious textiles melded with the tapestries on the walls. Everywhere we looked, we were delighted.



Anne McGinn, "Recycled Stanley: Catalog Only.
Interstitial Kiwi", 48" x 48"

Susan Iverson's work, our introduction to the show, filled the second floor landing with her "anonymous figure" tapestries. Both linear and dreamlike, we accept our place on "The Long Road Home," tracing our steps. Just exactly where we are is of no matter. We are led; we are in place. We are where we belong, on the lifescape path.

Moving through the gallery space, we encounter individual places, near-shrines. David Johnson's

work (photo page 1), both luminous and textural, incorporates traditional tapestry technique with computer-generated image. By juxtaposing the old and new, his urban environments blend to produce floating shapes and colors, secret passageways, transposed grids and metal objects. Wafts of beads suspended from hair-like appendages invite a closer look, a desired "touch." We begin to realize and respect the hidden beauty of urbanity.

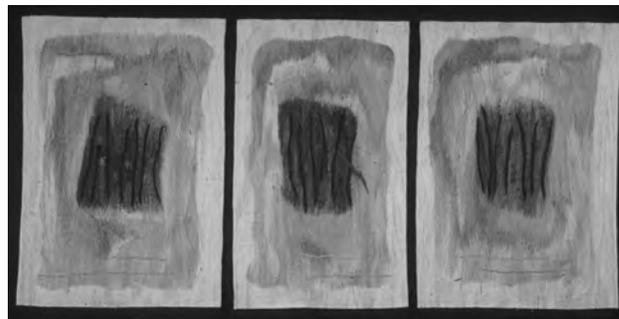
In "Reflections," Joan Griffin, whose liturgical projects are represented in Maryland's Torpedo Factory, explores nature. Griffin offers a window into the depth of water, its movement, transparency, clarity. As a vehicle of meditation, the water carries us to other places which are only contained by the boundaries of the piece itself. We flow, we go along, we are transformed.

Ruth Manning's honed "people-watching skills" are evident in her pieces such as "Tidy/Untidy" and "Tiptoe." Whimsical and to the point, we are immediately taken in by their size. "Tiptoe, for example, is 13" x 4", of which nine inches are "line" or fringe. The loose threads add to the movement and surface interest of each of the works. Their mosaic- and jewel-like qualities also point up Manning's sense of humor. There is levity in this place.



Priscilla Lynch, "Beach Babes," 24" x 20"

"Beach Babes," Priscilla Lynch's brightly colored figurative work, offers a humorous glimpse of women (Lynch's real friends) having fun and relaxing. From a place of the outer, everyday world, we



Ann Schumacher, "Meditations" 33" x 69"

are transported to the inner spirituality of "Communion of Spirits." Lynch's admiration of prayer rugs is translated into a luminous display of reds and purples whose geometry prepares a place of focus, centering, and depth of feeling. We are drawn in and, energized. We come away with the realization there is space for the multi-faceted in "all" of us.

As we round the corner, "Road from Here to There" and "Somewhere Sometime Ago," works by Tommye Scanlin pull us in, away from our place of observation. Viewing the postcard-like images, we wonder where she is going, where the road leads. Scanlin, who sketches on road trips as her husband drives along, invites us to share her personal vision. They are like snapshots of places near and far from her home that if not captured, blend, blur, or look the same. We walk away with the feeling we have been someplace special.

Sarah Swett's images, which according to the artist, reflect "wine, women, friendship, the universe, everything" could not be more true. Her use of figurative narrative in pieces like "Mary Magdalene and Maud" speaks to the comforts, familiarity, and intimacy of personal relationships. As complex visual stories emerge, we feel privy to not only Swett's superb technique and artistry but to her personal vision of life spent and shared in places and spaces she loves. Personal symbolism and common objects pique our curiosity. A sense of spirituality washes over her work, her world. As we look on, we are honored to be a part of her vision, feel glad to have been included in such special places.

The medium of tapestry is translated and transported to pure painterliness in the work of Ann Schumacher. Influenced by western abstract expressionism and the meditative serenity of the east, Schumacher astounds us with the magentas and turquoises of "Dance of the Northern Lights" The neutral center draws us in and sets us free once again to return to the sheer joy of color around us. Schumacher, who works from sketches but uses no cartoon, proceeds in an unplanned way. Her sense of travel and adventure merge with the individual stitched line. The triptych "Meditations," is just that, a meditation on beauty, line and space. We are moved into wonderment. Schumacher has touched the sublime.

Issues of size have always predominated the work of Anne McGinn. Generally, McGinn's pieces are small, exquisite studies of clever narratives that amuse and delight. One such work, "Recycled Stanley: Catalog Only. 1-5," is included in this exhibit. It measures 3" x 3". But McGinn has taken to playing with scale, pushing the limits in a grand direction. "Recycled Stanley: Interstitial Kiwi", 48" x 48" (photo page 5), astonishes us. By playing with the Neiman-Marcus catalog, fabrics, colors, images are scissored apart, rearranged, brought together, layered, and finally collaged. These cartoons are then translated into colorful, and sometimes riotous tapestries. "Interstitial Kiwi" -- offers such visual delight we are literally stopped in our tracks. Are those buildings? The urban institution of extreme consumerism merges with a new textile landscape. Jump in. The space is phenomenal. McGinn has given a whole new meaning to the art of shopping.

After spending time experiencing this exhibit, it is apparent The Tapestry Group has succeeded in forwarding American tapestry and, like the title of its current exhibition, has given these artist's work a place in the textile arena. Here's to continuing success.

Meet The Tapestry Group. Nine mid-career fiber artists have come together to work within the realm of thematic interpretation. The intent is to produce compelling contemporary art created primarily in the ancient but thoroughly modern technique of tapestry weaving.

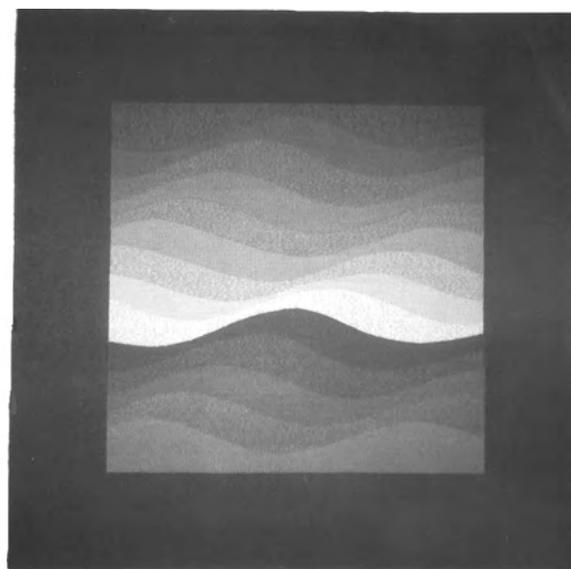
Speaking in Threads

By Janita Loder

"Speaking in Threads," an exhibit at Weaving Southwest in Taos, New Mexico, was a highlight of a carefully planned trip that included the Taos Wool Festival, northern New Mexico landscape, and everything connected to weaving that we could find in the area.

Meeting Rachel Brown, owner of Weaving Southwest, was a distinct pleasure for me. I had read about her in the book, *The Three Weavers* by Joan Potter Loveless, and viewed and heard her talk from the video proceedings of the ATA symposium, *Southwest Influence on Contemporary Tapestry*, in which she discussed the gallery in detail. I admire her tapestries and use her book, *The Weaving, Spinning and Dyeing Book* as a constant reference. She was so gracious to spend time with us, giving us information about the exhibit and allowing me to take photographs.

