



# Tapestry Topics

*A Quarterly Review of Tapestry Art Today*

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Barbara Heller, "Nova Scotia Morning," 16" x 20" framed

## Barbara Heller Donates Tapestry to ATA

Imagine owning a tapestry by Barbara Heller, one of North America's most celebrated artist/weavers. Having one of her gorgeous pieces in your home may be closer than you think. ATA is thrilled to announce that Barbara has donated a tapestry entitled "Nova Scotia Morning" for the purpose of a very special anniversary fundraiser in 2007. Valued at over \$1,500, this beautiful landscape, measuring 16" x 20" framed, will be raffled among donors to ATA's Silver Anniversary Campaign at our Anniversary party on April 28, 2007. More information about this fundraiser will be coming in the mail soon, and we hope that all of our members will wish to contribute \$25 or more in exchange for the opportunity to win this lovely work. As Barbara explains, the tapestry is part of an ongoing series:

"For the past twenty years I have been weaving these small landscapes taken from my own photos, about this size at 8 epi. They are partly an exercise in looking, partly a way to use warp at the end of a big project, partly a way to hone skills in translating a photo to a tapestry and to get different light effects and portray different textures, partly a way to always have something on the loom. But mostly they are a response to the beauty of nature."

## ATA's Web Exhibition Program

is initiating a new feature entitled "Work Over Time". These shows will cover the development of an artist's work throughout her (his) career. The inaugural Work Over Time exhibition will focus on the multifaceted career of Barbara Heller, and should be on display on the ATA website by early December.

## Greetings, from Linda Wallace

Public relations and promotions are areas that most artists shy away from. It is an uncomfortable sensation to purposely set out to tell the world how great you are. Still, unless we do, we usually stay unknown. This fall, ATA has begun the process of developing a committee to look after publicity on behalf of the organization and, consequently, on behalf of tapestry weavers. Three wonderful women have stepped forward to help us with the creation of this new project: Beth Herbert, from Ontario, Canada and Pat Williams, from Georgia have volunteered to help develop and maintain our central database and Elaine Duncan, of British Columbia, Canada has agreed to be the coordinator. My thanks to all three of you.

As this area develops and grows, we plan to ensure a greater exposure for ATA's programs, scholarships, exhibitions and events. One of the first tasks the new committee has done is to send information to appropriate American and Canadian colleges and universities, letting them know about the American Tapestry Alliance Student Award. Mary Caitlin Sellers, the first recipient of this award, was featured in the Fall 2006 issue of *Tapestry Topics* and the Board of Directors is confident the next award will continue the level of excellence.

As you all know, Becky and I are both new to our positions as Co-Directors of ATA and to the board. Speaking personally, I am overjoyed to be contributing to an organization I have appreciated for years and I am in awe of what I have taken on. I am constantly amazed at the quality of the exhibitions, the website, and the programmes, especially when I realize how much is done by a small group of dedicated volunteers. Join us anytime or email me if you have ideas you think I should know about. I'll do my best to represent you all and I would love to hear from you.

## Greetings, from Becky Stevens

ATA has grown and developed into a professional organization successfully representing contemporary tapestry in the art world. It is instructive to occasionally look back to our beginnings. In 2007, a mile-



Sarah Swett, "Miss Havisham's Cook,"  
36" x 48", 2004 Photo by Marc LaMoreaux  
See article on page 10.

stone event, the 25th Anniversary of the beginning of the American Tapestry Alliance, will mark one of those opportunities. We invite you to join us for the SILVER ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION in San Jose, California on April 28, 2007. We will honor our founding members and celebrate the journey that individuals and the organization have taken to bring contemporary tapestry to an international audience.

We will gather at the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles where the ATB6 exhibition will be on display. A day long event with speakers, a dinner party, and SILVER ANNIVERSARY FUNDRAISER and raffle of a tapestry by noted artist, Barbara Heller, are part of the developing agenda. You will receive an invitation with the details early in the year. Mark your calendars now and reserve the day to join the celebration!

I hope some of you will be able to see ATB6 in Bellevue, Washington, where it opened at the Bellevue Art Museum on October 5, 2006. The exhibit concludes on January 7, 2007 and moves on to the last venue in San Jose, California in April 2007. Thank you to ATA members Mary Lane, Ellen Ramsey, Joyce Hayes and Linda Wallace who provided educational programming to support the exhibition.

Please make a note in your new roster that my email has changed to: [stevensreb@gmail.com](mailto:stevensreb@gmail.com)

If you were part of the early years of ATA write newsletter editor, Linda Rees, and share your memories of the formative times. Tell us how you were involved in ATA or what part ATA played in your development as a tapestry weaver. There will be a special Anniversary issue of *Tapestry Topics* printed

in color next Spring. Each issue of 2007 will examine the players and events of ATA's history and report current events. Please join us in saying.

Happy Birthday ATA!

Becky and Linda

**Thank you, Mary Lane** for suggesting the Transition as Design Element theme.

## Next Issue:

Our next issue will start our Anniversary coverage. For this first issue we will feature an article by Jean Pierre Larochette on the San Francisco Tapestry Workshop, and we invite members to submit commentary about Mark Adams, the workshop, or other California influences. **Deadline: January 15th.** Following that, the color issue will focus specifically on "Then and Now," ATA's early years, and the exhibits. **Deadline: April 1st.** We welcome contributions for both issues.

**Errata:** Three pieces of information were incorrectly typed in converting Nell Znamierowski's manuscript to the computer. The artist whose wife first taught Mary Merrill to weave was Werner Drewes. Mary took workshops from Boston Guild members in 1974 and 1976, not 1978. And Mary's first one-person exhibit was at Harrisville Design in October of 1993, not 1990 as typed. Also Nell accurately dated Mary's degree from Brown University as in the early 1980s.

## GOT PHOTOS?

Wanted: photos of ATA events or people from its early days. They are needed for an "ATA memory lane" bulletin board for the anniversary celebration on April 28, 2007.

When? **They are needed by March 15, 2007.**

Where? Please mail them to:

Sonja Miremont  
156 Shelina Vista Lane  
Petaluma, CA 94952  
(707) 778-8267

Questions? Email Sonja at:  
sonjabm1@comcast.net

## Transitions and Joins in Tapestry

By **Kathe Todd-Hooker**

Transitions and joins bring up several interesting concepts. When is a join a transition or when is a transition a join? A join unites two entities. A transition moves one thing into another. Are they the same? Maybe. I tend to think of joins in tapestry as being structural, not decorative, but hidden elements better not seen. On the other hand, a transition is meant to be seen, sometimes boldly, sometimes discretely, and has the ability to transform design elements.

By definition, tapestry is a plain-woven fabric, an unbalanced warp/weft structure with the possibility for discontinuous weft. As long as the weft can be discontinuous, it is in the nature of its construct to produce a slit. What is done with that slit is often defined by the weaver's culture and the use for the tapestry. If left alone, lengthy slits make many applications difficult or impractical for how the tapestry cloth is to be used. Even when the slits are on the diagonal and are composed of one pass, they create tiny openings that may be a problem visually, technically, and design-wise. Light can filter through the slits and can create shadows and changes in colour. Of course, sometimes in a plain field of colour, one might use these slits to one's advantage and create patterns with the turns and even pull the turns a bit to further emphasize the slit. I was taught that anything over five passes needs to be sewn or joined; fewer than five passes is at the discretion of the weaver/designer and determined by structural needs.

Joins and slit treatments can be divided into categories that are based on the construction of the join or how the slit is treated. For instance, in Middle Eastern weaving, tapestry is generally classified as (a)slit tapestry in which crenulated weave structures are found; (b)dovetailed tapestry; (c)single interlocked tapestry and (d) double interlocked tapestry. Scandinavian weaving, most notably Norwegian crenulations, is classified as dovetails-pointed or not pointed.

**Dovetailed or shared warp joins:** Weft passes on both sides of the slit, share a same warp and close the gap. The biggest problem is that the joins

continued...



Left: "Hill" turn, Right: "Valley" turn,  
Illustrated by Pat Spark

build up faster on the shared warp, making it necessary to fill in with extra passes. A good way to close a slit is a single, alternating, dovetail several passes apart. Frequently, the weft covering the dovetail in the next pass will hide the single dovetail, especially if the turn is placed in a valley thread. Dovetails will always have a saw-toothed edge where the passes turn around the shared warp. This edge or toothing can be accentuated by groups of passes alternating in each dovetail. When done in multiples without fill-in passes, the tooth becomes arrow shaped as the weft short-cuts the distance between warps. The corners at the shared warp are packed down by the next pass. The common denominator in all dovetailed joins is the shared warp. According to Mallet, "A structure can only be called a dovetail if warps are shared by wefts from two adjacent colour areas—that is, if the wefts overlap (Mallet, 81). They occasionally become a design element but are mostly used structurally. In Scandinavian weaving, they can become either design elements on borders, edges of interior slits, or even transition into an integral design element. In Middle Eastern weaving, dovetails are not usually used as a design element.

**Single, or clasped weft, and double weft interlock:** Interlocks, whether double or single, always take place between the warps and "encircle each other" (Mallet 81). Double interlocks are quite possibly the strongest of all the joins. Weft does not build up thereby lacking the bulkiness of the dovetail. Yarns are interlocked only on every other shed or half pass. The double join creates a ridge on the back of the tapestry that reverses the two colours on either side of the ridge and looks braided. The ridge makes a "cool" border transition if accomplished on the front of the tapestry. The tooth of interlocked edges can be controlled by starting the join a half pass up, thus not

having the two passes in the same shed. Another possibility is changing which weft turns around the other at the interlock point. Adjustments can also be made by tugging on the wefts after clasping, to place the interlock in a better position between the warps and to take up any extra weft. The interlocks can be spaced so there are fewer teeth. If the toothing is unattractive, a vertical twine created over the clasp join while in progress, gets rid of the teeth by covering them and can be a completely different coloured line running over the joins. Twining is much easier to do over single than double interlocks. How visible the line will be is determined by the weft thickness used in twining and its colour. Weft interlocks are a great way to stabilize pointy shapes that chase up the warp. However, interlocks mainly function as a structural element, rarely as a design element.

