



AMERICAN TAPESTRY ALLIANCE

The Handweavers Guild of Boulder: A Tapestry Study Group

The Handweavers Guild of Boulder (HGB) is celebrating its 50th year and will commence its seventh year of providing Guild members with a tapestry study group. Comments and reflections from past leaders of the group are presented in this article as part of ongoing ATA member education. Of particular interest is how the Boulder-based group addresses the needs of its study group members from the beginning to the professional tapestry weaver, as well as those who just enjoy the discussion of tapestry. Overall, HGB sponsors 10 specialty-focused study groups for its approximate 400 members.

The Creation of the Tapestry Study Group of the Handweavers Guild of Boulder (HGB) and Reflections by Sally Stevenson



Sally Stevenson, "Curl," 6 in x 10 in, 10 epi, 2009, photo: S. Stevenson. Cotton warp, various wefts



(R) Sally Stevenson, "Flame," 27 in x 18 in, 8 epi, 2006, photo: S. Stevenson. Cotton warp, hand-dyed wool weft

(L) Sally Stevenson, "Winter," 24 in x 18 in, 8 epi, 2012, photo: S. Stevenson. Cotton warp, hand-dyed wool weft

Marie Eckl and I found each other at a James Koehler tapestry workshop the year before forming the Tapestry Study Group in 2006. Over that year we formed a friendship while emailing about tapestry problems, lunching, critiquing each other's work and visiting local fiber events. We thought it would be great fun to find one other person to share in our exploration. Marie had previously tried, without luck, to find other tapestry weavers interested in a study group within the Handweavers Guild of Boulder. During that year, I joined one of the existing Weaving Study Groups. Although they were a delightful group of ladies, they just didn't speak the same weaving language that I did.

With the President's encouragement and help, we announced, at both the Guild monthly meeting and in the monthly newsletter, a meeting time and location for our study group. We were overjoyed when half a dozen ladies showed up! That day we discussed what we wanted to get out of this group. Motivation and connecting with people were mentioned. Supporting

each other at the individual's level of expertise was desired. The expertise level ranged from one lady with a virgin tapestry loom to others who entered juried shows. Specific learning topics of design and color were mentioned. Then we decided on a regular meeting time of once a month in members' homes with summers off. Since social interaction was important to this group, we decided on an optional brown bag lunch after each meeting.

From this point we put together meeting agendas, which the group agreed would meet our needs. We had several meetings where various members presented lessons on color and design followed by discussion. We also decided on an end of the year challenge topic of "butterfly." The piece could be done in any media. A facilitator sent out email reminders and made sure the meetings ran smoothly.

Within a couple years membership grew to around a dozen with normally three-fourths showing up at any given meeting. Over the years members changed, but four of the original members are still in the group. The group's numbers jumped significantly after we held a show. At this point the group grew too large to meet in members' homes, and so we rented space at the local yarn shop.

This group is successful because there is continual assessment of how to meet members' needs. Each fall there is a discussion of what the meetings for that year should look like based on the current members' needs. An overall goal is agreed on and planning for individual meeting content supports that goal. Each year offers different knowledge or activities based on the enthusiasm of that year's group. Different facilitators also keep the group from becoming stagnant, as each facilitator adds their own strengths to the group.

Sally Stevenson was the Handweavers Guild of Boulder Tapestry Study Group Co-Founder and Facilitator (November 2007-9) and Past President of Handweavers Guild of Boulder (2010-2011).

Elizabeth Shoeman on 2011-2012



Elizabeth Shoeman, "Rhythms," 28 in x 19 in, 2013, 8 epi, photo: E. Shoeman. Cotton warp, wool weft

Elizabeth Shoeman, "Waterfall," 30 in x 24 in, 8 epi, 2009, photo: E. Shoeman. Cotton warp, wool weft



Elizabeth Shoeman, "Winter Birches," 17 in x 25 in, 8 epi, 2014, photo: E. Shoeman. Cotton warp, wool weft

My own personal experience with the Tapestry Study Group of HGB has made me a big believer in the value of these small groups. My work has improved since I have been a part of this group and it is absolutely due to the help and support from tapestry study group members. I have attempted tapestry designs that I never would have had the courage to attempt without that encouragement and support.

Small study groups provide an opportunity to focus on a particular area of hand weaving. It is easier to make friends and feel supported in your work as part of a small group. This is particularly true if you are also a member of a large Guild. I know I would not be an active Guild member today if I had not joined the Tapestry Study Group.

I remember when I first joined the Tapestry Study Group of the Handweavers Guild of Boulder. I was certain I would be an outsider, that everyone would be a much better weaver than me. Instead, I found a small group of enthusiastic, supportive, and knowledgeable people. These were people who were happy to share their expertise with others. And not everybody was an expert weaver! We were learning together. And we continue to do so.

