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“THE WORK O’ THE WEAVER: FIFTY YEARS IN TAPESTRY”

Presented by Archie Brennan

March 10, 1998

Yale Club in New York City

The following is a complete transcript of the Center's first annual lecture which is also recorded on videotape as part of the Gloria F. Ross library.

Introduction by Ann Lane Hedlund:

I would like to welcome you all here. My name is Ann Hedlund. I'm the new director of the new Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies. I want to welcome you to tonight's lecture, but much more than that I want to welcome you to the inaugural event for the Center for Tapestry Studies and our first collaboration with The Textile Museum of Washington DC. I know many of you are members of The Textile Museum and we especially welcome you here, also.

I do want to apologize a bit for the space problems that we have had, as your responses came in and the numbers went up and up, we moved from quite an intimate library setting to this sort of baronial room here. I think one that is sort of fit for tapestries. We should have lined it with tapestries for you this evening. There is no larger space here and I hope you will be able to breathe throughout the lecture and make yourselves as comfortable as possible. Following the lecture we would like to invite you upstairs to the library. It is one flight up; it is immediately above this. You can take the elevators, you can also take the stairwell up. We will have light refreshments there and I hope you all have a good chance to talk with Archie Brennan, this evening's speaker, with Ursula McCracken from The Textile Museum and me and all of the other representatives who are here.

As a small brochure on the entry table will tell you, and I think many of you have that now, the Gloria F. Ross Center is a research institute and an educational foundation that is devoted to the study of one single slice of the textile arts, and that single, very tasty slice of the textile arts is tapestry, as I am sure you have all gathered at this point. We take tapestry, at the Center, in its very traditional and very historical sense, but we also take it as it is expressed in contemporary forms. And you will hear a lot more this evening as Archie talks to us about the definition of tapestry and the range of defining limits for tapestry in today's world.

The Center was founded last summer by Gloria F. Ross, who has had a long career in the world of tapestry, working with well known American artists and with weaving studios in Scotland, as represented this evening, also in France, in the American Southwest, and as far away as China. The resulting Gloria F. Ross tapestries, over the last several decades, are made in a very specific technique that goes back to ancient China and Peru. It is a technique that also flourished in Europe in the Middle Ages.

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Gloria Ross gives the Center for Tapestry Studies its inspiration and its very reason for being, and I'm deeply grateful for her total enthusiasm and her total involvement in all of our endeavors. I spoke with her this afternoon on the phone, and she very much regrets that she cannot be here, but she sends her very fond and personal greetings to all of you

who have gathered here on behalf of the Center in this first event.

Today, the Gloria F. Ross Center is devoted to understanding and sharing tapestry in both the aesthetic and the technical intricacies that it holds. We also are studying the impacts that tapestry has on society at various times through history. We are based, some of you will be surprised to hear, in Tucson, Arizona, but with very strong New York links. We do not intend to become a collecting institution like a museum. Rather, public programs like this lecture which we hope to hold on an annual basis, and research that results in workshops, in publications, in exhibitions, will be our main activities, and we hope that you will hear much, much more from us during the course of this coming year.

Just as tapestries are created often by an entire host of characters, by the layering of artists, cartoonists and draftsmen, spinners, dyers, weavers, patrons, and collectors, our new Center is the result also of a great deal of collaboration. And, as our projects evolve over the coming years we certainly look forward to working with many different museums, with many artists, weavers, collectors, and scholars, throughout the country and internationally as well. So, while we are one very tiny entity, we certainly look forward to forming links broadly.

Tonight's lecture is co-sponsored by one of the very special collaborators that Gloria Ross and I immediately thought of when we began to talk about the Center for Tapestry Studies. I want to thank Textile Museum Director, Ursula McCracken, and Development Director, George Rogers, for so kindly making everything possible tonight. One tiny institution could hardly have managed the organization that this evening required. I would also like to thank Ellen Iseman for so graciously being our Yale Club sponsor this evening. I also thank the Yale Club staff for flexing with our plans as the program evolved. The Textile Museum, as I say, is very special, Ursula is here to say a few words to you before I introduce our speaker for this evening, so Ursula...

Introduction by Ursula McCracken:

Thank you, Ann. It is a pleasure to share the podium with you as a long time colleague of The Textile Museum and currently a Textile Museum advisory council member. And I'm delighted to welcome all of you textile enthusiasts, including many, many textile museum members who have come from all over the East coast for this special lecture by Archie. It is particularly appropriate that The Textile Museum co-sponsored this event to inaugurate the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies. Our mutual interests in historic, ethnographic, and contemporary textiles draw us together in celebration. Gloria Ross has a long association with The Textile Museum, and since 1991 has been a trustee. With a global view of textile arts, Gloria also has a keen eye for subtleties and nuance. Gloria understands the complexity and diversity of the textile arts, and the responsibility of the Courtesy of the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies, www.tapestrycenter.org
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museum to its audiences. I am particularly grateful to Gloria for helping The Textile Museum adhere to the highest standards. A special interest of Gloria's is the educational role of The Textile Museum, and she has taken pleasure in seeing the museum build its audiences among younger people. To see this vision that Gloria and Ann have had for the Center for Tapestry Studies develop and now be inaugurated this evening is a great pleasure for all of us at The Textile Museum, and I am sure for all of you. Thank you.