**Crenulated weave structures:** Crenulates are both a design element and technique for closing long slits. Crenulated structures are distinct in that they do not share warps or wefts. It is quite simply a form of slit tapestry used decoratively or to stabilize other slit areas. Sometimes these techniques are called zippers or combs because they feature staggered rectangles like the top of fairytale castles. Technically, structurally, and within design elements they serve to break up large slits of vertical borders. They create combs with constructs of any size using blocks the width of one or dozens of warps. Crenulations can be a single bar (pass), a series of bars, or a series of rectangles (multiple passes). They are often outlined by a single pass, soumak, a wrap, or a vertical 1-2 warp line and can be broken and stabilized by even smaller crenulations that will connect or join all of the areas together.

In Middle Eastern Kilim slit tapestry, where crenellation is used predominately, there are no interlocks, or dovetails or sewn slits. Slit tapestry has better drape and usually is not as stiff as interlocked and dovetailed tapestries of the same warp sett and weft. Stepped designs and crenulated structures produce strength and stability, allowing the stresses applied to tapestry to be taken up by the warp rather than the weft, which is generally the weaker of the two elements. Areas can be built up and not woven across the entire warp.

Kilims in some cultures, can create designs with heavily charged symbolic meaning where the combs can denote the sex of the weaver or number of children. Crenulations are used in Scandinavian weavings



as functional design elements, often incorporating interlocks or dovetails to close slits created by the crenulated joins or transitions, especially the toothed join. In Rölaken and Åkläe everything is interlocked wherever possible and all slits are closed. This is most likely because they were used in items that received hard wear such as upholstery and bed coverings. The crenulated areas are most often used as transition elements in borders, crowns, edges of flowers and teeth; areas that are not meant to disappear. It has been hypothesized that tapestry weaving was first introduced in Scandinavia by Viking trade with the Middle East, so there could be a crenulation connection.

Crenulated structures have an additional transitional function, the movement of colour, as in hatches and hachures. Hatches are one point, or bar, that can be used to create a bridge or intermediate colour with another colour area. Hachures are a little more sophisticated and can come in many shapes. They are usually at least 3 points, sometimes many more, and aid in the movement of colour in a similar way. In my distant past, an instructor said that it takes a series of six hatches or hachures to move perfectly from light to dark.. Crenulated weave structures can function in the same way as hatches and hachures. The only difference is they can have multiple points or turns that end on the same warp, creating rectangles rather than triangulated shapes. They can take many different shapes with an almost infinite number of variations. One could even posit that a one point hatch is actually the simplest of the crenulated weave structures.

**Miscellaneous join applications:** A bar join of fine invisible weft pass that weaves across a slit and is hidden by the next pass can stabilize the opening. An elongated join that weaves and wraps around behind a long one warp wrap connecting the two long slits on either side of the wound warp can be viewed on the back side of an Apocalypse tapestry. One of my personal favourites, is lacing between two slits to create an incredibly fine decorative structural line. I am sure there are many more slightly odd joins used to fulfill specific purposes that do not fit nicely into the above classifications.

Sewn slits and laced slits are a logical treatment although considered a weakness in the construct in many culture's weaving styles. Still, if done properly, sewing slits is a tried and true method to join two slits.

So, we are back to trying to decide when is a join a transition and when is a transition a join. A join makes one of two...A transitions moves something into another...

#### Bibliography

Mallett, Marla; *Woven Structures: A guide to Oriental Rug and Textile Analysis*, Christopher Publications, Atlanta; 1998 (another very good source by the same Author is her updated technical webpage)

Koppen, Maria Brekke; *Norwegian Tapestry Weaving*; Translated by Christine Spangler; Eikeskog Press, Silver Springs, MD; 2006

Todd-Hooker, Kathe; *Lines in Tapestry*, Fine Fiber Press, Albany, OR; 2006. (Good source for diagrams of some of the techniques mentioned.)

## Norwegian Dovetail Joins: Historical Significance from Several Perspectives

By Judy Ann Ness

The image of power and substance was conveyed to the European populace by the ownership of expensive, elaborate tapestries, but isolated and agrarian Norway did not have an aristocratic structure to motivate the commission and display of wealth via textile trophies. During a recent interview Christine Spangler, who has translated the book *Norwegian Tapestry Weaving* by Maria Koppen into English, elaborated on the cultural significance of the dovetail join in Norway and contextualized the discovery of a tapestry fragment found in the floor of an old Norwegian church, the "Baldishol Tapestry," which provided clues to thirteenth century weaving techniques in Norway:

The Baldishol tapestry employs the dovetail technique, a method of joining discontinuous wefts in tapestry that pre-dates the slit method employed after the renaissance in Flanders and France. The technique seems to have lasted in Norway long after the rest of Europe switched to the faster method. I think there may be some reasons for this that lie in the profoundly conservative peasant culture of Norway. Until recently Norway was an isolated and poor section of Europe. The harsh

continued...

geography and climate influenced its people in profound ways. Because subsistence agriculture and farming were so difficult there, people were not eager to accept new ideas that affected their tenuous livelihood. This conservative attitude seems to have spilled over into other realms of life. It could explain the preference for the older dovetail technique over the newer slit method in tapestry.

A second reason for this attitude may lie in the dovetail technique itself. The dovetail junctions are fundamentally more structurally sound than those of slit tapestry. Tapestry is a time-intensive activity, and in a society such as rural Norway where people worked all the time to stay fed, clothed, and sheltered, an activity that took that much time had to be practical as well as decorative. Tapestries constructed with dovetails are stronger and would stand up to use on a table, in a sleigh or on a bed in addition to their decorative use on a wall.



Kristin Sæterdal, "Very Rare Figures Seen on this Earth" 29" diameter each, woven in the traditional Norwegian way with the long fibered fleece. (See page 15 for more about Kristin) Photo by the artist

This conservative worldview persisted in Norway late into the twentieth century. So it was very natural that, when Maria Koppen, Sunnøve Lønning and Else Halling revived Norwegian tapestry after the second world war, they would look to the old classic techniques from medieval times. The Baldishol tapestry from the thirteenth century was an artifact of national pride and a suitable model

for technique. (An earlier revival in the late 19th century had also looked to the past to find technique. In that case, Frida Hansen and Gerhardt Munthe appropriated the interlock technique from the west coast of Norway which had been used for bed coverlets. The Baldishol tapestry was found, cleaned and exhibited for the first time around 1900.)

Modern tapestries are rarely called upon to serve a practical purpose. However, the dovetail techniques are exciting, because they offer an entirely new vocabulary of expression in tapestry design.

The serrated appearance of the joins gives the designer another element to work with that can enhance imagery. It's consistent use also offers a unifying element that can hold the artwork together visually. And dovetailing lends a certain folk-art feel to a tapestry in many cases." (Spangler-Ness phone interview, Sept 15, 2006)

For the Norwegians, "Form follows function" from the sheep to the yarn and to the choice of joins. Practicality traditionally proved the dovetail a superior join, seen as stronger than the slit method for their intended end use. Furthermore, its physical properties may be decoded as an interpretation of the cultural values of tradition-bound rural weavers. Marta Juuhl, a Norwegian weaver and fiber arts instructor, offers this perspective of Maria Brekke Koppen and her contribution to understanding the dovetail join.

... Maria Koppen taught for many years at the Norwegian College of Applied Arts, Statens Lærerhøgskole i forming Oslo. Her class was the only place in Norway specializing in tapestry weaving. Many of our contemporary textile artists attended Koppen's tapestry classes. Her books about Norwegian tapestry weaving are of great significance. She wanted to show the difference between Norwegian and European techniques, and the close connection between the weaving and the wool from the Norwegian Spælsau sheep. Norwegian tapestry weaving is a little different from French and Flemish tapestry weaving, mostly due to our wool. The sheep in central Europe have a much softer wool than our old Norwegian sheep, the spælsau. Our medieval tapestries were made by wool from the spælsau. and our contemporary tapestry weavers also use spælsau wool (spun by Norwegian companies, Norsk Kunstvevgarn and Rauma ullvarefabrikk). The spælsau has both a

long-fibered (guard) wool on top, and a very soft wool underneath. The long fibres cover the soft, short wool with the short fibres to keep the sheep warm. When you spin yarn for making tapestries you only use the long fibres. So here comes the explanation for using the dovetail technique. The yarn with the long fibres is very stiff and has a lustre (glans in Norwegian) which is everlasting. So the dovetailing technique has probably been developed because that is the most suitable way of dealing with the long fibres from the spælsau. (Ness-Juuhl email interview Sept 27, 2006.)

Ellen Kjellmo, Norwegian textile scholar and author of *Båtrya i gammel og ny tid*. (Orkana Forlag: Stamsund, 1996) reports in an email interview, Sept 26, 2006, that the dovetail join is the most common technique used in Norwegian tapestry weaving, and she is not aware of tapestry weavers in Norway who do not employ the dovetail, including well-known and highly respected Norwegian tapestry weavers Rigmor Bove, Else Marie Jacobsen, Hannah Ryggen, and Ragna Brevig.

As an aside, if we look at the tapestry from the American Southwest, the dovetail join is used by Native American weavers. Noted Diné textile artist and teacher DY Begay offers her experience in learning to weave the traditional Navajo way:

...this is my learning... I learned to use some of the weaving techniques by "watching", I had no formal introduction to weaving. Some of the things that I heard as a young girl was, "hitch them together" to show the designs. The yarns will "hold together" and this will be your guidance to elaborate on your designing.

It is reported by some Navajo (Diné) weavers that the dovetail join is not the strongest join, and so the 'hook' or interlock join is preferred. It can be noted that sometimes the dovetails on old Native weavings are the first places to abrade, perhaps due to the stress of the warp on the shared wefts. The Navajo Churro sheep have a 'primitive' fleece (i.e. related more closely to wild sheep, which have an ability to survive without human husbandry), and is double-coated as is the Norwegian spælsau. The apparent difference is that the Norwegian tapestry yarn is spun from the long fibers only, whereas the Diné have carded and spun both the long and short fibers together for their yarn. Perhaps the use of dovetail in both cultures is influenced by the common need for sturdy textiles in

a harsh environment, and the physical response of the yarn that encouraged its application. Dovetail design expression lends variety to a weaver's options, a welcome addition anywhere. The Norwegian tapestry techniques owe much to their coverlet traditions and a stunning similarity between Native Southwestern weaving and Norwegian coverlet weaving can be seen by referencing *The Woven Coverlets of Norway* by Katherine Larson, Univ. of Washington Press, Seattle & London. 2001.)

