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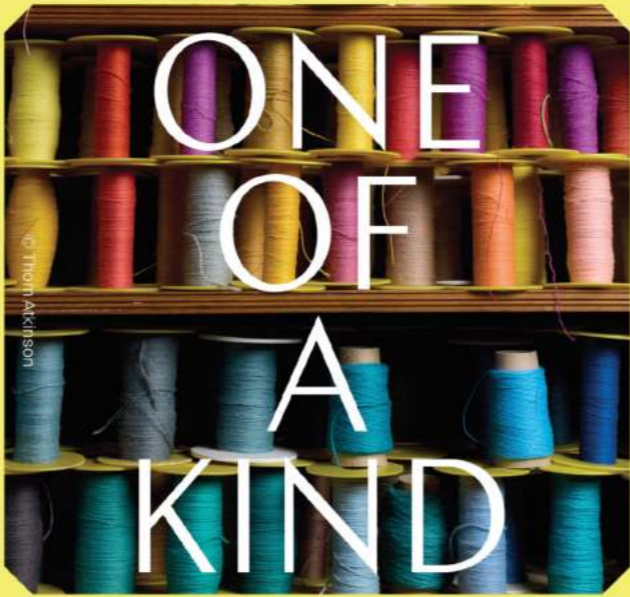
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the **BRITISH TAPESTRY** group

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The articles in this publication do not represent the views of either the BTG or the BTG Committee.

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The Purpose and Vision of the BTG

The British Tapestry Group exists to promote woven tapestry as a contemporary art form in the UK, by raising public awareness through professional exhibitions, journal, networking, regional initiatives, training and development.

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Hello from the Editorial Team

This issue we welcome two new members of the editorial team: Lucy Rowan and Sue Turnbull, and we are sorry to say that it is the last issue that Anna Wetherell will be working on. Thank you Anna, for all your input, and especially for organising us as a team and getting us all up to speed with the technology necessary for file sharing.

This issue continues to look at the legacy of tapestry weavers, with an article by Zac Whitewood-Moores about his mother Mary Farmer, ahead of an exhibition of her work which will open in Farnham in May. Becky Dodman-Wainwright tells us about her unusual method of working with clients, and we hear from Australia about the work of the Australia Tapestry Workshop.

A round-up of books about the general theme of 'colour' is a taster for the next issue - if you are inspired to write about any aspect of colour in tapestry, please do let us know!



Recycled newspaper & raffia by Sue Turnbull

Lucy Rowan

I live in Worthing on the South Coast, where I run my weaving studio with the fortune of enjoying a view of the sea from my loom. Initially trained and employed as a Graphic Designer, I always had a love for weaving on the side. After I had my daughter, I made the decision to focus solely on my weaving practice. Currently, I manage a weaving studio offering workshops and providing a variety of looms for hire.

I am immersed in my second year of the Tapestry Foundation at West Dean, an experience that has proven to be remarkably inspirational, leaving me with a sense of anticipation and a tinge of sadness as it approaches the end.

Lately, my creative exploration has led me to experiment with pulled warp techniques, resulting in the formation of 3D vessels and sculptures through tapestry weaving. I am committed to incorporating sustainable practices in my work, utilising either deadstock or recycled materials. You'll also often find me in my kitchen, crafting natural dyes in pursuit of the perfect colour palette.

Sue Turnbull

I live on the Fylde coast which for those unfamiliar with the geography of the UK is the bulge of land on the coast where Blackpool sits in the north-west of England.

My working history has been in the NHS where my creativity took a bit of a battering. While working I kept my sanity and love of textile art through joining ArtyBird in Carnforth where I started off as a felt maker. I have been part of that special community of like-minded textile artists for over 12 years now.



Woven Vessel by Lucy Rowan

More recently I regained my freedom (aka retirement) and started to learn tapestry weaving so I am a relative newcomer to this art. I would call myself an "eclectic weaver" at the moment and I am trying out all sorts of things as I learn, for example, weaving with materials other than wool such as recycled paper, learning about colour and experimenting with a range of weaving techniques both traditional and modern. I have done weaving courses with Elizabeth Buckley and Sue Lawty. I like mark making and I think I will probably develop into an abstract weaver rather than portraying realistic things . . . who knows . . . watch this space.

I also help the BTG social media team by posting on the public Facebook group.

Mary Farmer 1940 - 2021

Zac Whitewood-Moores (son and Administrator of the Estate)



Mary Farmer at the loom. Photo by Philip Sayer

I thank the editors of Tapestry Weaver for inviting me to write this personal reflection following mum's death in February 2021 and my experiences administering her estate. Like nearly 60% of people, Mary Farmer died without a will meaning her family could not be certain of her wishes regarding her estate. Thankfully, we as a family are pragmatic, practical, and fair; but when Mary died it was quite a responsibility to try to do our best to respect the wishes she had expressed and so many that she had not.

Mary Farmer (weaver) and Terry Moores (ceramicist, 1949 - 2014) purchased a warehouse in Boston, Lincolnshire in the early 1980s, establishing their first home together with workshop space and initially the aim was to have exhibiting space too.

My parents managed to establish the home and workshops but sadly the exhibiting space never reached fruition partly due to a deterioration in their own parents' health and ultimate deaths. Living in a five-storey warehouse makes it easy to acquire additional family items, meaning to sort them out later. My brother and I have rather more conventional, modest homes and thus some very challenging decisions had to be made, rapidly, in the middle of pandemic restrictions! It was several months before we could meet up and discuss anything face to face, indoors. We both live around 100 miles from mum's home, meaning a 4-5 hour round trip for every visit. Even when the restrictions relaxed, the clinically vulnerable and clinicians amongst us had more faith in Dr Chris Whitty and his colleagues than politicians, to maintain safety, and thus minimised face-to-face contact.

As the pandemic was 'coming to an end' or at least mitigations had enabled more usual social interaction, I started to contact organisations again and particularly where online presences referred to my mother. I work in healthcare and have a hobby (my wife would say obsession) with family history and thus death is not unfamiliar to me, but losing my parents was. Yet, I think many of the professional and more analytical aspects of my character enabled me to work through some of the issues more methodically than might otherwise have been the case.



50 High Street, Boston, Lincs.

Our respective households took it in turns to attempt to sort out the contents from at least five generations of the family which included personal and professional correspondence that could not easily be managed. Some family correspondence we kept but given that our attempts to contact many relevant organisations were met with silence, I had to make the decision that some of it would need to be destroyed by a professional confidential waste management company. Many of the departments and even organisations have ceased to exist (e.g. Lincolnshire and Humberside Arts), and in the middle of the pandemic the nearest person to executive authority I found in many organisations was a security guard. Some would have staff working remotely if one knew who or where to contact them. Many others were like ghost towns and sadly many people, like my mum, were ill at a time when being in hospital was perhaps one of the most dangerous places to be. Suddenly people evaporated from workplaces, small businesses just closed, and that world that seems so long ago; yet in reality, was such recent history.

Hello from the Chair

It's probably slightly late by the time you receive your copy of Tapestry Weaver, but Happy New Year to you all nonetheless!

Thinking about the New Year (looking back to the old year and forward to the new one), do you have any tapestry resolutions for 2024? Is there something you'd really like to weave this year - or maybe you wove a not so successful tapestry in 2023 and need to regroup. I'm sure we've all been there!

It's always interesting to look at other people's work and marvel at their ideas, techniques, colours - or the number of tapestries they seem to weave. Exhibitions can be hard to get to, but magazines and social media can open our eyes to

different ways of working. Here at the BTG we have an amazingly dedicated team who produce Tapestry Weaver and the e-News and are active on social media showcasing not only members' work, but also the work of tapestry weavers from around the world. Whether you want to browse or learn something new, inspiration is always just a click away.

So what will you weave in 2024? Whatever it may be, I hope you are thinking of entering a piece in our 20th Anniversary exhibition. With several venues and activities already lined up, it promises to be a celebration year to remember!

Paulette Furnival



Shepherd's Delight, 50x150cm 1977

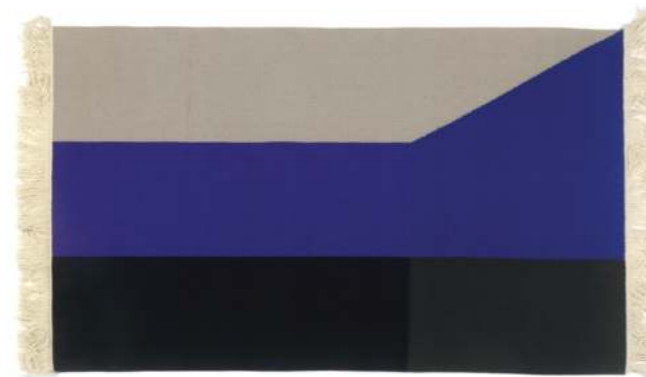
I contacted the Government Art Collection (GAC) as their biography of Mary www.artcollection.culture.gov.uk/person/farmer-mary/ was out of date due to her death, within a week it was all sorted! The staff at the GAC were amongst the most compassionate and helpful in the early days after her death and from that a cascade of events have seen mum's professional name **Mary Farmer** restored following a long absence. Gill Hedley made initial

contact through GAC and then Amanda Game and Jen Hallam became involved too. These amazing independent curators and consultants have helped reawaken an interest in Mary's work and indeed to restore an appreciation that had diminished in recent times amongst the family as priorities and focus changed due to her deteriorating state of health and passing. They have also identified a home for the archive of material at the Crafts Study Centre in Farnham.