Speaker's Introduction by Ann Lane Hedlund:

Tonight's speaker was an absolutely clear and easy choice for the Center for Tapestry

Studies. What we wanted was someone who had a broad perspective on the field, who has worked extensively with the "true" tapestry technique, who honors the European tradition while acknowledging tapestry roots and its worldwide appeal, and who rolls with, and certainly creates some of, contemporary tapestry's best punches. This is Archie Brennan; no other person would do for our first lecture.

I'll give you an abbreviated biographical sketch, as his credits are many and his reputation is already quite well known. Moreover, his wit is so wide we should get to it quickly! This year he celebrates his fiftieth year in tapestry, with his works shown worldwide. Following tradition, Archie was a weaving apprentice for seven years in Scotland, his homeland. He is a graduate of Edinburgh College of Art where he established the Department of Tapestry and gained worldwide attention. During the sixties and seventies, he was artistic director of Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh, where he collaborated with leading British and American artists. And he created many commissioned tapestries following his own designs as well. At the Dovecot, Archie Brennan and Gloria Ross first met up and began collaborating on many of their own intriguing projects. In more recent years, Queen Elizabeth has appointed Archie as an officer of the Order of the British Empire for his contribution to the arts. Clearly I am skipping many of those contributions to the arts. In the Pacific, he taught in Papua New Guinea and was coordinator-designer for the artworks in, and also on, the National Parliament Building there. He has consulted with weavers in communities in the Arctic. He and his partner, also a very fine tapestry weaver, Susan Martin Moffei, now live and work in New York City, which is our great good fortune tonight. It is a distinct pleasure to invite Archie Brennan to talk to us tonight about his views on tapestry. Archie...

[applause]

Lecture by Archie Brennan:

Let me do something first...[pause] [Hanging a narrow tapestry behind the podium]

You're up.

Thank you. OK, is this working now? (Yes.) You can see I'm a Luddite at heart.

There are ticket scalpers at the door tonight. Susan and I live in Madison Square Garden

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area, just across from the Garden, and any night we step outside we are asked, do we want to buy tickets for New York Knicks or New York Rangers, but, [laughing] it is astonishing that people are even looking for tickets for this lecture tonight! It's quite amazing.

I know that here I have many colleagues, friends. I know a number of people by name and by reputation. I know scholars, historians, conservators, curators, weavers, and I know some people came just because they were curious, and I know a few were bullied to come along too. But I have no misconception, I know that tapestry is a minor activity. It's not always been that way. There was a town outside Brussels in Belgium in the midsixteenth

century, where they had 2500 tapestry weavers living in this small town. I think there might be half a dozen in New York City today. It's crazily labor intensive as a process. It economically suicidal, I think. Some people have even suggested it's redundant. But it's not abnormal.

Tapestry, if you read over its history, it has been popular, it has been virtually gone, it has

risen again, sometimes centuries apart, sometimes decades apart. But, what I did notice over the years in seeing this rise and fall of the fortunes of tapestry making is that there were always associated, with these changes, individuals. People who were crazy enough to get hooked up in this antiquated process and make it happen. In my time, in the last hundred years, perhaps, I'll just list a few of the names. I haven't met them all but know of them all with great respect: William Morris obviously one, a hundred years ago, Jean Lurcat of France, forty-fifty years ago. In a personal sense for me the Third Marquee of Bute established the Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh. Harry Jefferson Barnes, names you don't know but they mean a great deal to me and to tapestry. John Noble, they were colleagues and they were ones who put their hands in their pocket to keep tapestry alive through the fifties, sixties, seventies, because they were so enthusiastic about the process. In Australia, Dame Elizabeth Murdoch, she's a strange one. She decided about 1975 that Australia had all these sheep, and therefore we could use the wool to weave tapestry, she said, make use of the wool. Now, I don't know what the sheep population is in Australia, but it's somewhere around 30, 40, 50 million, right? And a very hard working tapestry weaver used almost two sheep shearings a year. But it's that wonderful kind of logic that makes tapestry happen. Sue Walker, equally, of the workshop, and without question, Gloria--Gloria Ross.

