

“TAPESTRY AND BEYOND: EXPLORING THE ‘SLENDER MARGINS BETWEEN REAL AND UNREAL’”

Presented by Ramona Sakiestewa

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Introduction by Ann Lane Hedlund, Ph.D., Director, The Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies

Welcome to the third annual lecture, the Gloria F. Ross Lecture, in honor of Gloria F. Ross who was a passionate tapestry lover, as some of you know. I'm Ann Hedlund, the Director of the GFR Center, as we call it, the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies, which is based at the Arizona State Museum on the U of A campus in Tucson.

The GFR Center is a non-profit research institute and an educational foundation. Our projects, as many of you know already, are devoted to sharing the history and the beauty of tapestry weaving wherever it occurs--quite a broad mission in some respects. For a few examples, we would be interested in projects in precolumbian Peru, ancient China, medieval Europe, the historic American Southwest, where we are working currently, modern day Australia, the Middle East, anywhere in the world where tapestry occurs and pretty much any time period where tapestry weavers have been at work.

And, speaking of far away people and places, I know we have a number of out-of towners and lots of local people, too. How many of you are here from beyond the greater New York area? A few people, some people. Yes, are you Textile Museum members, Textile Society members? I know there are several of you who are part of the Textile Society. Just a few. And then finally, our own members as well. There must be a number of you here also. Welcome.

Five of our Center's Board of Trustees are here today and I would like them to stand up and be recognized. They are a very special group for us. Ann Bookman is here from Boston. Archie Brennan from New York and the globe, Darienne Dennis from New York City, also. Margi Fox from Bellingham, Washington, and Alice Zrebiec from Santa Fe and Denver. We also have an honorary member present, our first member, in fact, Emily Buehrens who is Ann Bookman's daughter and Gloria Ross' granddaughter. We're really glad she has been to every lecture we've held. At the reception, I hope you will have a good chance to talk with each of us, and to share your ideas about tapestry, tapestry weaving and Gloria Ross' world, and also your thoughts about our activities.

We have evaluation forms and we're interested in your thoughts about future lectures, future locations and all of that sort of thing, also. We are already planning next year's lecture. We're very excited to hold a Board meeting this Saturday here in New York and to plan for a lecture a year from now.

I do hope that many of you knew Gloria Ross as a friend or colleague or perhaps both. If you did, you knew her passion for tapestry. Her passion spread from classical European wall hangings to newer contemporary American and European forms. She in particular didn't love lumpy fiber art, but she adored good classic tapestry in a very clean sense and in all its modern manifestations as well.

Ramona Sakiestewa, today's speaker, represents a continuum from those traditions and more. She was selected as today's speaker, in fact, because she represents a very special mix of both tradition and modernity. Her award winning--and I have to say riveting--textiles, and you've seen some of them on the invitation and now on another on the program that you hold, her tapestry weaving reflects both her Native American background and an eclectic sense of other influences. In addition, she has done some interesting things: reproduced ancient antiques like rabbit skin blankets from the Anasazi world. And she has pursued contemporary painting and other media.

As a dynamic designer, Ramona Sakiestewa has consulted actively with the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian both here in New York and of course in Washington with their new building. She's worked with the Taliesin Foundation which is Frank Lloyd Wright's legacy and with Pendleton woolen mills. Now living in Santa Fe, she has previously called New York, China, Japan, and Peru her home at various times. Among her affiliations and projects, Ramona was a very good friend and a valued colleague of the late Gloria Ross. So, she has a very special connection to our Center, of course. It is a pleasure to welcome Ramona Sakiestewa, our third annual speaker.

TRANSCRIPT FOLLOWS.

Ramona Sakiestewa

(Applause) Well, thank you, and thank you all for coming. It's really a pleasure. I haven't done a talk in a long time, so this is a good exercise for me to put the slides together. The title of the talk is the "Slender Margins between the Real and Unreal."