My daughter recently commented that she wished she had understood more about her grandmother's work while she was alive. Have those conversations, record them if you can and respect what people can tell us about their careers, whether in the arts or other occupations. Until you start the conversation you do not know what will come out, triggering memories can have amazing outcomes. Whilst a vague memory may not be enough for academic rigor, it may give the information to identify keywords for a search of the internet for comprehensive evidence.



Rug 5B, 101x150cm, 1975



6E (MF7) Digital photo by Simon Warner

Perhaps as a teenage boy I did not adequately understand the impacts that attending private views with mum might have in later years, but I hope I have an appreciation of the arts as well as the sciences and have become a more balanced person as a result.

One of the reasons Mary slipped from the limelight in her later years was her retirement, brought on by the closure of the Tapestry Course at the Royal College of Art in 1997. She was angry that the course could not be sustained, and she perhaps perceived this to be a personal failure. The realities are probably that it represented the right sized cut for budgetary requirements. She rarely went back to

London after her early retirement. She was injured, damaging her shoulder and ankle in separate incidents, and anyone involved in weaving will know the power and resilience needed to weave is considerable. Impact shocks can be very painful, thus her career both as an academic and crafts person/artist meant she quickly became a near recluse.

It is lovely to hear of her craftsmanship and mentorship being described as outstanding by her contemporaries and students, but like so many artists I believe she was vastly undervalued during her lifetime and perhaps only now is starting to see some of the recognition that she deserved.



Blue Heaven, 44x44cm, 1979

Artists and craftspeople may be particularly prone to acquiring much through their lifetime, whether it is provenance for their work including exhibition catalogues and photographs, try to start to plan your legacy early. Many people prefer physical copies but also consider digitalised copies which may be accessible to a wider audience. My field is not the arts and had I not shown some interest earlier in life, I would have been very lost trying to work through the world of textiles. Just the language, like any profession, is alien to outsiders so open your world to your families and help them to understand the world you inhabit. Make sure interviews are recorded, talk about your work. Much can be achieved on a phone or digital camera these days but consider professional production where possible. We have shared some of Mary's work at www.youtube.com/@EstateOfMaryFarmer including the presentation from the GAC event showing many of the remaining works (tapestries and rugs) from the estate. Some of the playlists and videos are largely to give context to her lifetime, travel was important to her but so were her lived environments. Many of her later pieces were designed to brighten what otherwise could have been a darker space, however Ann Sutton used a piece to brighten an entire space with coordinated decoration, which was stunning. www.lyonandturnbull.com/news/article/mary-farmer/

Since I began this reflection, an amazing reception was held at the Government Art Collection alongside Admiralty Arch, London which was a truly moving event. The recollections of people who knew Mary Farmer and the insights of people discovering the work she achieved



Mary working on Black Mass 1979. Photo by Duncan McNeil

during her lifetime were inspiring. Oh, for one more conversation with her, to let her know what people thought of her work . . . if you see an artist's/craftsperson's work and love it, please tell them, life is so short; such a lot of love, care and themselves go into every piece.



Miniature tapestry 5K, 16x19cm, c.1980

We look forward to the exhibition at the Crafts Study Centre, Farnham with pride and thank them for attending the event and announcing this prestigious exhibition of Mary Farmer's work in Summer 2024. www.csc.uca.ac.uk/csc-blog/24/11/2023/mary-farmer-at-the-government-art-collection

EstateOfMaryFarmer@gmail.com

Those interested in any of the remaining works from the estate should contact Amanda Game:

amanda@twostreets.co.uk

All photos provided by the Estate, with photographers acknowledged where known.

Commissioning Tapestry through Tasseography

Becky Dodman Wainwright



Becky at the studio. Photo by Dom Moore.

I use textiles, and now predominantly tapestry weaving, to communicate stories inspired by my explorations into personal narratives and the transient nature of my own cultural history. Part of my practice includes weaving tapestries for commissions. I work with participants to co-create dreamlike pieces that reveal the abstract and hidden parts of ourselves.

I have worked in the textile industry for over a decade, including as a lecturer at Arts University Plymouth. Prior to this, I worked as a youth and community worker, fostering personal growth and self-discovery. These principles of diversity, communication and 'listening to understand' have remained at the core of my ethics, both in art and life.



Tea leaf reading. Photo by Dom Moore.

My artistic practice transcends boundaries, drawing inspiration from my diverse cultural background and experiences in textiles, fashion and community engagement. My work delves into themes of otherness, inclusivity and transparency. When working on commissions, I seek to offer an engaging and joyful creative experience for everyone involved, whether or not they have an art or design background.

At the heart of my commissions practice lies a participatory design process - a collaborative journey that revolves around the art of tasseography, commonly known as tea leaf reading. This unique approach redefines the designer-client relationship, focusing on mutual input and decision-

making. Together with participants, we explore individuality and bespoke design choices for tapestries and rugs through a fun and unique design methodology. Over several hours, we collectively arrive at a set of shapes and colours that become the foundation of the design.

Since October 2019, I have had the privilege of collaborating with 60 participants on commissions using the tasseography process. Together, we have embarked on journeys into the realms of the future, community, togetherness and spirit. Through tea leaf readings, we visualise, narrate and interpret individuals' dreams to create bold abstract designs.



Collage stage.

The Tasseography Process

Tasseography is a form of divination that allows intuitive interpretation of signs and symbols within a teacup. I use tasseography to empower participants, regardless of their artistic background, to engage in idea generation, symbol analysis and colour exploration. This approach echoes Joseph Beuys' idea that "every living being is an artist". The result is a unique textile artwork, a colourful representation of the participant's abstract self.

Each commission begins with a tea leaf reading session. The signs, symbols, and shapes that we observe in the tea leaves are recorded in a design journal. We consult a tea leaf dictionary, a visual lexicon which I crafted, to analyse and select pleasing shapes. Based on the signs and symbols identified, participants choose a colour palette. I then craft abstract shapes using a multi-media collage approach with various materials. This results in three design plans that are shared with the participant. They then choose the design which I bring to life through tapestry or other textile artworks. My tapestry weaving commissions and exhibition pieces are created using my Leclerc Gobelin loom using a 6-dent reed. Other than the odd lurex shimmer, I have almost exclusively used Axminster rug yarns appropriate for the density and longevity of a rug or wall hanging.

This participatory design process transforms client interactions into ritualistic dances, infusing intrigue into the act of sipping tea. I find that the tasseography process promotes transparency, inclusivity and draws out the best in each participant as they envision their unique textile artwork.

Commissioning through tasseography: a client's perspective

So what is it like to commission a tapestry using tasseography? I spoke to Sarah Smalldon about her experience of the process. She writes as follows:



Cartoon and weaving on the loom.

"I was intrigued how the process of sharing a cup of tea and tea leaf reading together could produce a huge tapestry personal to me. I loved that from a cup of tea shared with Becky and taking some elements of the patterns of the tea leaf reading could create such wonderful shapes. Becky and I both share a love of colour and bold illustrative shapes, so I wanted my commission to be a reflection of me and my love of colour, and the process allowed me to choose an instinctive colour palette which we designed together.

I really did not know what to expect but I felt drawn to the final design Becky had made - knowing the process we went through to get to the final piece made it all the more special. A wonderful experience from start to finish, I felt very involved with my commission. I did not know what I wanted but I couldn't be more pleased with the result.

I love how the ancient art of tasseography could be used in my commission. This is the first commission I have had where the final piece is a visualisation and an experience that we shared together.

The final piece was a reflection of my time with Becky and our feelings and thoughts on that day. When I look at the finished work, I see myself visualised through Becky's mind and her love of pattern shape and colour in a beautiful bold woollen tapestry. It's certainly a unique conversational piece - something that no one else will have."

Commissioning through tasseography: my own perspective.

Through the process of tasseography, I have witnessed the joy of individuals engaging in focused play and tapping into the wellspring of creativity within each of us. I have seen participants relax, gain confidence and take braver design decisions. This is a journey of self-discovery for participants that wanders through their internal and physical landscapes. It explores what is seen, felt and visioned in a way that is wholly unique to our interaction in that moment in time.

The time spent with an individual through tasseography allows me the opportunity to intuit and think deeply with the client about their specific design needs. In this way, I focus on creating pieces that speak directly with their co-creator.

As I navigate the artistic journey, I find inspiration from both hope and concern for our planet. Tapestry weaving emerges as my antidote to mindless consumption - a slow, meditative process that transcends conventional textile production cycles. It allows me to contemplate the world's challenges and my role in fostering a more connected and peaceful existence. I do not seek to make purely decorative

art; rather, I make work that is slow to create, holds meaning, is treasured and can be seen as both a decorative and utilitarian object. My tapestries are made for a specific individual as an abstracted portrait of a moveable, malleable soul.