These are some of the people throughout history who've had this irrational passion, and peaks have happened, and then it's gone quiet again. And there is a common thread between each one of these individuals. None of them wove. There are pretensions of some, like Morris, who made claims to have woven, but he didn't very well at all, he did rather badly weave. Only one of them, Lurcat, was a designer. But I think we have never to forget that this is such an important moment when people like that surface and we take advantage. And there's a nice American tradition that I've learned in giving talks like this, to dedicate them to individuals. And I'd like to do that to these people, the nonweavers

who've made tapestry happen, but also to the unknown weavers. If you look at the back of many tapestries you'll see a couple of initials, sometimes, sometimes not. But they too, had a major part in keeping this strange process alive.

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I'd like to go back to Madison Square Garden for a minute. Actually, to the son of Elizabeth Murdoch, a fellow called Rupert, who owns 20 percent of the Yankees, the Mets, no, the Rangers, and the Knicks. Imagine, they're playing tonight, there are probably 15 thousand people there. And imagine if we asked them what tapestry is, what they would say. It gives us a proper sense of perspective, I think. They would probably answer, is it something to do with genteel people sewing colored threads, a kind of embroidery? And, if more than that, and this is really a kind of a quote, made up from a number of comments on what tapestry is: "It's a vague picture of thick brown cloth, old, hanging on a wall, usually a blotchy picture of some buxom maidens, with faded faces but big arms, traipsing through a meadow sprinkled with wildflowers, with dogs and maybe birds. Maybe one or two young men, in tights and funny hats, all set amongst leafy trees and some vague castle-like building in the distance." That's probably what they would say tapestry was; it's certainly been said to me.

I'd like to talk briefly about a friend and colleague from the Dovecot who's been a weaver

now since the early sixties, Douglas. His solution to this situation, what he thought if you were to ask what he did, right? If he met somebody at the golf club or bar or something, Douglas has claimed for 35 years to be a carpenter. The easiest way to explain what tapestry is. He still does it. But the question in my head in thinking about this evening, wasn't what Douglas thought about tapestry or the supporters of the New York Rangers or whatever, but individually, what tapestry means. What kind of picture, what kind of image would surface, for you, if somebody said, you know, what's tapestry anyway? I know for many, it would be a large picture, covering an entire wall perhaps. Probably 15th, 16th, 18th century when it had any significance. That's probably about it, for many people it would be that.

I've been laboring under a great difficulty here, but I've just remembered I've got my glasses, so I can see my notes. Here we are. Thank you, Susan. She brought them. Ah, yeah... [laughter]

Tapestry is a bed cover, right? For long periods in Norway, 17th century, tapestry had a role very similar to that. It was woven as house furnishings, keeping drafts out over a bed recess, or as a bed cover, as a cushion. Or is tapestry a blanket, to be worn, maybe by a Navajo chief, in a Chief's Blanket in the 19th century? Is tapestry a linen tunic? In looking, I discovered, clearly, that these were the roles tapestry had, right. A linen tunic with some tapestry insets, and I say this, a kind of sweatshirt that's the equivalent of a Tommy, is it Tommy Hilfiger? Because that probably was a common place, and socially probably it had the same role... It was so ordinary, right? And so I say it, kind of tongue in cheek, but with some real seriousness behind it, which is like a great deal I say about my work. It's tongue in cheek, but underneath there's a deeper comment very often.

Tapestry for sitting on, chairs, sofas, cushions, and a long period of that. Tapestry for standing on, the kilim rug. Tapestry is a military uniform in the pre-Columbian Andes 1200 years ago. Tapestry even is a tax levy, for people wove textiles, including tapestry, Courtesy of the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies, www.tapestrycenter.org
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and then in early Peru, you paid that as taxes. I'd love to pay my income tax, what little I have to pay, in tapestry. But they were put in storehouses, they were woven and just put in storehouses, as a tax levy. It's an astonishing role.

Tapestry as a burial shroud. Imagine spending months, months weaving, because it took many months for fine weaving, again in pre-Columbian Andean region. Weaving something that was immediately then either set alight, or tossed into some gorge or other as a sacrifice.

Or, tapestry as a work of art. This is the one that gets me, because it's such a modern notion, and it's the one that most of us involved in tapestry tend to presume that that's what tapestry is about. Tapestry as a work of art in terms of art works in galleries. Or, any of these other categories taken today and mounted, stretched, and presented as a work of art.

Or is it just a process, is it just a way of working? I've spent my fifty years looking back in wonder and amazement at the 3000 years of tapestry history. And looking each day over these years, without any doubt, without any confusion at all, that the requirement for me is to look for a role for tapestry today, in this time. Or roles, for that matter. That's been the work of this weaver anyway, for these years. But I'd like to pick up that question by means of slides, and expand it a little further, if the thing works.

[Adjusting slide projector] Is it on? OK, can the lights go down perhaps? Can more lights go down, or...

[Voice of another man] I'm videotaping. I need the lights.