In order to exhibit at Weaving Southwest, a weaver must first be a resident of New Mexico. Other qualifications include that weavings must be made from hand-dyed yarn and must be contemporary in style. All work must have been woven in the last two years. Each artist should have four pieces at the gallery. continued...

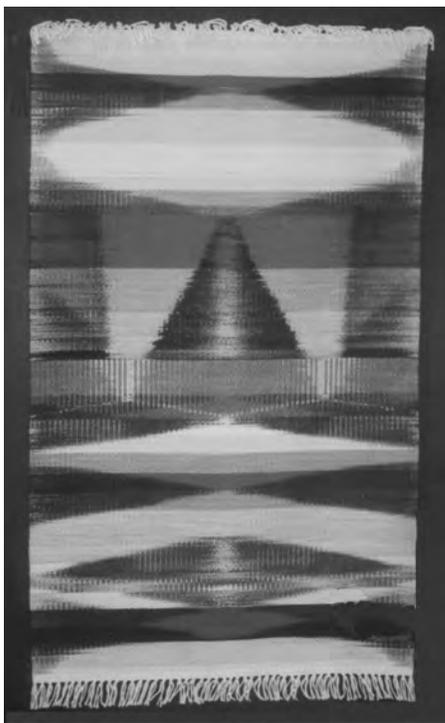


James Koehler, "Harmonic Oscillation XXIII"
37" x 37", 2003 Photo by Janita Loder

Weaving Southwest presents three main shows each year. The summer exhibit focuses on the work of one artist. The 2003 solo exhibit of Karen Benjamin's work was reviewed in the fall 2003 issue of *Tapestry Topics*.

Walking in the front door of the building, I found my attention focused on the "Speaking in Threads" exhibit. Each piece displayed is beautifully woven in Southwestern styles of abstract and geometric designs. The artists represented in the exhibit included Karen Benjamin, Donna Loraine Contractor, Pat Dozier, Viki Edwards, Margaret Hermann, James Koehler, Skaidrite McKeag, Susan Meredith, Denise Miller, Kathy Perkins, Dick Shea, Bettye Sullivan, and Cathy Viele.

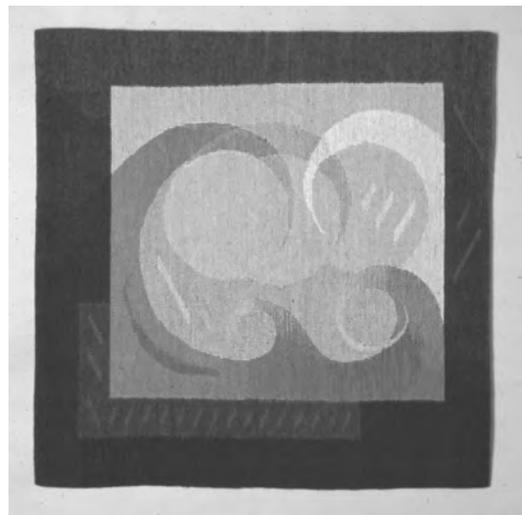
A very unique piece, "Trail to Sun Dog Mesa," woven by Dick Shea deserves special notice. A shaped cone in the upper half of the weaving seems to be reflected in the lower half. The cone has a transparent effect with the gold, red and white stripes from the background showing through the center and the gray "pillars" at the outer edges. The orange, yellow, and white stripes shaped in an oval above the cone appear to be a light, which is also reflected in the lower part of the weaving.



Dick Shea, "Trail to Sun Dog Mesa," 57" x 37"
Photo by Janita Loder

"Harmonic Oscillation" by James Koehler is a departure from his geometric tapestries. Beautiful shades of blue form soft waves that are bordered on all four sides by yet another deeper shade of blue. A feeling of rest and peacefulness comes through to the viewer.

"River Magic" woven by Kathy Perkins also casts a peaceful spell on the observer with her use of blues and blue-greens in wool and silk. The motion of the waves reflected within the borders enhances this feeling.



Kathy Perkins, "River Magic" 35" x 35", 2003
Photo by Wendy McEahren

Cathy Viele's "Piedra Lumbre" is woven with churro wool with horizontal lines of triangles. The lovely hand-dyed colors are in shades of yellow, gold, rust, brown and peach. This abstract tapestry has the feeling of Navajo style with corner fringe.

An elegant tapestry, "Illusions," by Karen Benjamin, is a perfect balance of color and design. The colors are gradations of red, blue, purple and gold. The gold is set in an upward wave amidst blocks of the other colors and continues through a blocked border.

A bold tapestry by Donna Loraine Contractor commands the attention of the viewer. "Sierpinski Band" is woven with shades of red and a central theme of black and white triangles bound by a white stripe on top and a black stripe on the bottom. A surprise in this area is one of the triangles woven in multiple colors.

Susan Meredith wove "Churro Mondrian" in, of course, the style of the artist Mondrian. She uses different sized blocks of natural and hand-dyed churro wool, which are bordered by lines of a darker shade.

"Mesa Sunrise" has the southwest landscape as its inspiration. The expertly hand-dyed yarns ranging from deep maroon to shades of red, orange and gold are exquisite. Woven by Bettye Sullivan, this tapestry is a handsome image.

This Weaving Southwest exhibit, "Speaking in Threads", was truly a delight to view.

Contemporary Tapestry, Archie Brennan and Susan Martin Maffei

By Janet Ducote

I had the pleasure of attending the opening of Susan & Archie's exhibit at the New Jersey Center for Visual Arts, in Summit, NJ and found myself in weaver's heaven. The gallery is a very nice space and the 85 woven art pieces were shown to their advantage. Archie and Susan were on hand to greet patrons. Many from our weaving community were there. I also attended the talk that both Archie & Susan gave on Dec. 21 and this furthered my appreciation of the two as artists and their work.

The gallery is considerably longer than wide with some irregularity to its shape. Archie's work was in the front half with Susan's starting further back in the gallery. My first impression when I walked in at Archie's end was that it was more somber in color with lines defining space. It felt serious, like you should be quieter. When I looked at Susan's end, I saw vibrant color and lots of detail going on. It was cheery, lively.

Archie showed many tapestries from his drawing series, works based on the sketching he does regularly. According to an article he wrote for *International Tapestry Journal* (May 2002) he deliberately began weaving his drawings to "open up new questions, even to strengthen earlier directions." In his talk, he said that by weaving from the sketches he is specifically searching for "a current

language in tapestry". I am looking forward to hearing more of his thoughts on these works as I do not yet fully understand his statement that one in particular, "Drawing Series XLIV", is "successful" and the others are "not."