Elizabeth Shoeman was the Handweavers Guild of Boulder Tapestry Study Group Facilitator (2010-2012) and President, Handweavers Guild of Boulder (2013-2014 and 2014-15).

Programs for 2011-2012:

September: Planning for Year

October: Pre-Columbian Influences on Weaving

November: Cancelled Due to Weather

December: Holiday Brunch and Social

January: Asian Influences in Design

February: Inscribed Armenian Rugs

March: Bauhaus Design Influences

April: Color Overview/James Koehler's Convergence Workshop May Challenge Pieces and Show at Shuttles

Barbara Brophy on 2012-2013



Barbara Brophy, "Luminosity with Dovetail Join Exercise," 14 3/4 in x 14 in, 8 epi, 2010, photo: Barbara Brophy, Cotton warp, wool weft. James Koehler Studio Workshop



Barbara Brophy, "Triangles Exercise," 4 1/4 in x 11 in, 8 epi, 2009, photo: Barbara Brophy. Cotton warp, wool weft. James Koehler Studio Workshop

The Tapestry Study Group had 19 members and we met on the first Wednesday of each month at 9:30 a.m. in a member's home. The group has met in members' homes since its inception in November 2007. It's an informal group with a variety of talents and interests spread among our members.

Some members have degrees in fine art and textiles while others pursue tapestry as a hobby. Generally, we start with a little socializing and then move into show and tell, topic of the morning, and then close out the meeting with a social brown bag lunch. At our first meeting of the year

in September we decided on a challenge project and the monthly program topics. One member hosted each meeting, and another took on the program. The hostess usually provided coffee, tea, and some munchies. During the past year, we studied social and country influences in the past, such as Bauhaus, Pre- Columbian, Armenian, and Asian. This year, our focus was on techniques in tapestry design that produce specific artistic effects. The December meeting was a holiday brunch, and we just socialized and had a yarn exchange. Everyone brought a skein or cone of unwanted yarn in holiday decorated bags, and we drew numbers for the order of selection, with three allowed takings (exchanges) from other members' choices or opening a new yarn bag. It was a fun event! Five monthly meetings were designated for demonstration, such as colors and values, dyeing, and tapestry techniques.

Generally, the group meets September to May with possible road trips to galleries and art exhibitions during the summer months. This past summer some members gathered informally and watched the [Sylvia Heyden DVD](#), read the book, and had an informal study session. Others took on the [Archie Brennan DVD](#). On the website of the Handweavers Guild of Boulder, the tapestry study group has a [gallery](#) which showcases some of our member's work as participation was optional.

Barbara Brophy was the Handweavers Guild of Boulder Tapestry Study Group Facilitator (2012-2013) and an ATA Board Member of Education (2014-2016).

Suzanne Angevine



Suzanne M. Angevine, "Summer Night Sky," 16 in x 16 in, 6 epi, 2013, photo: Suzanne M. Angevine. Wool warp, wool and mohair weft

During the summer of 2012, I studied the DVDs by Archie Brennan. As a result, I chose to study weaving vertical lines for the Challenge in 2012-2013, wove the tapestry “Summer Night Sky,” and then presented line weaving techniques at the February program.

Suzanne Angevine is the Handweavers Guild of Boulder Tapestry Study Group Facilitator (2013-2014 and 2014-2015).

Barbara Brophy on “Show and Tell”



Barbara Brophy, “Angles Exercise,” 6 in x 11 1/4 in, 8 epi, 2008, photo: Barbara Brophy. Cotton warp, wool weft.

James Koehler Studio Workshop



Barbara Brophy, “Metal and Color Gradation Exercise,” 4 3/4 in x 11 in, 8 epi. 2010, photo: Barbara Brophy. Cotton warp, wool and stainless steel weft. James Koehler Studio Workshop

Show and Tell has included: Small demo looms, hand-dyed yarns, books, large pieces in various stages of completion (pictures or off the loom, unfinished, or finished), artistic pieces in another medium, cartoons (generally the member wants the group's critique and ideas), and fiber pieces purchased. The member hosting generally gave a tour of her/his studio space and yarn stash. Not everyone brings something for show and tell and some of our members haven't completed a project in quite a while and that's okay. No pressure or competition as we are informal and just love to have fun with our passion for tapestry!