[Archie Brennan] Oh, you need the lights. So the people who've come to listen to the lecture need the lights off, I think it's...[lights off].

OK, tapestry is a glove. My reaction to seeing this from a book a few years back was to wonder if it was found singly, and would someone from outer space come down in time and find gloves like this buried in the sand somewhere and presume that we were all a one-handed race. But it's amazing, I've tried to think about weaving with it as well. Tapestry is something to wear, tapestry is clothing. This is a black and white slide of ceremonial robes for the Royal College of Art in London woven in gold metal, in tapestry. So tapestry even in the last 30 years or so has been clothing. That's the facing of the same piece. But what I like is that one of the weavers at the Dovecot, when this project was over, he gathered up some of the gold metals and the yarns and he wove himself a tapestry waistcoat, a tapestry vest. And he used to, on a Saturday night, wear it to the local pub. And that really is splendidly unique. A tapestry waistcoat. Now I've got problems, I can't see my notes. That's for talking, there might be a switch here. I love to be inefficient about modern technology. I hold onto it with some pride. I can hold that there, that's great. OK, yeah. We're all right. [The light is fixed].

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I've got a hundred of these slides to change, I've got to move. There we go. Tapestry is a uniform, a military uniform in this case, again pre-Columbian. These Andean weavers were busy, 1000, 1500 years ago. But equally the Coptic tapestry clothing as well. Tapestry is a headband, sweatband. I think that if you half close your eyes and tilt your head sideways a little you can see it says Nike along the top left there. I say that again in jest, but, in fact, these identification headbands would be a commonplace as today the Nike sweatband is.

But the next area, this from the Devonshire hunting tapestries in the Victoria and Albert Museum, a detail, tapestry is clothing. Tapestry weaving clothing. Tapestry weaving textiles, within the content of the imagery. It's a strange one when you stop and think of it. I tried some years ago to think of the equivalent in painting. There's a wonderful tapestry, wonderful in a strange way, anyway. The Gobelins Workshop in Paris wove a tapestry where the French king is arriving at the workshops, dressed in woven finery, and there are tapestries being unrolled to display to the king. It's such a commonplace thing right through the Middle Ages, woven tapestry with the illusion of woven clothing within the images, or even the illusion of a woven tapestry, I tried to think of the equivalent, I can't recall any painting ever... a painting of an exhibition of paintings, because that would be the equivalent of that. Or maybe a glass engraving of a still life of wine bottles and glasses, that would be the same kind of introspection. Or even a woodcarver carving a woodland landscape or something.

Anyway, somewhere a way back in the late '60s, I got attracted to tapestry as clothing. Or weaving woven things in that series of tapestries. This here... Susan introduced me to Verona, where Bojana Leznicki and her husband live nowadays, tapestry weavers. The first time we went... I knew Verona, Italy, and I was shocked to see the gentlemen from Verona, New Jersey. So I decided to put them in a tapestry.

Equally, this about 1989, maybe, they're actually all drawings done from television's "Nightline" with Ted Koppel. And I made them into members of a board, because the odd thing was, and I've said this so many times now, but I discovered that these experts in the world were, according to Nightline and Koppel, they were always male, and they always wore ties and suits, and they were nearly always ugly, I'm afraid.

An extension of that. These are about 18 inches tall I think. The owners who are here will probably know better than I do, but it's taking the same thing further. It went on and on. I think I did a series of six, eight, clothing, out of that notion of weaving real weaving.

Tapestry for walking on, the slit kilim. Very much tapestry weaving, and strangely, I have found myself continually introducing sections of kilim rugs into tapestries as part of the information within it. I've done that now for many years. Tapestry as a tiger. I like the ludicrous nature of this. And it goes back to probably the early '50s, It was woven.

1875, Aubusson. Tapestry to sit on. I don't care, I guess, for the imagery, but I like the notion that this process can be so ordinary, that you do sit on it. And there have been

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some interesting variations on upholstered tapestry over the years. I think Raoul Dufy particularly did an intriguing series of sofas and chairs. Picasso did one for the Gertrude Stein memorial room. He designed it. It was two white-gloved hands kind of wrapping around the back of a chair.

I'm sure if you're an historian this is horrifying: Late 17th century, I believe, German vesper chair, that someone owned and the original silk covering had completely deteriorated. It was privately owned, so they said: "Weave a tapestry cover for it but do what you want". I enjoyed doing it, I enjoyed the result of it, but mostly I enjoyed the sin of it.

Tapestry is a religious document of sorts. That's not a great example, it's Swiss German, but there are so many examples that if you've been interested in tapestry at all, they've abounded. This astounding piece of weaving, the archangel Michael. I have a... well, I won't talk about John Travolta this time, and I've said it before. He played Michael in a recent film, I think.