Archie Brennan, "On Top of the Mountain" from the "Dersu Uzala Series, The Earth Awaits"

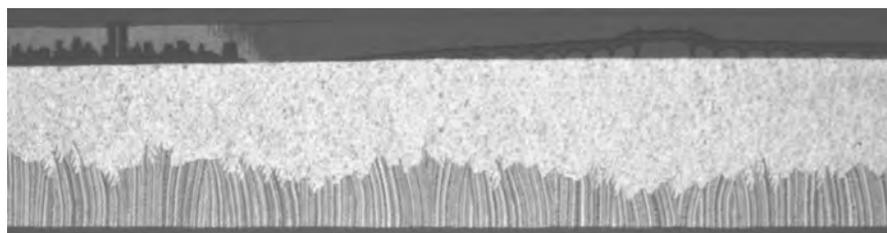
Archie also showed the "Dersu Uzala Series, The Earth Awaits." This is a wonderful 12-part depiction of the journey of Dersu Uzala (the title character from a Japanese film, based on a Russian book) across Siberia's frozen lands. The inspiration for the landscape came from Archie's stay with the Inuit of Canada. I find the series over-whelming, even in its subdued colors, sometimes sparse composition, and seemingly graphic-art depictions. Upon closer inspection, I find many tapestry techniques throughout which makes the series very, very rich to me. According to Archie, this series is his resolution to handling narrative. As separate pieces "the essence is there in each" and "it is not necessary to read them sequentially."

My favorite work of Archie's was "A World Map". It is here that his wit comes out. When talking to my husband, Archie relayed that he came to the realization that everyone views the world with

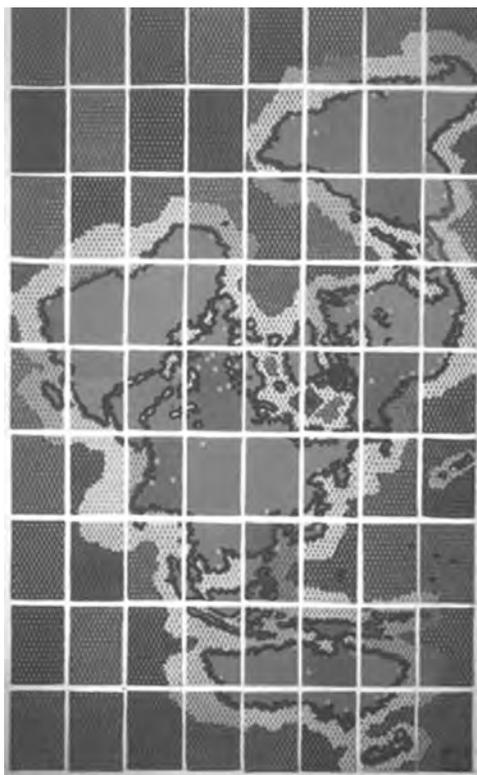
themselves or their country at the center. He decided to put the North Pole at the center of his version, disorienting when you first see the map. And then there is the second Archie twist: The map is composed of postcard-sized tapestries, attached to a backing. He started weaving tapestries and using them as postcards in the 1970s. He stated that mailing the small weavings in this way suggests to him how ordinary and every day tapestry is. We were reminded that in tapestry's long past, it did not always serve as 'Art' for the wall. Archie sent his world map postcards to 72 friends all over the world and asked that they be mailed back to him. He noted that, surprisingly, all post cards came back in OK condition. However, the last, from Uzbekistan, only arrived the Tuesday just before the opening, too close for comfort. I too was asked to send one--a very deep part of the Atlantic Ocean. It was very hard to come up with something appropriately witty to say on the back of Archie's work, knowing his fame!

To me Susan is a tapestry weaver's artist; her works stand up as art. When you start looking closer to see how she did various aspects, you discover she pulls out all the tapestry 'tricks' in the book. In fact, she claims to have learned much from her teachers, the Pre-Columbian tapestry weavers of South America.

Susan showed works from her "NY Times Series." Each is a portrait that tells you a lot about the person and of course includes a section of the newspaper. This time I noticed the prominent motorcycle tire in "Automobiles/Styles" and that Susan created its wonderfully undulating tire treads by maximizing her use of the space between the warps. Most of us use this space by having the wefts of adjoining shapes meet about halfway into the space, never seeing the possibility of manipulat-



Susan Martin Maffei, Detail of "Meadowlands and Skyway," 9 " x 67", 2003



Archie Brennan, "A World Map" 76" x 48", 8" x 5" each, 2003

ing the gap in minute increments as she has done so successfully.

Another tapestry "Meadowlands and Skyway" caught my attention. It quickly became one of my favorites for the techniques used and its rich color. Susan split the epi for a part of it, allowing more refined detail in that area. She bowed up the top edge just over the bridge to emphasize its upward curve, used coarse textured nubby looking yarn for the feathery Phragmites grass heads, and carefully laid in multiple colors of finer weft for the grass' smooth stems.

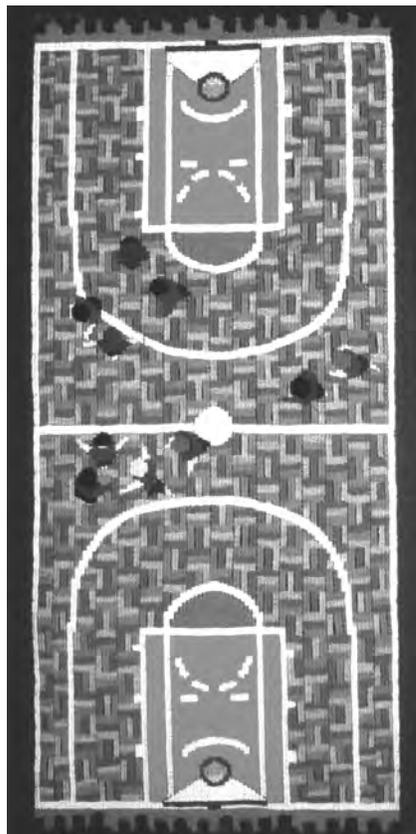
I have heard Susan say that she loves working very large and very small. She has created several large works depicting scenes around NY city: "View Up 7th Avenue" (the balloons in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade) and "Traffic" (on the GW Bridge) are both favorites of my 5 year old. My favorite is "Blessing of the Animals" (the yearly event at St. John the Divine). It is one of Susan's favorites too. Personally, I am struck by the coolness and the architecture of the stone cathedral, woven in black, white and grays, contrasted against the joy and warmth of the multitudes of parishioners, animals, monks and angels. I picked up this feeling because Susan used no blues to weave them. Instead she used all warm colors--reds, oranges, yellows, browns--and warm versions of the greens and purples too. I also love Susan's distortion of perspective; you see the façade and the front steps of the church, the pews and altar inside, and even the choir loft, all at once.

For small, think tiny. Susan has woven tiny 2"x 2" tapestries and assembled them in "Sketches III-Mendocino to New York City, California Zephyr". She has mounted 92 of these mini tapestries on a set of 4 long, narrow panels. The subject matter is related to the way Susan and Archie travel, by train. Susan brings a small loom with her. As she notices what is going by out the window, she weaves it. Each tiny tapestry is her woven sketch. They are little "vignettes" that together present an entire "storyboard". She told us that she sees them as units in a whole, much the same way the great Inca weavers wove grand tapestry tunics for their kings, made up of a grid of varied little images.

Susan's extensive "Sport Series" was new to me. Not being a sports fan, it was a real treat to find they still delight me. Many have Susan's signature use of crowd that she sees as being Inca influenced too with the people as the repetitive units this time. She takes a top-down view, and apparently the Pre-Columbians

did this too, as I learned from her talk. In these smallish works, often about 7" x 8", Susan spoke beautifully in the language of tapestry. She had wonderful ways of depicting the surface of water, the mowed lawn patterns on the greens, sand-traps, and parquet floors. I am sure that I will find even more details to enjoy the next time I see this series.

