



# Tapestry Topics

*A Quarterly Review of Tapestry Art Today*

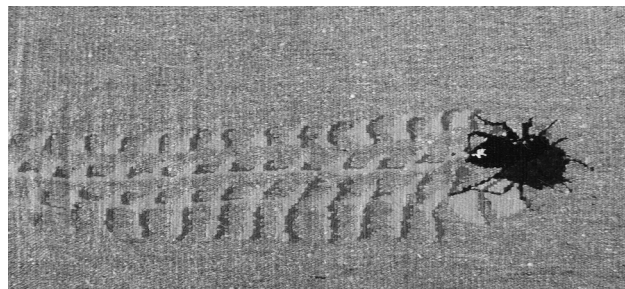
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## In this Issue

### Sustaining Creativity

<b>Creative Non-Doing</b> . . . . .	3
By Pat Williams	
<b>Sustaining Creativity</b> . . . . .	4
By Ronda Karliukson	
<b>Diversity and the Creative Process</b> . . . . .	5
By David L. Johnson	
<b>Mining the Vein of Creativity</b> . . . . .	6
By Tommye McClure Scanlin	
<b>A Creative Day in a Life</b> . . . . .	8
By Ann Keuper	
<b>Stimulating and Maintaining Creativity</b> . . . . .	9
By Michael Rohde	
<b>Fruitful Ambiguity</b> . . . . .	10
By Barbara Heller	
<b>Connections Exhibitor List</b> . . . . .	12
<b>Tapestry Weavers West Members' Showcase</b> . . . . .	13
By Tricia Goldberg	
<b>Review: TWINE on Display</b> . . . . .	14
By Micala Sidore	
<b>Review: Different Perspectives</b> . . . . .	16
By Anne Jackson	
<b>Review: Putting Content To Color</b> . . . . .	17
By Kathe Todd-Hooker	
<b>ATA Award of Excellence: Tommye Scanlin</b> . . . . .	19
By Merna Strauch	
<b>ATA Volunteers - January 2009</b> . . . . .	20
<b>Volunteers Make it Happen: Joan Griffin</b> . . . . .	21
By Linda Rees	
<b>Member News</b> . . . . .	22
<b>Kudos</b> . . . . .	22



Lyn Hart, PINACATE SHUFFLE, 9" x 21.5" 2008;  
natural colored wool, rayon, linen, silk

## Creative Sustenance

By Lyn Hart

Creativity: artistic or intellectual inventiveness, according to Webster's, is as essential as air and water to an artist. At once manna and bane, creativity's ebb and flow dictates our artistic endeavors. A topic usually subject to considerable discussion, *Art & Fear* authors Bayles and Orland consider the word itself taboo and make a point never to discuss it. *In Art & Soul: Notes On Creating*, Audrey Flack likens creative time to dream time:

The element of time in the creative process is similar to dream time. It stretches and contracts as you work. You can work on something for weeks and weeks and nothing will happen, and yet something can transpire in only an hour. The last five minutes of dream time can process data of epic proportions, and yet one needed the entire night's sleep to arrive at the dream images.

Astrid Fitzgerald's *An Artist's Book of Inspiration* is a compilation offering many insights to ponder regarding art and creativity

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ranging from Fitzgerald's own to those from countless renowned artists, writers, and poets, such as this one from Henry David Thoreau:

I wish to live ever as to derive my satisfactions and inspirations from the commonest events, every-day phenomena, so that what my senses hourly perceive, my daily walk, the conversation of my neighbors, may inspire me, and I may dream of no heaven but that which lies about me.

Tapestry weaving is not a quick process; Flack's nexus of time and creativity perfectly capture this unchangeable aspect. Thoreau's musings, however, draw attention to the evanescent nature of innovation itself. We have all experienced the crystalline moment of inspiration that spawns a singular or serial tapestry design, but creative juices must be flowing at that moment so that we are open to receiving and acting upon those inspirations. Likewise, we have experienced not only the exciting surge of passion when we want to spend every waking moment at the loom, but also the abject ebb of stalled motivation when sitting down to design or weave feels like torture.

How, then, do we stimulate, promote, nurture, and sustain originality on a daily basis, and, when the thrill is gone, how do we jump start our creative drives? Are there parallels or differences among abstract and representational, male and female, or seasoned and novice weavers? These are questions this Tapestry Topics' theme seeks to explore. Sincere thanks to the artists who have so willingly shared their thoughts and experiences regarding the creative process. Read on and get inspired!

## Greetings from Becky and Linda

After the long, cold winter many of you experienced this year, the arrival of spring is a welcome relief. Spring is a season of growth and renewal and a perfect time for "Creativity" as the thematic focus for this issue of *Tapestry Topics*. The articles have been planned to inspire you and give you insight into the creative process of other artist/weavers.

Inspiration is important. This fall will bring the deadline for entering ATB8 and we are delighted to announce that Rebecca A.T. Stevens, Consulting Curator, Contemporary Textiles, of The Textile

Museum will be our juror. While acceptance into ATB is always viewed as a pinnacle to strive for, having your work selected by such a revered curator would be as good as it gets! So, create and weave and submit. Make sure your work is seen by Rebecca A.T. Stevens and possibly accepted into the next ATB.

ATB7 closed at the Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft in January. Thank you to all the participating artists and the volunteers who made this outstanding exhibition a success.

Our new biennial exhibition, "Connections: Small Tapestry International" is about to launch its first opening. The exhibit and educational workshop, Toolkit of Tapestry Techniques taught by Christine Laffer will take place at the San Jose Quilt and Textile Museum in San Jose, California in May. We are thrilled with the large, international response to our call for submissions and look forward to seeing the exhibition selected by our juror, Jane Sauer. Thank you to all who entered our first all digital submission and for complying with the new requirements.

You may have noticed that Barb Richards, our treasurer of the past three years has stepped down. Barb finished her term last spring and graciously stayed on while we searched for her replacement. Thank you for your dedicated service Barb and best of luck with your new endeavors!

Please welcome ATA's new treasurer Rosalee Skrenes of Wisconsin! Rosalee has over ten years of financial experience and has seamlessly stepped into the position. Marcia Ellis of California is ably assisting her. We are fortunate to have a treasury team to take care of our financial transactions.

Our first Valentine's Day annual appeal arrived in your mailbox with the new membership roster. Please take a moment to read some of the work accomplished by ATA during this past year. It is only through membership fees, donations and volunteer efforts that we are able to support the work of this organization. Exhibitions, programming, the website and the newsletter are benefits we all enjoy. We recognize these are challenging economic times, but if you are able please make a donation, upgrade your membership or volunteer your time to keep ATA a productive and viable organization.

The American Tapestry Alliance is your organization and only exists with your help and support. Thank you all!

## Next Issue: The Materiality of Surface

Our sincere thanks go to Lyn Hart for suggesting the topic of the current newsletter, Sustaining Creativity, and organizing the wise comments from experienced and novice weavers.

**April 1: Materiality of Surface.** A tapestry is certainly more than meets the eye; it is equally about the hand and the rich possibilities of surface. This coming issue explores aspects of meaning in tactility and features work that focuses on surface as a design element. Facilitator: Ellen Ramsey

**July 15: Exhibits - Our Public Voice.** Questions for discussion might be how to present submissions, the pros and cons of various selection procedures, theme shows, and the role of exhibitions as a means of educating the public about our medium.

**October 15: Tips and Tactics.** Submit the clever solutions to tricky problems about looms, cartoons, physical ergonomics, techniques, studio design or whatever innovation you have tucked up your sleeve. This issue will depend heavily on readers' contributions.

**January 15: Proportion.** Other than limitations of loom capacity, how do we tapestry artists determine the size of an image? How do scale and proportion relate to design elements? This is an opportunity for the mathematically oriented designers to come to the fore.

**Adendum:** The "Walking the Warp" video mentioned in the article by Dorothy Clews on page 5 of the last newsletter, Winter, 2008 was created by Chicago artist, Anne Wilson and a discussion of the project can be seen at: [http://www.annewilsonartist.com/projects/windup/text\\_windup.html](http://www.annewilsonartist.com/projects/windup/text_windup.html)

## Creative Non-Doing

By Pat Williams

My first tapestry workshop was in 1990 with Nancy Harvey. Tapestry began as a fierce attraction, and has increased in intensity over succeeding years. But I just wanted to weave; not design. Of course designing is essential, but at first, I resented the time spent on that aspect of the process. I would scratch around, aching for an idea, looking in books to sort of "borrow" ideas. Meanwhile, the empty loom wept in the background, naked and alone. Something had to change, especially after too many of the tapestries turned out to be pure blah.

Feeling sorry for me and hoping to stop my whining, my husband cast about for a Christmas present around 1993 and gave me *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron. She outlines a twelve-step program for artist's block recovery. After reading her introduction on Christmas Day, I promised myself I would begin on January 1, read one of the twelve chapters per week, study it thoroughly, and follow all of her suggestions—which I did.

The "morning pages" were the key for me. Morning pages are an assignment to write three pages of a journal every morning. No editing—just "let 'er rip" and write fast. Gradually I began to loosen up and creativity was a bit easier. After a while, I began to draw every morning in addition to writing. I buzzed through the writing to get to the drawing. The agreement I made with myself about the drawing is to put down whatever image came to me regardless of how dumb, awkward, poorly drawn, embarrassing, or repetitive it might be. No editing was allowed on the original drawing. I put them on small pieces of 180 lb. Arches—generally in the range of 30 to 50 square inches. An important aspect of the



Pat Williams, UT-OH, 12.5" X 18" 2009.  
Relates to our current disastrous environmental,  
economic, and cultural situation.

agreement was to save every one of them. I drew small in order to complete them quickly. I did that religiously for about six years.

Concurrent with the non-editing attitude is a state of openness and receptivity, relaxing into the situation, so to speak. When an image comes along through my consciousness, I look at it and lay it down on the drawing paper—even if, and this is critical, it is the same boring elementary-school-style square house, broccoli tree, mountain, and sun with pointy rays. It might start out that way, almost like it's a "test" from the universe to see if I am truly not editing.

There is a knowingness involved, possibly a trance-like state, but without the bruised, demented eyes of Bela Lugosi and weird music in the background. Speaking of music, it is rare if there is any present at this time of drawing.