I have found tasseography to be an accessible and fun design methodology that allows participants to travel on creative paths together. It gives people the permission to embrace the amorphous and the ridiculous. Together, we talk, plan and weave futures, celebrating a vibrant tapestry of individuality and self-expression. In this unhurried commissioning model, my clients and I find joy in the in-between spaces: in the deep breaths and quiet chatter of focused play and co-creation.



Exhibition. Ocean Studios, Plymouth, October 2023.

Acknowledgements

More information about Becky and her work can be found on her website and Instagram:

www.beckydodman.work

Instagram: [@becky.dodman.wainwright](https://www.instagram.com/becky.dodman.wainwright)

A huge thank you to Sarah Smalldon for contributing to the article. Sarah is an artist and her work can be found on her website: www.sarahsmalldon.com

All photos by Becky Dodman-Wainwright unless otherwise credited.

The Neve Tapestries

Ruth Bell



Neve Yerushalayim 1.5m (H) x 3.0m (L). Photo by Cindy Wax.

Neve Yerushalayim Women's college (pronounced Nevé) is perched on the top of a steep hillside in a suburb of Jerusalem called "Har Nof" which means "mountain view". The college has stunning views across the Judean hills and the view at night, particularly with the vista of lit up villages on hilltops, was my personal inspiration for the tapestries which have a predominantly dark background giving a strong contrast to the brightly coloured buildings (and suggestion of walls around parts of the city). The college wanted something eye-catching for their newly built campus and their initial idea was to recreate a view of the campus as depicted in the architect's sketch! Fortunately I was given plenty of room to make alternative suggestions.

The college teaches Torah (all levels of Judaism) to women who have had little exposure to their faith. As the Torah is compared to fire, I wanted to take the Hebrew letters of Neve Yerushalayim and depict them as fiery and full of movement. The letters dance across the tapestry and out of its dark borders to give the impression of energy and light entering into the world through the Hebrew letters. According to Jewish teachings the entire creation is built from the "building blocks" of the Hebrew letters, as they combine to create infinite permutations.

In 1987, I was working as an apprentice weaver at a tapestry studio outside the Old City of Jerusalem. On my way to work (at the Georges Goldstein Tapestry Studio) I would pass the ancient walls of the city. These, and the old buildings were a source of inspiration for my work.

I have always been fascinated by the effect of bright colours against a dark background. The softness and contrast of the wools adds a depth and vibrancy which is emphasized more strongly in tapestry weaving than in other media. There is a concept in Kabbalah that the light that comes from transforming darkness to light (through our positive actions) is greater than light on its own.

As an ex-Neve student myself I was still in touch with the college. The principle wanted to adorn the walls of his new building with artworks. He knew I was an artist and a weaver, but I don't think he had any real notion of what tapestry is and how long it takes to weave a 3 metre x 1.5 metre wall hanging (especially for a laborious perfectionist like myself)! He gave me carte blanche to purchase all the equipment I would need as well as the wools; a tapestry



Neve Yerushalayim detail 1.5m (H) x 3.0m (L). Photo by Cindy Wax.

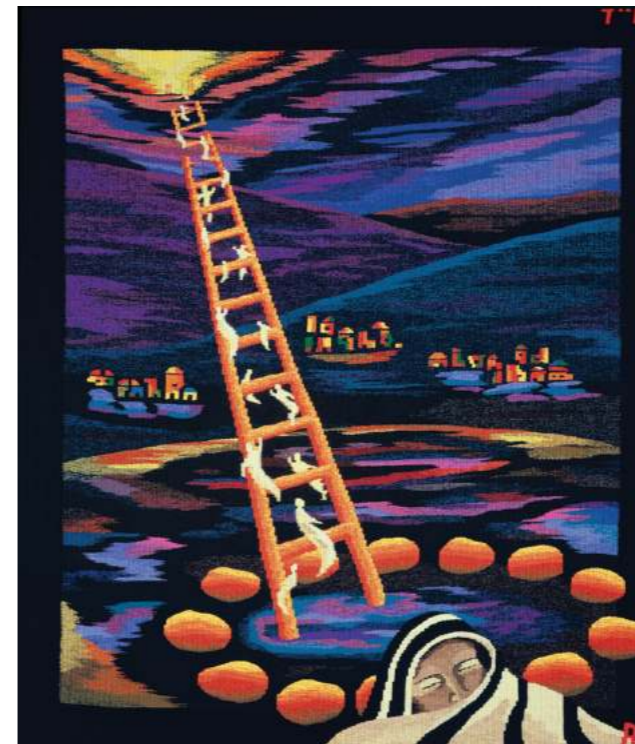
weaver's dream come true. My "studio" became a room at the top of the main building, and I would sit in the Neve "tower" like Rapunzel, weaving the months away.

Before my first child was born, family circumstances compelled me to return to England. The principle agreed to let me ship the loom back on the understanding that I would weave more tapestries. I still have the Glimakra upright tapestry loom on semi-permanent loan some 37 years later.



Neve Yerushalayim detail. Photo by Cindy Wax.

The second tapestry, complementing the first, was woven (in England) using the same colour scheme. Prayer is compared to a ladder where one climbs slowly rung by rung, always moving, never static. I've always been fascinated by the story of Jacob's dream and the college were happy to have this as the subject matter for a second



Jacob's Ladder, 1.7m (H) x 1.5m (L). Photo by Warren's Imaging Lab, Leeds provided by Ruth Bell.



Ruth showing the original colours on the reverse. Photo: Shmueli Bell

tapestry. The hatching on the angels gives them an appearance of vibrating (like early TV images) and moving along the ladder. The ladder itself rises in steps adding to the effect of movement. Jacob's image extends into the margin of the piece representing this physical world, whilst the ladder reaches up into a bright other worldly light from a spiritual source, but mirroring the world below.

My work is all about the interface where physical and spiritual meet.

Ruth adds that the tapestries have recently been remounted and rehung, though in doing so part of 'Jacob's Ladder' has been folded around the mount.

... And 30 Years On

Howard Anthony

An old acquaintance, Ruth Bell, recently contacted me and asked if I would write something about two wall hangings which she wove and which hang on the walls of the foyer in a prestigious women's college in Jerusalem.

Over thirty years ago, my wife and I lived in Jerusalem. This was about the time the tapestries were installed and since Ruth would talk about them, I got to follow their progress.

Now, I have to admit, apart from what she explained to me, I know very little about tapestry. In fact, I used to think it was the same as embroidery. But those tapestries were great! They really brightened up the plain white walls of the foyer.

One of the tapestries is a picture of the Jerusalem Hills with the name of the college emblazoned over them in fiery colours. The other one depicts the story of Jacob's dream of a ladder reaching the heavens. My wife pointed out that it's got similar colours to the first one, so they match pretty well. We liked the second one so much that we got a large print of it and it's currently hanging on our lounge wall.

Possibly one reason Ruth asked me to write this, is that a few years ago I revisited Jerusalem (like Ruth, I now live in England), and being near the college and having the picture in our lounge, I thought I'd pop in and see what was happening with those foyer walls.

The wall hangings were still there! After thirty years! That was the good news.

On the other hand they were VERY faded. I suppose that's what happens when things are exposed to the sun. They were also rather dusty. (I don't know how you would clean big woolen pictures like that). To add insult to injury the tapestry of the hills actually had a coke machine partly concealing it and Jacob's Ladder had a plant in front of it. This being said, my feeling was that the hangings still add something special to the walls and when I got in touch with Ruth I told her that. I hope she is proud of her art! I also hope that one or two of the young women at the college, going back and forth through the entrance on a daily basis, with their busy schedules, pause once in a while to look at the pictures on either side. They may be faded, but I think they're worth a few minutes perusal, even if it's just when sipping on a can of Coke.

Exploring the Relationship between Architecture and Tapestry

An Interview with Sophie Travers, Director/CEO of the Australian Tapestry Workshop

Olga Owczarek

Established in 1976, the Australian Tapestry Workshop (ATW) is a not-for-profit visual arts organisation with a global reputation for creating contemporary hand-woven tapestries. It is unique to Australia and one of the few workshops remaining worldwide. The ATW nurtures creative exchange through partnerships with a broad scope of artists and architects, and shares its specialist knowledge across generations.



Pamela Joyce with Ellen Kwek in front of Old Growth Fire tapestry in progress. Photo by Marie-Luise Skibbe.

Please could you tell us about the rich historical connection between architectural and tapestry design?

There is a long-standing connection between architectural space and textile art, and in particular, tapestry. Rare tapestry remnants have been found in Greece dating from the 3rd century BC and the tapestry-laden walls of European museums and palaces are very familiar to us. They show enormous scope, having been used for traditional designs employing historical and mythical themes, to being utilised as a preferred medium by avant-garde architects and artists at the beginnings of the modern movement in Europe.