It could be speculated that the stylized dovetail technique, judged as a less refined folk-art technique when compared to the painterly joins of hachure and slit of the European weavers, has its place even in the lengthy controversy of art vs. craft. Considering the expression of culture and personal experience, combined with exceptional technique, as criteria of aesthetic for 'fine art,' perhaps this assessment is somewhat inaccurate. European tapestry weavers followed a strict interpretation of a master painter's cartoon, without much opportunity to participate in the larger scope of the design, making their mark within the thousands of minute decisions that contribute to the finished piece. The dovetail join as seen in antique Norwegian tapestry does offer a coarser interpretation of line which boldly lends a distinctive abstract quality, quite modern in its expression. Although traditional Norwegian tapestry weavers might have followed themes of a moral or religious nature, the woven construction of the piece as it was ultimately expressed, perhaps allowed the Norwegian weaver a truer individual interpretation in the art-making process.

*Mange takk.* Or "Many thanks" in Norwegian

## **The American Tapestry Alliance Student Award**

ATA has created the American Tapestry Alliance Student Award to encourage study in the field. The Award will be presented annually to a student enrolled in a college fiber program. The award will consist of \$250 and a year's student membership in the American Tapestry Alliance. The winner's work will be featured in the ATA quarterly newsletter, *Tapestry Topics*. Guidelines for submission are available on the website [www.americantapestryalliance.org](http://www.americantapestryalliance.org), under Education.

## Borders

By Kathy Spoering

In Edith Lausanne's book, *Great Tapestries*, a border is defined as a "decorative motif of varying importance framing certain tapestries." Barty Phillips tells a bit more in her book, *Tapestry*, saying:

The border can be a useful indication of the date of a hanging. In the early fifteenth century the picture on a tapestry tended to be finished off at each end by a vertical feature such as a tree or a column. By about 1500, this vertical element had developed into a true border or 'frame.' Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tapestries are often recognizable by their enormously wide borders, whereas during the eighteenth century the borders became narrower, often imitating carved wooden picture frames. By the nineteenth century, borders had been abandoned, except on work that was deliberately designed in an older style.

When I first began weaving tapestries, I had not seen any of these early tapestries to which Phillips refers. I had seen only one tapestry, and it did not have borders. Yet I somehow felt that my tapestries should have them. Perhaps it was because all the art I

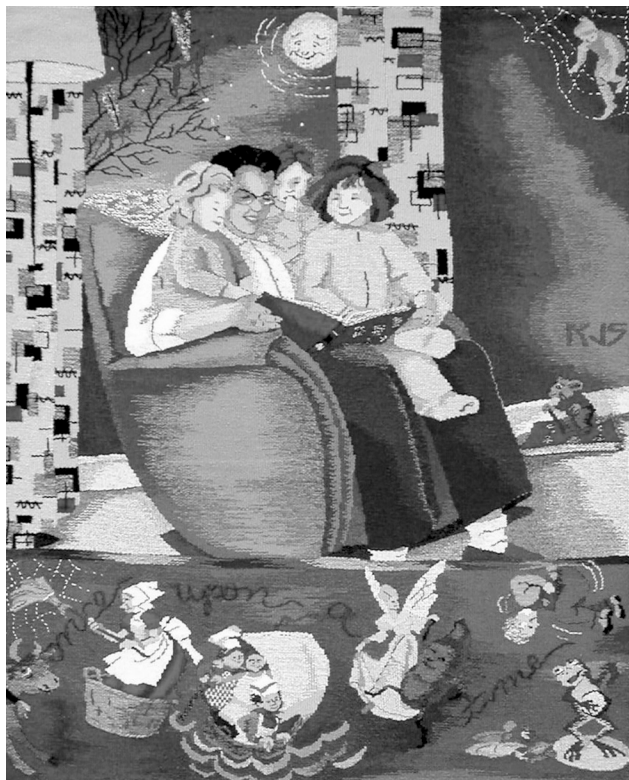
had seen had something surrounding it, setting it apart from its environment, luring the viewer in from one side, and trapping the eye from escape on the other. Of course, because these matt and frame "borders" did not work with the fluid medium of tapestry, for my early tapestries I mounted the woven piece on heavy canvas or fabric, leaving several inches of the fabric showing all around the tapestry, and embellished this border with stitching, dyeing, or painting to tie it in with the woven image.

After a few years of creating mounted tapestries, I saw other exhibited tapestries and realized that the woven piece could stand on its own, without artificial "frames". So I abandoned this style of border. I wove unbordered pieces for a number of years. Then, while designing a maquette for a small tapestry, I discovered its proportions were not pleasing, and it needed to be longer. Not wanting to alter what I had already designed, I decided to simply add the needed length to the bottom, and create a border for the design.

I discovered that I loved that little 5 inches of border! I felt about it how a writer feels about adjectives. The design was complete without the border, the story was told. But it was enhanced and became much more interesting with a border.

Shortly after weaving this tapestry, I went to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. There I saw the amazing fifteenth and sixteenth century tapestries Barty Phillips was referring to. I felt an immediate affinity with those tapestries, and most especially with their glorious borders. They are all that I ever believed a tapestry should be; they are narrative tapestries, stories in fiber, contained within decorative and beautiful borders. From that point on, I have used borders in most of my work.

In the tapestries of my Heritage series, I used only a border along the bottom edge. Again, I used the border as an "adjective", as a place to add elements or descriptive details to the story my tapestry was telling. After weaving the Heritage series, a second visit to the Gardner Museum, emboldened me to begin putting borders all around the four sides of the tapestry body. I wanted the four tapestries of the Seasons series to have the stylized feel of Arts and Crafts pieces, such as tapestries by William Morris that relied heavily on decorative borders. Therefore, I added stylized and strictly decorative side borders, and an arched upper section. Having four borders added greatly to the area that I could



"The Big Green Chair," 56" x 36" Heritage Series



Kathy Spoering, "Tending Peace," 56" x 36"  
Seasons Series

fill with adjectives. It also added a number of technical problems to the weaving.

Borders along the sides need to be woven in such a way that they are joined to the rest of the tapestry as you weave, so they will not separate either while weaving or when displayed. While deciding how I wanted the side borders to be joined to the body, I went back and looked closely at the Gardner Museum tapestries again to see how those huge borders were joined. The immense pieces were woven sideways, with the joins along top and lower borders when hung. The weavers had used a triple dovetail join that was barely discernable at the fine sett they used. I observed that the join was clearly a strong one that I could use. At my sett of 12 epi, I would allow the viewer to see the ornamental little jogs the weft took back and forth. It became a part of the decorative style of the side borders for the series.

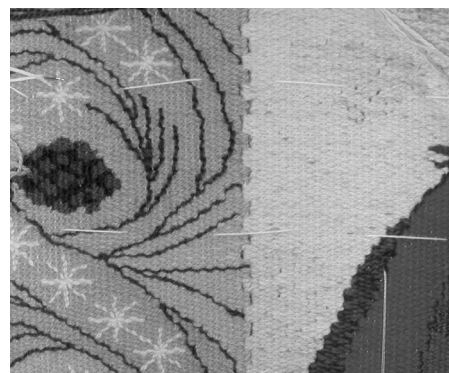
Even earlier, working on Heritage tapestries that were woven sideways, I chose to use a decorative dovetail (technically not a true dovetail since the alternation does not overlap) or a diamond shaped join as well, for strictly personal preferences. The main reason is that, rather than weaving all the way across the tapestry with every pass, I prefer to weave shapes and areas separately. I do 'play catch-up' every inch or so as the tapestry progresses. If I were to use an interlock join where the side borders and the tapestry body meets, I would need to weave at least these adjoining sections pass-by-pass, at the same time. I confess that this style of weaving wears on me, boring me. But, since the decorative join only changes direction every 3-6 full passes, I can weave shapes for at least that long before having to catch up with adjoining areas.

The other reasons I prefer decorative joins is that there is no weft buildup along the join area, and because having the join spread over 3-5 warps tends to keep that area from losing the correct sett along the join more easily than a single warp join does.

Weaving borders on your tapestries does add technical challenges to your work at the loom. But, if the stories you weave can benefit from adjectives, as mine seem to, borders can be a wonderful addition. They can be filled with symbols, styles, and anecdotes that you want the viewer to associate with the content of your tapestry.

As Strunk and White say about adjectives in the writer's classic

*The Elements of Style*, "the adjective has not been built that can pull a weak or inaccurate noun out of a tight place." In the same way, borders are only meant to enhance and embellish a tapestry. The content of the tapestry's body needs to have its own strength, both technically and visually, to be able to support the addition of borders.



Kathy Spoering, Close-up of decorative join of "Winter" in progress.

## Back to Borders

By Sarah Swett

The noun: tapestry. The adjectives: pictorial, painterly, narrative. My work has been described as all of these, I have long sought the perfect adjective with which to describe my weaving, but never, until recently, did I consider the possibility of a different noun. A year and a half ago, however, after over sixteen years of longing for my loom on a daily basis, I could hardly bear to be near it.

I wove, and then in disgust, unwove the first few inches of three different tapestries on that warp. By the fourth attempt I resorted to shameless bribery. The bribes, though not thrilling, were moderately effective. It was not until I gave myself permission to quit when this tapestry was finished, and noticed how relieved I was, that I could finish it with any sense of tranquillity and without further graft. I did not, until then, know that I wanted to stop weaving.

I was longing to paint. Other than a few hideous and overworked watercolours, I have previously spent almost no time with pigment and brushes, so the relative ease with which my pictorial, narrative, painterly images slipped into this new medium was disconcerting. It was clear that the images themselves did not care what medium they were in. But did I? Has my work over the past 16 years been about the weaving or about the stories?