If the drawing turns out to be pure crap, I keep it anyway. Later, I might see a seed of an idea that can be developed. Sometimes, even then, I still have the urge to wad it up, stomp on it, and throw it into the fire while muttering under my breath. I suppose you might say that I have trained myself to bypass the ego which, given it's way, encourages me with that crazy nagging ego-voice to be perfect, which it knows I can't be perfect. In fact, Pat Williams is a poser, fake, and will never ever become an artist, "no matter what, ya fool!"

I no longer draw every day, but the channel or door to creativity has apparently been permanently propped open. Now, I carry a sketchbook in my purse and draw on trips or odd idle moments. Sometimes I have an itch to draw and draw all day long for several days. When I get a commission, research and reading come first, then I draw out ideas. What has not changed is the no editing on first thoughts. It has been amazing to me to see what comes out by not editing.

A drawing of a cross-eyed woman was perhaps my first "break-through" drawing that was the begin-



Pat Williams, BARKING DOG, 11" x 10" 2000.

The first in the series appears immobile, almost frozen. Her eyes offer the idea of motion, albeit inside her mind.

ning of an artistic voice for me. I drew quite a few of them before it occurred to me to weave one. They looked ridiculous and absurd. I had never seen such before, but I loved them. They made me laugh, felt good, and expressed my attitude to life. I played around with tweaking the design of my first cross-eyed piece quite a bit before making the cartoon and wove "Barking Dog" in 2000. The dog is small, hardly recognizable as a dog, and barking into her ear. I used metallics and experimented a bit with novelty yarns. As I wove, I became connected to the piece in a way I had not experienced before. It was a trance-like involvement and

great fun. It took me a while to actually show "Barking Dog" to anyone, but when I did, the reaction was that they laughed. I liked that.

The next cross-eyed tapestry was "Meditation," and then more faces of women. During a workshop with Archie Brennan and Susan Maffei, Archie suggested I weave a full figure. Duh. Of course. The result was "The Beginning" and then "Homunculus." In the past nine years I have lost count of the pieces in what I now call the "That Woman" series.

## Sustaining Creativity

By Ronda Karliukson

My imagination is full of unwoven weavings. I have never had a problem of becoming inspired or staying inspired. My creativity feels like a river, roaring at times but always flowing, demanding release. My biggest impediment in the past was my inability to fully express that creativity. Before I began weaving I was painting. Painting was not my thing. At the time I did not know any other way to attempt to release my vision. Providence introduced me to weaving. When I found weaving it was like coming home. There was an instant connection.



But I certainly faced many frustrations. One was my lack of skill to weave what I wanted to. The second was my lack of skill in the dying process. Today I have overcome those hurdles. I feel adept at my current weaving and dying skill levels. I certainly do not feel like I know everything! But I feel I know enough for now to communicate what I want to the viewer—and to release my creative energy.

Landscape has always inspired me. Another newer inspiration comes from the work of other tapestry weavers. Pamela Topham's "Water Music" is superb. (See TT Winter 2008.) So is "Edge of the Pond II" by Julia Mitchell. James Koehler, Robin Reider and Michael Rohde are rich in their interpretations and offer the viewer a creativity source.

If you are feeling uninspired my suggestion is to find a tapestry weaver whose weaving resonates with you. Their work can inspire you. Not to copy them but for you to weave your own interpretation of your inspiration. Of course my other suggestion is to spend some time out on the land. You will be sure to find something out there that will inspire you.

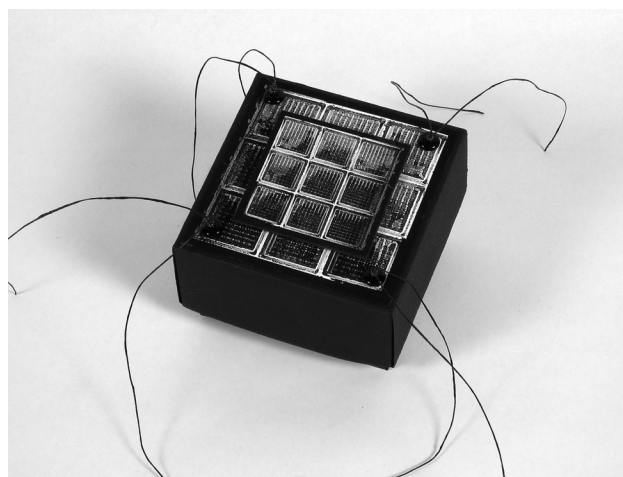
## Diversity and the Creative Process

By David L. Johnson

I have been weaving tapestries and producing other fiber related work for more than 30 years. Over those years both the form and content of the work have changed dramatically in response to changes in my ideas about process, materials, and artistic intent. The question of how I "stimulate, promote, nurture, and sustain creativity on a daily basis" is one that is almost constantly on my mind. The request from ATA to write about the topic offers a welcome opportunity to answer that question and put my thoughts on the subject to paper.

I think the simplest explanation I can offer for sustaining my own creativity is that I work concurrently on diverse projects and that allows for an ongoing change of focus and renewing of energy. In addition, I made a decision about twelve years ago to work on a smaller scale. I think that decision has been of enormous benefit in allowing me to finish pieces more quickly and to experiment more widely with both process and materials.

In 2006 I began a new series of tapestries called "Edges". The idea behind this series was to figure out a way to make tapestry more sculptural. The pieces are woven and then shaped once removed from the loom. They are embellished with various combinations of beads, waxed linen knotting, and crocheted elements and are then mounted on painted industrial felt and stretched canvas. To date I have completed eight pieces in the series and have two more in progress. As I work on each I have time to think about what the next piece in the series will look like and in what ways I can expand both the scale and dimensionality of the work.



David Johnson, GLASS BLOCK WINDOW BOX, 3.25" x 3.25" x 2.25" 2008. Handmade Origami box using colored card stock, digitally altered photo on Epson paper, beads, waxed linen

The idea of mounting tapestries on painted industrial felt and stretched canvas came to me from work in my ongoing mixed media series, which have the same mounting. There are two series that I add to each year. One is called "Spirits" and uses mask-like images either drawn on paper and scanned into Photoshop or images drawn on a digital tablet directly into Photoshop. Over the past several years I have periodically added images to the spirit sketchbook. When I'm ready to work on the next pieces in the series I spend time reviewing the drawings, pick the ones that appeal most to me at the time, and then color them and print them on inkjet canvas. After printing, the images are embellished, usually with beads and waxed linen, and then mounted on felt and stretched canvas. Each time I work on one of the Spirits or review the drawings in the sketchbook I get ideas for the next phase of the series. Some of the Spirit drawings have also become tapestries.

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The other mixed media series is called "Artifacts" and consists of digitally altered photographs of urban artifacts - old walls, doors, windows, fences, broken sidewalks, vents, grates and manhole covers - which are printed on inkjet canvas and then embellished with beads and waxed linen. They are also mounted on industrial felt and stretched canvas. The photographs celebrate what Thomas Moore calls "the re-enchantment of everyday life" by looking for beauty in unlikely and frequently overlooked spaces. I am most attracted to spaces in which nature has begun to reclaim what men have built. My iPhoto library contains more than 13,000 images. There are family, friends, and travel photos in the library, so not all of them relate to the Artifacts theme; but whenever I need inspiration I just spend a couple of hours reviewing the photos and an idea usually comes to me.

And, finally, I have a line of retail work consisting of fiber-based jewelry and handmade Origami boxes. The jewelry relates to the photographs and eschews the use of silver, gold, and gemstones in favor of earthier elements: tapestry woven pendants made of wool and cotton, crocheted pendants that are coated with paint, digital images printed on inkjet canvas or paper, and painted industrial felt. All of them use waxed linen and are embellished with wood, seed, stone and/or glass beads. I often make my own beads from vines, twigs and tree branches or from rolled or printed paper. Many of the jewelry pieces have a tribal look about them. As a weaver who has spent much time studying ethnographic textiles and other artifacts, that seems to be a logical connection. The jewelry and boxes can be executed rapidly and it is very easy to allow possibilities for new work to generate and develop as I work on them. Sometimes a piece of jewelry regenerates itself as a tapestry or mixed media project.

Working variously on these several series is usually enough to keep the creative juices flowing, in that ideas generated from one series often overflow into another in some way or other. But when I feel frustrated or bored with what I'm working on and have the need to jumpstart the inspiration process I have a variety of means to do that. I maintain what I call my "seed catalog" which consists of a portfolio of drawings that goes back nearly 30 years. I periodically open the portfolio and have a look. Each time it seems that a few of the drawings will come to the fore and invigorate my creative thinking. I may not use the actual image, but it serves as a starting point

for the process. Another device that often works for me is to go for a long walk with my camera, preferably in an area of the city that is new to me. That is sure to inspire. I also have an album in my iPhoto library that I call my Inspiration Collection. It consists of images of other artists' work that I have looked at in books, magazines, exhibition catalogs, and on web sites. I never intentionally copy another artist's work, but I do get inspiration from it.

Another thing that quite often works for me is to dream about a solution to a creative problem. I talk to myself before going to sleep about the problem and ask for my dreams to provide a solution. They frequently do. It's always amazing to me when I wake up full of ideas about a current project. It's like I kept working on it all night, even though my conscious self went to bed.

And, when all else fails and I am just not sure what to do next, I step away from it all and knit a sweater, crochet a scarf, learn a new piece on the piano, or, best of all, go on vacation and leave everything behind for a time.

## Mining the Vein of Creativity

By Tommy McClure Scanlin

Creativity—that elusive and precious quarry! I continue to find myself challenged to discover ways to mine the vein of creativity. I search for inspiration and, once found, I am then confronted with the challenge of how to turn those ideas into tapestries. Luckily, over the years I have developed an array of strategies that help dig into that hidden vein.

For instance, I have often thought the answer to everything is in a book—I just need to locate the right book. I have searched among many writings for the answer to the ubiquitous question of "How does one become more creative?" When I bought the book *The Mind's Best Work* by D. N. Perkins a few years back, I hoped it held the secret of how individuals came up with novel ideas. But what I learned from Perkins was that there is not a magic formula for "being creative." Instead, it results most often from—work!

The process of digging for inspiration then developing it further is sometimes painful, sometimes joyful, but always must be accomplished by action. Writers often say: "You have to show up every day..." and that is true. Effort has to be made every day just



Tommye Scanlin, *SPRING PROFUSION*,  
30" x 25", 2008; wool & cotton

to have a chance of discovering the potential hidden gold mine of creativity. I have learned that every day I must look, draw, paint, take photographs, read, ponder, write, and weave.