From their earliest history to the full integration of textiles into the comprehensive design programme of the Bauhaus in Germany under Walter Gropius (1919 - 28) and later under Mies van der Rohe (1930-33), tapestries have been linked intimately with built space and its creation. One only has to think of the great architect Le Corbusier and his integration of textiles with architecture, including his own masterfully self-designed epic tapestries, to understand the significance of placement in architectural space. William Morris in the 19th century and the 20th century French artist Jean Lurçat paved a way for others to follow, including internationally influential artists such as Picasso, Calder, Léger and Miró, who used the mediums of tapestry and textile as key platforms for their work.



On the loom: Old Growth Fire, 2023, designed by Ellen Kwek, woven by Pamela Joyce at the ATW. Photo by Marie-Luise Skibbe.

How has that relationship developed in recent decades? Are there any particularities specific to the Australian context?

The realisation of the two great tapestries for the new Parliament House and the Sydney Opera House came via collaboration with the ATW. In fact, most of the ATW tapestries are designed with a specific location in mind, and architectural considerations often have a great effect on the designing artists and the weavers when they create a commissioned work. In our Australian context, the architect and enthusiastic champion of integrated art, Aldo Giurgola of Mitchell Giurgola Thorpe, included the monumental Arthur Boyd tapestry Untitled (Shoalhaven Landscape) in the new Parliament House in Canberra. Harry Seidler, European émigré and pioneer Australian modernist architect, included great tapestry works in his local buildings. Jørn Utzon, responsible for the world-acclaimed Sydney Opera House, designed his tapestry Homage to CPE Bach for the Utzon Room in that same building.



Chris Cochius and Jane Caught from Heliotope with Bundanon Tapestry in progress. Photo by Marie-Luise Skibbe.

What motivated the ATW to establish the Tapestry Design Prize for Architects (TDPA) in 2015?

Given the strong contribution that tapestry can make in the built environment, we were keen to involve more architects and designers in our work. The positive feedback we received in regard to our tapestries sited in public spaces such as hospitals, schools, libraries, theatre foyers and reception areas, made clear that people were keen to see more tapestries. We quote for many more tapestries than we eventually weave and felt that the enquiring architects and designers were sometimes missing information about the value and impact of tapestry. It therefore felt obvious to join the demand and the supply together in the form of this competition which is an invitation we hope will lead to many more commissions for tapestries for public space.



On the loom: Bundanon Tapestry, 2023, designed by Heliotope, woven by Chris Cochius at the ATW. Photo by Marie-Luise Skibbe.

How has the Prize evolved since its inception? Have you seen a change in awareness or recognition by the wider public, perhaps as a result of the 'People's Choice' award?

We are always delighted by the high number of applications for the prize and by the broad geographical spread of applicants from around Australia and the world. The voting for the People's Choice is a lively process that involves not only our wide community of artists, weavers and arts organisers, but also those associated with the prize in that year or previous years. We are sure that the community that is building around the prize has a cumulative impact for tapestry overall. We hope that the wide-ranging conversations that are sparked by each edition of the prize lead to more people engaging with not only tapestry, but craft and arts practice more widely.



On the loom: The Fox and the Lyrebird, 2023, designed by Tasmin Vivian-Williams and Tonielle Dempers woven by Caroline Tully at the ATW. Photo by Marie-Luise Skibbe.

What do you see as the contribution of architectural design to the field of tapestry weaving? And vice versa?

This year we have taken the step of weaving the ten short-listed tapestries, rather than the final winner only, as was the case in previous editions. This has led to the challenge of interpretation, as each design is being led by a different weaver. The complexity of the designs provides the kind of stimulus that our weavers enjoy. They are their own project managers and are making all the creative decisions for their projects alone, rather than in the usual ensemble of weavers that we put together to create a large scale tapestry. We note that the weavers are tackling some of the ambiguities of the translation from a CAD drawing to a textile with their usual creativity and experimentation. There is no doubt that this is an extension of their skills and personal practice.



On the loom: Once Upon A Time, 2023, designed by Jamileh Jahangiri, woven by Emma Sulzer at the ATW. Photo by Marie-Luise Skibbe.

In regard to the impact that the weaving is having on the architects, we are looking back to several architects who have gone on to work with tapestry repeatedly in their processes as well as the fact that we count architects as regular attendees of our public programming, workshops and events here at ATW. We know from anecdotal feedback and the writing we have commissioned from architects about the medium, that tapestry offers something distinct to designers and their interaction with our skills is an expansive and stimulating experience.

What does the ATW look for when evaluating the designs submitted by architects? How do you bring considerations about the physical space into the evaluation process?

Each edition of the prize is judged blind by a different jury. That jury comprises curators and arts sector leaders as well as leading architects from around Australia. They are given a basic induction by our team into the Gobelin technique and our work here at ATW, but they are not influenced in any other way, beyond the expectation that the design is “weavable”. The great diversity of designs short-listed and in production for this edition of the prize demonstrates that this criterion is incredibly open and that great design allows for an almost infinite range of choices of scale, colour, light, form and response to site. The site that is selected each year is well documented in the collateral for the prize and the jury pays particular attention to the designs as a response to the site. Their consideration of the effectiveness of the response is the most stringent secondary criterion after the practical concerns are addressed.

The ATW is currently weaving several of the designs by the finalists for the 2023 Prize. Can you tell us about the process of translating these designs into a woven tapestry?

At the ATW, weaving a tapestry is a collaborative process, where the artist or designer works with the weaving team to develop the best possible interpretation of an artwork into tapestry. The founding Director of the ATW, Sue Walker likened this process to an orchestra’s interpretation of a musical score, with the added advantage at the ATW (to continue the analogy), of being able to develop the interpretation in discussion with the composer.

An open exchange of ideas is crucial in enabling the weavers to translate the artwork into the language of weaving and give life to the designer’s intentions. Translating a design into tapestry begins with discussion between weavers and designer about the artwork itself, the ideas the designer wants the work to communicate, and the context in which the work will be hung. The weavers need to clearly understand the intentions, as well as the relationship of the tapestry to the space in which it will be hung and how it will be experienced, whether in an intimate space to be seen close up, or in a large space, perhaps high on a wall, to be viewed from a distance. All these aspects are taken into account when deciding just how the tapestry is to be woven.

Before work begins a series of samples are woven to determine the warp setting (the fineness or coarseness of the weave), the colour palette, and to experiment with different ways of weaving particular aspects of the design. This stage is essential as it enables the weavers and designer to make a series of informed decisions about how the translation should be undertaken before work on the actual tapestry begins.

How does this process differ, if at all, from the ATW’s experience of weaving designs by specialists in other fields - e.g., a woven translation of a painting or a commission for an institutional client?

There are significant differences in the approach the weavers take to every commission and so it is tricky to compare any two responses to designs. On each occasion the weavers use their skills and experience to negotiate a set of solutions that inevitably address translation across media. Whether this is from photographs, digital designs, multiple forms of painting, drawing or media such as mosaic, is part of their extraordinary expertise. Every day at ATW you will hear the weavers debating colour, line, texture and more. Their cumulative experience of working with leading Australian artists ensures that they are working at the highest level and able to bring the most informed decision making to bear. In the TDPA the weavers have each selected a section of the design concepts they are working on and their choices have been informed by their understanding of what makes for a good tapestry. Is there sufficient detail and interest in the selection of elements to inspire deep engagement and contemplation in the viewer? In each approach, different emphases are being placed on colour, shape and scale and I have no doubt that the weavers have made the most informed choices.

Are there any learnings or advice that you could share with other tapestry weavers, whether about designing for a specific physical space or commissions more generally?

We are fortunate to have a small, hard-working management team that enables us to create quotes for commissions and feed the weaving studio. This enables us to handle a larger volume of enquiries and to mitigate the costs of enquiries that do not result in commissions. We hope that each engagement with an enquirer results in a greater understanding of tapestry, but it can be disappointing. I think it is this effort that would be very hard for an individual weaver to absorb. Architects and designers, when converted, are advocates for tapestry, but the work of converting them is laborious. We would love for there to be more prizes like this in the world, so that our work could be magnified and the process of building enthusiasm for and engagement with tapestry could be more robust. We welcome more support in this cause and are happy to share our experiences widely.

ATW Tapestry Design Prize for Architects - The Designers’ Perspective

Interviews by Siobhan Ratchford and Olga Owczarek



On the loom: Solstice, 2024, designed by Beth George & Emerald Wise, woven by Tim Gresham at the ATW. Photo by Tom Hvala.

The Australian Tapestry Workshop manages the biannual Tapestry Design Prize for Architects (TDPA). They invite architects from around the world to design a tapestry that would enrich the architectural space at a specific site, in 2023, Bundanon Art Museum in NSW, designed by Kerstin Thompson. A panel of judges assess

Sophie Travers is the Director/CEO of the Australian Tapestry Workshop. Further information about the ATW is available www.austapestry.com.au

This interview includes extracts from two essays commissioned by the ATW for the Tapestry Design Prize for Architects: ‘On Translation’ by Emeritus Professor Kay Lawrence AM and ‘Woven space: Architecture and Tapestry’ by Peter Williams AM. The full text is available at www.tapestrydesignprize.org

the entries, and the winner is awarded a AU\$10,000 cash prize with a People’s Choice winner, voted for on the TDPA website, receiving AU\$1,000.