Programs for 2012-2013:

September: Planning for Year

October: Color and Value Workshop

November: Tapestry Techniques

December: Holiday Brunch and Social

January: Tapestry Techniques: Color Effects

February: Tapestry Techniques: Lines and Eccentric Weft

March: Tapestry Techniques: Selvedges/Sara Swett Workshop April Makers' Day at Shuttles, Spindles and Skeins

May: Challenge Pieces: Tapestry Showing Growth in Technique

Barbara Brophy on Growth and Challenges in 2013



Barbara Brophy, "Tapestry Techniques Exercise," 7 1/2 in x 11 1/2 in, 8 epi, 2007, photo: Barbara Brophy. Cotton warp, wool weft. James Koehler Workshop December 2007



Barbara Brophy, "Aleatory Exercise," 7 3/4 in x 11 3/4 in, 8 epi, 2009, photo: Barbara Brophy. Cotton warp, wool weft. James Koehler Studio Workshop

In September 2013 the group moved to a larger space at *Shuttles, Spindles and Skeins* to accommodate a growing number of members. In January of 2013, 15 of 17 study group members participated in a Group Think Survey which asked for feedback on the following:

- Why do you attend the tapestry study group?
- What do you like most about our meetings?
- Are your expectations being met? If not, how could they better be met?
- Does the time and date work for you? If no, give alternative.
- Should the size of our study group be limited? If so, give thoughts on options of splitting group?
- Components of the meeting (Keep, No Opinion, Delete): Show and Tell, Brown Bag Lunch, Presentations, and Group Exhibit/Show
- Please share your additional thoughts and comments.

We found that most of our members' expectations were being met, such as technical education, sharing passion for tapestry weaving, group motivation, sharing of knowledge, a supportive environment, having a wide range of talents and skills, and worthwhile discussions. The group response was overwhelming positive to keeping our meeting components: Show and Tell, Brown Bag Lunch, Member-Led Educational Presentations, and a Group Exhibit/Show every two to three years. Comments included the value of the yearly challenge, more focus on tapestry, and extended, unstructured social time. The date and time of our meetings, the first Wednesday of the month at 9:30 a.m., worked for our members. A suggestion was made to develop group guidelines for a constructive feedback process. Responses on limiting the size

of our study group ran the spectrum: open enrollment up to the group-size limit, perhaps with a waiting list, offering two monthly meetings, or splitting the group along interests. The group struggled between loving the intimacy of a smaller group meeting in members' homes and desiring a designated meeting place with unlimited membership.

Suzanne Angevine on 2013-2014

A study group is most likely to be successful if the members have rather similar notions as to what they'd like to get from the group. It also helps if they have similar skill and experience levels, but these are less important. If group members want similar things, then activities, programs, learning opportunities, and such can all be organized in order to meet the group's interests.

If the group is somewhat more diverse, then a successful experience can still be had, but it takes more work to organize and more sensitivity on the part of all members. More experienced members need to tolerate programs that help less experienced members, while less experienced members need to learn to participate constructively in a structured feedback session that the more experienced members desire to advance their artistic capabilities. If actual technical interests diverge, then that too must be a point of tolerance.

Elizabeth Shoeman on HGB Study Groups



*Elizabeth Shoeman, "Dusk," 12 in x 12 in, 8 epi,
2010, photo: E. Shoeman. Cotton warp, wool weft*



(R) Elizabeth Shoeman, "Monument Valley," 21 in x 28 in, 6 epi, 2008, photo: E. Shoeman. Cotton warp, wool weft

(L) Elizabeth Shoeman, "Heliconia," 30 in x 16 in, 2013, 8 epi, photo: E. Shoeman. Cotton warp, wool weft

In 2013 study groups from the Handweavers Guild of Boulder presented their work to the general membership at our December meeting. It was wonderful to see all of the beautiful work our members are doing. Even more wonderful was listening to the groups talk about their work and their group. The obvious joy they took in each other and in working together was apparent.

Suzanne Angevine on the Tapestry Study Group Challenge Project

Our study group defined a Challenge project for 2013-2014 which helped us with the previously described needs. The group selected an abstract painting. One member did the work to divide it up into 16 squares, one for each of 16 participants. Each participant was free to choose their favored technique in which to render their portion of the picture, as long as it was the defined size. Several members used some techniques besides tapestry weaving, such as knitting, needlepoint, and even silk painting. This activity proved a stimulus for personal learning for

nearly everybody, regardless of his or her skill level. Showing completed squares as they were finished enhanced the Show and Tell portion of our meetings. The activity provided motivation for those who had trouble completing things, as they didn't want to let the group down. When the squares were all finally viewed together at the end of the year, the experience was thrilling to all, and clearly outstripped our expectations. This moment was captured in a photo taken after the squares were laid out in correct order on the carpeted floor, the day we first saw it together.



"Challenge 2014," each square 8 in x 8 in, various epi and techniques, 2014, photo: Suzanne M. Angevine. Based on the oil painting "Electric Prisms", Sonia Delaunay, 1914.

Participants: Suzanne Angevine, Milly Beavers, Janet Colville, Jenny Conway, Debbie Davis, Michael Delaney, Alice Gansfield, David Johnson, Lynn Lum, Alex Marriot, Marilyn Martynuk, Ivy Riggs, Elizabeth Shoeman, Sally Stevenson, Zoe Ann Stivers, Kathy Strathearn.