Occasionally I can devote only 15 minutes to the process. But if I miss those few minutes, then I lose positive momentum and a negative cycle of un-productivity may follow.

When reading, I know a book will not "make me creative," but the author may suggest clues about where those veins of creative gold lie. A couple of books I've found quite helpful are *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron and *Drawing on the Artist Within* by Betty Edwards.

In *The Artist's Way*, Cameron advocates what she calls "Morning Pages"—three pages written by hand first thing each morning. The daily writings, Cameron says, are not to be read by others—or even necessarily re-read by the one who writes them. I tried the morning pages but only for a few weeks several years ago. In February of 2008 I decided to try the process again and stick with it. Now I am eager to get up each morning and get at these pages. I usually spend about thirty minutes and a cup of coffee on them. Cameron calls the morning pages a "brain drain," and I find

them to be a great way to get niggling anxieties about what is going on in my life into the words on the page. That "gerbil-wheel" cycle of worries spinning in my mind can be quite debilitating to my expressive side, if I let it. I feel being faithful to writing the morning pages has enhanced my tapestry making through helping me generate ideas that I can then take further.

*Drawing on the Artist Within* by Betty Edwards gives excellent suggestions for quick visual exercises. I have found several of the exercises to be helpful for pushing me out of my typical approach to designing. One of the resulting compositions has turned into a tapestry entitled "Spring Profusion." Other designs generated when working through Edwards' book wait to be developed into future finished work.

I have found that workshops are a great way to become quickly immersed in a topic or medium. For instance, in 2008 I participated with a few others in directed individual studies led by Steven Aimone at his Asheville, NC, studio. As we worked, Aimone talked about working in flux, letting the image grow, and making changes along the way. One of his comments was, "When in doubt, make big changes!" We took this to heart as we sometimes erased hours of earlier work with a few strokes of white paint. He encouraged us to consider nothing precious in our composition... until just the right time when all parts came together in a pleasing unity. Steve Aimone, the author of *Design!: A Lively Guide to Design Basics for Artists & Craftspeople*, is an inspirational teacher, and taking his course has given me more options to consider when designing for tapestry.

Finally, one of my most treasured ways to develop and nurture creativity is by spending time in a setting removed from my daily routine. A favorite retreat location is with friends on their 120 acres of wooded land in the mountains of Western North Carolina. Countless days in the past twenty years have been spent at their place being inspired by the woods, creeks, waterfalls and pond, as well as by their organic gardens and orchard. In fact, many of my tapestry images of the past two decades (like "Yates") have come from photographs, drawings or paintings I have made in those surroundings. My friends have placed their land into a conservation easement, and it will be preserved to inspire others in generations to come.

I also value the times spent at the Hambidge Center for the Creative Arts. Among the oldest artist retreats in

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the United States, Hambidge is located in the north Georgia mountains, near the small town of Dillard. I was accepted for my first residency at Hambidge in 1994, and that experience was pivotal for my artwork at the time. I have returned several times since, and each retreat has been beneficial to my tapestry making.



Tommye Scanlin,  
YATES,  
34" x 16", 2006;  
wool & cotton.  
Private Collection

The Center accepts artists in any creative field including visual art, music, writing, dance, theatre and others. Six to ten residents are there at any given time with overlapping stays, some for two weeks while others may be at the Center for up to eight weeks. The cost is quite reasonable and the only expectation of residents is that all come to the main house to have the evening meals together. The generous mix of personalities, media, and experiences of the residents provides great artistic ferment, adding a dynamic atmosphere to this special place.

Finding and sustaining creativity is a distinct challenge, to be sure. Yet it's a challenge that can be rewarding in many unexpected ways, if one shows up every day to do the work. In my case, the work must involve thinking about and searching for innovative solutions. I have learned I must do the work to pursue what I truly love, the making of images and the weaving of tapestry. Probing for veins of inspiration; recording thoughts and images in words, sketches, photographs; seeking guidance and instruction; and finding places that nurture and celebrate the generative process feel important for mining the creativity that lies hidden in each of us, just waiting to be revealed.

## A Creative Day in a Life

By Ann Keuper

I want to start with a story; the story of my day.

At the turn of the New Year, I decided to schedule 10 hours of studio time into my week. Wednesday and Friday mornings, 9:00-1:00 and a 2 hour evening session was my time to turn off all busy work and to turn on the creativity. Today is Wednesday, the first chance at trying out my new schedule.

My day began last night. I made a nice meal and my family arrived home, all in the usual expectation to relax and eat, do homework, shower and go to bed. Before dinner my husband and I got into an argument after which neither of us felt like eating. So, I went to bed still upset, did not get a very good night's sleep, was awake and had disturbing dreams. My neck was bothering me too, my body stiff. I need to start stretching. Our shower had been sending off some electrical shocks and we were becoming the grounds for the electrical current between faucet and tub. An electrician needed to come ASAP. The family took off for school, my son upset about the shower situation. I cleaned the kitchen and briefly met with a countertop installer in an almost completed remodel we are doing. My mother met me for the studio time since she wants to be a part of it too. It was already 9:30. We made coffee and talked a bit. Then it was time. She stopped me from feeding the chickens and doing another load of laundry and... dragged me in.

I then began to move things around in the studio feeling like it was a mess and not set up for both of us. She quieted me down again. "Come, let's just have a moment of prayer," she said. So we did. We prayed for protection from interference for the time we were there and for the creative creativity to come forth. We began by warping a tapestry frame loom for her.

I have been struggling with writing this article. I have so many "tools" that I know about, use and suggest to others. Yet, there just has been something missing. What is it really about the creative process that I want to tell others; what is the core of the matter for me? I think the problem is what I go through every day; that everything tries to stand in my way of working. Even in the studio, my daughter calls from school, upset with something. I do not like to answer the phone then but I cannot help answering her call. I am stiff, I am sore, and my unsettled mind has a hard time warming up to my tapestry and seeing what it wants to tell me.

During the warping process, we began to talk about this article I was writing. Mom started talking about an article she read recently about a woman who had a left brain stroke and for many years lived entirely on the right side of her brain, her creative side. After years of therapy, her left brain did fully recover at which point she said that living in the right brain had been the most blissful state she had ever experienced. After knowing this about life, she was able to switch from left to right brain activity at any moment. The woman, Jill Bolte Taylor, was interviewed in the recent AARP magazine (Nov/Dec 2008) and has written a book about her experience, *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey*.

I began to weave on my tapestry that had halted months ago, if not longer. I began introducing new materials and began weaving eccentrically to break up a grid structure. I just began weaving, not knowing where I was going with it. I still do not know but I am hopeful it will take me somewhere.

I do know that the tapestry weaving process for me is both right and left brain. Weaving is naturally a left brain activity, over, under, what goes over, what goes under, counting threads, turn. It wants perfection. The right brain keeps the piece alive as I move away from perfection and challenge myself by adding a new texture, or technique, or image. I begin with a concept; I draw, photograph, think, look, gather and collect materials and colors. I begin with a size and format that seems interesting, feels right. If I weave a plan, I cannot keep to the plan. Years ago in figure drawing class, I could never contain the drawing within the square frame; it was more interesting to let it grow.

I know enough that when I get to the loom, that the piece in progress may need to change direction. What direction is not easy to figure out but it is a very important part of creativity and something I know I have to face.

Why is it that the left brain takes over? Even this exercise of writing about the creative process is that left brain kind of activity. How can we allow the right brain to be more often present? How can we help it to exist? Because, when the right brain is fully present, the dialogue between the work and the artist happens. That moment is when the tapestry lives, in the timeless space, in the present, in the magical, the indefinable and what comes into being is greater than the left brain can conceive.

So, I think if there is any wisdom to be learned from this day's story, it is to allow the right brain some space. Let all left brain activity cease... the plans for the day, for the future, thoughts of the past. Weave. That is all. Weave and see where it takes you.

The electrician came, the problems began to mount and I again succumbed. I cannot wait until Friday. And, I will try to go to the studio in the times in between, even to just say hello.

Anyone interested in talking about the creative process is invited to write to me at [ann@desertweaving.com](mailto:ann@desertweaving.com).

## Stimulating and Maintaining Creativity

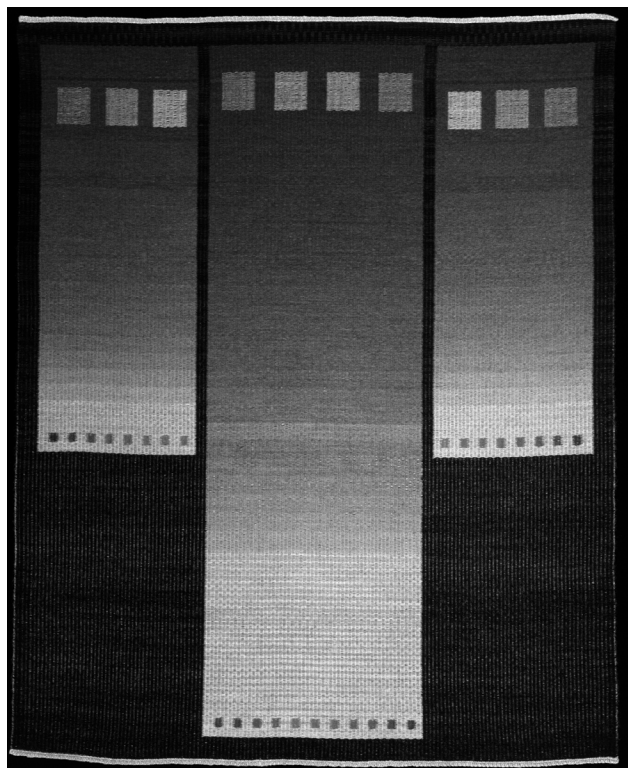
By Michael Rohde

Stimulating and maintaining a creative 'high' seems the ideal of anyone trying to make something new, but being constantly in an innovative mode is not necessarily an ideal situation. If we were to always be in a generative mindset, how would we be able to sift good ideas from bad, or at least the less good ideas? In fact, in talking about the creative process, many writers mention how important it is to have times for a break from sustained effort on an uncompleted or unrealized project. Rollo May, in "The Courage to Create" observes that often when a roadblock occurs, the answer or inspiration will come at the time when you take a break from the pursuit of that goal. The 'ah-ah' moment comes when you stop thinking about it.