"Red Nun," 35" x 35", 2005 Photo by Marc LaMoreaux

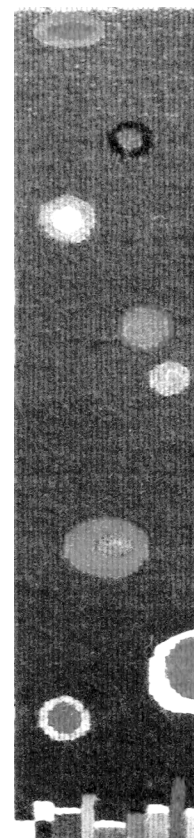
If one is to go by this lengthy prologue, the answer is the stories. If asked last week, I would have agreed with that, would have said with sorrow, that as a maker of images I am a slave to what Peter Harris, in an earlier issue of this newsletter, called "my stubbornly pictorial imagination." (*Tapestry Topics*, Summer, 2005, p.11)

Today, however, I have changed my mind. I have missed weaving—that lovely feeling of tugging on leashes, tapping the yarn into place, watching the colours grow and interact in the clean, crisp, slightly fuzzy way that only yarn can. The desire to begin again started to pull at me, circle around my brain, whisper in my ear... "Warp your loom, warp your loom." But what to weave? With drawings lining up to become paintings and stories demanding to be written, nothing insisted on being woven—nothing, that is, but the yarn itself. I wanted shape, colour, improvisation, room to play. I wanted borders.

I missed my borders. So a few days ago I screwed galvanized pipes together, put on a five inch wide warp and wove a border all by itself. It was fantastic—like being 11 years old and climbing a tree. The warp was covered in a few short afternoons.

I warped my loom again and wove a second one; it was even more fun than the first and the selvages were straight. But, is a border a border when there is nothing for it to contain? What do I call it when there is no pictorial image? What noun? What adjective? Does it matter?

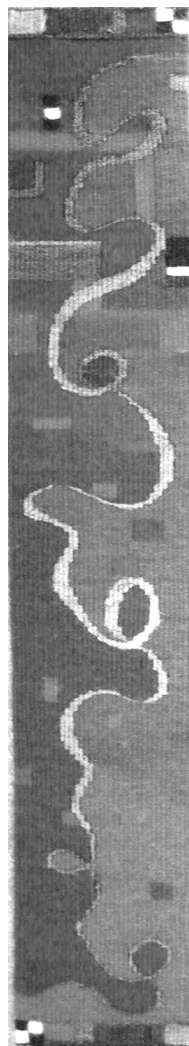
Borders have always embodied the part of weaving that drew me to looms in the first place—the physical acts of interlacing weft with warp and putting colour next to colour. They are the places in each tapestry in which the air vibrates and values dance with no pre planning on my part. Though I remain connected to the real life of the narrative image, in a border I am free to forget the rules of composition and to trust what I know to be true at that moment.



Sarah Swett,  
"Indigo  
Narrows," Photo  
by the artist

My borders are not where I live, but the fenced back yard in which I can build paths and grow riotous wildflowers, where I can mow, or not. Sometimes they are a natural extension of whatever story I am telling inside, or they merge, oozing from outside in so that I do not have to waste any time closing doors (or sewing slits). Sometimes they are clearly defined. It all depends upon the mood—of the image, of the border, of the weaver—me.

Weaving the bottom border is my path into the image itself. Thanks to the wonderful nature of tapestry wherein one starts at the bottom and moves upward, the border MUST come first. And as my cartoons are black and white and I do not choose any colours until I am at the loom, they also define and inform the mood and the colour temperature of the narrative.



Sarah Swett,  
"Line Between  
Pink and Red."  
Photo by the  
artist

The very first thing my borders do is define the palette. Across the bottom of each tapestry, I make a line of small blocks of colour, and do not begin to build anything above that until they feel right. Selecting that very first ball of yarn is always a thrill, since every colour that I will weave for the next few months will necessarily relate to it. This allows the yarn to be in charge, and for instinct to come before intellect. And because I do not weave selvedge to selvedge, I can focus on that colour, and each one that follows, making sure that each belongs before proceeding to the next.

I almost never use joins. Warp interlock, weft interlock, double weft interlock—I have tried them all and, like weaving selvedge to selvedge, they do not suit me. I do not multi task well, and joins, by their very nature, insist that I deal with what is going on in two places at once when I want to stay in one—either this colour or that, the border or the narrative, the garden or the house. Am I weeding or cooking? Every join is a pause, like the

opening and closing of a door, when I move from one area to another.

Why bother when one can sew a few slits? To avoid joins I use three kinds of borders: the long slit border, in which the border and the image are entirely separate until stitched together (Miss Havisham's Gardener and Red Nuns), partial borders, in which there is a long slit but it goes only part way along the image (The River Wyrld and The Hut On The Rock) and what I call stair step, or short slit borders, in which the border elements move in and out of the main image in small blocks or stairs. (Fresh Peppermint Tea and Miss Havisham's Cook). This last method is something of a compromise. There are no slits to sew but it allows me to "mow half the lawn before being called away to the phone". Once there, I can give my focused attention to my friend's enormously important dilemma.

I worry about my images—I do not want them to look cramped or to feel claustrophobic, so the size and style of a particular border is related to the size and the content of the cartoon. If the borders are too big or threaten to infringe on the image I tend to choose the second or third style. If the image wants a lot of space between it and the world, I tend to choose the first. This part is merely instinct, a reaction to the cartoon and the mood, and probably to the day on which I start.

Although I have put a few borderish elements into my paintings, they generally have frames and do not seem to demand borders as tapestries do. Stories frame themselves—either between the covers of books or with nice introductions and conclusions. When my images are all ensconced on paintings or in stories, then, there is no nice yard in which to play. I have missed that freedom—or did, until I warped my loom the other day and began to weave these long, narrow tapestries that are neither pictorial nor painterly, but simply about colour and shape and selvedges, the only narrative the stories that I tell myself as I weave.

These borders are entirely separate from the story on my computer, the painting on the easel. There are no slits to sew and certainly no joins. I turn to them with relief and pleasure when I have run out of words and used up my paint. My arms are out of shape so I cannot weave for hours and hours as in the past, but on a narrow warp the colour evolves relatively quickly and I can touch a great deal of yarn before my

continued...



biceps begin to ache or one of my characters starts stamping her foot and shouting that she has a story to tell and that I had better write it down, damnit, or she's not going to tell me what happens next.

As to describing/defining it... do I have to? As my muscles regain their strength, I want to skip the categories altogether and say when pressed, "I don't know, wait a sec, I'm busy. I have this skein of pond scum green that wants to swirl so very badly. I'll be there in a minute... or two... or five."

## Slits as Kilt Allusion

By Joan Baxter

"Migdale Kilt" is a tapestry designed to tell a story about a landscape and a history to convey ideas of absence and belonging, very common themes in Highland Scottish history and deeply imbedded in our psyche as Scots. As well as being a big technical experiment, it re-visits and draws together several persistent themes which have run through my work for many years. Every once in a while we make a tapestry which draws all our themes together in a complete and satisfying way. I call them milestone tapestries. "Migdale Kilt" is one of my milestones.

I wanted to develop a "clothing as landscape" theme started about a year earlier. I had woven several "Pine Forest Scarves" using digital photographs as the main weft component on a tie dyed woollen warp. Developing the idea further, I started to think about clothing constructed from a single uncut length of cloth—the kilt, sarong, and sari being obvious examples.

I had also used the idea of checked cloth within the designs of a group of work entitled "Landscapes of Home" based around my local terrain and the archaeology within it. One of the first elements of these designs was to create a series of horizontal and vertical bands of colour which represented the colours of the landscapes and also alluded to different zones within the landscape, in vegetation, layers of history, time of year and so on. While working on the series, I was already thinking about tartan as a way of expressing a landscape.

The final theme in "Migdale Kilt" is water. I use water a lot in my imagery. It represents a gateway or

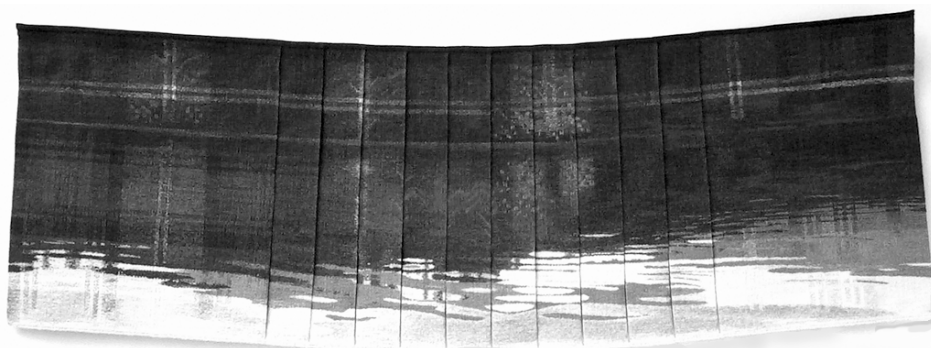
gives the impression of transience or transparency. The ancient Celtic peoples of Scotland worshipped water as a medium of transcendence, even sacrificing human victims by ritual drowning. I believe that they appreciated the duality of water—its capacity to both reflect the world back at the viewer and to be transparent, showing the viewer what lies beneath the surface. I often use ripples to denote the passing of time, water washing over the past. Also it has come to be a symbol for the passing of a people, the trickling away of a population from the landscapes I weave.

The first inspiration for any of my thematic tapestries is always the feeling I get when visiting the places, walking in the hills and valleys around where I live, searching for material remains of previous inhabitants. Usually my initial ideas are not visual but a series of somewhat unconnected thoughts and impressions - a collection of things which may or may not appear directly in the finished piece but which make up the research towards it. I have great difficulty getting my ideas into any sort of visual form prior to weaving them into a tapestry. Although art trained, I find any of the usual design media almost totally irrelevant to tapestry. However, recently, I have found digital images and Photoshop to be useful tools along the way in the designing process.