Just a tiny detail enlarged on the screen. Because it raises something that tapestry most assuredly is for me. It is that it's an intimate medium. If you sit weaving this for a day, a section might be a day, a day and a half, work. It's a detail of a lectern fall, it would hang down like the front here [pointing to podium]. But it really operates at that level. That's the level the weaver works it at. Not just technically, but the marks, the surfaces, the changes that the weaver makes, and it probably is one of the great losses for people who see tapestry at large, that they don't get close to it. I'll touch on some examples as we go through. I was asking Pam over here today if she was at the Cloisters looking again at the tapestries out there, the Hunt of the Unicorn. And I asked her how many times she rang the buzzer, the alarm if you go too close. And I'm sure it's time we, underlying, amongst tapestry weavers, seek a category in the Guinness Book of Records, because it's impossible for a weaver not to go up and look closely, with their hands behind their back. But Pam said six times today, which is pretty good.

Tapestry as a religious object, again. The weaver of this is sitting a third of the way up here, Jean Pierre Larochette, designed by Yael his wife and woven as a tapestry for a synagogue. I think a wonderful example of a role for tapestry, which kind of becomes a

major artwork by setting out in a sense not to be.

Tapestry as a mask. As part of a burial shroud where the deceased person would be wrapped up in a kind of fetal position and this was put pretending where the head... human hair.

Not a great slide, but part of the Unicorn series. I shall refer to quite a bit, the Hunt of the Unicorn out at the Cloisters, up at the top end of Manhattan. It's an interesting moment, in 1498, the first two of this series of seven were delivered, actually five hundred years ago this year. I looked..., measured this up, worked out the square footage, the warp set, how fine the weaving was, and I worked out that, with proper assistance, with dyers, spinners, people drawing, helping prepare the loom, it would take one weaver fifty years. Courtesy of the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies, www.tapestrycenter.org

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to weave that whole set. It probably took me, a day, and that's perhaps one of the things to point out, the state of modern tapestry. It's about two inches by six, something like that. I tried it two or three times, this is one of the versions. A variation on the same piece. I'm not going to tell you how big this actually is. In modern life we live with reproductions and this meaning can change when it's just a projected slide. I said intimate and small and one of the things about very small tapestries, you can get another try at it without any great loss. And here it's taking a simple, Narcissus figure head, but if you move from left to right and look very carefully, you'll see the quiet changes that each little piece... they don't belong together, I'm just showing them together here, each little piece makes, quietly increasing the slit down the nose to make a fine line, decreasing the width of it, pushing out the warps, you see in the extreme right here where I've woven, so to speak, badly. To delineate a cheekbone. And it's that kind of intimacy that one can handle in weaving and find in weaving if you do recognize it as an intimate process. I'm terrible at driving this remote control, I feel like I'm waving to you. I'll go back again.

Detail from the Hunt of the Unicorn. It's these little incidental parts that I delight in. This is gossip in the background to something grand going on, the whole hunt. Couple of men arguing about something or discussing something or somebody. This is a terrible slide, but it's how many old tapestries can look. And there are lovely groups of ladies gossiping in little balcony boxes.

Here's a modern equivalent. A couple of ladies gossiping again. It's a kind of rebuild of Reg Smythe, Andy Capp figures with a slight variation. It was great fun to reconstruct, to weave, and it has a little twist to it. I'm sure every woman in the place here presumes it's two women talking about men. But if you look really closely, the voice is coming from a distance, and it's we men talking about ladies.

This is another detail, again, and, in a way, the little section I'll show you. Well above the two arms, the calf of the leg, the little leaves, wildflowers growing, I don't know what it is, but I remember seeing that some years ago, making the buzz of the alarm go off, time and time again, because I was totally sharing it, after 500 years with the weaver who wove it. I could work out and follow every practical decision, every change of shape, every choice of color, and every value of color in that little section. It was like talking to a weaver 500 years ago. It was a wonderful experience. And the reality is about the intimacy of weaving. It's a terrible slide, I apologize for that. But... [break in tape] Probably seven pieces around eighty feet long. The acts of the Apocalypse, it's an

amazing subject to deal with, to handle, to conceive, to design, and to put into weaving. And it tells us something about quite early times in the history of tapestry in Europe. That they could deal with something like that.

And something of mine a couple of years back. It's a postcard. I really was trying to sort out in my head. I had looked for the most commonplace, banal, trite, obvious thing on a postcard, a cryptic message, four inches by six and a half. It's an interesting contrast with Courtesy of the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies, www.tapestrycenter.org

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this big time Scottish tapestry weaver, the best he can do is this in the face of the Apocalypse at Angers but there is another aspect to this, in fact. This happens to be woven for an exhibition of miniature tapestries in Hungary, so it is a postcard, it's a woven post card slide. It's stitched onto a bit of card at the back, an address, and sent through the mail, so that it's not an artwork, it's not a work of craft, as far as the post office is concerned, it's a postcard. And it doesn't need to be categorized and it escapes all customs, all duties, in going through the mail. It's something actually I've been doing since the early seventies, a package to London. I did the first one, I think in 1975. So the mailman is the judge. And I've had fun... In Honolulu to an exhibition there. An exhibition in New York at what was the Scheuer tapestry gallery, mailing the card, and then having it reproduced as a postcard.

