In 1999 the Advisory Commission on Works of Art commissioned four large tapestries for display in the two largest committee rooms in Portcullis House, Palace of Westminster. The themes for each pair are Democracy, designed by Pat Taylor and Parliament, designed by Philip Sanderson.

‘Democracy I & II

Pat Taylor’s designs contained two complementary definitions of democracy, combining text and photographic source material. Writing to a random selection of 300 MPs requesting their definition of democracy resulted in using their most repeated words to construct the lower portion of the design like the running credits of a film. The upper half is a composite image of people, which has been both mirrored and blurred, acting as a metaphor for debate. The tapestry is woven in three panels, the two outer panels mirroring the central one.

The second of the pair of tapestries gave Pat Taylor the opportunity to use a minimal colour palette with numbers and silhouetted figures. The vertical network of numbers, which is formed from key dates, is reminiscent of the pin striped suits that cross Westminster bridge twice a day, while the silhouetted figures in the rain are viewed as if from a passing train. The key dates are the extensions of the enfranchise:

1832 Great reform Act
1918 Women over 30 enfranchised
1968 Extension to 18 year olds

1867 2nd Reform Act
1928 All women enfranchised

Caron Penney and Katharine Swailes, Senior Weavers led the project supported by the weavers, Penny Bush, Louise Martin and Tricia Warman working on this two year project, problem solving the demands of the design and creating tapestries which reinvent this ancient art form, yet tapestry’s warmth, colour and texture remain constant.

Facts
The weaving was carried out at West Dean Tapestry Studio which is part of an educational trust, the Edward James Foundation, and it was itself established in 1976 with a series of commissions...
from drawings by Henry Moore. The tapestries are permanently on display at the Henry Moore Foundation.

Pat Taylor is part of a new breed of weavers who has been formally trained as an artist and can therefore combine the skills of both disciplines.

Weaving on the first tapestry began in January 2000 and was completed in November 2000. The second started in December 2000 and took 11 months to complete. Each tapestry is 5.4 x 1.4m woven in three sections. The worsted wool yarn was hand dyed with Acid Milling dyes; the warp is cotton and the sett is a double warp 3 e.p.c.

The client: The Palace of Westminster
The location: The Thatcher Room, Portcullis House, London
The architects: Michael Hopkins and Partners

Portcullis House is situated opposite the Houses of Parliament and over Westminster Underground station accommodating 205 MPs and around 400 support staff.

This year, 2014, Zenzie Tinker and Natalia Zagorska-Thomas, professional conservators, led the programme of cleaning and conservation of the two sets of tapestries working to the highest technical standards, supported by the conservators, Emily Austin, Maria Grabowska, Cecilia Voss and Shiya Zhuo, ensuring the future of the tapestries for generations to come.

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