I rarely have one finished design to work from; it is usually a series of drawings and collages which all contribute towards the finished work. During the design process I alternate between working on paper and sampling on the loom. My samples are to work out which colours are going to be the "core" colours of the piece and how I am going to dye them. But mostly, samples are the best preparatory process to clarify my ideas and get my head into gear for the 'real' designing which only happens during the weaving of the piece. I can only start the tapestry once I have identified its compositional form and something approaching the colours I will use. I joke about my samples being necessary to show me what I am not going to do in the tapestry or so that I can do better in the tapestry.

At first as I began to think about the design for "Migdale Kilt," using photographs, the remembered atmosphere of the place, and examples of the different versions of the Sutherland tartan, I assumed I would be weaving the tapestry as a normal rectangle with the kilt allusions simply there as fragments of the tartan. However, as I began to think about the kilt as a





Joan Baxter, "Migdale Kilt," 28" x 82" Photo by the artist

garment, and how it felt to wear a kilt, the swirl of the pleats and the actual shape of it, it suddenly occurred to me that I could use slits to emphasize the pleats and the idea of using slits to physically form the piece into a kilt-shaped tapestry quickly developed.

This was the first time I had attempted to weave real tartan and I have to say it was pretty slow as it contained so many verticals which needed to be joined without creating any more slits. I did enjoy the fact that the tartan was a "counted," rather than an inked on, element of the design. It seems in some ways a more honest and weaverly way to work.

The tapestry is joined at the bottom by a row of reversed knots, then divided into the two flat end sections, which represent the parts of the kilt which wrap over each other at the front when worn; and the central "pleated" section on the back and sides, further divided into 10 cm strips. The slits continue from above the knots right up to the top. The tapestry was woven as a rectangle only it had slits running all the way up through the design. After the piece was cut off and the ends finished, I stitched each pleat down to the one beside it, overlapping it by four warps at the top.

I was not overly concerned about the slits in the structure of the piece since I have woven pieces in panels before and had no real problems with the design joining up and all the pieces coming out the same length. I always weave them as if they are one piece, all at the same time. I am an experienced weaver and I know that my weaving and my beating down is pretty even—still, it would not be a project for a beginner! I have found over the years that working on what most tapestry weavers consider to be quite a slack warp is the best way to control surface, edges

and density of weave. It sounds a bit counter-intuitive, but a very tight warp and a rigid reed can conceal problems caused by too little weft or too little beating down and only when the tension is released and the tapestry has had a chance to relax, does the true state of the weaving reveal itself. A slack warp gives you a much truer impression of how the tapestry will be when the tension comes off and it is much easier to beat more weft into the fabric to ensure against shrinkage.

What did concern me, and it was something that I simply could not know until the piece was finished, was whether the tapestry would hang flat once the pleats were made, or whether the bottom of the tapestry would flip forward at the corners because of the slight curve created by the pleating. Therefore, I decided to make the curve very shallow. Without being able to hang it properly before the pleats were finished, I just had to make my decision about how much to overlap the pleats and go with it. I have subsequently woven another tapestry using this slit method, "Midwinter Naver" but this tapestry is joined at the top, not the bottom, and the panels open out at the bottom, like a fan. The kilt allusions, although more subtle, are still there.

One really wonderful thing which happened during the finishing of the tapestry was that I began to recall how my grandmother, a tailor, stitched down pleats in kilts she was making. Suddenly I knew how to do it from a childhood memory I did not know I had, triggered by doing the same thing myself more than forty years later. A lovely gift from my grandmother to me.

## Point of Contact = Point of Power

By Mary Zicafoose

I weave large scale, graphically minimal tapestries. The sense you get from viewing my work is that it contains a significant depth of saturated color and equally significant areas of wide-open space. This also holds true for the landscape of Nebraska, where I have lived and woven for the past ten years.

The contemporary tone of my work revolves around my pre-occupation with "point of contact," or better said, "transition." This point of contact is made when wide-open space encounters a stripe, design element, or another large field of color. From observing nature we know that there is an enormous amount happening in a condensed space whenever land and sky or water and sky meet. These are called horizon lines and they contain very specific horizon issues. Similar issues exist in tapestry and painting, when blue meets yellow, and black greets red.

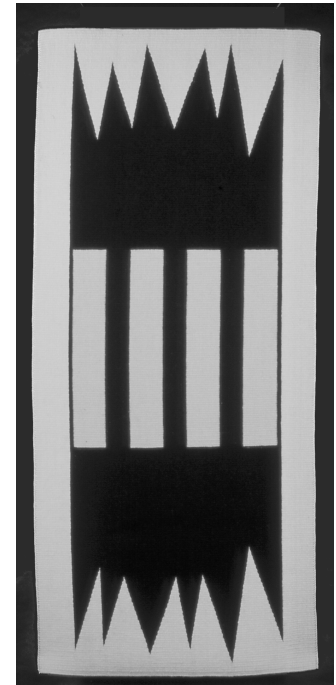
When I first began weaving rugs, well over 20 years ago, I was very excited and distracted by so many aspects of the weaving process. I was newly in love with all of it, the materials, the design, and the sheer scale of the product. Looking back on my older work, you will notice "hills and valleys", rather than clean sharp lines, within the spatial transitions between forms.

The great moment of my awakening to the visual importance of point of contact happened years ago at a Jean Pierre Larochette and Yael Lurie workshop in Taos, New Mexico. Jean Pierre masterfully, yet understatedly, demonstrated how to weave a perfectly straight horizontal line, peak-less and valley-less. The rest is history, as they say. I have not intentionally peaked or valleyed since.

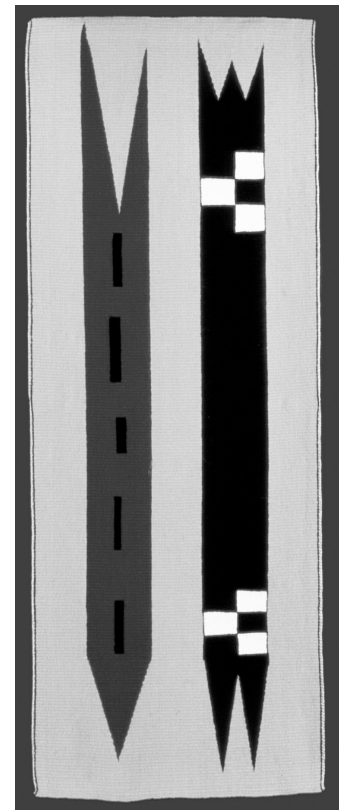
Even more than a point of contact, the juncture where two colors touch is quite literally a point of tension, dissension, and power. Each color bends, to some degree, to the influence of the other, each shape concedes a bit to what it is opposing. Because of this, I often separate the two dueling areas with a very fine sharp line of yet a third intensity, be it complementary or contrasting.

In reference to the minimal nature of my work, when a piece contains perhaps only 8-10 points of contact, they have got to be technically well executed and they must have something to say. The transition sequences must have found their distinct voices, not just be thinking about clearing their throats, or becoming something only mildly significant in the overall message of the composition.

My attention to transitional detail also holds true for the beginning and end of a piece, which really are the ultimate transitions. Literally, the very first woven shot sets the tone for the entire tapestry and the last shot ends the story. I purposefully do not fold back the top and bottom of my tapestries to create a hem or a sleeve for mounting. This is a very conscious aesthetic decision that allows every shot to be accounted for, exposed, and part of the energetic dialogue of the front of the piece. Nothing disappears around the corner, or is said behind the viewers back. All my pieces begin and end with a very fine line of color, call it a hint, a memory, or just a nuance of a thought. This gesture draws the tangible line between the manifest and the unmanifested, the idea and the object, the dream and the doing.



Mary Zicafoose, "Barn Burning," 68" x 30" 2003



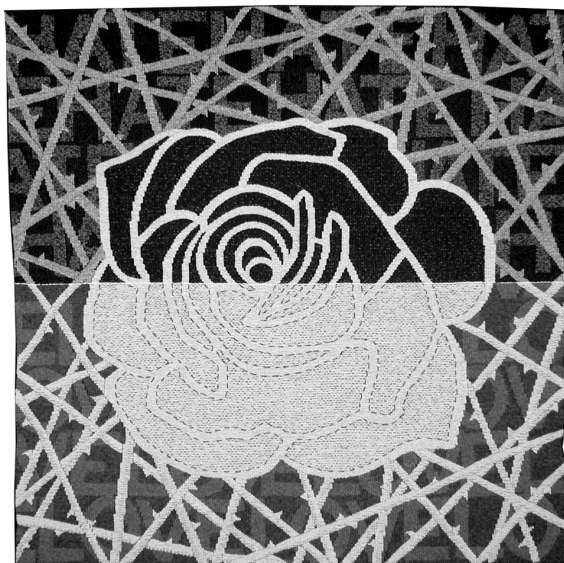
"The Voyagers," 62" x 23", 2004. On loan to the United States Embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia.

## ATB6 Artists on 'Transitions'

By Linda Rees

The composition of many tapestries in ATB6 rely dramatically on transitions. I decided to contact artists for a few images that I particularly wanted to know about in more depth.

**"Rift" by Ellen Ramsey** is obviously about polarity, Love and Hate, but while there is no melding in the middle, there is a continuity of banded lines uniting the thorny and the delicate nature of the rose and binding the disparate sides. Not only is the piece strong in design but technically very well executed.



Ellen Ramsey, "Rift," 35" x 35" Photo by Scott Ramsey

Knowing from experience how challenging it is to achieve attractive turns in a pattern area such as the lower half of the rose, where one color is used only every three or six picks, and the edges of the shape are free-form, I asked Ellen to share her insights.

When I took classes from Mary Lane, she always said that when faced with this decision of what method to use, consider the image—slit between objects in an image have a crisp edge but interlock between shapes within an object if you want it to appear "whole." This was given to me as a maxim. The bottom part of the rose, where the red runs through as a single pick, is woven from one side of the rose to the other. This part pulled in as a result, and controlling the slits at its border was a major issue. Something I had not realized would

happen. The black half of the rose uses double-weft interlock where black meets white. The background is full of slits everywhere. This part was woven in small areas at a time. Anyway, if what I did works (and an experienced weaver may never have done it this way), it is partly just luck. I had the feeling from start to finish of impending disaster because of all the technical issues—none of which I had ever worked through before. I call it "My Big Fat Learning Curve."