Western Europe has defined art for centuries, but in traditional and indigenous cultures of North America there really aren't words that describe art. There's function, there's uses; we can define the states of ice and snow in Alaska in over fifty ways. We can define a state of a pine tree in northern New Mexico among the Tewa in twenty-four different ways. But, it is states of being that we are better at describing than what art is. So, I'm always poking around to see what other non-European cultures might define as art, because as you are making art or you think you are making art, part of it is based in just doing the process over and over again. Very little of it, for me, turns out to actually be art. It's more in the process. It's going somewhere, but that's not quite it.

I think everyone recognizes when something is art. For example, there is a bowl that we [Hopi people] eat corn meal mush out of. It's a piki bowl. Everybody knows what it looks

like. It's undecorated, it has a certain shape. Every person who makes it knows what it's supposed to look like and yet if you put 200 of them together very few of them would be works of art. But, you would in fact be able to say, "ah ha, this one really does have some other meaning."

So, I found this quote. It's by Chikamatsu Monzaemon who was born in 1653 in Japan. He was noted as the Shakespeare of Japan. He was a bun raku playwright--bun raku involves the small puppet-sized figures that are manipulated by full-sized humans. His definition was, "Art lies in the slender margin between the real and the unreal." And, I thought that's good, because I'm constantly wrestling with personally trying to put intellectual ideas, emotional ideas, and concepts together. There is some kind of void that sometimes they go into. Sometimes it's a metaphysical idea that I am trying to develop in my work.

So, what I would like to show you today are those ideas, what I see, what I feel and how I think about processing my work. I hope at the end you'll have questions about it. So, we'll start [with slides].

I was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico and I was raised in the Southwest. So, it was the center of the universe when I was growing up. I still pretty much think it's the center of the universe, frankly. Weaving in the techniques that I use, what I call the American Southwest tapestry, come directly out of the Four Corners area (which is to the left on the slide). You can see the Hopi reservation and it's surrounded by the Navajo reservation. They are surrounded by some of the most beautiful landscape I think you'll ever find. It's never occurred to me to leave this planet unless they discover one in space that looks like New Mexico and Arizona, for the most part. This is the Painted Desert just below what we see from our reservation.

American Southwest tapestry really is techniques that came out of [the ancient] textile tradition. Probably the biggest scholar in this field was Kate Peck Kent, who was a colleague of Ann Hedlund and a friend of mine. She wrote extensively on Southwest techniques, which were from fragments and from small pieces of fabric found in the Southwest.

The only date you really need to know about is 600 AD. That seems to be when the loom materialized in the Southwest and it seems to have come up from northern Mexico in various forms. There are upright looms, there's something called quatro estacas, which is four stakes. There's a backstrap-like loom. There were predecessors to [the loom]--lots of non-loom techniques like netting, a kind of finger braiding or sprang, and also embroidery. There was traditional embroidery, which is still a separate technique from European embroidery. So, that's really the only date that really means anything to me.

So, these [places on the slide] are the areas that some of these textiles were found. You can also see these textiles on other things besides the textiles themselves. Here we have a quiver case that is netted. And here [on a kiva mural] we have a figure that is wearing some sort of garment and knit or perhaps finger woven leggings. There aren't many examples on ceramics in the Southwest, there are just very few.

These are from murals and they have some astronomical connotations. The figure on your left is basically a person wearing some sort of kilt. We no longer make this pattern, but you will see that it has some reference to these other women's mantas or dresses. The figure is using the feathers to dip into the pot and bless whatever is going on in this mural. So, it's information like this that we are able to use in developing the history of weaving.

Here is a loom, a traditional upright loom. It's basic. You can put as many heddles on it as you want. You can do twill on this. On the right is a Hopi man weaving one of those mantas. The manta is traditionally woven with a diamond twill at either end--the piece is inverted [during the weaving so both ends are woven first], and then the heddles are re-tied so that a diagonal twill [can be woven] through the middle. It's a very simple, straightforward loom, anchored into the floor and anchored anywhere that you can find overhead beams and something to tie it to on the floor.