Also on hand were earlier works where Susan experimented with shape and color to see how far she could push them and still have the image read as a person or a face. "Head in Green and Brown" and "Face in Red and Pink" are two. Her conclusion was that eyes, a nose and a mouth would qualify, created in any color under the sun. Even if you did not see the show, these names tell you that she does not shy away from color.



Susan Martin Maffei, "Sports Series - Court," 8" x 18", 2003

It was wonderful to be able to see a show of this caliber by two of my favorite artists and to hear their talk. I look forward to future shows by Archie & Susan and more inspiration!

Ed. Note: A catalog of this exhibit, filled with photos and an essay by Mary Lane, may be obtained from the New Jersey Center for the Visual Arts. See the Related Web Sites for contact information

The Wednesday Group

By Carol Bittner

The Wednesday Group is made up of students of Archie Brennan and Susan Maffei. They recently exhibited their work at the Lombardi Cancer Center at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. from October 1 through November 4, 2003. These tapestry weavers have been studying with Archie and Susan for an extended period of time, some as much as ten years. Their accumulated body of work suggested they seek venues for an exhibition.

The Director of Arts and Humanities at Lombardi, Nancy Morgan, graciously invited us to exhibit there. The tapestries were displayed in the Atrium that has a nicely lighted gallery. A kiosk nearby contained explanations about tapestry,

The tapestries in the exhibit are far ranging in theme. Over the years, the pair of instructors has chosen a variety of sources for inspiration and study. One suggestion was that the students focus on small details of a historical tapestry that could be enlarged. The book *The Medieval Woman*, edited by Sally Fox and the "Hunt of the Unicorn" at the Cloisters in New York, were the sources for "Through the Window" by Carol Bitner and many of the other students' work. "Detail" by Don Burns (photo page 12) is an exquisitely woven study tapestry of three men's faces framed in flowing locks of hair woven in eccentric weave. Intricate hatching

techniques mold the faces below fashionable hats. "Oak Leaf" and Rabbit" were Betsy Snope's medieval studies from "The Lady and the Unicorn".

Annalise De Coursin displayed a four part series of still lifes called "Four Seasons." Each meticulously woven tapestry displays a flower arrangement on the sill of a distinctly curtained window. In another four part grouping, Anna Byrd Mays centered her attention on letter shapes. "Fragments # 2, 3, 5, 6" become abstract when the letters are only partially shown. Anna used the angles, patterns and blended shading to explore and exploit words woven in tapestry. Bitner's "Through the Park" was a journey in four parts starting on the left lower quadrant with a path that wound through all four scenes including Canadian geese, wildflowers, and a pond.



Don Burns, "Detail"

Alta Turner exhibited two "Not -Kilim" designs, one rather traditional and the other framed by a gaily zigzagged edge. Kilim designs were our group's "brush-up" lesson after a two year sabbatical by Archie and Susan. Janet Ducote's "Homage to the letter 'O'" was a reference to Dr. Seuss. "Breakfast for One" was a still life design with a clean-cut linear quality. Both "Sadie" by Rita Landau and "Tenor" by Helen Gold were based on photographs adapted to a tonal grid.

Susan Maffei's portrait of her cat "Gus" was also in the exhibit. It had a striking design of oranges, purples, and black woven with multiple hachures. She said it was woven after she had completed some studies and incorporated all the techniques she had learned to that date. Archie's "drawing Series XLIII 3rd Version" was the back view of a nude, woven in his crisp, minimal, almost abstract style.

At the same time one tapestry from each Wednesday Group member was displayed in an area by the main gallery for Archie and Susan's "Contemporary Tapestry" exhibit at the Center for the Visual Arts in Summit, New Jersey.

Lialia Kuchma: Tapestries

By David L. Johnson

The tapestries of Lialia Kuchma were on exhibit from November 22, 2003, through January 25, 2004, at the Chicago Cultural Center. The Center is a major art destination in Chicago's Loop. Since its conversion from public library to city-sponsored cultural center in 1973, it has included many significant fiber art exhibits in its calendar of events. The American Tapestry Alliance exhibition "World Tapestry Today" was in the Center's large fourth floor gallery in 1988. The recent Kuchma exhibit was in one of the three first floor Michigan Avenue galleries. These galleries are smaller, but have major foot traffic as people pass through on their way to concerts and other events in the Center. The three galleries have a common opening night celebration, well attended for the Kuchma exhibit.



Lialia Kuchma, "Fruit," 70" x 86", 2002
Photo by David Johnson

The twelve tapestries in the show represent Kuchma's work from 1992 through 2003. Most of the pieces are large and divide into two basic styles, one full of complex abstract images and textures; and the other highly geometric, using bold unblended colors.



Lialia Kuchma, "Luke and Matthew"
96" x 96", 2000, 119" x 48", 2001

Kuchma's early work, not on exhibit, is primarily figurative and biographical, presenting images of people and animals that were important in her life at the time. Her recent work contains more abstract and often spiritual motifs. A common element in many of these designs is a black line drawing superimposed over a richly colored and textured background.

"Fruit" is a large piece that directly reveals Kuchma's past as printmaker, calligrapher and painter. The bold, black line of the fruit stands in sharp contrast to the painterly background. Kuchma comments that the edges of woven black yarn lines reminds her of the fuzziness and richness of etched lines. The richly shaded background develops from her technique of using multiple strands of fine wool in each weft butterfly, allowing for much complexity and subtlety of color. She explains that most of her tapestries are woven using black and white cartoons with a small painted image for color reference.

"Luke and Matthew" are two very large, oddly shaped tapestries that together form a meditation on the Annunciation. Despite its intense yellow background, Kuchma considers this a quiet piece reflecting on a particular and momentous event in a young woman's life. The shape, which could be interpreted as a house or church, creates an architectural structure for all that is happening to the Blessed Virgin physically and spiritually. Luke shows the Holy Spirit descending to Earth from above. "Matthew" reads from the top down, beginning with a dark and roiling depiction of the dark universe from which it all begins. It was displayed in the ATB4 with a different title. The diptych is displayed alone on one wall of the gallery. Kuchma says that she prefers

large-scale work that allows the viewer to be engulfed. Once a viewer is acclimated to the irregularity of the shapes and the intensity of the color, the power of the meditation begins to be experienced.

Three nearly square pieces, displayed one above the other and simply titled "Squares," show the other side of her work. The lowest one was done as a respite after working on a complex shaded tapestry. It is basically an exercise with colors and shapes altered within each of nine squares. The piece in the middle is still grid-like, yet has more movement in it. The top piece has a much more restless geometry. In these geometric items Kuchma prefers to use unblended colors, or, as she says, "delicious colors used in an abstract way."

"Grove (My Father's Orchard)" is another piece that uses intense unblended colors. The three tapestries that make up this triptych created in 1997, use the technique of eccentric weft to create surfaces with uneven tension that undulate to form irregular ridges and valleys. Kuchma wove several pieces in this style and enjoyed making them because they were just about playing with color in a random way. In her words "there was no effort at color harmony - this is the real world - but harmony comes from profusion." The title of the piece comes from a view of tree trunks in the rain and honors the memory of her father who loved trees and planted many of them.

Kuchma is Ukrainian-born and lives in Chicago's Ukrainian Village neighborhood. She has a BFA from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. After graduation she focused on printmaking and pursued independent studies at the School of the Art Institute. Before making the transition to tapestry weaving in 1975, she also worked on painting and photography projects.