ATW weavers Leonie Bessant, Chris Cochius, Amy Cornall, Saffron Gordon, Tim Gresham, Pamela Joyce, David Pearce, Emma Sulzer and Caroline Tully all responded individually to a section of each design that inspired or intrigued them.

The “Tapestry Weaver” editorial team interviewed finalists Beth George (BG) & Emerald Wise (EW) (“Solstice”), Glenn Russell (GR) (“Mezcla”) and Yiling Shen (YS) & Yuchen Gao (“Fata Morgana”) and these are some of their responses. To see the interviews in their entirety please visit the BTG website.

How did you first come across the TDPA?

BG: I entered a design with my friend, Emerald. Our entry was called “Ten Deserts”, which was a finalist in 2016 for the National Gallery site. Emerald and I loved being involved with the competition and entered again this year with our “Solstice” piece.

GR: My initial exposure to the TDPA was seeing the results published from the first competition held in 2015. I thought this was a great initiative to open awareness of this unique artform. I’ve entered most of the TDPA competitions that followed and was a shortlisted finalist in the 2018 entries as well this year’s 2023 entries.

YS: We came across the TDPA from an article about it in “ArchitectureAU”, and were excited at the opportunity to try our hand at designing a tapestry.

Why did you decide to enter a design in the TDPA?

BG: It is our favourite competition! We enjoy working with visual media, we are both academics and have drawing and making practices that lean toward the art world.

EW: These weavings offer us a moment of reflection, of play, and of homage to the living country that defines and connects us.



On the loom: Fata Morgana, 2023, designed by Yiling Shen & Yuchen Gao, woven by Saffron Gordon at the ATW. Photo by Marie-Luise Skibbe.

GR: I have always found this competition captivating as a concept and as a platform to better understand tapestry as an artform and the potential to integrate this form of artwork with architectural spaces.

There seems to have been a great response from architects to the TDPA.

BG: This competition appeals to many practitioners who perhaps see it as we do - an opportunity to broaden out of more humdrum design and management rhythms and engage with the visual field in a joyful way.

GR: Providing there is an interesting brief there will always be a broad captivated audience eager to express their creativeness - the TDPA is a testament to this and continues to grow in entries and to the interest of architects and designers.

YS: architects in Australia are generally very interested in cross-disciplinary work, such as how architecture can intersect with visual art, performance, and other mediums. That was a key reason why we were drawn to the TDPA.

What was the inspiration or intention behind the design you submitted into the competition?

BG: Emerald and I both love cartography, and I think we saw the possibility of a map-like image early on. We talked about two main things: the idea of an image completed by the viewer - hence the notion of a weaving that is half of an image, the other half constituted by a reflection on the floor on dark glass.

There is something about the need for the parts to come together with an observer's own involvement - and that the work is not complete in and of itself - that speaks to us of ecological thinking and the interconnectedness of things.

GR: The design of "Mezcla" attempts to describe the multitude of elements that are characteristic of the Bundanon landscape; the sheer expansive depth of the landscape and the distant landforms, the multiple horizons and the strong presence of built form bridging the valley, stretching the view of landscape and emphasising the undulating green valley.

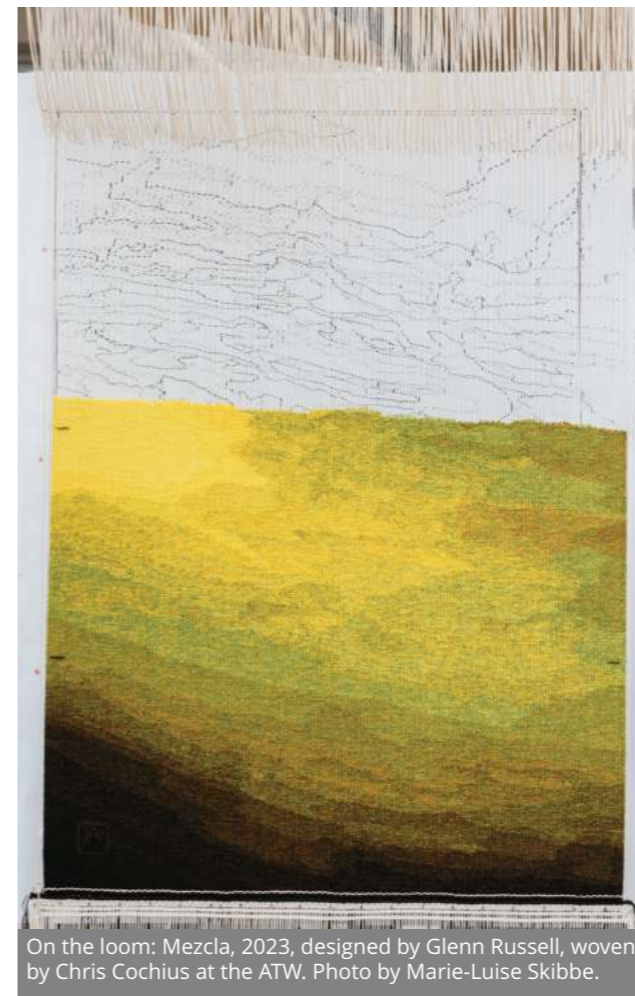


Saffron Gordon weaving Fata Morgana at the ATW. Photo by Marie-Luise Skibbe.

YS: Our design process began with researching the site of Bundanon Art Museum. Bundanon was the home and studio of Arthur and Yvonne Boyd, and the inspiration for many of Boyd's paintings. We were inspired by the history of tapestry as a means of telling history with a fantastical flair, including what we saw as a link between the surreal creatures of medieval tapestries and the creatures from Arthur Boyd's paintings.

Tell us a bit about your design process.

BG: All processes for us seem to work their way out of an exchange of words and sketches, then some tests and critique. I think the difference between this and designing architecture is knowing that the medium of its production has its own history, techniques, and processes with which we are only faintly familiar.



On the loom: Mezcla, 2023, designed by Glenn Russell, woven by Chris Cochius at the ATW. Photo by Marie-Luise Skibbe.

GR: The design process didn't necessarily follow a strict linear path; instead, there were crucial elements that defined the Bundanon landscape which were vital to 'weave' into the design process. Through a process of overlaying, applying, extracting, blurring and saturating highlights, the elements and the design evolved.

What factors or considerations did you take into account when working on your design?

GR: Scale was important along with the expression of strong contrasts between darkness and extremely vivid highlights to create emotional depth to the image. Lines and shapes are blurred and undefined to a point where they are still recognisable but test the limits where definition disappears.

EW: We both have a deep love for working across varied mediums. The original painting was done using wet on wet watercolour and Japanese ink - with gold paint pen and azure added later. The painting challenges the skills of the weaver as the warp and weft pixelate the fluid gradients and textures of the wet mediums.

YS: One of our key considerations was the use of detail in our piece. To achieve the trompe l'oeil effect, it was necessary that the artwork had an almost true-to-life scale to it, as if the wall of the gallery was really opening up to show this landscape beyond. With the size of the piece, we wanted it to still have the detail and intricacy of a medieval tapestry.

How did the eventual client, the Bundanon Art Museum, fit into your process?

BG: The museum issued the brief and we responded to it - there was no interaction prior to our submission. After that we were given the opportunity to meet the weavers and to collaborate with them on the weaving of a portion of the piece.

EW: While there was no interaction with the gallery, Beth and I spent all Covid lockdowns in NSW - the sky and waters of the country inspired the work. The Museum and the tapestry design are both made in awe of these landscapes - in sharing this site they enter a relationship.

GR: The Bundanon Art Museum established an important role both in the design of the tapestry and in the proposed installation siting within the exhibition space. The work was over-scaled spanning the entire end wall, stretching corner to corner with this dark horizon drawing the onlooker to view the space from wall to wall; across the tapestry and across the valley.

What was it like to see your design translated into a tapestry weaving?

BG: We are thrilled about seeing our proposal come to life.

GR: It was great to be selected as one of the 10 finalists and really exciting to see test samples of the finalist artworks, including "Mezcla", on the loom. It will be great to see the final large format TDPA studies and gain greater understanding of the process of tapestry weaving.



On the loom: Solstice (Detail), 2024, designed by Beth George & Emerald Wise, woven by Tim Gresham at the ATW. Photo by Marie-Luise Skibbe.

Do you have experience of commissioning other forms of artwork?

GR: The commissioning of a tapestry hasn't been one of my experiences to date, however it would be good to broaden consideration of works to be included as integral artworks and not limit these to the usual go-to art mediums.

YS: We worked on a project for Melbourne Design Week 2022. This was similar in a sense that we were once again learning about a new medium through the process of translating a concept from one form to the next, and as with our previous experience, learnt a great deal about the constraints and opportunities that come from this unique medium.

What will happen to your finished tapestry- where will it go?

BG: The sample weavings are going on an exhibition tour, which is wonderful. I am unsure of where their eventual homes will be. Our winning one will not be woven in full unless it is commissioned, and we are crossing our fingers for that!