Tapestry weaving is an art that does not lend itself readily to generating inspiration on the spot while you are working on a given piece. The process is so slow, that most weavers only begin weaving after spending many days, weeks or months developing a specific plan or cartoon. So the creativity for that piece comes during the design. Fortunately, while carrying out the rote motions of the weaving process for the first piece, there is time to think and daydream, and look ahead to the next thing you will weave. Hence, I more often find myself impatient to finish one tapestry so I can start the next one.

Still, there are times when the loom is empty, and so is the brain, at least of a new plan. The first thing I do is go to books and look through the images, armed with a small packet of Post-It notes; I will mark two or three in one book, then go on to others, until I have

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Michael Rohde, WINTER/LAKE BIWA, 59" x 48" 2001. wool, dyes; tapestry. Collection of The Art Institute of Chicago. Photo: Andrew Neuhart

no more than eight or ten candidates. If nothing strikes me the first time thorough, I might turn an old art school trick around and look through the book with the images upside down. This takes away some of the 'context' and fools the eye in your brain to consider the image in a different manner. Then, I wait a few days before winnowing down the field of the images that struck the first time.

When I return to the books, I see the eight or ten images with a fresh eye and can usually narrow the choices to one or two. Then, I begin the process of making the cartoon. Often what happens is that the colors of one image resonate with me, but the shapes of another image appeal to me, and the first sketch is a synthesis of two or more original ideas. The cartoon goes through several iterations (usually on a computer screen), then is printed and perhaps modified with colored pencils before becoming a final plan for the next tapestry. An example of the outcome of this approach is "Winter/Lake Biwa." It evolved from consideration of a catalogue of traditional kimono, where I was drawn to the color choices, but also considered the role of indigo in many Japanese textiles. The cartoon I developed was an abstraction of the way such garments are often pre-

sented in galleries. This piece is in the permanent collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.

What have often been sources of inspiration for me are travel, and looking at other textiles, or hand made objects. Travel can be one of the strongest generators of new ideas. If we think of creativity as making something original, what better way to give yourself a nudge or shove in a new direction than to expose yourself to something out of your own comfort zone. This does not mean that you have to go half way around the world, leave the country or even the state. Anything to expose yourself to something untried, even visiting a new store that is not your usual one, or take an outing with a friend to even a familiar place. Too often we become stuck because we see familiar things in the same way. However, a trip through a familiar place (store, museum or gallery, to name a few) with a second pair of eyes will generate comments about things we had walked by and never noticed. Some of the most wonderful works of art are depictions of commonplace objects or activities, but seen through new eyes.

## Fruitful Ambiguity

By Barbara Heller

Ah, how to maintain that balance between the open mind daydreaming of new possibilities and the focused mind obsessing about an idea? How to rid ourselves of the puritan work ethic and allow for serendipity in our lives? How to turn off the critical parent and turn on the inner child? If I don't work on my new project am I being lazy and exhibiting avoidance behavior or am I giving my mind time to work on the idea while I watch a movie or read a book or talk to a friend?

For me, creativity seems to occur with slow accretions onto the nub of an idea. Something bothers me, something hits me over the head and demands to be woven, something consistently nags me at odd moments. An idea forms, and then everything I come across seems to relate to this idea. Then I begin to explore, searching for images and ideas to enrich the original nub. A problem arises, then a solution occurs. There may be minutes or days between problem and solution or, for my tapestry about land mines, "Ozymandias", there may even be years between the original idea and the perfect image that best embodies the emotion. I knew I did not want to show a dis-

membered human being in a tapestry but I did want to make people realize the seriousness of the situation of unexploded land mines maiming innocent victims long after a war was over. On a trip to Mexico, going to our rental car one morning, there, under the wheel of the car next to ours, was a broken rag doll. Out came the camera and the last piece of the puzzle was found. But the problem had to be in my head, unresolved; the idea had to still be active.

Two years ago I wove the last of the "Cover " series. What now? Would I ever have another good idea? I had to weave and I had to find something I could feel passionate about exploring.

Several different ideas, longtime concerns, started to wind themselves together and demand attention. Many years ago I bought a new computer and wanted to recycle the old one, not throw it in the garbage. Recycling depots for e-waste were not yet in existence, so I thought I could take the computer apart and, at least recycle the plastic shell. What treasures were revealed within! I took apart a keyboard. I took apart a radio, I took apart a mobile phone. I took apart other people's junk. I saved the innards. Why was our society becoming so dependent on computers? Why did we worship technology? These thoughts interwove themselves with a long-time fascination with the golden reliquaries that hold the bones of saints which I had seen in museums in Europe (some are on view at the Cluny Museum in Paris). Maybe I could



Barbara Heller, OZYMANDIAS, 62" x 66" (158 x 168cm) 2004; linen warp, wool, cotton, rayon, silk, some hand-dyed and hand-spun; photo: Ted Clark, Image This Photography Inc.

create reliquaries for the bones of the new religion, technology; the guts of the electronics as the bones of the computer? Wasn't the first computer a jacquard loom? And doesn't a computer encode stories in a binary code of on/off just as textiles encode stories in a binary code of up/down? Maybe I could morph one into the other, an ethnic textile into a circuit board and joined by a golden hand as reliquary for both. Hmmm. So exciting.



Barbara Heller, FUTURE RELIQUARY #1, 24" x 37" 2008; linen warp, wool, cotton, rayon, silk, metallic threads, some hand-dyed

The problem is not in sustaining creativity—the problem comes when the constant inventiveness of our minds is ignored. Who knows where inspiration comes from? Perhaps the gods really do breathe it into us, but we also have to inhale. Why not? It happens in areas of the brain we seem to have no control over. After weaving for several years, I finally got the courage to visit my favorite teacher from art school to show him my work and get his critique. I commented on the time involved to weave a tapestry and how I needed big ideas to justify the project. Yes, he said, but you must weave every day, whether or not you are weaving a "major" work. It is in the daily weaving

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that we strengthen our techniques and it is in the doing that we find what we want to say. Creativity does not exist in a vacuum. The mind must be active and so must the fingers. Then connections are made and new ideas are formed.

So I really do try to weave every day. And I collect things that are beautiful to me - shells, bones, buttons, old paper. And I keep an idea book/sketch book/diary, and I keep an image bank of pictures from magazines and other places and a slide bank of things I would one day like to incorporate into a tapestry. And if I am not weaving a large tapestry I weave a small tapestry, translate a photo to improve technique, weave a small celebration for something gained or a memorial to someone lost.

This morning I was reading *God Is No Laughing Matter* by Julia Cameron who also wrote *The Artist's Way*. But I have also been thinking of this essay over the past few days, procrastinating, avoiding the actual writing, just as I have done since college and still do when designing a new tapestry. The ideas are so clear in my head. Putting them down on paper can seem like torture. I have to wait until the pressure builds inside me to the point where it is easier to do the task I am avoiding so I can get on to the next step, than it is to pretend to ignore the problem. My need to weave overwhelms my reluctance to design.

Reading in bed, I came across these sentences: "There is a cyclicity to life, a recognizable on-off pulse. When we go with the current we experience a sense of rightness. When we force action we experience strain. And yet forcing action can be more comfortable and familiar than allowing fruitful ambiguity. Ambiguity breeds anxiety and this uncomfortable anxiety in turn catalyzes new directions." (Page 23)

It seems to me that, in the end, sustaining a fruitful ambiguity in life; an openness to new ideas, a treasure trove of images, ideas, movies, book, lectures, and conversations with friends all jumbled in our brains, is the way to sustain creativity.

## "Connections: Small Format International" Exhibitors' List

By Kathy Spoering

Jane Sauer chose 49 pieces to be in the "Connections: Small Format International" exhibit from the pool of 184 entries representing tapestries from 19 countries. Thank you to everyone who entered. Whether your piece was accepted or not, you have played a part in the exhibit. Also, I was very pleased that all of the entries were readable, digitally, which impressed me very much for a first time effort in that arena.

Watch the website: [www.americantapestryalliance.org](http://www.americantapestryalliance.org) for details on when the catalogs will be available for purchase.

Janet Austin	RI, USA
Nicki Bair	CA, USA
Cecilia Blomberg	WA, USA
Barbara Burns	NY, USA
Don Burns	DC, USA
Laura Center	NM, USA
Clare Coyle	Scotland
Sharon M. Crary	LA, USA
Katy De Bock	Belgium
Elaine Duncan	Canada
Lany Eila	NM, USA
Christina Frey	Germany
Tricia Goldberg	CA, USA
Mihaela Mirela Grigore	Romania
Marianne Haller	CA, USA
Louise Halsey	KY, USA
Joyce Hayes	WA, USA
Barbara Heller	Canada
Urban R Jupena	Mich, USA
Jean Pierre Larochette	CA, USA
Ayelet Lindenstrauss Larsen	IN, USA
Maximo Laura	Peru
J.Martins, L.Branquinho, C.Ceia, V.Fino	Portugal
Lynn Mayne	FL, USA
John Nicholson	FL, USA
Pam Patrie	OR, USA
Christine Rivers	Canada
Pete Rocci	OR, USA
Deann Rubin	MO, USA
Terri Stewart	FL, USA
Sarah Swett	ID, USA
Kathe Todd-Hooker	OR, USA
Pamela Topham	NY, USA
Linda G Weghorst	TN, USA





TWW Installation #1 far left: Marcia Ellis, VERTIGO; Jan Langdon, ARTFUL/RED, ARTFUL/PASTEL; Tricia Goldberg, SUNFLOWERS; S. Henegar, WHERE CLOUD SHADOWS WALK; J. Nisbett, NAVAJO CODE TALKER; Maj Britt Mobrand, BOOGIE WOOGIE BLUES

## Tapestry Weavers West Members' Showcase

By Tricia Goldberg

The Tapestry Weavers West Members' Showcase in July and August of 2008 was a curated exhibition of TWW members' latest work, intended to show the variety of style and achievement from old and new members who are either emerging or established artists.

The exhibition was held in the Craft and Cultural Arts Gallery, in the atrium of the State of California Building in downtown Oakland. Most visitors to this lovely, well-lit gallery work in the building or nearby, while many others are individuals who keep up with exhibitions in Oakland and elsewhere in the San Francisco Bay Area. With our publicity and invitations, we wanted our show to attract an audience particularly excited about textiles. Even in the Bay Area, most people are not very familiar with contemporary tapestry. Because many of us live and work in the Bay Area, we could invite friends, colleagues, and textile and art enthusiasts and many exhibiting artists were able to attend one or both receptions.