Here's a historic piece of Hopi pottery and you can see one of the things that I find fascinating about all of this, which is that we have very few garments. We have five or six pieces. The women on the right are wearing very large embroidered mantas and then they are folded over to make the tops. The figure on the left is wearing a kilt that is folded over and made into a top, also. It would be as if you had a couple pairs of pants, three sweaters and two skirts. How would you make that into over three hundred outfits that were separate and distinct? Sometimes, we turn them inside out so you see actually the backside of the fabric. And, that makes its own statement about whatever a figure is wearing.

So, this is a contemporary scene. These are women from San Ildefonso today. This is a contemporary embroiderer named Isabelle Gonzales who still works in the classic tradition.

This is the most contemporary of styles, where sewing has entered into southwestern Pueblo life. We have Pendleton blankets which are still very popular among men, and we have women in back scarves and sewn clothing and under dresses and some hand woven mantas. Most of it is storebought fabric that's been finished on the ends. So, this is the tradition today. This is pretty much what I have to work with in terms of continuing culture.

In 1989, I did an exhibition with the Wheelwright Museum, so I'm going to show you some slides and part of what the exhibition tried to show people. [The theme] was [that while] everyone says, "Well you've got to be a special person to be an artist," but what I am saying is that everyone is born an artist. They forget about it, it's beaten out of them in school, or there is some intimidation factor. First, what you'll be looking at is as if you were looking in my studio or looking at the tops of my desks and tables in my studio. These were samples that I wove for this exhibition. One is a turkey feather blanket and one is a prehistoric twill.

Striped twill occurred prehistorically in the Southwest. It was some of the foundation to my own learning and my experience really was based in what were the prehistoric fabrics of our area--what kinds of minerals, what kinds of dyes were they using in these areas. I did a full sized turkey feather blanket for Bandolier National Monument and then I did a smaller sample. You're sort of talking about down jackets of that time period. And Levi [denim] material for that period was just a [handwoven] wearing blanket.

I have done the full gamut of traditional dyeing; cochineal, indigo, lots of natural dyeing. I never have figured out a way to weave and spin and dye and make money. Because they all require time. They are all very different and they are all very satisfying in very different ways.

There is also another satisfaction factor in my design aesthetic and that's stripes. I keep going back to them over and over and over again. There are a lot of stripes in Italy, a lot of stripes in Japan. Lots of stripes in the Southwest as you might imagine.

These are two pieces, and here's what the [work] desks look like. This might be in my studio. I might be drawing something on graph paper. I might be listening to Aretha Franklin. I might be making myself a pot of tea. I might be putting together a group of yarns for a project or a piece. It just depends on what my inspiration is at the moment.

These pieces are all natural dyed. Then I started using other fibers. This one on the right has 24 carat gold Japanese gold thread in it, which I thought would just be an interesting exercise to see if you could make these different materials really blend together. And, [I use] variations on both traditional Navajo work and Pueblo work in our area.

Then, just picking up ideas. I travel a lot. The wall is actually a wall in China. I have a penchant for things that are in a row or things that kind of resonate. I collect slides of things I really think speak to my work, also.

Here's the Basket Dance series. This has some tradition in Hopi culture, there's a tradition, not a strong one of the men weaving basket designs in their blankets. The women are generally only belt weavers. Basket making however is generally done by women. So there was a tradeoff where basket designs and woven designs were at one point used interchangeably, even though one has a circular motif and one is linear.

I picked up on that and did a series. I tend to do a series of pieces where you can see abstractions. I have done literal work that I did not like at all. It's not really who I am and what I like. That is, I prefer doing abstractions of designs that convey certain concepts.

So, this is a searching process, for sometimes a piece turns out well and you say that's a really good work and other times it's like, "Boy I have to give this to somebody who doesn't know me or put it in a Goodwill box somewhere!" I have done probably as much bad work as I've done good work. (Laughter from audience).

I'm really interested in color. Color for me is really the emotional part, the emotional text

of what I do. Some people think this looks like the Chrysler building or filmstrips. That's okay.

Then I've done another series based on the katsina or katsinam, these supernatural figures that help us through our lives in the course of a year. Their specific colors always try to engender benevolent events or rain or snow or fecundity, so we all know what these colors are, but I've abstracted them into other configurations. You can actually see the kachinas, these are the ones we give children, these flat ones, so they can learn what the different kachinas are.