YS: We haven't heard where the woven samples will go - hopefully my living room wall, although there are two of us so we will need to fight over it.

What's next on the horizon?

BG: We will always be interested in making propositions for the TDPA. The legacy of architecture and weaving is strong and we would love to realise a piece. Personally, being exposed to the work of the ATW has compelled me to want to learn to weave myself.

GR: The TDPA has been a great initiative in recognising the incredible skill of the weavers in this artform and the relevant place that tapestry can provide within architectural spaces.

YS: We are interested in space and creating atmospheric narratives, whether that is through architecture or other mediums. We have learnt a lot through this process and can definitely see ourselves designing more tapestries if the opportunity arises!

The TDPA is generously supported by Metal Manufactures Limited, Creative Victoria, Architecture Media and Envelope Group.

Bobbins and other tools

Andrew Dickinson

I was asked, recently, how I got into making tapestry bobbins and tools. I replied saying that it was a mixture of serendipity and opportunism.

I work one day a week in the art shop at West Dean College and I was on duty whilst the weaver, Pat Taylor, was teaching a course. We had had trouble in the shop replenishing our stock of bobbins for quite a while and Pat resorted to supplying her students with some of her own.

Just prior to this period I had worked with a talented engineer, John Peskett, making the valve sections for high end French Horns. This was a combination of working on computer driven lathes and very careful hand building. Shortly after the bobbin supply problem occurred in the shop I happened to be in conversation with John "... so, what do you think John, would it be possible to turn wooden bobbins on one of your machines?" Without hesitation he replied "we can give it a go, sounds interesting". And so, with great generosity on his part, we began to draw up some ideas and try turning some bobbins.

This was a new challenge for both of us and I learnt, over time, something of what his discipline really involves. Like any practice it is never straight forward and John has become very adept at finding solutions to the difficulties of turning wooden bobbins on one of his machines. It is quite different to turning on a woodworking lathe and the advantages, particularly in terms of accuracy and consistency, are evident. Like standard turning, as the



Titanic bobbin.

operator, I've had to learn how to respond, moment by moment, to the particular piece of wood that I was turning. Each wood has its own properties that require subtly different processes.

So, what to turn? I am fortunate, working at West Dean, that I can speak to weavers and get some idea of what is required ... or so I thought.

I can quite categorically state that for every experienced weaver there is a subtly different, preferred, way of working and bobbin types and functions are variable. Also apparent is that a professional weaver working on a 3m x 2m tapestry will, generally, have different requirements to someone at home creating a piece say 20cm-30cm square. Around the time I had just produced my first bobbins I was fortunate to meet Lin Squires (owner of Weaversbazaar) who had a pop-up shop at West Dean at the time of one of the short courses. We got into conversation and everything for my practice became a little more concrete and Artisan Bobbins was born.



1st War bobbin.



1st War bobbin detail.



1st War bobbin detail.

Lin has asked me, over time, to look at designing frames and stands and various other ancillary tools. This I have done and will continue to do.

It is, without doubt, very satisfying to produce tools that other artists/craftspeople/makers/weavers can utilise to create their own work. Since my training in musical instrument making at West Dean I have always gleaned an immense pleasure from this kind of relationship (hearing Bach or Dowland played on a lute that I had made was immeasurably pleasing).

But any maker or artist needs to be able to bring their creativity to align with some kind of self-expression and I needed to do that with the bobbins.

As a maker of tools I have parameters to maintain but, within that, there is wriggle room.

Going back to the outlines that we had initially created John and I set about breaking the bobbins down into homogenous components. This means that a bobbin can comprise up to five different parts with extra lines and collars to make up the whole bobbin. I can combine various woods to explore different effects and moods. This is where much of my self-expression finds its voice.

As this has become a more established practice I have occasionally played with the parameters of what it is that I am making.

I made an installation for a textile exhibition in a gallery in Chichester that was a double-sided display cabinet which, ostensibly, contained a row of bobbins.

The first bobbin was a simple ash bobbin. As you scanned from left to right the bobbins became increasingly ostentatious, eventually to the point that they ceased to be functional tools and drifted into the realms of sculpture. It was interesting to explore where that crossover came. One of the last bobbins was made from ebony and casein ivory. The head was dressed in 6mm wide, dyed linen that was wrapped in the manner of a putti leg dressing as worn by soldiers in the first war and, for the weft thread, I created miniature barbed wire. The tip was a reimagined bullet.

I later hung six of these in a Newtons cradle made from very heavily scorched oak.

For another exhibition with the title 'Titanic' I made a bobbin from worm infested wood that had small copper plates stamped with some of the classes of craftsperson who were stuck in the steerage bowels of the Titanic when it went down. The weft was a thick warp thread that stretched up to the high gallery ceiling and floated along the ceiling/surface as if viewed from the depths of the ocean.

I have always approached my work with an open mind, mindful that nothing is set in stone. My work comes from somewhere that has evidence of development in practice but has an unknown future. As an artist/maker I'm excited to explore both.

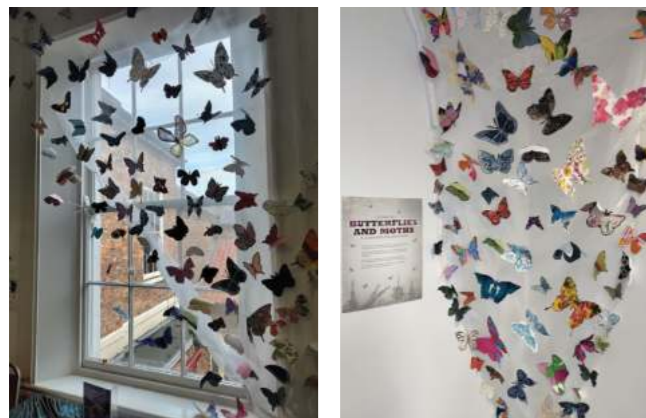
www.artisanbobbins.com

All photos Andrew Dickinson

Exhibition Review: Flight

Darlington Weaving Rooms, Preston Park Museum. Stockton-on-Tees

Anna Wetherell



Colourful butterflies created by members of the local community, welcoming visitors to Flight.

'Flight' is an exhibition organised by members of the Darlington Weaving Rooms, involving weavers from across the north of England. It's the fruition of discussions about the loss of butterflies and moths, impacts on them and their impacts on us - observations and thoughts which evolved into a concept for individual weaving projects and this exhibition

Darlington Weaving Rooms is run by Jane Riley (tapestry weaver) and Becky Sunter (cloth weaver), using the space as their own studio but also to run classes in various aspects of weaving and spinning. This exhibition has been a wonderful collaboration between downstairs (table & floor looms) and upstairs (mainly tapestry) - both groups meet on the same day once a week (to manage heating costs!) and an exhibition like this is a good way of getting to know each other. Tapestry weavers from BTG's Northern Regional Group were also invited to take part, resulting in a diversity of work from a wide range of weavers.



(left to right) Scorched Wing Moth; Lime Hawk Moth; and Elephant Hawk Moth, woven by Glynis Johnson, with a wall mural designed and painted by Jane Riley.

The exhibition is being held at Preston Park Museum, near Stockton on Tees. The River Tees forms one boundary of the site, which contains large areas of open space, a walled garden, café, and re-created Victorian street, shops and all, as well as the museum. The museum have taken the



Unintended Consequences: Artificial Light, woven by Sally Reckert.

concept of the exhibition and invited the local community to join in. As a consequence, as you walk into the entrance to the exhibition space you are greeted with clouds of colourful butterflies - and more are welcome from those who wish to take part!

The exhibition space itself has been split into two, allowing circulation round both halves and creating more room for work. As you walk in you are greeted by a poster explaining the concept behind the exhibition, alongside a beautiful, intricate tapestry woven by Gwyneth Hunt. You can then choose to turn right or left, depending on what attracts you first - Jane Riley's 3D mobile depicting a range of chrysalises, some woven, some sculpted, casting wonderful shadows on the wall as a result of carefully thought through lighting; or a fascinating and beautifully shot video talking about the project, with a number of participants



Happy Days in Amongst the Weeds, woven by Leslie Fox.



Hiding Beauty, woven by Carolyn Bird.

explaining their thought processes, showing work in progress, and including Margaret Bennett, a volunteer in the walled garden at Preston Park. Margaret is someone who noticed the decreasing numbers of butterflies using the walled garden, who was learning tapestry at the Weaving Rooms, who was part of the conversation, and who has been instrumental in helping this exhibition to happen - a wonderful example of the collaboration that so often enables ideas to become reality.

The works in the exhibition explore different aspects of butterflies and moths - their life cycles, their colours and the patterns in their wings, their habitats, and, of course, climate change and habitat loss. Carolyn Bird, for example, has woven some beautifully camouflaged moths, mounted on a woven 3D 'log'. Sally Reckert has taken the idea of 'Like Moths to a Flame' - but used that as a basis for exploring the impacts of artificial light on moth movement and life cycles, entitling her work "Unintended Consequences: Artificial Light". Becky Sunter has woven a pleated cloth, incorporating metallic copper-coloured threads, and responding to her research into why conkers were not to be found in a favourite spot one year, and tracing the culprit to a leaf miner moth. Clothes moths have also been explored, including by Glynis Johnson, who has woven a series of tapestries reflecting on their impact and lifecycle. The colours in the wings of the Elephant Hawk Moth have been translated into warp and weft colours for a beautiful shawl woven by Ann Licence. Looking through my photographs I am reminded of just how many beautiful and often intricately woven as well as well researched pieces there are - Leslie Fox's 'Happy Days In Amongst the Weeds', for example. None of the works are large, but all are exquisite.