The receptions were planned to coincide with Third Thursdays Oakland Art Night, a monthly event that encourages art lovers to spend an evening "gallery hopping" among the city's exhibition spaces. We called on TWW members to contribute refreshments for the first reception; my daughter Renée catered the second. Members were also asked to gallery-sit as often as possible during the gallery's open hours. This proved to be an excellent way to

engage the public. The second reception included musical entertainment, as well as two invited speakers from within our group who both gave excellent presentations. Alex Friedman spoke about the influence of nontraditional weaving on her art, and Michael Rohde talked about his travels to Tibet and his exhibition in Lithuania. It was exciting to see their tapes in the gallery and hear their stories.

Deborah Corsini, a member for many years and recent TWW president; Care Standley, a founding member and our slide librarian; and I curated the exhibition and were closely involved in all aspects of planning the show, including working with the gallery's director on the invitation postcard and two receptions.

We visited the gallery to estimate how many pieces, including large and small tapestries, would fit comfortably in the space. In addition to the gallery itself, two long built-in glass display cases were available for smaller tapestries and related materials. In these we placed a small loom, yarns, bobbins, and a cartoon developed through several stages next to a tapestry by Jan Langdon, who was exhibiting with us for the first time and is our current president. Our talented newsletter editor, Mimi Heft, a professional graphic designer who was also exhibiting her tapestries for the first time, designed the invitation postcard. We asked participating weavers to help with hanging and taking down the tapestries at the end of the show.

While group members are usually involved in many aspects of an exhibition, the process of choosing who would exhibit, and which pieces would be shown, could have been awkward. Why did we not have a guest curator or juror? For us, curating this exhibition was an integral part of the members' showcase. In a sense, this show was only partially juried, since every interested member was included. Beyond that, however, choosing the work and putting together a cohesive show was important to us, and we worked carefully and thoughtfully in our curatorial role.

Each TWW member could submit up to four tapestries. We chose what we considered was the best piece by each artist first. Additional work was chosen based on what would work best in the main gallery and in the display cases. This, of course, was a subjective matter, but in general we looked for the most interesting images or designs, along with outstanding craftsmanship. To our surprise and relief, we had few

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disagreements about the choices. We were happy with the quality of the work and its presentation. Twenty-one members exhibited a total of 46 pieces.

Some members, both old and new, were exhibiting with TWW for the first time including Alex Friedman, Katie Alcorn, Janette Gross, Kay Kent, Maj-Britt Mobrand, and Merna Strauch. Some were exhibiting their tapestries for the very first time. In addition to Deborah Corsini, Care Standley, and myself, long-time active members include Bobbi Chamberlain, Marcia Ellis, Marianne Haller, Susan Henegar, Nancy Jackson, Christine Laffer (like myself, another founding member), Sonja Miramont, Jan Moore, and Jacquetta Nisbett.

Participants paid an entry fee and the expenses were shared between TWW and the gallery.

We plan to celebrate TWW's 25th anniversary in 2010 with another exhibition and additional events. Time and history are important in the world of tapestry weaving, and keeping a volunteer organization afloat for such a long time takes many dedicated tapestry weavers. For 2010, we may have an outside curator/juror, but we will encourage all of our members to help with the planning and work involved, as well as—most importantly—having new, interesting tapestries to exhibit.

## **Review: TWiNE on Display**

**By Micala Sidore**

Many regional tapestry groups developed in the late 1980's and early 1990's. TWiNE, Tapestry Weavers in New England, held their first meeting in Guild, NH, in the fall of 1991. Susanne Pretty, Leslie Voiers and Patryc Wiggins had put the call out and about 18 people came. I was among the charter members. Most, but not all, lived in New England states so the group declared one of its first principles: that meetings would always take place somewhere in the six state region, but members could come from anywhere. Later on, the group established another inclusive policy: that the individual makers had the right to define tapestry for themselves. Anyone using any technique (at one point, a felt maker became a member) could join.

From the outset the members have talked endlessly with each other, at meetings and through email.

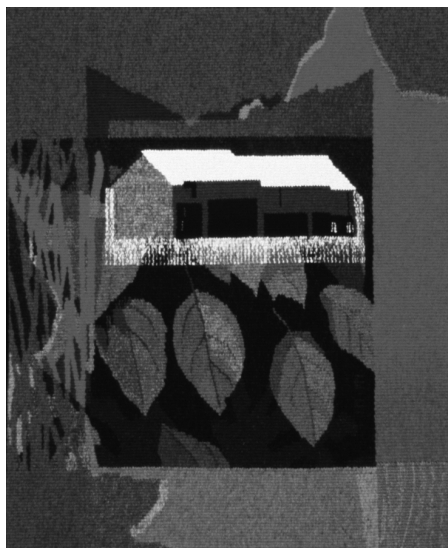
They originally met on a quarterly basis; these days, it is usually three times a year. In the beginning as well, a small sub-committee edited, wrote and sent the newsletters; these have since evolved into newsy emails sent by one member to the others. Members have visited museums, textile departments, restoration workshops, exhibitions and some professional studios. They have invited well-established tapestry weavers to lead retreats, and they organized one group challenge, based upon Donald Hall's poem "The Oxcart Man." In addition, TWiNE has had a few small exhibitions.

This most recent, held in the fall of 2008 at the River Tree Center for the Arts in Kennebunk, ME, was possibly the most ambitious. Members Jan Austin, Michelle Mancini and Susanne Pretty juried sixty-seven entries, and selected forty-two that met their criteria. At least one piece by each member submitting work made the cut. (Pretty and Austin also included their own work, making clear their role as jurors, though the gallery, unfortunately, did not add that information to the labels.) Anne Homme helped gallery director Kevin Townsend install everything in the entry hall as well as in one large room of the gallery.

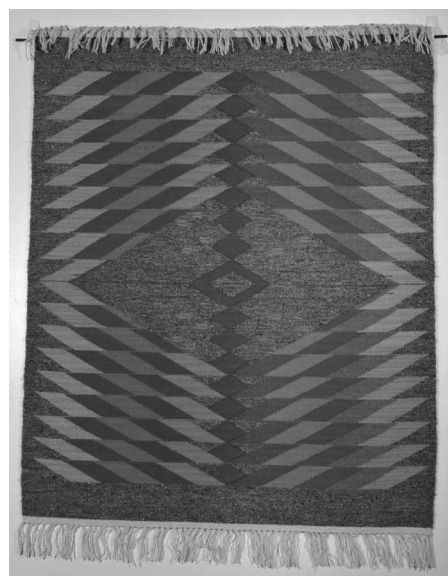
Installations, especially work by a variety of makers, can act as an invisible force contributing to each piece and to the coherence of the show. Thoughtful grouping can bring out the connections between dissimilar pieces. Those principles operated well here.

One of the most satisfying qualities about this exhibit for me was the degree to which so many weavers had changed and developed their visions of tapestry. Good tapestries can tell good stories; in this collection, the utilization of a variety of tapestry techniques created some lovely narratives. When done ably and thoughtfully, these pieces drew attention to the textile nature of the work. Here I will discuss a limited number of pieces; space limitations means I cannot discuss them all.

Elinor Steele has long used a computer as a design tool to make abstract work. I remember her earlier weavings as full of circles, squares and rectangles. In this TWiNE exhibit, by contrast, she has produced two pieces that are rich with color and jagged shapes that cut across each other and create visual layers. As you study the details, you can almost discern human faces, landscapes, structures. Steele's work radiates energy and fun. She also included a surprising



Elinor Steele, AUTUMN LEAVES WINTER, 30" x 24"



Elizabeth Trocki, NAVAJO REFRACTION,

"Autumn Leaves Winter," with a building and trees and two leaves and snow. She used her non-geometric shapes here as a frame—it made for a handsome result.

Alex Friedman has changed the look of her work dramatically. Whereas earlier tapestries showed the quintessential New England summer vacation, with clean vertical and horizontal lines, towels and porches and windows, she now focuses on graceful evocative curves. In the two pieces she submitted for the TWINE exhibit, she exploited the technique of eccentric wefts. She has created rivers that run through plains of diamonds, three-dimensional narrow waves on a flat surface. (See TT, Winter 2008 .21)

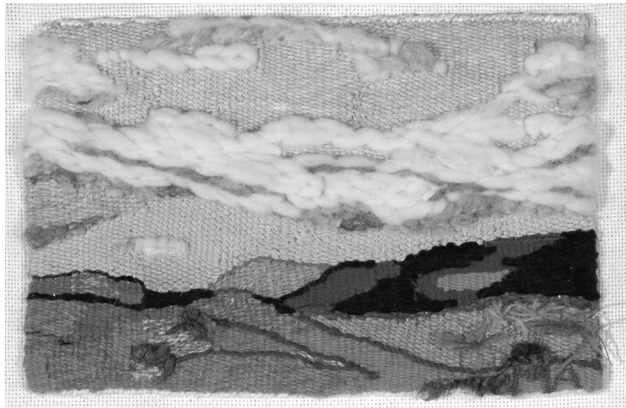
Three weavers might be working with objects for the floor, or are they? Elizabeth Trocki's "Wedding Blanket" and "Navajo Refraction" both do honor to their southwestern Native-American aesthetic. The symmetries are elegant and raise welcomed questions about where they might settle in. Hung near by, imaginative and large, Sara Hotchkiss' work, constructed with rag wefts, represents the continuing commitment of the group to inclusiveness. Whether her use of rags means that her pieces should land on the floor is not self-evident. Like Trocki her hangings defy my pre-conceived notions of the materials she used.

Priscilla May Alden, whose early work called to mind her training in the southwest, used to compose carefully balanced arrangements of images. What she made always seemed to me far more like rugs than wall pieces. Her two tapestries for this exhibit break that pattern. Especially satisfying to me was "Meadow Cove," with wonderful, silly colors (like pink!)-and wild irregularly shaped evergreen trees which evoke convincingly those along the Maine coast, where Alden lives. Hers other submission, "Sunset at Ocean Point," has a grand giddy quality. The silk thread shimmers. Zigzags in reds, pinks and oranges fill the center in a field of pick on pick. Alden has framed these at the bottom and the top of the piece with impressionistic reflections in blues. It feels like the churning water of ocean at the end of the day.