Hungary, a miniature textile entry exhibition. They required an entry form and a submission, and they said make up your own entry form. So I proceeded to do so, then I just sewed them together, back to back, and mailed it. Last year I think it was, a bienale exhibition. Same thing another postcard. I've done it... well, I've sent cablegrams to Japan, I've sent packages to Australia, every two or three years I do one. I like subversive weaving and the big attraction weaving this is I wove it all in cotton, for an international linen exhibition in France.

Words, this is Swiss German again, Swiss Alsace, one of my favorite periods of tapestry weaving, running parallel with more sophisticated 15th, 16th century French, Flemish works. In passing the flattened nature of the griffin, where the body is almost a twodimensional

cut out, and the background is shortened, but lettering. By happy coincidence, the quill pen and gothic script printing of that nature is very suitable for weaving, very easy to weave. So it was used extensively in that time.

This slide from 1987, I think, responds to words in weaving. It's actually a cutting from 1977 out of the London Sunday Observer. It just seemed to me the most superficial bit of Sunday journalism imaginable, and I cut it out because I couldn't square the incredible technology of modern printing in my head with the incredible abuse in the use of printing. Sue Arnold is a good writer and she wrote many fine things but this seemed to be what was asked of her at that time. I mean, it's quite a funny thing, but to take it, this press cutting, and weave it, 60 inches high, 30 inches wide, as a replica of the original was some kind of a needed expression from me, and I made a little addition to it that really is what it's all about, in sense. So it's a different role for tapestry.

And this is dealing with... that's a stitch up there, but its flat, it's two dimensional, it just pretends to be imitating sewing. It's a whole exploration of structure. This is a bent bit of weaving where the warps move sideways and upwards again, and it doesn't really fall.

Another of the same, a flat bit of weaving that seems to have sewn itself back.

That bedspread piece...not a bedspread, it was probably a hanging. I think one of the great under-rated periods of tapestry was a wonderful exhibition up town, last year, of Norwegian tapestries from this period, 17th, 18th century, perhaps. This style is the result
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of the fact that they would not leave slits in tapestry, the opposite of the kilim rug. So rather than going straight up and leaving a slit in the weave, or sewing it up, they tack into the wind, they zigzag, and it makes a much stronger, sturdier fabric with no slits, and therefore was practical in terms of furnishing.

Back to the Hunt of the Unicorn again. There was a lot of talk in the '60s, the writing examinations of the role of these two fragments of the Hunt of the Unicorn series, they couldn't work out who the lady, this lady, this medieval maiden might be looking at. And I decided that I would make a version of it and introduce a photograph of Princess Di of that period.

The series Hunt of the Unicorn and Apocalypse, seven, in all, large tapestries. I have done a number of smaller series, and this is one that I finished last year. Each piece is separate, they're only three feet high. Dersu Usala is a fascinating character from a Kurosawa film, which was based, first and foremost. And this is just some parts of the series. There are twelve in my series.

That's how the weaver sees it and that's how you should see it if you go close to a tapestry where the cloth, the whole drama, increases. Not surface change for the sake of it, but it has a much more powerful role in the image, the ruggedness of the cloth, change of surface.

A more benign detail of the same character.

Tapestry. I can't find the right phrase for describing this, but there's whole series of tapestries throughout history that are tapestries in praise of the person who paid for them. They're self-congratulation tapestries. Coats of arms are sometimes of that nature. And this is Louis XVI recapturing Dunkirk. In fact the reality was he bought Dunkirk back from the British. But they made a tapestry proving that it was otherwise, and this is them arriving in Dunkirk with his entourage. The coat of arms is in the same genre. It still goes on today and I think, happily, commissions for large corporations' tapestries where the entrance hall is given stature and status to the company, the organization by means of tapestry.

This from the Dovecot. The local county... it's a county map. There's a wonderful tradition of county maps, in tapestry, particularly in England. But some in France as well, of decorative maps. And this was an updated version of mine, where in fact, the county wanted a coat of arms, and I wanted to weave a stylized map based on survey charts and the like. And the solution here, was to discover who the committee was, who was judging the design. I found they were all local counselors, representing various towns. And I ensured that their town was on the design. That was the judgement. They checked that they were there. I think that is as honest a way and reasonable as way to deal with it...