As well as the works themselves, a series of posters, printed on carefully sourced card, explain a bit more about moths and butterflies, and what is happening to them. The design of the posters beautifully complements the works forming the exhibition, while also reflecting the curation and themes - 'Home': habitats such as the walled garden;



The Subtle Cloak, by Jane Riley.

'Hope': habitat impacts but also conservation efforts - and linking these through to the material used for the works themselves, including waste or recycled yarn and material from existing stashes. It all reflects the thought and research that lies behind the concept of the exhibition, and the way it has been brought together in a thought provoking, inspiring and beautiful way. It is well worth a visit!



Without Borders, woven by Gwyn Hunt.

Flight is on at Preston Park Museum, Yarm Road, Eaglescliffe, Stockton-on-Tees TS18 3RH until 17th March 2024 - and there is plenty to do there as well as visiting this fabulous exhibition!

All photos Anna Wetherell

Exhibition Review: Earth Threads

BTG South East Group, Whitchurch Silk Mill, 9 September to 28 November 2023
Reviewed by Christine Paine, BTG SE group member and exhibitor



Jane Kirby, Wood Wide Web, Photo by Jane Kirby



Jackie Bennett, Dancing Fronds Catalogue photo by A Batov



Jane Brunning, From the Earth Photo by Christine Paine

Earth Threads is the sixth biennial exhibition of the British Tapestry Group (BTG) South East Region. All members were invited to submit a woven tapestry (maximum 45cm wide) and up to four additional small works (12 x 12cm). 25 members submitted work in the form of 23 tapestries and 33 small works.

I met up and looked round the exhibition with Anna Wetherell, our husbands and Anna's friend, Libby, who lives nearby. Anna and I had a long discussion about hanging exhibitions and using gallery hanging systems. We decided this is a topic for a separate article or blog post!

The historic Whitchurch Silk Mill has a beautiful location on the River Test. After passing the massive industrial looms threaded up with delicate silk warps, I found the exhibition upstairs. It is part of the route through the mill and merged with the looms and displays put on by the mill. It was well lit and the view from the windows overlooking the mill race seemed to echo the exhibition theme of Earth Threads.

As in nature, there were bold splashes of colour, subtle earth tones, textures, and hidden gems around corners. Tapestries representing the beauty of the natural world ranged from seascapes, beaches, and sea cliffs to bluebell woods, gardens, and abstract landscapes. The striking yellows and blues of Lesley Frame's "My Friend the Tree" caught my eye.

In "Wanderlust" Claire Buckley showed the bigger picture, representing the earth against the blackness of the universe using fine silk mixes in eccentric and wedge weaving. Anchored by hag stones, this piece hung in a free-standing corner next to Mike Wallace's "Mineral Strata" which included silver highlights of solder from his garage floor - the riches buried beneath our feet. Christine Paine's nearby "Rare Earth, Raw Earth" echoed this theme, showing the potential destruction of the Bolivia salt desert in the search for Lithium.

Jane Kirby's wittily titled, "Wood Wide Web" brought the mycorrhizal underground network into view, representing it with fine soumak roots of silk. Lin Squires' "Mycelia" also imagined the world of fungal mycelia in abstract colours and shapes. Maggie Kateley's "Threads of Life" used wrapping and supplementary warps to represent the interconnections of plant growth on a stone wall.

Jackie Bennet's intriguing 3-dimensional forest of forms "Dancing Fronds" tapestry and "Fronds 1-4" combined willow basketry with tapestry techniques in raffia and waxed twine. On the theme of recycling and reuse, Jane Brunning's tapestry "From the Earth" was inspired by the Japanese Boro tradition of patching and mending cloth and dyeing it with indigo.

It was exciting to see all the ideas brought to life using a broad range of techniques such as wrapping, supplementary warps, and soumak, along with unusual materials such as hag stones, sea shells, beads, raffia, paper, willow and wire. Hanging some of the small works between the large tapestries was the only thing that did not work for me.

Overall, I felt inspired and appreciated all the thought and effort that had gone into the pieces, both large and small. The exhibition looked and felt coherent and united by its common threads. I look forward to seeing it again in Sunbury in April 2024.



Earth Threads, Exhibition View Photo by Christine Paine

This is a touring exhibition and there will be another opportunity to see it in Spring 2024 at the Sunbury Embroidery Gallery: The Walled Garden, Thames Street, Sunbury-on-Thames, TW16 6AB. 22nd April to 23rd June 2024. As a taster, the Sunbury Gallery already has a lovely introduction to the exhibition and images of selected tapestries:

www.sunburygallery.org/britishtapestrygroup

The exhibition catalogue can be purchased from the BTG website shop, if you can't visit in person:

www.thebritishtapestrygroup.co.uk/shop/

Exhibition Review: Sheila Hicks: Infinite Potential

6 October - 18 November 2023
Alison Jacques gallery
Cork Street, Mayfair, London
Reviewed by Lucy Rowan

Alison Jacques Gallery dazzled art enthusiasts with the inaugural exhibition at its new Mayfair location on Cork Street. Renowned artist Sheila Hicks took centre stage in a show titled 'Sheila Hicks: Infinite Potential,' marking her first-ever exhibition in London. The exhibition ran from October 6 to November 18, 2023, presenting a mesmerising collection that epitomises Hicks' unparalleled creativity and unbridled passion for artistic exploration.

Hicks, born in Hastings, Nebraska, in 1934, and residing in Paris since 1964, has been a global advocate and pioneer in the art world. Her collaboration with Alison Jacques dates back to 2012, a partnership that has flourished over the years, culminating in this groundbreaking exhibition.

At the heart of 'Infinite Potential' is Hicks' distinctive ability to transform ordinary materials into extraordinary works of art. The exhibition features an array of series, each contributing to Hicks' vast artistic vocabulary. One of the highlights is the debut of 'Talking Sticks,' an installation of wall-based batons meticulously crafted from bamboo and multicoloured pigmented fibre. The sticks engage in a captivating visual dialogue, exemplifying Hicks' fascination with colour and her commitment to pushing the boundaries of sculptural possibilities.

'Mirage in the Oasis' from Hicks' iconic Lianes series is another noteworthy inclusion. Here, linen, cotton, and silk cords hang like vines, showcasing a spectrum of colours that range from avocado green to russet orange and gold. The exhibition also introduces new additions to Hicks' repertoire, such as 'New Comets' with titles like 'Scarlet in Orbit' and 'Coincidence,' bursting with vibrant hues. The consistent presence of 'Minimes,' small-scale weavings made on a repurposed frame-turned-loom, adds a personal touch, acting as metaphorical diaries of the artist's adventures and often incorporating found objects like seashells, stones, bones, and razor clams.

Among the notable pieces are new thread paintings, including 'Sunset Contained Forever,' and 'Bas Reliefs' like 'He, She and More' and 'The Shortest Route to Mercy.' These works reflect Hicks' evolving artistic direction and her continued experimentation with warp and weft, showcasing her infinite spectrum of colour.

The exhibition was not merely a visual feast; it is a testament to Sheila Hicks' enduring commitment to innovation, adventure, and the boundless potential of artistic expression. 'Infinite Potential' was a dramatic, memorable, and fun experience, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in the vibrant world of one of contemporary art's most influential figures.



Infinite Potential, 2023.



Mirage in the Oasis, 2023.



Lianes de Lin, 2023.



Book Review:

Sheila Hicks: Weaving as Metaphor

Sue Turnbull



This book has been sitting unopened on my book shelf since I bought it from the Hepworth in Wakefield having twice visited the Hicks exhibition Off Grid during May 2022.

I was finally galvanised into unwrapping the cellophane by my offer to write this review.

This 6th edition is a reprint of the original book produced to accompany her exhibition Sheila Hicks: Weaving as Metaphor in 2006 at the Bard Graduate Center Gallery in New York City, U.S.

It is a smallish chunky book (22cm H x 15cm W x 5cm D) which cost me £85, though first editions seem to be going for hundreds of pounds on the internet, as are later books described as “used”.

It is printed on thick tactile paper and has the fanciest frilly deckled edges I have ever encountered. It looks and feels beautiful. However on a practical point it can make the pages difficult to prise apart and turn. This became quite frustrating when I was trying to cross reference various photographs of the textile pieces mentioned in the text. I have good dexterity but it did cross my mind that people with arthritis or neuropathy in their hands (e.g. post chemotherapy) could find it difficult.