Each wall of the installation created the possibility for dialog. "Chaos" by Jan Austin, interacts well, for instance, with "Shelter" by Cheryl Holbert and "Homage to Anne Frank" by Barbara Burns. Each has a limited colour range and each carries a message. Austin's work has grown, literally, from her usual small pieces: "Chaos" measures 18" x 24". She has also limited her palette to black, gray and white. What she has done becomes clearer as you look at it: cones of yarn near a weaver's tools, suggesting a tapestry as yet unwoven. Austin has chosen with assiduous care the way she marks dark and light, adding to the pleasure of the result.

In another unexpected twist of my expectations, Mary Adebonojo turns the miniature on its head. Usually, small pieces pull us in closer, so that we can study each seed of color and analyze each decision. Adebonojo's "The Heavens Declare Their Glory" (12" x 15"), however, works best from a distance. The small section of soumack makes her clouds puffy; with the insertion of a few strands of pile, she produces satisfying texture to her ground. In contrast, Estela Serafini's "Knowledge Tearing the Ignorance" rewards close scrutiny. She has also mounted her 7" x 7" tapestry on aluminum and zebra wood, materials which echo the images of lightning and the ground it strikes.

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Mary Adebonojo, *THE HEAVENS  
DECLARE THEIR GLORY*, 12" x 15"

Sarah Warren's "Mountain Waves V" and "The Cove" as well as Betsy Wing's "Untitled" produce subtle and effective results with restricted palettes and limited shapes. Warren made landscapes for the show: the sun going down behind mountains, a body of water surrounded by trees. She has composed the first with horizontal lines and triangles. Early attempts to weave tapestries often look like this—the horizon divides two elements of sky and ground. But here Warren inserts a terrific collection of stuttering lines which act as counterpoint to the more common landscape, defining the edge between the sky and the brilliant colors of sunset. In her other, "The Cove," Warren does a fine job rendering water, with repetitions of short woven dashes in light, medium and dark. Her choices reminded me of Susan Martin Maffei's work, which achieves the illusion of crowds of people in infinite variations as she shifts small details from basic elements.

Betsy Wing, who has studied for years with James Koehler, manages to make the work of Untitled seem effortless. She has combined several blues and a peach in a combination of lines, simple shapes and low rising curves in a piece that reads in the order in which it was likely woven, from bottom to top. The tapestry leaves the strong impression that Wing simply wove it as she felt it, without a cartoon, in a serene state of mind.

All in all, the TWiNE exhibit showed a high level, not just of technical competence, but also of care in imaginative design. I look forward to the possibilities of the next 18 years.

## Review: Different Perspectives

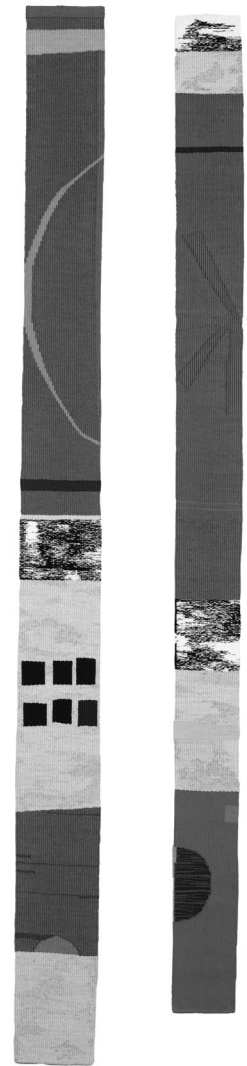
By Anne Jackson

Four leading British tapestry artists recently exhibited at the BSW Gallery, Exeter, Devon, U.K.. They represented a cross-section of professional practice in the UK. All four are experienced international exhibitors, executing major commissions and installations as far away as Japan. The "Different Perspectives" of the exhibition title concerned the interpretations they bring to bear on their experiences of the human-made world and the natural environment.

Fiona Rutherford's tapestries, influenced by Japanese textiles, displayed a mastery of colour and design that made them almost dance off the walls. For example, in 'Present Past', a fine mauve stripe moved across a field of bright aqua, and another of almost industrial sea-green, with optical effect akin to a Bridget Riley painting.

Due to its historical evolution as a pictorial art form, there is often an assumption that a tapestry has a 'right way up', and is to be hung like a picture. Many of Fiona Rutherford's pieces could be hung vertically or horizontally according to taste, as the composition was not intended to be read pictorially. On some level, this conveyed a light-heartedness and ease that were part of the works' appeal.

Jilly Edwards' mixed-media series consisted of rolled tapestry fragments in small perspex display units, along with ephemera such as embroidered train tickets. Each piece could have its elements rearranged, capturing a sense of the non-linearity of remembered experience. She also exhibited a series of tiny,



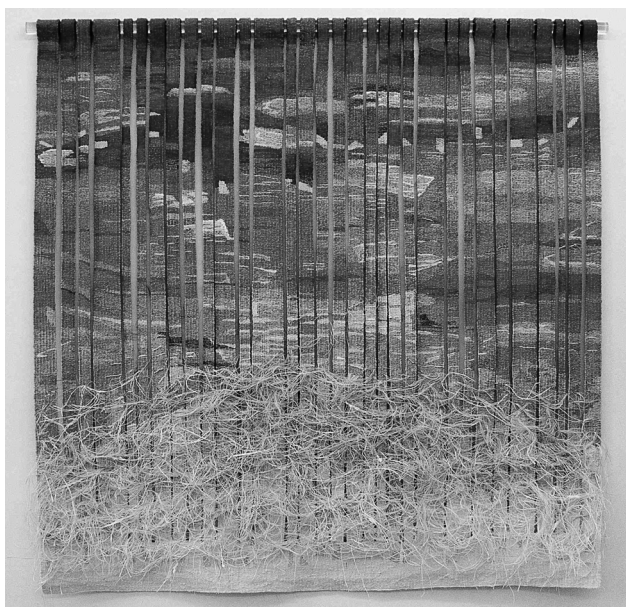
Fiona Rutherford,  
*IN CONVERSATION*, 64" x  
5" and 60" x 4 (163cm x  
13cm and 153cm x 10cm)  
2007; cotton warp, linen,  
cotton weft. Photo by  
Keith Pattison

intensely-coloured abstract tapestries, each in a spacious frame, like a precious fragment of memory from a visual diary.

In Fiona Hutchison's two large-scale works, she dematerialised the conventional rectangular plane of tapestry into airy vertical strips. Clouds of pale, added filaments floated before them, appearing to be uncontrolled, but individually painted, treated and placed with painstaking care, giving an effect of flying sea-foam.

All her works expressed her love of the sea and sailing, including several small framed pieces where the quiet fineness of the weaving suggested calm water, reflections, or harbour elements. The scale and delicacy of these works invited close looking, while paradoxically evoking the vastness of the uncontrollable sea.

Fiona Mathison's work subverted the traditional structures and materials used to construct woven tapestry. She showed a pair of slender, cylindrical forms, curving from floor to ceiling, evocative of birch trunks in a wood, whose construction included furnishing fabric and monofilament wrapping. Small freestanding shadow boxes were related to her site-specific work in the gallery courtyard, a tall, bright, tree trunk-like form, reminiscent of the work of Nikki de St Phalle in its colour and humour. Entitled 'Mixed Fruits', it was woven of monofilament and long strips cut from fruit juice cartons. The effect



Fiona Hutchison, WHERE TWO TIDES MEET, 120cm x 113cm 2006; Woven on cotton warp at 8 epi with a cotton, linen, monofilament and paper yarns.

was of flowing patterns, bark and cellular structures, as the freestanding tapestry form moved gently in the wind, changing with time and weather.

This show represented a synthesis of four very different approaches to tapestry weaving. It was carefully hung in the semi-domestic scale of the gallery space, so that each artist's work could speak clearly and be heard. The four perspectives on the world and weaving were united as a harmonious whole, a fitting achievement for a contemporary tapestry gallery; as creating coherence from diverse strands and materials is the technical heart of the weaver's art.

Tapestry is often unrecognised in contemporary culture. Judging by recent national press coverage, several professional arts journalists clearly have no idea that tapestry lives and thrives as a contemporary art form in the UK. Exhibitions like this one make an important contribution to the rectification of this situation.

## Review: Putting Content to Color

By Kathe Todd-Hooker

*ed. note: The following review was arranged by Pam Stout with instructions for Kathe Todd-Hooker to submit the article directly to proof reader, Mary Colton, who in turn sent it on to Elinor Steele for layout.*

Visiting Diva Gallery to see the exhibit of Linda Rees was an enjoyable experience. I had never been to the gallery in Eugene, Oregon. DIVA is a great name for a great gallery! The name stands for Downtown Initiative for the Visual Arts. It's actually a series of galleries in the same building that showcases Oregon artists. The gallery in which the Linda Rees exhibit was hung was large enough that there was plenty of spacing around the tapestries. This made the groupings show to advantage without making them feel cramped. In addition, the lighting was great. Also intriguing was the fact that two of the larger geometric pieces were mounted on a black wall, setting the two tapestries off spectacularly. As luck would have it, I was able to attend a very interesting question and answer gallery talk by the artist on the day I visited the gallery.

I was first intrigued and then made curious by Rees' artist's statement that the design and subject matter was dictated or evolved directly from the yarn selections

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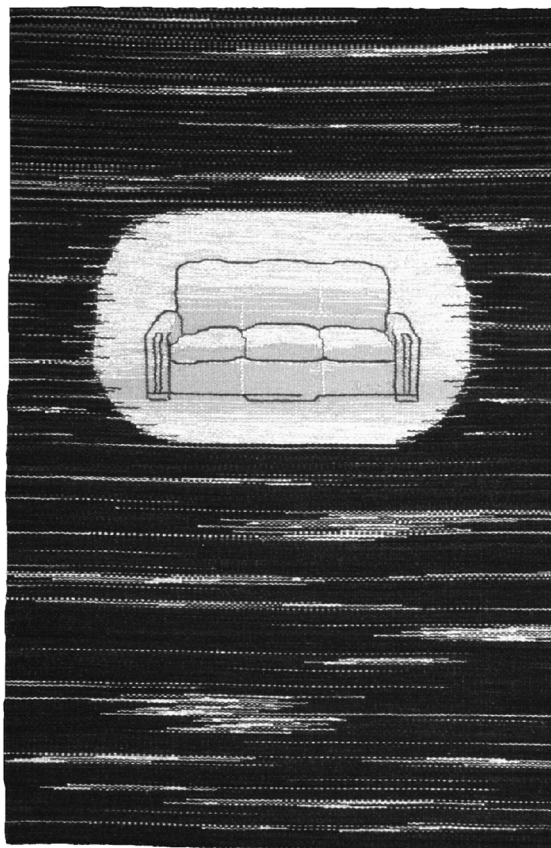
and/or yarn wrappings. I read the statement and was able to think about it for several days in advance of seeing the exhibit. Rees stated "The colour interaction defines the imagery." This is an unusual approach to designing tapestry. Usually the artist thinks of the design first and materials second. Those materials conform to the design, not the other way around.