**"Possession: Impact/Imprint #1," by Jane Kidd**, unequivocally "divides and conquers" the surface, but with a delicate and cheerful beauty. (See photo on back page.)

The tapestries in the "Possession Series" including "Possession: Impact/Imprint #1," explore the implications of accumulating, collecting, and displaying objects from material culture and the natural world. They explore the impact of the human desire to possess and control our bodies, our environment and our histories. I use a compartmentalized format to separate distinct spatial and conceptual areas. I present the collection of images and symbols in this disembodied frame to separate them from their familiar environment and draw into question their identity as natural objects or objects from the material culture. I want the images to seem confined in distinct pictorial fields as if collected, analysed and recorded as data.

I reference a wide range of historical and cultural influences looking for approaches associated with the technical language and visual pattern of weaving. I look for maximum detail with the minimum of tedious joins. To this end I often employ auxiliary threads that are linked into the woven structure but can work more freely on the woven surface. The inventiveness and skilled hands of the Coptic weavers have provided a wonderful reference.

**"Seen Through Tears # 6" by Kristen Sæterdal** of Norway, the direct opposite in presenting a subtle two color movement, woven on an oval frame of her own construction. Once she has cut the frame, she uses a computer drawing to indicate where to cut slots for evenly spaced warps. The frame's portability gives her freedom to work anywhere. Kristen begins weaving the tapestry at both sides, using a needle in the middle where the two met. Her warp is linen with the

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Kristin Sæterdal, "Seen Through Tears #6,"  
21" x 25" Photo by the artist

traditional long fibered wool weft, which she dyes with chemical dyes for a longer lasting color.

I use the traditional joins (as from the Koppen book) because I want a tight solid fabric. The slow graduation of the colour is a meditation on how little or how much is enough to make an interesting picture. It is like a close up, or a fragment, and I think of it as both a figurative and an abstract motif. It is about continuity and peace. The technique gives the weaving a precise expression, and it puts emphasis on the piece as an object, rather than as a piece of cloth. I call these works "wall-jewellery."

I am dealing with themes like perception and communication, considering the way we relate to our physical environment. We observe the surroundings through different filters.

The title "Seen through Tears" refers somewhat to a picture by Edvard Munch, which we say has been "painted through tears." The round format represents a lens through which a straight line becomes curved in a special way. The lines are transformed from straight to curved, like a miracle! How can a straight line and a curve, so basically different, be the same thing?

The perfect circle is a shape that is easily distorted or transformed. To be perfect it has to be seen from a precise point on the line going out from the centre of the circle. If the viewer moves just one bit to the side, the circle becomes an ellipse. We can find the circle in the window of a submarine or a spaceship. Perhaps it can be like a peephole into a slightly different world?

## Book Review: *Norwegian Tapestry Weaving*

By Maria Brekke Koppen,

Translation by Christine Spangler

Eikeskog Press, 2006 eikskogpress@comcast.net

ISBN 0-9777968-0-9 \$48.95, Hardcover (library bind), 132 pages, 7.75" x 10.25"

**Reviewed by Judy Ann Ness**

The original book, *Norwegian Tapestry Weaving*, was written by beloved fiber artist, tapestry scholar, and teacher, Professor Maria Brekke Koppen, in three Norwegian editions, 1974, 1978, and 1988, now long out of print. Fortunately, this 'bible' of Norwegian tapestry was translated into English in 2006 by American tapestry artist, Christine Spangler. This first English translation is an exciting event for the international tapestry community, as the significance of Norwegian tapestry weaving has largely been ignored due to the literature being available only in the Norwegian language. We are fortunate that Ms. Spangler merged the original illustrations and content of the Second Norwegian with the Third Edition's overview of equipment, basic tapestry technique, materials, and finishing.

The great strength of this book is the large thread-by-thread drawings illustrating the various shape and line expressions that are developed by the dovetail join. Since the primary distinction between traditional Norwegian technique and other European tapestry styles is the use of the dovetail join, *Norwegian Tapestry Weaving* contrasts the techniques in a definitive analysis of the under-utilized dovetail technique. The book is easily accessible to weavers who have had at least some acquaintance with tapestry. The clarity of the illustrations and the exhaustive variations of the dovetail technique presented, invites all levels of tapestry weavers to explore new joining options offered by the distinctive solution.

The author's Foreword outlines the discovery of the mid-13th century Baldishol tapestry in the floor of a church in the 1880's. Its emergence coincided and contributed to the Norwegian tapestry renaissance of the late nineteenth century. (More on the Baldishol tapestry: <http://www.albus.dk/baldishol/technic-eng.html>) The first chapter discusses, illustrates, and compares the vertical joins of tapestry exemplified by the three main techniques, interlock, slit and dovetail. The next issue addressed is both the pointed and square dovetail join, and their use in gradual diagonals, steep angles, and vertical junctions. The circles

and curves section has a good diagram on curve construction that would be useful for many weaving techniques. After examining the basics of building diagonal, vertical, and curved lines, outlining is covered with treatments for a gradual diagonals, either within the grid or as an eccentric weft. Outlining is a frequent design element in the older Norwegian tapestries, and care is taken to illustrate and describe the many variations of woven outlines with and without dovetailing. Color plates of antique Norwegian tapestries depict the outline as a significant contributor to the unification of the overall design and character of the weavings. Hatching as a European influence is covered, followed by a short explanation of the Gobelin slit technique. In Norway, the square-weave coverlet technique contributed the interlock join, both single and double, to tapestry weaving, and the description and illustrations for this standard join are offered in a simple and concise manner.

The book's second half is devoted to basic information and instruction on the Norwegian tapestry loom and method of warping, dressing, elementary tapestry weaving, cartoon development, orientation, and materials. Finishing with hems and braids, blocking, and mounting are also included, representing a simple overview of Norwegian tapestry weaving.

This translation of *Norwegian Tapestry Weaving* is really two books in one, with the last half of the book a how-to suitable for beginners (with some help), and the first half an intense exposure to a specialty technique. The bibliography is divided into three parts: textile history, weaving design and technique, and reference works.

*Norwegian Tapestry Weaving* is a welcome contribution to general tapestry instruction, and offers overdue attention on the historically significant dovetail join and its variations. Ms. Spangler's translation is thankfully lively and fluid. Textile scholars, Scandinavian weaving enthusiasts, academic and public libraries, fiber book collectors, and tapestry weavers will find this contribution to the story of tapestry a powerful reference as well as a successful learning tool.

The author will be teaching a weekend workshop at the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Deocorah, Iowa (<http://vesterheim.org/>) on dovetail technique in the Fall of 2007. The book is available from the publisher and various outlets including: Vesterheim, Halcyon Yarn, Webs, The Mannings, HGA, and Unicorn Books and Crafts.

## Review: Gugger Petter: The Dailies

By Lany Eila

For the past 18 years, Gugger Petter has been creating artworks from newspaper. A recent show of work, on display at Thirteen Moons Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico ([www.thirteenmoonsgallery.com](http://www.thirteenmoonsgallery.com)), includes heavily textured wall pieces woven with this medium. In her artist statement, Petter writes, "My fascination with newspaper consists not only of its historic and informative aspect, but also that newspaper being a daily material, holds a reference point for my own daily stories used as imagery."

In keeping with their origins, the images have a graphic, almost comic strip quality. The two themes in this show are sidewalk scenes and enlarged images of 'bolsjer' (hard candies remembered from her native Denmark; she now lives in the San Francisco bay area). In the sidewalk scenes, the legs of one to three people are shown with perhaps a small dog or two. Whether wearing modest skirts and pumps, or pants and sensible shoes, the figures and their dogs are positioned to evoke a single frame in an ongoing story that is left to the viewer to complete. An occasional barfing dog adds humor.

The newspaper is tightly rolled into tubes and woven (1 to 4 ppi) on a hemp warp (1 epi). The stiffness of the weft would not allow the warp to be fully covered, even if that were her intention, but the weaving techniques are otherwise those of tapestry. In the sidewalk scenes, eccentric weft is used for the sidewalk and street, offering a textured contrast to the non-eccentric weft of the figures. Conversely, the hard candies are woven with eccentric weft against a conventional background. After weaving, the works are mounted on wire backings attached to wooden frames. Petter states, "...sealing then with varnish, it is then transformed into a very strong and durable material." Image sizes in this show range from 14"x 20" to 75"x 62".



Gugger Pedder, "Three People with Dogs," 69" x 63"  
Photo courtesy of Thirteen Moons Gallery.

continued...

Petter's palette includes colors from comics or ads, and grays. "The [San Francisco] *Chronicle* is very grey in its print, where the *New York Times* is much more contrasted." The dense print of the stock market pages offer an additional gray. Petter may also leave newspapers in the sun to yellow, or add a thin coat of paint over portions of the final work.

The thick weft that creates this highly textured work requires simplification and/or magnification of images, and plays on the pixelation inherent to tapestry. The result often appears abstract up close, resolving into the image only at a distance. In an interview with the Santa Fe *New Mexican* a few years ago, Petter recalled, "As a kid, I would walk close to a painting, and I couldn't see anything but brushstrokes. Then I'd step back, and the piece would come together like magic. And I would step forward and backward, forward and backward, just to come into that magic moment." These works, especially those of the candies, capture that magic moment as well.

## **Review: ATB6 - More Than One Way of Visiting a Tapestry**

**By Elyse Koren-Camarra**

While I am not necessarily a proponent of the random "shot-gun" theory of art criticism, exhibitions such as ATB6, which offer the viewer a potpourri of subject matter, style, narrative, and size, are often the easiest and the most difficult to navigate and negotiate.