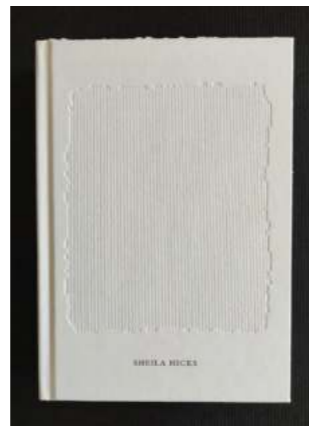
The book itself is divided broadly into four chapters. The first is part of an essay written by Arthur Danto, an American art critic and philosopher discussing weaving as a metaphor. It probably requires some background knowledge about Plato and Kant to fully understand it. It

left me cold but more erudite readers may enjoy it.

In contrast the second chapter was much more readable and interesting with information about Hicks' history and development and technicalities in her weaving practice. Who knew that once she had used the frames from bee hives to weave on? Relevant photographs are spread throughout.

Chapter three is what the book is really about. Over 130 colour photos of some of her miniature weavings, each on a full page, with the opposite page containing technical information and little incidental interesting points about things such as what had inspired the weaving. I recognised several of the miniatures from the Off Grid exhibition shown in Wakefield, though given that she has woven over 1000 miniatures, it represents a small fraction of the total.

Chapter four was a discussion from the editor about the relationship between design-craftsman versus artist-craftsman and where Hicks fits if at all. It discussed how she had been influenced by architecture. It also covered the fascinating story of how she worked with industry creating weavings and artworks at the other end of the magnitude size.



I'm glad I unwrapped this fabulous gem and finally got around to looking at it. I don't think you need to be a Sheila Hicks fan to appreciate it though that would help and the story within the decorative pages enriched my knowledge of her work.

Sheila Hicks Weaving as Metaphor

Edited by Nina Stritzler-Levine; with Arthur C. Danto and Joan Simon Bard Graduate Center, New York City Distributed by Yale University Press ISBN 978 0 300 23722 1

All photos by Sue Turnbull



Books on Colour

Sue Turnbull and Anna Wetherell



In a recent Tapestry Weaver editorial team zoom meeting, we were discussing future issues, book reviews - and colour. TW36 will look at colour - dyeing, colour theory, books on colour, using colour in tapestry, and more. To whet your appetite and get you thinking (fancy writing an article on some aspect of colour?), here are some books that Sue and Anna refer to.

Of course, some books, such as Joseph Albers' 'Interaction of Colour', and Johannes Itten's 'The Elements of Color' are classical references, still forming the foundations of colour theory tuition today. Both Albers and Itten were key tutors at the Bauhaus in the 1920s where colour, alongside the principles of design and other key elements, formed the foundation to all the craft specialisms. Joseph Albers married Anni Albers, with both moving to America and continuing to teach, and Johannes Itten taught in Zurich where Sylvia Heyden initially trained, after the Bauhaus school was closed - good weaving heritage from both! A key element worth looking out for from Joseph Albers is how colours react and respond to each other - one colour will look different when placed next to different colours. Try it with some coloured card! David Hornung's book gives plenty of ways to explore and develop your use of colour, as well as looking at how a range of artists use colour. Garth Lewis's '2000 Colour Combinations' offers 300 pages of inspiration and insight into the visual effects of different combinations of colours.

Other books give us an insight into how colours have evolved, from the original pigments, minerals and source plants to modern chemical dyes. Kassia St Clair and James Fox both give fascinating accounts of this. We appreciate the colours we have to hand, and what goes into making

them, so much more as a result. Jenny Balfour-Paul is an expert in the history of indigo and has published two excellent books. 'Indigo: Egyptian Mummies to Blue Jeans' is a comprehensive book about this fascinating natural dye. 'Deeper than Indigo', about the Victorian explorer Thomas Machell, is also very interesting if you want to learn more about the indigo trade in 19th century India. Turning to natural red dyes, Gösta Sandberg covers cochineal, madder and murex purple in 'The Red Dyes'.

Colour also has an influence on our moods and has its place in storytelling, myth and legend. We have used it to denote status - purple dye was one colour that was difficult and expensive to obtain, so was reserved for emperors and royalty. James Fox and Keith Recker give us insight into these aspects of colour, with 'Deep Color' containing many stories to explore.

Which are your favourite colours? How do you usually use colour - a simple palette, muted tones, or bright and vivid? Do you blend your colours in a weft bundle, and if so, what sort of mixes do you use? Do you dye your own yarns for weaving, and if so do you use synthetic or natural dyes? Colour influences us so much as tapestry weavers, and in so many ways. Do send us your thoughts for the next issue of Tapestry Weaver!

Colour A Visual History

Alexandra Loske
Tate in partnership with ILEX Octopus Publishing Group
ISBN 978-1-78157-399-0

Chromorama How Colour Changed Our Way of Seeing

Riccardo Falcinelli
Particular Books
ISBN 978-0-241-57379-2

Josef Albers Interaction of Color 50th Anniversary Edition

Josef Albers
Yale University Press
ISBN 978-0-300-17935-4

The Secret Lives of Colour

Kassia St Clair
John Murray Publishers
ISBN 978-1-473-63081-9

The World According to Colour A Cultural History

James Fox
Penguin
ISBN 978-0-141-97665-5

Colour Making and Using Dyes and Pigments

Francois Delamare and Bernard Guineau
Thames & Hudson
ISBN 978-0-500-30102-9

Colour: A Workshop for Artists and Designers

David Hornung
Laurence King Publishing
ISBN 978-1-85669-877-1

Deep Color: The Shades that Shape our Souls

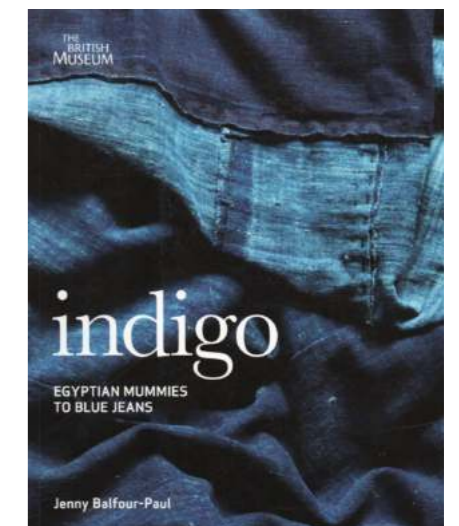
Keith Recker
Schiffer Publishing
ISBN 978-0-7643-6441-9

The Elements of Colour

Johannes Itten
(out of print & difficult to get hold of!)
www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions_events/exhibitions/bauhaus/new_artist/form_color/color/

Deeper than Indigo

Jenny Balfour-Paul
Medina Publishing Ltd
978-1-909339-53-8 (hbk)
978-1-909339-56-9 (pbk)

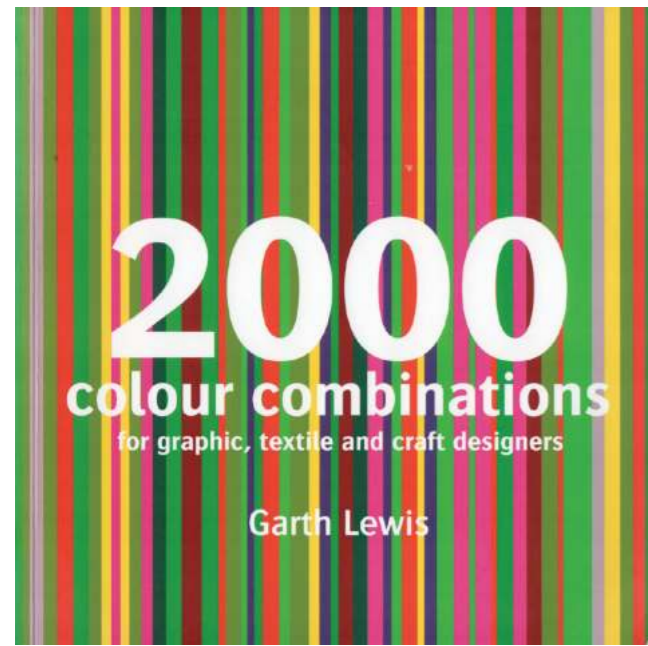


Indigo: Egyptian Mummies to Blue Jeans

Jenny Balfour-Paul
British Museum Press
978-0-714150-96-3

Continued overleaf

The Red Dyes
Gösta Sandberg
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978-1887374-17-0



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Sunbury-on-Thames
TW16 6AB

23rd April - 23rd June 2024
www.sunburygallery.org

BTG Northern Group with the Weaving Rooms, Darlington

Flight

Preston Park Museum
Yarm Road
Eaglescliffe
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 3RJ

Exhibition extended - please check dates with venue
www.prestonparkmuseum.co.uk/events/

Other exhibitions of interest

Hello Sweet Cheeks!

Sadie Paige
Gairloch Museum
Gairloch
Ross-shire
IV21 2BH
March-April 2024

www.gairlochmuseum.org/exhibitions

Mary Farmer: A life in tapestry

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29th June 2024 to 29th August 2024:
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November/December 2024:
The Morley Gallery, London (TBC)

8th January 2025 to 6th March 2025:
Farfield Mill, Cumbria.

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