Although she does not credit her heritage as a specific influence in her work, she does cite her mother's traditional embroidery, using woven fabrics and bright colored threads, as a possible unconscious force at work in her compelling tapestries. So might the stained glass windows and rich iconography of the Ukrainian church where she has spent many hours have influenced her.

Her work is in the permanent collections of the Illinois State Museum and the Governor's Mansion in Springfield, Illinois, the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art in Chicago, as well as private residences and several corporate collections. She has had items in ATB 1 and ATB 4.

The Story of Nancy Jackson's Incarnation Triptych

By Nancy Jackson

Many of you have asked about the story of the Incarnation Triptych and how I came to be honored with a retrospective at Vesterheim Museum. Here is the response to your questions.

In December 2001, Laurann Gilbertson, Textile Curator at Vesterheim Museum in Decorah, Iowa, called requesting my permission for the museum to mount a retrospective of my work in the Fall of 2003. They primarily wanted a selection of tapestry spanning the years 1980 to the present, but were also interested in my current work in sacred iconography. I was shocked and delighted by the opportunity and, of course, said, "Yes!"

My mind began spinning. Within a few days, I had decided to design new work for the show. The process of collaboration began shortly thereafter. Two weavers were to participate with me, Joan McColgan and Marielle Snyder. I would design a tapestry aimed to develop each of their weaving skills in ways that they would not likely do by themselves in the near future. The plan was for them to weave the tapestries in their own studios with my support. Later, Christina Rasmussen joined us as an apprentice to work on the central tapestry.

Between December 2001 and May 2002, I struggled with imagery and finally came up with a potential image for Joan McColgan to weave. It was not fully developed and it didn't make my soul sing loudly enough, but it was all I had. Time was running out. I needed to have a cartoon for Joan by July so she would have enough time to weave and meet the deadline. Also, from all the sketches I worked on during those many months, I didn't have even one image that I felt strongly enough about for Marielle. I struggled with this dilemma with "Anxiety" as my uncomfortable partner.

Finally, I gave in to the nagging in my soul. "Get the paint out. Get the paint out. Get the paint out," Anxiety shouted to my nearly deaf ears. Late one night in mid-May I began painting and the "Incarnation Triptych" was suddenly born, like a child sliding down the birth canal. 'Annunciation

(The Ark)" came first, with more difficulty, and then the others followed. Triplets. I slept deeply and late into the next morning.

Cartooning started in earnest in mid-May 2002 and Joan began weaving "Incarnation" (right tapestry) in July, as originally planned. As she wove, I continued cartooning the other two tapestries. The cartoon process took from mid-May until October 1, four and a half months of more than six hour days with pencil to paper. This was not casual work, and I was near collapse before I finished. Family and friends were all worried about me. I slept and slept afterwards.

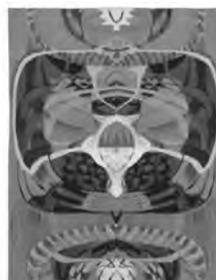


Marielle Snyder working on "Consanguine."

In October 2002 I took the cartoon for "Consanguine" (left tapestry) to Marielle on Bainbridge Island, Washington and spent ten days in marathon weaving, averaging 12-16 hour days at the loom. Marielle had developed serious tendonitis during the completion of "Su Ling", which she had pushed to complete prior to starting "Consanguine". The pain Marielle battled during the entire project should earn her a Purple Heart. It posed an issue we had to work together to overcome and we succeeded. After four marathon weaving trips to help her, we cut "Consanguine" off her loom on April 30 with the usual cutting off festivities. I am happy to say her arms are healing.

Then about one month later on May 24, 2003, ten months after Incarnation was started, we celebrated cutting off at Joan McColgan's in Napa, CA. (see Tapestry Topics, Summer 2003)

The central tapestry, "Annunciation (The Ark)", was begun on October 1, 2002 at the same time as "Consanguine." Christina worked with me on "Annunciation (The Ark)" in my studio in Vallejo, CA, from January 1, 2003 until she moved to Gurnee, IL in August.



Nancy Jackson, "Incarnation Triptych"
60" x 47", 97" x 47", 60" x 47" 2003

I am grateful for the hospitality of Vickie Gregg and Richard Bartholomew on September 13, 2003 at the premier showing of the Triptych. Their home was a beautiful place for the more than 40 people to view the Triptych on one wall for the first time. The light in the room was wonderful.

It is always wonderful when my mentors, Jean-Pierre and Yael Lurie Larochette attended one of my cutting off ceremonies. Jean-Pierre, as he has done before, mounted "Annunciation (The Ark)" on the wall.

Dr. Robert J. Goeser, Professor Emeritus from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, also cut threads marking the occasion of the Triptych being dedicated to him and Dr. Timothy F. Lull, past President of PLTS. Dr. Lull's widow, Mary Carlton Lull, cut threads on his behalf.

A thank you goes to weavers Joan McColgan Marielle Snyder & Christina Rasmussen for their dedication!

INCARNATIONS: A Retrospective Exhibition of Tapestries by Nancy Jackson

by Peggy Strang

From September 27, 2003 to January 4, 2004, the third floor of the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa, contained a feast for the eyes and the minds of its visitors. The retrospective, Jackson's first solo show, included works in several media, including egg tempera,

embroidery, and Åkle weaving, but most prevalent were the tapestries.

When the elevator door opened to admit you to the Anna Hong Gallery, the "Incarnation Triptych", centerpiece of the exhibit, confronted you immediately. Its impact was so forceful that it took several minutes to

realize that there were many other wonders to discover in the room.

It was the diligent work of Jackson and Museum Curator Laurann Gilbertson that produced this exhibit, as all but two pieces were on loan from private collectors. "The Battle of the Horse and Bull" is in the Museum's collection, and the "Incarnation Triptych" had just been completed months before the show.

The selection of tapestries represents a journey through the development of this contemporary artist. "Old Man," the earliest piece in the show was woven in 1986, before Jackson's study with Jean-Pierre Larochette and Yael Lurie. Most were abstract, yet complex enough in structure to tempt the eye to try to find recognizable images in them. It is this ambiguity that, for me at least, riveted my attention for several minutes at each piece. This was not a show to stroll through casually! Some among the more representational works were whimsical, as in "Kelly's Ganesh", or "Ann's Star", which features three cows floating through a space filled with colorful, five pointed stars. Is that where the cow went after she jumped over the moon?

For several of the pieces, the displays included developmental material used to create the tapestry. A large section of the cartoon for the "Incarnation Triptych" was shown, as were various drawings, color studies, and a color blending log for "The Battle of the Horse and Bull". Jackson makes a color painting, then prepares her cartoon from that,

and a few of these were on display as well. This kind of supplemental material helps to convey to the non-weaving visitor the amount of time and work that goes into the weaving. The only problem I found with the display was that in some instances the titles of the works were mounted on a facing wall in a way that made it difficult to tell which piece was which.



Nancy Jackson, "Ann's Star," 12" x 18"

Far and away, the work that most dominated the exhibit was the Triptych. The words that came to mind were "alien, mysterious, wild, and awesome". There is a balance and a symmetry that provides grounding and cohesion for the work. From left to right as they hang, the pieces are "Consanguine", "Annunciation (The Ark)" and "Incarnation". The longest of the three, "Annunciation (The Ark)", is dominated by yellows, greens, and browns. The two side pieces, both the same size, are dominated by reds. All three pieces have a strong vertical symmetry. The titles of the individual pieces evoke to me (with a Christian background) biblical themes or imagery. Like the work, the titles are ambiguous enough that someone from a different background from mine might interpret them differently.