But this, in terms of the 20th century in tapestry is probably the most important step. 1932. Two tapestry exhibitions, tapestry going into the art gallery, into a private gallery in London and into the Chicago Arts Club. Marie Cuttoli in Aubusson had a series of
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works woven by Braque, by Leger, Picasso, Dufy, and so on. She bought paintings of their works and had them reproduced in tapestry. And they were exhibited under glass, framed, alongside the original works. And that was tapestry as an artwork. It's a very modern step. And this is one, the Braque, tapestry from the painting that was in these initial exhibitions. It's a major change.

Victorian Tapestry Workshop in Melbourne, begun twenty-five... twenty years ago, and they've done some amazing work in tapestry over that period. And this follows very much in the Cuttoli tradition of inviting an artist, or in this case an artist who had done some tapestry work, himself, as a weaver, Gordon Crook. I put this slide in because I rather like the nature of it. And that a Scotsman is showing it to you in New York. But it's a tapestry woven in Australia by a designer who lives in New Zealand, but is actually a Londoner, and that kind of sequence [pause, referring to slide projector] It's not the machine, it's the driver, I can assure you.

I sneaked this one in, another tapestry as a work of art, essentially based on painting, but with other things happening. The weaver is someone called Sarah Brennan, my daughter. Gloria, one of the collaborative projects with, in this case, between Gloria, myself and the Dovecot and Dubuffet. There's a couple of things, I've spoken about intimacy, but one of the other aspects of tapestry that is extremely powerful, particularly today, with the quality and permanence of modern dyes, is the nature of color in tapestry. And I know that was a great concern and enthusiasm of Gloria Ross, when working together. Color was what really sent her chasing after particular artists.

This was woven I think in France, in Feletin or Aubusson. One of my great surprises recently, I had never seen this slide before, I haven't seen the tapestry, but I think it's terrific, and I'll just... And a wonderful detail of this character.

Tapestry imitating paint. I know I should not be happy with it, and mostly I'm not. Sometimes one is impressed, and this is an amazing piece of virtuoso weaving out of Australia again. It's hard to tell that it's not watercolor. And it's obvious to say, well why bother to weave it? I can only say but... other things start to happen. A wonderful series of works I did with Gloria at the Dovecot out of Louise Nevelson, where the structure of the cloth, the slides never represent the work well, but this is a very interesting set of complex cloths that really haven't been done before or very much since. The weaving is woven into the weaving, the warp becomes weft, and the weft becomes warp. It's complex overlays that started out with a very simple Nevelson collage of fairly mundane papers.

Seemingly the same, an imitation of paint, but one that meant a great deal to me because I discovered something I had never found before. This is about five feet wide, out of Gottlieb called Black Disc on Tan and you can see it's surely imitating paint. But when we came to deal with that black disk, about three feet in diameter, maybe four, five square feet of seemingly plain black weaving. But if you stand in front of that actual size, and look into that black, and see how the black has been handled with a complexity of blacks. It went up in size from the original sketch, so the marks had to go up in scale, the Courtesy of the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies, www.tapestrycenter.org
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mood had to be enlarged. And the way that we did it was not by having many different dyed blacks, but actually taking the same dye vat, but having introduced into that vat many variations of spinning, so that you were really inside that black to a depth and a

reality when you see the actual tapestry that really is quite pure in tapestry weaving. The quality of color that is available is very different from any other medium.

A Romare Bearden, again one of the surprises. Not a Dovecot woven, one of Gloria's collaborations with, I think, a French workshop. But again, the color has a smoldering depth to it that is wonderful, I think.

LeCorbusier. I had the good fortune to spend a day working with him in Paris, 1962. And he was a very forceful character. His two arguments were tapestry had above all to be mural in size, filling a wall, and essentially flat, had to recognize the wall, and be twodimensional.

Not to make holes in the wall. And he said that loud and clear. To me then and to others since then. And you can see this from the Trojan War series in the Metropolitan here. The two-dimensional nature of it, it's been tilted up for sure so there's no great depth to it. The wall that the tapestry hangs on is respected so to speak. It's very difficult to look at this tapestry from afar. It has no great overall presence, but if you start sitting in front of it for hours and days and pouring over the details it's a wonderful, wonderful rewarding experience. Anyway, tapestry being two-dimensional and shouldn't make a hole in the wall immediately made me question that thought. So I set out to do a series of tapestries that were essentially windows, holes in the wall. Textile references for sure. Because above all tapestry is an object to me, not totally illusion. The presence of the cloth is so strong that you are dealing with other elements when you put them into a pictorial context. So the very ambiguity about the solid cloth and the sense of breaking the wall has been a great attraction to me. Sometimes more respectful of two dimensions, other times leaning into three dimensions.

A commission where the hole in the wall is in fact is a window. This odd base is because it's in a particular building, a particular setting in the building. There is a portrait of the owner behind the blind up at the top that you can't see in this slide.