After hearing Rees speak about her work, I had a better understanding of her approach. She tries to limit her designs to 6 colours, and in her statement she says that she has been using these self imposed limitations for 40 years. She begins with wrappings and winds stripes of yarn until she defines the ratio of colour to colour appropriate for her future tapestry. Then after viewing the wrappings, she decides on the design and/or subject matter.

Rees' approach to designing is the direct opposite of the way many other tapestry artists think and design. For instance, Lurçat indicated that there be no more than 12 colours and perhaps a light, dark and medium of these colours. The image was to be defined and the colours and materials chosen after. The tapestry image itself would dictate colour and material usage. Rees' approach to designing may be opposite that of other tapestry artists, but it works well for her. The chosen colours were nicely harmonized, and because they didn't have to follow the usual colours of the subject matter, they added interest to the tapestries.

Once I got past my fascination with the artist statement, I found that the show actually had three distinct divisions of the 24 tapestries on exhibit. There were the whimsical smaller pieces; the elegant, large format, geometric designs, and a series of small format tapestries mounted on Plexiglas with writings that flowed from the tapestry onto the Plexiglas.

The first grouping was quite whimsical. It's not often that one finds whimsy in tapestry done excellently, but when one does it's both surprising and fascinating. Whimsy always adds interest. I have two favourites in this grouping—one ("Possession #956") is a very mundane, comfortable-looking, perhaps well-used sofa, a tapestry sofa or divan on an elegant indigo and green background. Just the idea of weaving a well-used, cosy-looking sofa makes me want to forget about questions and statements, settle back, be comfortable and relax. Well, it feels comforting and comfortable, so not pretentious in the least. The second is



Linda Rees, POSSESSION #956, 47" x 31" 2002; weft faced weaving with soumak and underside couching Photo by Jack Liu

a woman escaping, leaving, or exiting (any of the above the viewer wishes it to be, which might change according to mood) an opening onto a bright pink landscape. There is a third that I also really like—the pink clouds of "The Mirth Makers" make me want to giggle and put on a happy face.

The next tapestries were geometrically designed. They all had an elegant sparseness, a severe quality or simplicity of design that worked well. The restricted mellow palette and the large geometric elements of the designs created a contemplative mood that was neither Southwestern nor Scandinavian in its final inspiration and derivations, creating a peaceful uniqueness. The tapestries were technically simple but well done, with a relatively large scale and large format and with an extremely limited range of colour selections.

The third group—six small pieces called "The Door Opens on Aging"—probably had the most to say about the artist as a person. I found the relationship between Rees, her mother, and aging bodies to be interesting and riveting. At some point in our lives we all find it necessary to think about aging and the changes in our

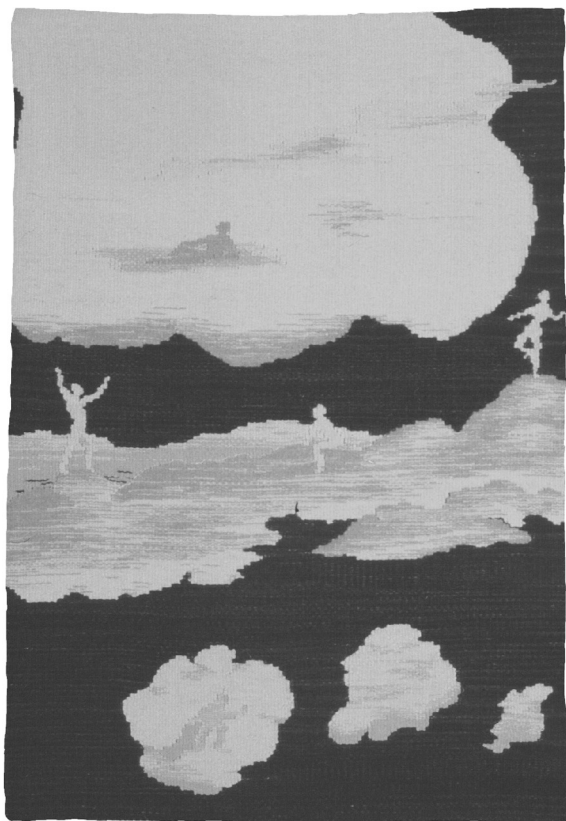
bodies. We seem to come to it with slightly different perspectives, but it is inevitable. I think this series of tapestries really does a good job portraying that retrospection we come to as we age. The six pieces were mounted on Plexiglas with letters and words spilling over onto the Plexiglas edge. The clear Plexiglas with the words created a shadow on the wall behind the pieces that enhanced the meaning of the words and the tapestries. They worked well as a row of three tapestries hung above another row of three, but would have been just as interesting as single pieces on a solitary wall.

One of the things that is most interesting to me as a tapestry artist is being able to see the growth or evolution of another tapestry weaver from one point to another in both technical and aesthetic matters, and design concepts. In this exhibit, I was able to see many tapestries by the same artist that came into being over many years of work. We very seldom get to see this in one place, but with this exhibit, we were allowed to see the growth and musings of a long time fiber artist. According to her artist statement, Rees began weaving in 1965. She was part of an influential NW textile art scene from the early 1970's to the mid-

dle 1980's that produced many well known fiber artists such as Joanna Stanizski, Barbara Heller, Patty Robeson, Pat Spark, Lynn Biasel, Charlotte Van Zant, to name a few. This is the "vibrant art scene" that Rees mentions in her artistic statement. Many of these artists were heavily influenced by a Polish tapestry show that took place in Vancouver, BC, in 1974.\* We don't often think about this period of tapestry weaving because it was overshadowed by the influence that Jean Pierre Larochette and Archie Brenner had on the tapestry scene in the NW in the late 70's, 80s and 90's.

In the 26 year period of time that Rees was involved in the NW textile scene, she helped to produce 10 major textile exhibitions. In this time period she also volunteered at the Whatcom Art Museum and was involved in their various textile and art programs. She was also extremely influential or at least persistently on the scene in the Bellingham Handweavers Guild. It would be interesting to know how much of this scene has influenced her later work.

\*The Polish show that was so influential in the NW was written about in The National Gallery of Canada Journal No.7, October 1975.



Linda Rees, THE MIRTH MAKERS  
Indigo Series # 3, 32" x 29" 2005

## ATA Award of Excellence: Tommye Scanlin

By Merna Strauch

Tommye McClure Scanlin's "...to the essence of every nature..." won the ATA Award at Western NC Handweaver's Guild's "Blue Ridge Handweaving Show" in Asheville, NC in October, 2008.

Tommye is Professor Emerita at North Georgia College & State University, Dahlonega, Georgia, maintains her private studio in Dahlonega, and is no stranger to ATA or to these pages. She was profiled in the Fall 2008 issue of Tapestry Topics, where a picture of her award winning piece can be found. Using a cotton warp, "...to the essence of every nature..." is woven with wool weft yarns, measures 34" x 54", and like most of her work is inspired by the natural world.

In Tommye's words: I use the slow medium of tapestry weaving because I love the surface of flat woven tapestry, the intensity of color as interpreted in yarn, and the significance of each movement of the weaver's

continued...



hands to the finished work. My tapestries are based upon ideas and images that are meaningful to me; the glorious natural world of north Georgia and western North Carolina provide many of those images.

Many of us take our inspiration from Tommye. Her work is widely shown and published. One of her current projects is weaving a daily tapestry Diary for 2009. Check out the details and her progress at her blog <http://tapestry13.blogspot.com> and visit her web-site <http://web.me.com/tmscanlin> for a wealth of other tapestry information.

Congratulations and thank you, Tommye!

## **ATA Volunteers as of January 2009**

It takes a village to run ATA! Everything we do is accomplished by very dedicated volunteers.

Volunteering is a great way to network with other ATA members. We have small and not so small jobs that could use your expertise. Contact Joan Griffin if you can help. [volunteer@americantapestryalliance.org](mailto:volunteer@americantapestryalliance.org)

**Member Services Group:** Co-Director Becky Stevens

**Treasury:** Rosalee Skrenes

**Treasurer's assistant:** Marcia Ellis

**Membership:** Ellen Ramsey

**Education and Special Events:** Mary Lane and Marcy Fraker

**Distance Learning:** Tommye Scanlin

Recent or Current Mentors: In the last 5 years there have been over 20 mentor/student combinations. Some recent ones: Tricia Goldberg, Terri Stewart, Barbara Heller, Michael Rohde, Christine Laffer, Pat Williams, Mary Lane, Sarah Swett, Kathy Spoering, Alex Friedman, Joan Griffin, Sharon Marcus.

**Helping Hands:** Joyce Hayes and Jeanne Bates

**Exhibits Chair:** Alex Friedman

**ATB 8 chairs:** Michael Rohde and Susan Iverson  
Committee: Tricia Goldberg, Jennifer Sargent

**ATB catalog chair:** Regina Vorgang  
Proof Reader: Open

ATB catalog pre sales: Open

**Connections: Small Tapestry International Chair:** Kathy Spoering

Committee: Sarah Swett, Susan Edmunds, Ruth Manning, Nancy Taylor

**2010 Small Format exhibit:** Letitia Roller

**Web Exhibits:** David Johnson

**Online Exhibits Coordinator:** Sarah Swett

Current or future curators for online exhibits: David Johnson, Mary Lane, Barbara Burns, Susan Martin Maffei.