The exquisite technique of Christine Laffer's "Cloth" and Nancy Jackson's "Consanguine" and "Incarnation," the compassion of Monique Chmielewska Lehman's "Heartsong...", the ecstasy of Lialia Kuchma's "Wing," paired with the fluidity of water, landscape and home imagery, help move the viewer along the linear pathway that wanders around and through the exhibition space of the hip Urban Institute of Contemporary Art in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

While the exhibit was well worth the price of admission, the bonus that ties/binds everything is the accompanying exhibition catalogue which contains Shelly Goldsmith's and Lotus Stack's juror remarks and Jessica Hemming's essay. Steeped in postmodern narrative, these chats with the audience help round out the visual with the current rhetoric of art thought and theory. "Zeros and Ones," Sadie Plant's feminist manifesto on technoculture's relationship to women's work, weaving, nets, shuttle systems, programming language, and the digital age, receives a hearty hom-

age. Where we have come from, where we are going sometimes hinges on this kind of information that has finally hit the popular culture scene thus informing the (un)initiated that fiber has arrived, textiles rule!

We are also particularly fortunate to have the ATA website available – a step into the 21st Century – the Age of the Digitized Digit, which offers the cyberspace traveler a virtual tour of Biennial Six. Because of and in spite of our technological wizardry, those participants will be afforded the opportunity to "look" but "not touch" a remarkable display in a virtual gallery space containing what has been deemed "the best" of tapestry on the international scene. And, frankly, which would we rather have...a living space viewed by a few, or a virtual space experienced by many? I'll let the reader decide.

## **Recently Exhibited Tapestries**

**By Christine Pradel Lien**

I chose tapestry weaving because I grew up in The Loire River Valley region of France, where there has been a strong tapestry tradition since the fourteenth century. As an art student, I could hardly have escaped the influence of this grand tradition. Like many weavers I was particularly influenced by the "Apocalypse de Saint Jean," a fourteenth century tapestry of sixty-seven scenes that is permanently exhibited in the Chateau d'Angers.

I weave on a horizontal, low warp loom that is seven feet wide. It was made especially for me in a workshop along the Loire River in 1970, a year after I began weaving. I use a cotton warp that has a range of two and a half to six threads per centimeter and I weave with wool, cotton, linen, silk, along with synthetic and metallic thread.

The exhibition of tapestries at the Howard Conn Fine Arts Gallery this past summer and then at the Richeson School of Art and Gallery in Kimberly, Wisconsin, showed three themes in my work: community music, architecture of the Loire River Valley, and people in groups or alone.

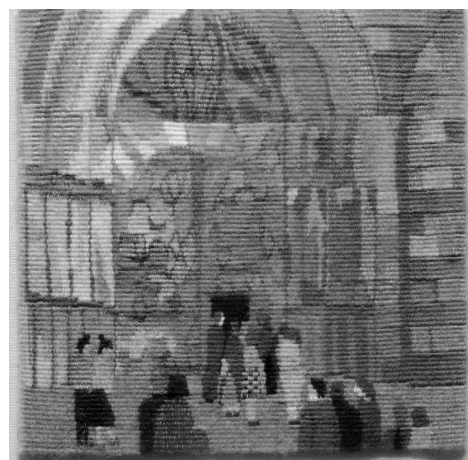
"Fete de la Musique," or "Celebration of Music" is part of a series of tapestries based on scenes of a bandstand in "Le Jardin du Mail," a garden park in Angers. (See ATB3, 2000) This park has existed for two hundred years and the bandstand has been a central piece in the park since the nineteenth century. The park is directly across the street from my parent's home. Opening the door of our courtyard to step into the street, I saw the bandstand everyday for many

years. I remember playing around this elegant structure as a child and listening to concerts in the park as an adult. Geraniums, mixed with other flowers, always grew around its base. Green wrought iron columns led upward toward the roof around which soft white lights glowed during evening concerts. Musicians of the summer dressed formally and played in tight formation on the platform beneath a white ceiling that reminded me of a spider's web. Memories of the forms, sounds, and crowds of people urged me to weave "Fete de la Musique," as well as other pieces in this series.

"Des Pierres, des Prieres" or "Stones, Prayers," revealing the architectural theme, was inspired by a Roman church along the Loire River between the cities of Angers and Saumur. (See ATBI, 1996) I think the church's stone is quite extraordinary. The walls were made of beige and white blocks that have mica flakes that sparkle in the sunlight. The roof is covered with gray-blue slate taken from the quarries in the region. As a young adult, I often visited this church for two quite different reasons. On some Sunday afternoons I went there to listen to organ music. On others I went to sell my tapestries. During spring and summer Sundays, jugglers, wine sellers, farmers and artists got together just outside the church to sell their products and works in a circus like atmosphere to travelers driving along the Loire. Although "Des Pierres, des Prieres" shows the outside of the church, the mood of the weaving is serene rather than circus like.

Everyday we experience life in groups and in solitude. The third theme contrasts people alone with people in groups. The intent is to express thoughtful situations as people spend their lives in groups or by themselves. "La Fenetre" shows members of a family through a window in our cottage along the Loire. They are talking animatedly and visiting happily. Another weaving that shows people in groups is "Le Premier Mai," a labor day scene in Paris showing people marching in the streets to celebrate the holiday. A contrasting piece is "Rue Saint Aignan," showing a woman trudging down a narrow street in Angers. A similar solitary piece is "Carol's Garden," which was woven in the United States. It shows my neighbor, Carol, working contentedly in her garden.

All three themes tend to blend together in some of my weavings. It is thus difficult to separate these works by distinct themes. Most often there is a combination of varying degrees of the three persistent themes.



Christine Pradel Lien, "Le Parvis de la Cathédrale St Maurice" H. 7" x 7", 1996



Karen Page Crislip, Buyers considering rugs at the Crownpoint Navajo Rug Auction. Photo by Karen Page Crislip

## The Crownpoint Navajo Rug Auction

By Karen Crislip

The Crownpoint Navajo Rug Auction is one of my favorite, contemporary, "real west" experiences. I live and weave in the land of turquoise skies, blazing sunsets, green chili stew, Navajo fry bread, pictographs and petroglyphs, and unbelievably beautiful rock formations comprised of colorful striations that seem to pulsate.

Navajo tapestry weaving has existed far longer in this part of the U.S. than the French style of tapestry weaving that I was taught. The designs on most of the rugs have evolved from sacred symbols and beliefs. The methods, including prayers to Spider Woman, are passed to youngsters from their grandmothers. Every color and symbol has traditionally held a meaning for the weaver's matriarchal clan.

The Crownpoint Rug Auction, is a tradition on the Navajo Reservation that has been held since 1978. A common starting bid on an average small rug started at \$35 in 1978 but is more apt to start at ten times that now with larger rugs fetching up to \$3500.

[www.CrownPointRugAuction.com](http://www.CrownPointRugAuction.com)

Weavers, buyers, auctioneers, registrars, volunteer workers, vendors

continued...



and families begin gathering at around 4:00 p.m. on auction days at the Crownpoint Elementary School, in high mesa country. The Crownpoint Rug Weavers Association holds the auction every month. Rug viewing is from 4:00 – 6:30 p.m., and the auction begins at 7:00 p.m. and usually ends around midnight. The event offers more than handwoven tapestry rugs to peruse, appreciate and buy. While the preview progresses in the main room, other Native Americans are setting up tables in the hallway to sell food, pottery, jewelry and crafts—including handmade, wooden tapestry utensils—all obtainable at close to wholesale prices. There might be just a few buyers milling around in the gymnasium/cafeteria and a few weavers in the hallway until around 4:30 – 5:00 p.m. when the registration team arrives to document the rugs for the weavers and assign bidding numbers to the buyers—all of whom commit to staying until after midnight or until the rugs they have an interest in are sold.

The head registrar secretly records the minimum amount for which the weaver is willing to sell each rug, and one of her team staples a tag that includes a bidding number as well as information identifying the weaver and her (his) hometown into one corner of each rug. The rugs are then folded and placed on one of four cafeteria tables according to size.

As soon as there are several rugs on a table, the buyers start gathering around with their tape measures, scraps of paper and ballpoint pens (which come uncomfortably close to tapestry surfaces) to record the numbers for rugs they wish to bid on later. I was disturbed not only by the stapling and the errant pens but also by comments such as, “I see some warp on that one—it’s worthless!” and by buyers laying rugs on the floor to see how they felt under foot! The Navajo weavers said they were not bothered by this “disrespect” for their rugs, but I do not believe them.

I talked to buyers—not the easy to spot gallery owners and trading post operators but ordinary people who came to the auction to purchase a rugs for either their home and/or for resale on EBAY. The Navajo weavers are very aware of this recent resale practice and have seen their rugs on line for usually only 20 to 25% more than the buyer paid at the auction. It is actually a better deal for far away buyers than galleries. Many owners of a beautiful rug will return years later to buy another or bring friends and family members who want to purchase a similar one.

At the March auction I spotted a Navajo woman about my age sitting near one of the tables piled high with rugs. I asked if she was keeping an eye on her rugs and she laughed, so I sat down to chat. She

attends nearly every Crownpoint auction, traveling from near 2nd Mesa on the Hopi reservation in Arizona, bringing rugs from other weavers in her area and then taking checks back to them. The reason she comes often is to see what sells and for how much in order to plan her marketing strategy. She weaves her own unique designs, not the traditional ones, using unusual colors, and purchasing most of her yarn. (Other weavers I talked to still raise, shear, wash, card, spin and dye their yarns and weave the traditional designs.) Her husband is pleased with the money she earns selling her rugs, most of which is used to help support a son through medical school. The weavers take any rugs that do not sell at the auction to a trading post where they receive approximately the same amount as the minimum auction sales price.

Due to an approaching blizzard that evening, I regrettably had to leave before the auction began. However, I chatted by phone with my new friend several days later. One of the two rugs she had woven and brought that evening sold for \$25 over her minimum and the other \$50 over—way too little, in my opinion, for such beautiful work. She had stayed for the entire auction and then driven her pickup truck through the storm, across mesas and through canyons, washes and arroyos, back to her home—a braver woman than I!

Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr. and his First Lady, Vikki Shirley, attended the April auction. This was apparently an unusual occurrence as everyone in attendance was very excited. I was able to stay until the end of this auction and to participate in some highly spirited bidding. That night there were around 280 rugs to be auctioned, starting with the largest and the saddle blankets, then the sandpainting/pictorial/*ye’ii bicheii*, next the less-intricate, medium-sized banded pieces and finally, the smallest rugs. At the end of the evening, the buyers were lined up on the south side of the room to pay for their rugs, while the weavers were lined up on the north side to receive their checks.