"Consanguine" (meaning related by blood) communicates flowing movement. The dominant reds are accompanied by blacks and browns. A network of pale turquoise and yellow provides a lighter contrast to the intensity of the central part. I felt introspection and calmness in viewing it.

"Annunciation (The Ark)" has a high degree of energy. Its rounded figures suggest confinement. The central figure, using browns, salmons, and a light turquoise, seems wild and dangerous. I perceived it as cool and terrifying at the same time.

"Incarnation" has a great deal of horizontal symmetry while still maintaining the verticality of the other two pieces. Its energy feels white hot. The central figure seems to jump right out of the background. It felt explosive and demanding of attention.

Do I like the Triptych? I cannot say that I do. The imagery disturbs me, tantalizes me, and unsettles me. I'm not comfortable looking at things I can't name. What I do like is that the work communicates with the power to make me feel this way.

Review of Tapestry Soup

By J. K. Weiss and Lys Ann Shore

Excerpts from The Canadian Tapestry Network newsletter Winter, 2003/2004

The Old School House Arts Centre in Qualicum Beach provided the setting for a show of current work by the members of TAPIS, a group of tapestry artist-weavers based on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. The show nicely filled the large, well-lit upstairs schoolroom in which it was displayed. From the hallway, a glimpse of the brightly colored tapestries beckoned even casual visitors to enter, look, and appreciate.

The centerpiece of the show, and one that best reveals the dynamics of the TAPIS group, was a large-scale collaborative work, "Vamp to Visage." This group project was a variation of the classic "Exquisite Corpses," in this case challenging TAPIS members to weave co-ordinating pairs of heads and feet. The result is an assemblage of small (about one square foot) tapestries featuring "compatible pairs," showing as much of hats and shoes as of the relevant body parts. The elements were hung so that corresponding pairs were not together. According to TAPIS, this was intended as a way to engage viewers by challenging them to locate and identify the matching pairs. A booklet accompanying the exhibit showed the matched pairs so that viewers could check their guesses.

Beyond "Vamp to Visage," the Qualicum Beach show has no overall theme. While this reduces the visual unity of the show, it has the advantage of dis-

playing the diversity of aesthetic approach, color sense, and skill levels of the group members. Viewers gained a good sense of some of the artistic possibilities of the medium, and the less experienced group members have an opportunity to see their work displayed and to increase their level of professionalism.



Anne Clark and Karen Leitch
"Feature Presentation II," 38" x 34"

One disadvantage of the miscellaneous approach is the unevenness of the mountings of the tapestries. For example, some small pieces were framed, others mounted on stretchers. Almost all were tightly sewn down, something that tends to minimize the "textileness" of tapestries. Some large pieces were hanging from rods of various types, one by a system of what looked like shower-curtain rings. At least one piece was framed under glass. Mounting, in general, tends to be a weak element among tapestry artist-weavers.

We noted a variety of interesting tapestry techniques in the works displayed . . . We also noted a tendency . . . toward embellishment, as in, for example, the embroidering of details that the weaver evidently found too difficult to weave. Study of

historical tapestries. . . demonstrates beyond any doubt that there is no detail, however small, that cannot be woven into a tapestry, and we believe that it is the artist-weaver's obligation to demonstrate technical mastery by refusing to take the "easy out" of embellishment.

Among the highlights of the show was the ambitious work "Conundrum" by Linda Wallace, with its foreboding messages (woven into the work, we note) of "Bewail" and "Beware." This work featured an interesting border consisting of an irregular black and white checkerboard, good use of color to "texture" the background, and the use of "lightning bolts" to enliven the background.

Also notable was the sizable work "Spectres and Emanations" by Karen Leitch, with its dreamy appeal. Particularly intriguing was the presence in the background of an apparent "shape" defined only by slitwork. The collaborative works "Feature Presentation I and II," by Anne Clark and Karen Leitch, showed more heads and feet, in a nod toward "Vamp to Visage." Especially interesting here was the effective use of framing and the interaction between frame and content.

One perennial issue among tapestry artist-weavers concerns the appropriateness of a design to being woven as a tapestry. . . This is a serious consideration because of the extremely time-consuming nature of the tapestry medium: if a design would work equally well as a painting, then why not paint it in a weekend rather than weave it for six months? In the TAPIS show, we would single out Wallace's "Conundrum" and Clark and Leitch's "Feature Presentation I and II" as being the designs most appropriate to tapestry and making the best use of the unique history and characteristics of the medium.

Perhaps reflecting a praiseworthy interest in the history of tapestry, we noted several instances of "medievalism" in the works displayed. In some cases, this seemed to be merely a nod in the direction (e.g., J. Farrington's "Creative Process," with its background of fleurs-de-lys, or the "Medieval Maiden" from the Cloisters "Hunt of the Unicorn" tapestries in "Vamp to Visage"). In other cases, it was a more fanciful reconstruction, as in M. Turner's "Knights' Pennant"

continued...

Also, as might be expected in a part of the world so justly famed for its natural beauty, there were several works featuring nature subjects. These included S. Cameron's "View above the Orchard" and D. Miller's "Killer Whales."



Sharon Cameron, "View above the Orchard on a Windy Day," 35" x 52"

Some of the identifying labels carried information that was either puzzling or obviously inaccurate. For example, we wonder how Cameron could be sure that her "Entrance Island in Fragment" consisted precisely of 95 percent wool and 5 percent synthetic (and why?) . . . And Madeleine Darling-Tung's butterfly image, "Dancing in the Rain," clearly contained metallic threads although its content was identified as "100 percent Spelsau wool."

Overall, we found the "Tapestry Soup" show appealing and captivating . . . We came away with a sense of a dynamic group of talented artist-weavers benefiting from the creative cross-fertilization that such a group can provide. Their chief limitation appeared to be the same as that affecting today's tapestry artists throughout North America: lack of sufficient technical knowledge to fully realize their ambitious designs. This intractable problem can only be addressed through advanced training in tapestry technique, something that in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been lacking on this continent.

The assemblage, "Vamp to Vissage" will be on exhibition at the Bata Shoe Museum, 327 Bloor St. West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada from January 20 to March 11 2004.

Navajo Blankets of the Nineteenth Century: Selections from The Textile Museum Collection

By Joyce Hayes

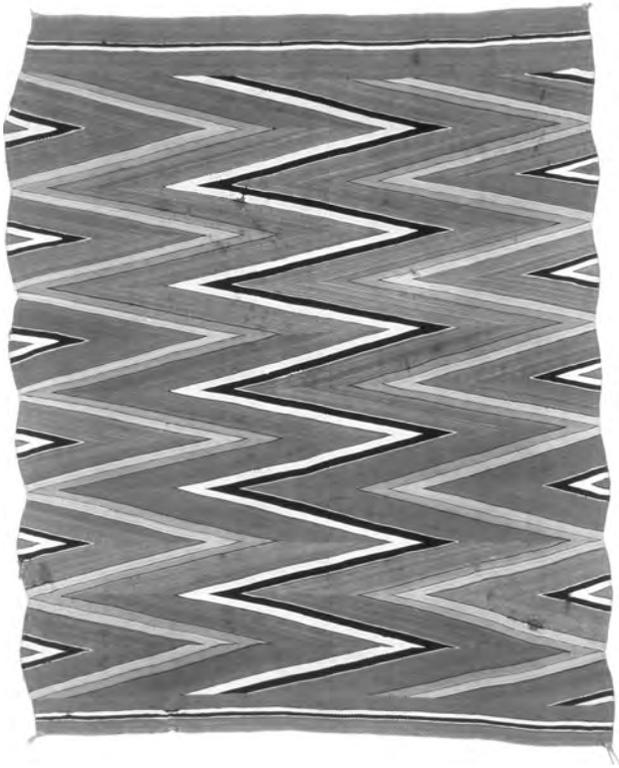
During a family trip to the east coast this fall we were able to spend some time in Washington D.C. Our first stop was the Textile Museum, which had an exhibition of 19th Century Navajo Blankets. Navajo textiles have been an interest of mine long before I took up weaving and decades before trying tapestry. The show, guest curated by Ann Land Hedlund, was a combination of science, history, and art. My impressions of the exhibition are as a tapestry weaver not as a historian or scientist.