**Newsletter Editor:** Linda Rees

Committee: Mary Colton, Elinor Steele, Merna Strauch, Lyn Hart, Kathy Marcel, Ellen Ramsey

Newsletter column writers: over 40 various volunteers write articles during a year

**Guest Editors or Theme Facilitators:** Lany Eila, Michael Rohde, Mary Lane, Lyn Hart, Ellen Ramsey

**ATA eNews:** Christine Laffer

**ATA Study Forums:** Dorothy Clewes

Recent or current leaders: Dorothy Clewes, Mary Lane, Sharon Marcus

**Library:** Joyce Hayes, chair

Achives: Fran Williamson

Catalog Sales: Joyce Hayes and Ellen Ramsey

**Resources Group: Co-Director:** Linda Wallace  
**Promotion: Open**

SOFA : Mary Zicafoose

ATA Award for Excellence: Elisabeth Quick

ATA Student Award: Open

**Web site Development and Maintenance:**  
Christine Laffer

ATA Artists Pages: Sarah Warren

Web Resources: Christine Laffer and Kathy Marcel

Web Mistress: Jeanne Bates

Graphics Standards: Elinor Steele, Mimi Heft

**Public Relations:** Elaine Duncan and Linda Wallace

**Postcard Manager:** Lynn Mayne

**Fundraising:** Open

Grants Research and Preparation: Susan Skalak

Special Event Fundraising: Open

**Ad Hoc Committees**

**Volunteer Coordinator:** Joan Griffin

**Nominations Committee Chair:** Jan Austin

Committee: Karen Crislip, Pat Williams

**Red Book Revision:** Joan Griffin

\* during Convergence last year we had about 15 other volunteers working on specific Convergence events for ATA.





Joan Griffin, BEND IN THE WIND, 36" x 36" 2008

## Volunteers Make it Happen: Joan Griffin

By Linda Rees

I chose to write this volunteer column about Joan Griffin because the newsletter has benefited immensely from her efforts as volunteer coordinator. Actually, Joan has possibly been the key person in shaping the current direction of ATA because she was one of the initial members who worked on its reorganization in 2002. Essentially the new mission was to have a relatively small board but use many volunteers to distribute the task of running the alliance. Then it became obvious that finding volunteers would need to be a full time commitment and her understanding of what was needed made her the likely candidate. Ask the many members she has recruited and they will say that she actively searches to find the right person for each job, clearly defines what they are to do and gives follow up support when needed. I have roomed with Joan for two conferences and have witnessed her passion for and skill at this particular aspect of personnel management.

Joan began weaving in the 1970s and became active by mid decade as a founding member of the "Torpedo Factory", a craft center in Alexandria, Virginia. She was the first director of its Potomac

Craftsmen Gallery and actively involved at the center for 18 years.

She started doing tapestries early in the 1980s and joined ATA after the organization moved from the west coast to Virginia. In the late 1990s she became treasurer. When nobody could be found to assume the leadership role, she started wondering how to sustain ATA, hence getting involved in its revitalization.

Joan is a productive artist currently living in Charlottesville Virginia, and active in the Tapestry Weavers South regional group. She has sold many of her tapestries, exhibits regularly and has work in embassies. The land is the primary influence on Joan's design concepts:

"I am intrigued by taking a detail element of a natural landscape and translating it into my own imagery. The relationship between color and form is the most important consideration for me and I like to combine fine wool, silk and metallic yarns because of the different ways that they react to light. There are patterns, there is a progression of time. As the tapestry develops I have a dialogue with the landscape and find it a never-ending source of inspiration."

**STUDENT AWARD  
SUBMISSIONS DUE APRIL 15**



Lyn Hart, CEREUS EXPECTATIONS, 17.5" x 16.5" 2007; natural & synthetic dyed wool. See page 1.

## Members News

By now you should have received your lime green 2009 Membership Directory.

Bulk mail, however, is never 100% so if you have NOT received yours please contact us at [membership@americantapestryalliance.org](mailto:membership@americantapestryalliance.org)

**Be an ATA Promoter:** It's regional conference time again and workshops are springing up all over! If you are teaching or attending a spring workshop please contact us for an envelope of promotional materials you can share freely with other conference attendees. Help spread the word about ATA and all that we have to offer to tapestry weavers at every level of experience.

## Kudos

Send items to: [mstrauch@mac.com](mailto:mstrauch@mac.com)

**Nicki Bair's** URANUS AND ITS 23 MOONS and **Michael Rohde's** NOTERRA INCOGNITA will be on display at the Riverside Art Museum [www.riversideart-museum.org](http://www.riversideart-museum.org), Riverside, California until April 4th, as part of a show of 25 weavings from Designing Weavers, a juried fiber guild.

"Progress and Ideals, 21st Century Arts & Crafts", an invitational group exhibition of glass, textile, metal, wood, and ceramic, includes **Michael Rohde's** PARTITA, BOTANICAL MAZE, and PASTORALE. Exhibit dates are Jan 11 - Mar 29, 2009 at the Muckenthaler Center in Fullerton, California [www.themuck.org](http://www.themuck.org).

In addition to the above two exhibits, **Michael's** knotted vessels are included in national juried exhibits in New York City and Minneapolis. RUSTS VESSEL and VESSEL 65 were on display in "Economies of Scale", an exhibit of miniature works at the Phoenix Gallery in NYC in January. FUNKY FESTIVE HOUSE is part of "Web and Flow", at the Textile Center in Minneapolis [www.textilecentermn.org](http://www.textilecentermn.org) March 6 - April 18.

The Los Angeles County Arboretum <http://www.arboretum.org/> is celebrating weaving with a small exhibit in their library through the end of March, 2009. Included are tapestries by the Seaside

Weavers tapestry group and individual work by **Nicki Bair** and **Merna Strauch**.

**Shelley Socolofsky** has some exciting news! Her new work just received a 2008 Fellowship Grant from the Ruth & Harold Chenven Foundation [www.chenvenfoundation.org](http://www.chenvenfoundation.org). Only 7 artists nationwide received this 2008 award. Shelley's work can be seen at [www.shelleysocolofsky.com](http://www.shelleysocolofsky.com).

ARTIFACTS: BRYN MAWR STORM DRAIN by **David Johnson** won the award for "Most Creative Use of the Medium" at the Dairy Barn Art Center's Bead International 2008 in Athens, Ohio.

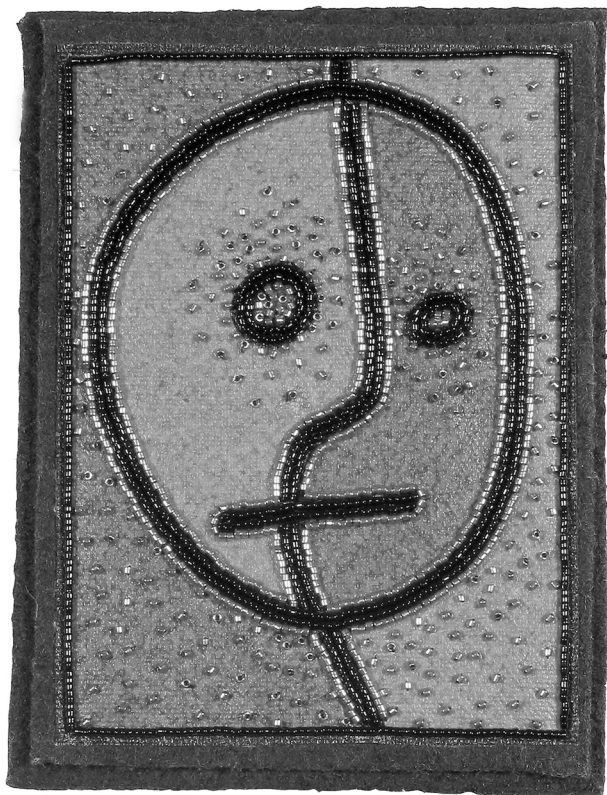
**Terry Olson** and **Marielle Snyder** had two tapestries each in "Dancing Threads" fiber arts exhibit at the Springfield Museum in Springfield, Oregon during the month of December.

The tapestry TRY TO SEE IT MY WAY by **Becky Stevens** was selected for the Center for Modern Psychoanalytic Studies (CMPS) 2008 Fall Art Show "Woman!" in New York City, November 1 - December 20.

**Beverly Walker** of Little Hocking, Ohio, won a regional award for her tapestry EL NINO in July (see "Kudos" TT Winter 2008), and that tapestry also won a regional purchase award in the Marietta, Ohio, Peoples Bank "5 Senses" exhibit in November.

A major review of the Española Arts Center fiber exhibition at the Ghost Ranch Museums in Albiñu appeared in the Rio Grand Sun, Española, New Mexico October 30, 2008 issue. Featured was the work of **Letitia Roller**. The exhibit included several tapestries by her and by **Pat Dozier**.

The Blue Ridge Handweaving Show in Asheville, NC last October was richly rewarding for a number of ATA members. Not only did **Tommye Scanlin** (see accompanying article) win the ATA Award of Excellence, she also won an award for SPRING PROFUSION. **Kathe Todd-Hooker** won Best of Show for SO SAUGHT AFTER. Awards were also won by **Joan Griffin** for ROAD TO THE INTERIOR, **Barbara Burns** for WOMAN IN A RED TURBAN, and **Sherri Coffey** for FLOATING IN A DEEP BLUE SEA.



David Johnson, SPIRITS: CIRCUS MASK, 4.5" x 6" x 1"  
2003. Digitally altered photo on inkjet canvas, bead embroidery, painted industrial felt, painted stretched canvas. See article on page 5.

## Contact ATA

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

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### Library Chair, Archives & Slide Registry

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## ATA MEMBERSHIP FORM

	1 year	2 years
Individual	\$35	\$65
Studio Circle	\$60	\$110
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  
c/o Ellen Ramsey  
4911 NE 178th Street  
Lake Forest Park, WA 98155  
(206) 440-8903

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American Tapestry Alliance  
PO Box 28600  
San Jose, CA 95159-8600

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

## Tapestry Topics

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

**Next Deadline: April 1:** The Materiality of Surface. Commentary that highlights work that has distinctive surfaces qualities. **July 15: Exhibits - Our Public Voice. October 15: Tips and Tactics. January 15, 2010: Proportion.**

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 exhibit and explain the parts that contribute to this sense.

Newsletter committee: Newsletter committee: Proofreader: Mary Colton, Layout: Elinor Steele, Kudos: Merna Strauch, Distribution: Ellen Ramsey, Online excerpts: Lyn Hart, Web Posting: Kathy Marcel

visit our website: [www.americantapestryalliance.org](http://www.americantapestryalliance.org)

Fiona Rutherford,  
PAST PRESENT detail.  
Photo by Keith Pattison