The first time I saw a fly screen in Australia and was completely engrossed in it as to how to deal with it in weaving. This was my studio window there, which looked out an identical window. Another hole in the wall, a tapestry for a fire place that had been removed from a Georgian library. This is absolutely flat again, but it really pretends not to be. More two-dimensional, very much a hanging. So it's gone on for me, this concern with tapestry about a window, from I guess 1967 and on, and on until 1998.

You may recognize this... its source. I changed the title a little. Certainly plenty of textile references. The presumption in my head was this particular couple from American Gothic painting sold the farm and moved to New York and became quite wealthy and started collecting. Chief blankets to stand on, kilim rugs to hang as curtains. The church, the modern church, the bank, lace curtains with a cross hinting there, and removing his pitchfork and having a cup of coffee. Still a dutiful wife serving him. And a few real buttons thrown into the tapestry for good measure.

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Talking pairs and textiles in a window with a hint of painting. This is number seventeen over the years. This is the last one I cut off. There are two pairs, kind of friendly. Not very big, it's only a couple of feet tall. But again that wool color in particularly the sky here where you could put your whole arm into it as you're weaving it, you feel the depth is forever and you could put your arm through it.

But going back, 1963 maybe 1964, and the first commission I ever got for a tapestry. Very French, very loose, light, perhaps, superficially, superficially, but it was a discovery then in detail that so much more can happen close up. Really an interplay of surfaces, so that the physical difference is... very two-dimensional. Flat, close-up of what is in fact, Muhammad Ali. One of a whole series of Ali pictures I did, about twenty odd pieces, not all tapestry, but always based on press reproductions. It kind of had an affinity with Chuck Close the current exhibition at MOMA at the time around 1970 when it started but he moved it on more than I did, for sure.

There it is, extremely intimate, that's what the weaver sees, [pointing to another image?] that's what you see from afar. You can see the color and the characteristics from close up. Same here. This is... around last year or the end of last year, it's about that size, a little smaller. I can't find a title for it, it's four divided by five, I think is the nearest title. But it's not just witty, it's about other things, I guess. Here again, the interplay itself is... the formal aspect of tapestry is very strong.

Again the... oh maybe 1973, looking at ways of almost mechanizing tapestry weaving in a system.

Almost up to date, this is something I've been struggling with for many a moon. I love to draw. Drawing is a part of my week, our week, one day is devoted to drawing. Often with a model. And trying to find a marriage between drawing and weaving. And it's just starting to happen. One always thinks that, when it's just starting to happen, you think it's about to happen, and next week the disillusionment comes along. But that's because the following week you'll think it's going to happen again.

So, dealing with weaving as drawing. Not a big tapestry though. It's been an extended series of..., well that's a detail of that, one of these pieces. They're only nine inches high, each section. And it went on, tests, there again nine inches high. These are separate pieces. They're actually double faces, these. There's a profile hidden the front view. Dick Tracy is hidden in there alongside the other figure if you look closely.

Tapestry structure. This is one inch wide. The warp becomes the hair. I kind of put this in I think as the last slide... the second to last slide. I liked the idea of three hundred people looking at an inch square piece of weaving and seeing it how the weaver does.

This is a Scotsman in America. Transatlantic Crossing. It's about five inches wide.

American culture, British culture, they seem so similar in so many ways, but there are

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odd little things that are different, as banal as driving on the other side of the road. And I wondered what fish did in mid-Atlantic, whether they kept to the left or the right. I made my decision as you can see, they swam the British way.

Tapestry as a pair of boots. Again, pre-Columbian, that's what it might be. So, today, for me, and it's even more so than it was in the beginning, tapestry is an obsessive, it's a compulsive, activity. I sit at my loom ten, twelve, sometimes sixteen hours a day, weaving, contentedly, with no effort. Every day if I can possibly manage it. And I'm very content to work within the traditional restraints that define woven tapestry. And I do respect, however, and delight very often in the work of others who choose to move away from the more technical boundaries that are defined as woven tapestry. But I'm far more excited by the reality that today tapestry making is still seeking a purpose, even if it's a modest role in the late twentieth century. Tapestry, perhaps, is a work of art for the

gallery wall, or tapestry is a pair of boots. I don't know which, but it's a most exciting time to be fiddling around with asking that question. And I hope I get lots more years to keep trying. And that's it, thank you very much for listening.

[applause]

[Ann Hedlund]

Thank you Archie, I'll say it over the microphone. We hope with this, that you'll join us for a light reception upstairs to continue the discussions that Archie has hopefully sparked in many minds and to create new discussions as well. As I mentioned earlier, you could go up the escalators, you can also go through the blue door on the right and go up one flight to the library. Look forward to talking to you there. Thank you.

[applause]