The techniques for scientific analysis of Navajo textiles were originated by John Ben Wheat. Dr. Hedlund was a student of his beginning in 1973. This analysis was key to the exhibition; each blanket had written documentation listing all of the yarns and their fiber type, twist, origin, color and dye. Also listed were warps per inch and wefts per inch and any other comments worth mentioning.

Historically the Navajos have been a very adaptive people. While influenced by the Pueblo, Mexican, and Spanish American weaving traditions, through all transitions they have retained their essential Navajo spirit.

As horrible as the internment at Bosque Redondo (1864-68) was and despite the human suffering and decline in population, their weaving still persisted. Many of the pieces in the exhibition come from that period. During the internment they were exposed to new ideas and an influx of new materials and tools. The expressive nature of the work is inspiring. They also had a new market to sell their work to.

The first room of the exhibit included six Classic and Late Classic Chief's Blankets ranging from the First Phase through the Third Phase. The phases further delineate the blankets by date and style. Their simplicity and elegance engaged me



19th century Navajo Wedge Weave Blanket
Courtesy of The Textile Museum

visually and emotionally to the point where I almost forgot about the rest of the show. There was a balance and harmony that was satisfying. On closer inspection I noticed that there were stripes within the larger horizontal bands. At first they were almost imperceptible with combinations of black, indigo, brown, or sometimes dark red. The natural or creamy white bands were made interesting with lazy lines accentuated by the subtle differences in the yarn shades inherent in the carding and spinning process of the yarn. The reds were likewise interesting. The weavers got their reds from several sources. Often they dyed their own reds with cochineal or lac natural dyes. They also unraveled wool cloth. When spun again, that yarn often gave a speckled effect that was called “bayeta”. Finally, they used some red synthetic aniline dyes.

What I found interesting was the use of three different reds in a small area of a blanket. Sometimes in a natural dyed stripe the weaver

would insert a shape of synthetic dyed red which after a hundred years had faded giving an interesting design effect.

I am curious to know if they were using these yarns interchangeably because it was an expedient decision? Was there little difference in the colors at that time, or were they playing with color variation and design? Another interesting point in classifying the Chiefs' Blankets is their design phases and dates. There was a logical progression in their development, which can be documented, but once a design was in their vocabulary they continued using it.

In the second gallery there were two Womens' blankets from the late classic period which were smaller and more coarsely woven than the Chief's blankets. On the opposite side of the gallery were two Wedge Weave blankets that were exceptional. The larger and less traditional of the two was breath taking. The diagonal bands of wedge weave were expansive and colorful using the undyed natural wools to full advantage. The reds were likewise varied creating a wonderful energy. Having done some wedge weave recently and 25 years ago, the technical facility of the weaver was inspiring.

The last gallery contained one poncho and 6 serapes from the late classical period with printed displays showing the scientific techniques used for classifying the yarns. The Navajo weavers took advantage of the availability of new yarn colors when weaving the serape. They also incorporated Mexican design elements such as serrated diamonds, and vertical zigzags combined with the stepped and terrace motifs from their early Navajo basketry. Again the Navajo adapted and brought in new ideas and made them their own.

I would like to thank Ann Lane Hedlund for her assistance helping me to better understand the history and complexity of the Navajo weaving tradition. The recently published *Blanket Weaving of the Southwest* by Joe Ben Wheat, edited by Ann Lane Hedlund, is a fine book with many colored reproductions and interesting text, well worth reading.

TIME TO WEAVE

by Jan Austin

"What is the average number of hours you spend on tapestry per week?" This was one of the questions that ATA Membership Chair Ellen Ramsey included in her recent survey. When she reported the results, it was the one question about which she said: "the results were unquantifiable."

The responses seemed familiar. Some people weave full time. Others weave very little, although they love weaving, even say it is their favorite thing to do. There are many reasons for not weaving, but I wonder why we struggle to find time for something so satisfying?

Many people are truly short of time, especially those with full time jobs or small children, but still find time for weaving anyway. Clearly time is not the only factor. When my children were small, I blamed them for my inability to weave more than an hour or two a day. Later, when they were in school full time, I found other distractions and with all that free time, I got less weaving done.

Time management is important. "Schedule your most important work for the first thing in the morning. . ." says Jeffrey Mayer in *Time Management for Dummies*. "...Don't spend your time trying to complete all the easy things first, just so you can get them out of the way. If you do, you won't have enough time or energy left to work on the harder projects." I always thought that if I could get the pesky little chores done, I would then be able to concentrate on my weaving. I see now that the little things are never done!

"Don't use the arrival of the daily mail, e-mail messages and voice mail message as an excuse for taking a break. By interrupting yourself and losing your flow, rhythm and momentum, you'll find that it's twice as difficult to resume your work." (Mayer) This works over the long haul as well. ATA member, Kathy Spoering has discovered that the habit of weaving every day is a hard one to break, as much as not weaving every day.

"Nobody has unlimited energy...focus what energy you have on things you are passionate about." (Silber) This may seem obvious, but it was news to me; I thought that if I didn't have unlimited energy, I must be doing something wrong.

Unconscious disturbances can consume surprising amounts of energy. It can be hard to concentrate on weaving when we are going through a difficult time in our lives. Members of the Tapestry List recently discussed how to get started weaving again when you are stuck, particularly after suffering the loss of a loved one. Many people spoke of turning to weaving or other creative endeavors as a therapeutic experience. Most suggested trying something new or different, perhaps more playful, to avoid the pressure of high expectations.

Others felt that to force oneself to be creative while grieving is pointless. In *The Courage to Create*, Rollo May states that the total involvement of "genuine creativity is characterized by an intensity of awareness, a heightened consciousness." This results in clear neurological changes, similar to what we feel in anxiety and fear, but the artist is actually feeling joy, at the moment of creating. It seems logical that a person who is grieving, or otherwise caught up in pain, might have a difficult time surrendering to that total involvement and joy. At a certain point in the grieving process, when the artist is less preoccupied with sorrow, weaving could be a real source of healing.

Most of the time, however, we don't really have an obvious obstacle, such as grief to get over. Mark Twain said "If you have to swallow a frog, don't stare at it too long." Although tapestry weaving is hardly an unpleasant chore, Twain's comment is relevant, because tapestry weaving, like any serious creative endeavor, can be difficult, and a little scary. I am not the only one to admit that, even when I have enough time, sometimes I don't get around to weaving. I always assumed it was laziness.