Unfortunately, my new friend and her unusual rugs were not in attendance, but I did successfully bid on six beautiful, very well-woven rugs, including an “eye dazzler,” and an unusual “tree of life” tapestry containing 36 realistically woven birds. These tapestries now hang in my studio/gallery along with my work, and I love the combination. The Navajo rugs still have the slightly musty smell of wool that has not been over-cleaned and are a more abstract representation than are my tapestries of the beautiful New Mexico “Land of Enchantment.”





Barbara Heller, "Ozymandias," 66" x 62",  
photo by Ted Clark of "Image This Photographics"

## Volunteers Make It Happen

By Mary Lane

During her six-year term on ATA's Board of Directors, Barbara Heller served as exhibit chair for American Tapestry Biennial 4, as liaison to Convergence 2002, as a member of the Nominating Committee and as the liaison to the Canadian Tapestry Network. Barbara's willingness to help, and her experience as an artist, organizer, and businesswoman have benefited ATA in many ways.

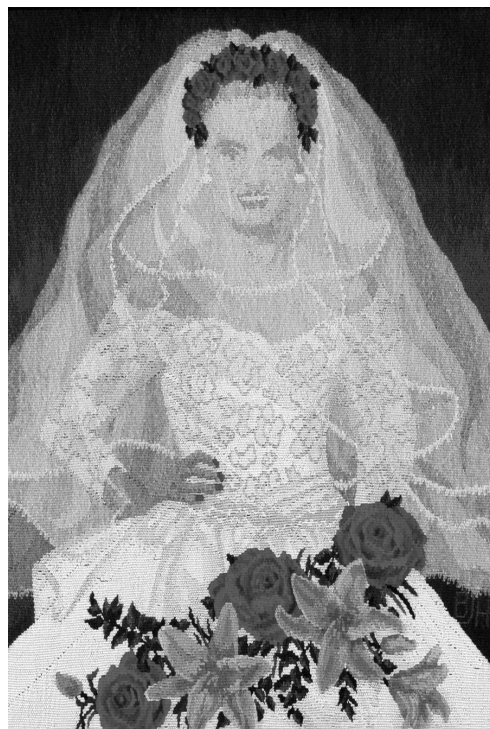
Barbara maintains a studio on Granville Island in Vancouver, BC and her tapestries reside in collections around the world. Much of her work falls into thematic series. In the last edition of *Tapestry Topics*, Micala Sidore reviewed the show of her Cover Ups & Revelations series along with other series that focus on stone walls and ghost images. In fact, Barbara considers all of her work to fall into series. This is because her tapestries reflect particular

ideas that continue to occupy her thoughts. The series reflect the development of these concerns, through time. Working in series allows an artist to consider a topic from numerous perspectives, offering a richer and more multi-faceted interpretation.

The continued reflection on a particular idea often raises new questions and generates work that adds complexity to the series or, perhaps, spawns a new series. For example, Barbara's recently completed tapestry entitled "Ozymandias" is part of the Revelations series. However, upon its completion she recognized that this tapestry was "part of a group comprised of Earth: 'Ozymandias', Air: 'Babylon is Fallen', Fire: 'Still Life with a Bird' and Water." The concept of Water is still formulating in her thoughts.

In some senses Barbara's series are all interconnected since they deal "with spirit and memory and concern for the planet. They are related not only conceptually, but often share technical features. For instance, in the Cover Ups series, the conceptual thread is "how we judge people by their costume and make assumptions," and "how we strive to make eye contact and the emotions generated when we can't." The formal continuity is achieved through a similar style (photorealism) and a common size. In addition, in each piece the perspective of the person is the same—staring out at the viewer. In the Ghost Spirit series the technical continuity is the use of two warp setts within the same piece.

In order to stimulate new ideas and the development of ongoing themes, Barbara uses the techniques of free association, mind mapping, sketching and research. She often employs photographs and found images in her work, either searching for the perfect image to express her idea, or constructing that perfect image from various sources. It is important to give images and ideas the time they need to develop. Consequently, the research and gestation of her designs may take months, or even years. For example, the most recent tapestry in the Cover Ups series, "The Bride," was woven a year and a half after the rest of the series. "The Bride," which presents a



Barbara Heller, "The Bride," 35" x 25"  
photo by Ted Clark of "Image This Photographics"

continued...

Western woman in a traditional wedding dress, provides a partner to "The Surgeon," the image of a Western male. Together, the two counterbalance other tapestries in the series, which contain images of non-Western people.

Working in series has helped the development of her career. Curators, jurors and gallery owners often prefer artists whose work shows the development of a line of thought, work that is clearly all from the same mind and hand. Series not only allow the artists to develop ideas more fully, they also allow the viewer a deeper and more intellectually engaging experience by offering a richer insight into the artist's investigative and creative process.

Barbara's current research involves reliquaries, computer chips and motherboards, objects that relate to her interest in memory. We can all look forward to seeing the tapestries that arise from this new area of investigation.



Christina Rasmussen, "Entering the Borderlands."

## Christina Rasmussen Wins Gold Medal

By Nancy Jackson

Christina Rasmussen, of Gurnee, IL, was recently awarded the Vesterheim Museum Gold Medal at the Museum's banquet celebrating the Nordic Fest winners. Christina's tapestry, "Entering the Borderlands," contributed to her winning the gold medal by taking first place. In addition, it tied for Best of Show in Weaving with a rya on doubleweave coverlet entered by a past Gold Medalist, and won the People's Choice Award. Christina's woven band in pick-up technique also won, adding the needed additional point.

Having won the same ribbons two years ago, she has acquired the required eight points for a gold medal in record time.

"Entering the Borderlands" focuses on the passage from childhood to maturity and Christina's oldest daughter, Heili, is the central subject. Christina describes this tapestry:

"The Borderlands reside between childhood and adulthood, a place of exploration, transition, and change. My daughter Heili has reached this landmark. She has cut her girlish locks. We see her letting go of her childhood, which takes the form of a fairy being released from the palms of her hands.

## Circle Membership Provides Support for ATA's Mission of Excellence

By Ellen Ramsey

Circle Memberships include an additional donation in support of ATA exhibitions, publications and programs. As the costs of operating ATA have increased, these contributions are more vital than ever. Organizing traveling exhibitions of international scope incurs significant shipping and insurance costs that are not completely covered by entry or venue fees. The accompanying exhibition catalog is by far our most costly recurring project. These publications are critical, however, for the promotion of tapestry and as documentation of our history. Circle membership contributions have played an essential part in making the last two catalogs possible.

In recognition for the valuable role your contribution will play in sustaining our organization and allowing us to grow, we offer all Circle Members complimentary participation in our Distance Learning Program, an Artist Page and web link, and special recognition in our Annual Member Directory. Studio Circle memberships start at \$55 – that's just an additional contribution of \$20, but the difference it makes to ATA is truly huge.

So consider joining the Circle! All dues and donations to ATA are fully tax deductible (in the US). But please note, membership volunteers cannot process credit card payments. If you would like to renew your membership or make a contribution to ATA by credit card in the month of December and you want it to be

deductible in 2006, please contact Treasurer, Barbara Richards, directly at (970) 577-9728 by December 31st to donate by phone. Donations via check dated 12/31/06 or before and mailed to membership staff for processing need not worry about timing and tax deductibility.

ATA would like to thank the following members who joined or renewed their memberships at Circle level between July 1st and October 1s.

Studio Circle: Ann Blankenship, Don Burns, Marti Fleischer, Mary Ann Jackson, Jennie Jeffries, Catherine Kapikian, Peggy Krauser, Sonja Miremont, Letitia Rogers, Letitia Roller, Laura Viada. Curator's Circle: Georgeann Blaha, Carol Chave, Mary Lane, Tommy Scanlin

## Kudos:

29 ATA members from the west coast states and British Columbia, Canada have work in "Tapestry on the Edge," November 29, 2006 to January 14, 2007, Nordic Heritage Museum, Seattle, WA

Susan Martin Maffei, "People at Play: woven tapestries of sports, games and hobbies," January 10 to February 16, 2007, Interchurch Center, Treasure Room Gallery, New York, NY.

Shelley Socolofsky, "A Confluence of Sorts" Art in the Governor's Office, September 5 to October 6, 2006, State office Building, Salem, OR

Julia Mitchell, Tapestries, Belushi Pisano Gallery, August 11-24, 2006

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## ATA MEMBERSHIP FORM

|                    | 1 year | 2 years |
|--------------------|--------|---------|
| Individual         | \$35   | \$65    |
| Studio Circle      | \$55   | \$100   |
| Curator's Circle   | \$125  | \$225   |
| Collector's Circle | \$250  | \$450   |
| Student*           | \$25   | \$45    |

\*enclose copy of current student identification card with payment

☐ Please contact me about volunteer opportunities

Send payment to: ATA Membership

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## Tapestry Topics

### Guidelines for submitting articles to *Tapestry Topics*:

Next Deadline: January 15, 2007: **California Influences**; April 1: **ATA Then and Now**; July 15: **Distances Diminished**; October 1: **The Mavericks**

Send all items to: Linda Rees: lerees@comcast.net

--Or--

1507 Elkay Drive  
Eugene, OR 97404

Phone: 541-338-8284

All photographs and electronic images should be accompanied by the following information: size, date completed, and photo credits.

Articles should be under 2000 words. Submissions will be edited for clarity and space requirements.

Exhibition reviews: We seek articles that describe the show with insight and critical observations. Describe the overall sense of the show and explain the parts that contribute to this sense.

Newsletter committee: Proofreader: Anne Clark, Layout: Elinor Steele,  
Distribution: Ellen Ramsey

visit our website  
[www.american Tapestry Alliance.org](http://www.american Tapestry Alliance.org)

Jane Kidd  
"Possession: Imprint/Impact #1"  
54" x 25" Photo by John Dean  
See article page 15.