In *The Artist's Way*, Julia Cameron says, "Do not call procrastination laziness. Call it fear." Experts agree that common causes of procrastination are fear of failure, fear of success, fear of being controlled, perfectionism, lack of resources, and self-doubt. People put off starting a project because they are unsure exactly how to proceed, or the task seems too difficult. The unrealistic expectations of a perfectionist can be paralyzing, as can the fear of harsh judgment. Some people devote tremendous amounts of time and energy to becoming technically proficient, but don't trust their own ideas enough to proceed.

It is important to recognize that there is a reason why you aren't weaving, and in most cases, the rea-

son is inside yourself. In *What Should I Do With My Life*, Po Bronson interviewed many people about the life choices they had made, and concluded that when "all the reasons you can't accomplish your dreams have fallen away, the final stumbling block is within."

Improvements in time management and organization can help, but only up to a point. In *On Writer's Block*, Victoria Nelson says, "Beyond a reasonable point, external irritations represent nothing more than a projection of internal conflict onto the world. They are rarely the causes of creative malaise." She suggests that rather than being lazy, people who accuse themselves of procrastination are throttling "the spontaneous contact with self that all creative activity requires," by attempting to be ruthless with their creative selves. The creative self then rebels against being over-controlled, by rejecting the command. Rather than a passive state, procrastination is an active pushing away, a rejection.

"Over any extended period of time, being an artist requires enthusiasm more than discipline. . . . Our artist child can best be enticed to work by treating work as play." (Cameron) The reality is that weaving a tapestry takes so much time, that we want to make sure the design is worthy of the work it will take to execute it. This makes it difficult to treat our work as play, but not impossible. Perhaps the recent trend toward weaving smaller tapestries reflects the need for artists to recharge their creative impulses by experimentation.

"The call to weave is so great that like my own heartbeat, it catches me unaware at the most startling moments - when my mind is fullest or busiest - right before I drop off to sleep - or as I'm pulling up to a red light in traffic." These words expressed on the Tapestry List by Maria Giacchino captured the yearning that many of us feel. I hope this article will help us translate our fantasies into reality.

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A Historical Vignette: Theresa Conley

by Linda Rees

Last summer, Carole Greene, an apprentice in Christine Laffer's studio, visited Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina. As the tour guide, Theresa Conley recalls, Carole kept asking questions about tapestry. Theresa revealed that she had been a tapestry weaver as a young woman and one of her tapestry's was included in the book *Great Tapestries: The Web of History* from the 12th to 20th Century by Edita Lausanne. When Carole got back to California, she and Christine looked up the picture. They suggested we investigate her story further.

Theresa Conley, nee La France, was born in Quebec City, Quebec, Canada. She enrolled in the weaving program at the École des Beaux Arts in the mid 1940s. Her teacher, Irene Beaudin, went to Penland for summer classes to learn better lecturing skills. In 1947 she arranged for five students, including Theresa, to accompany her.



A joyous Theresa Conley in front of "The Pines" at Penland, NC.

The weaving studio at Penland was in the Craft House. It had a large collection of looms stored out on its spacious porch. The students spent their mornings in the studio. Their afternoon assignment was to untangle and tidy the haphazard assortment of looms on the porch.

The other four students came from wealthy families and had substantial allowances for the summer. Theresa's family could not afford to give her nearly as much spending money. Having a soft spot for

underdogs, Penland director Lucy Morgan paid special attention to her. Theresa continued to spend her summers working at Penland until 1953.

She fell in love with the son of Emma Conley, the woman who taught vegetal dyeing, carding, and spinning. In 1953 they were married at Penland and "Miss Lucy" closed the school for the wedding. The couple settled in Michigan.



Therese Lafrance, "Le Coq," 84" x 60", 1949

Theresa's mother-in-law was a very typical mountain woman, very kind and gracious. All of her dye recipes were kept in her head although eventually a woman from Chicago recorded them for her in a small book.

During the 1948-49 school year Theresa decided to weave a tapestry for her senior project, even though she had never done any tapestry weaving before. In fact, she had only seen tapestries pictured in old books. She chose a cartoon that had received high marks in her design class, weaving it from the front, and guessing at how to accomplish the look she wanted. The school was so impressed with the result, "Le Coq" that they offered her a job weaving designs created by other students. The first year after being hired, she wove a second similar design of her own, "La Mer, La Terre, Le Ciel" since the other students were just beginning to create designs for tapestries.

Another student, Jean Bastien, received a scholarship to study at the Gobelins atelier in Paris. When he returned, he taught her and the other stu-

dents what he had learned in France. From then on she wove in the traditional high warp manner, weaving with the back of the tapestry facing her.

The students were very influenced by the imagery of Jean Lurçat. In all, she wove five designs. She had a full school year to work on each tapestry. The largest, "La belle Francoise" was 8' x 10'. It was so heavy when she cut it off the loom that she could barely carry it into the office to show the director. His only comment when she proudly displayed it to him was that he would let her know if they found any mistakes in it.

The tapestry turned out to be flawless but his attitude was so unrewarding that she walked home crying. It was a common occurrence to receive no positive support from the instructors. That made it hard for Theresa to have confidence in her work, and tended to produce a competitive climate among the students.

However, her tapestries did get recognition. The first of Theresa Conley's tapestries, "Le Coq" was included in the book mentioned previously. Also in 1966 the Willistead Art Gallery in Windsor, Ontario held an exhibit of tapestries created at the Fine Arts School. "Le Coq" and two other tapestries that she wove from other student's design, were displayed along with the work of the woman who replaced her as weaver, Jeanne D' Arc Corriveau.

In 1985 Theresa was asked by Corriveau to repair a large tapestry commission by the Hiram Walker Company. The tapestry was placed in a banquet room next to the Detroit River and the high humidity had damaged the linen used to sew the slits together. Corriveau suggested using fishing line for the repairs. See the photograph of Theresa next to the stylized tapestry that traces the whiskey making process from grain to bottle.



Theresa Conley after restoring the tapestry of Jeanne D'Arc Corriveau's

Theresa feels that part of the reason she did not pursue tapestry weaving after she was married was because of the lack of support given to her in art school. When her fourth child was ready for school, she started teaching in the Cooperative Pre-School in Garden City, Michigan. She had a flair for working with young children and teaching became her creative outlet. She retired in 1995.

In 1970 she and her family went to Penland for a visit. They asked her if she could teach during the summers. During the interview with director Bill Brown, when asked what she had to show for the interim fifteen years since she wove, she listed her four children. Apparently it was answer enough. She continued to teach there until 1977. It was an excellent opportunity for her children to take classes. One of her sons has become an artist.

She also taught adult classes at Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan at various times. The 1970s proved to be a challenging time to be teaching traditional tapestry techniques. The students were interested in more contemporary techniques but she was able to teach a little about tapestry. They wove a sampler on a narrow 5" high-warp setup incorporating methods of creating shapes, slits and working from a cartoon.

When asked what changes she has seen in tapestry over the last fifty years, she stated that tapestry seems to be in transition. There is less reliance on a cartoon or prescribed plan and a shift in emphasis away from weaving to more varied techniques. She

does believe that artists are approaching a way to express themselves that will be consistent with traditional weaving methods but that she will not see its fruition in her lifetime.

Once her husband retired they returned to North Carolina and celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 2003. Many of the people who have been active in Penland's administration over the years live in close proximity to the institution and continue to volunteer there as docents and tour guides. However, Theresa only occasionally conducts tours so it was fortuitous that Carole Greene came on a day when she was there.

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