[In my work,] the black and white striping here is really meant to represent rain. Sometimes it really works. I want [a design] to be so strong that it makes your teeth hurt to look at it.

I've done a series based on abstractions of nature, which you are just completely surrounded by in the southwest. Sometimes people think, "These are not real post cards of the southwest, they are not real colors". But, in fact these are very real colors.

I have a theory about color. When I did a lecture series in Japan I remembered seeing a whole group of the ukiyo-è wood blocks at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, which have very clear crisp precise color even though lots of them portray people walking through pretty intense rain. When I went to Kyoto, I had an experience where I was walking across a bridge one morning with a friend of mine with an umbrella and it was monsoon rain. I imagined myself like these people in the woodblock prints bent over into the rain crossing the bridge struggling through the rain to get across the bridge. And the color in Japan is now completely mediated by the pollution of the country. The wood block prints from that time period are bright and clear – now days air pollution has changed the color of everything.

People now can only see Fuji on certain specific clear days or if they take plane trips in Japan or in special circumstances. I believed that once probably most people were able to see Fuji more clearly, more crisply.

In Japan, all [the people in] my audiences wore on variations of beige and green. More shades of green than you could possibly imagine. I didn't really understand green because I grew up in the Southwest and green isn't one of our colors. It's brown or it's intense color. But, after being in Japan, I realized that the quality, the tone of green is really important to this culture. It's evolved over time.

In the Mediterranean, you have very clear light, like we have in the Southwest. It's the same idea. Our color [perceptions uses] in the Southwest was introduced from other cultures that came from the Mediterranean to Mexico. From Mexico it's mediated again by Aztec, Olmec, other cultures, and then came into the Southwest with trade. So, there are several nuances of color that have taken place over time.

I'm always just picking up concepts of cultural color, shapes, etc. This [slide shows] is a

trip I made to Peru. Of course, the stonework we've all seen--it's just unbelievable, hard to comprehend.

These are patches in those enormous bronze caldrons that you find in the Forbidden City in China where they have bubbles in the bronze and can't recast it because they are so enormous. So they make these patches. They make a very elegant pattern, I think.

I've done special commission work. In fact, some of it began with Gloria Ross. Unfortunately, I don't have slides of that because we needed to get the work out. I realized so quickly that we have everything but slides of the actual piece of work. Still, it was an interesting project. It's always interesting to do something that is out of your own experience. We did quite a few pieces that were Kenneth Noland drawings and then we did a special series for Gloria Ross based on the churro sheep and that was really interesting. I actually do have slides of that--where we got churro sheep. The wool was spun at a special mill and I dyed the yarn. The yarn was used in using a special grouping of textiles.

The next series I did was for Taliesin West based on Frank Lloyd Wright's work. They're very careful about color. I knew very little about Frank Lloyd Wright when I started the project and I wanted to do it, not as an interpretation of his work, but as if he was still around to say, "Yes, I think that's a good color." Or, that's what he would have wanted. It became kind of voyeuristic art.

Taliesin had the original drawing which you see on the left. Out of those drawings they let me select the different areas that were then abstracted into tapestries. This one is called "May Baskets" and was also done in linoleum. This linoleum on the right has sort of fallen out in various places, but you can see the detail and the vivid color. He also inverted it and it became a different theme. These became covers on magazines and were used for other projects.

Here's a close-up of an area that I selected from that original drawing. And that's the finished tapestry. These were also produced equally as quickly because they were used in a fundraiser for Wright's Usonian house that traveled the United States and eventually wound up back in Phoenix. Here you have the section that was pulled out from the linoleum print and the finished tapestry.

I think the colors are as true as we could make them for this series. Here's another one where Wright used the architectural rule to draw the design, kind of one of his famous looking drawings. Here is one whose theme is, I was told, based on shogi screens in Japan. He spent quite a bit of time building the Imperial Hotel in Japan. As you might imagine, weaving this was really a lot of fun. We'd think, oh, gosh, we can do maybe two inches today, that'll be it for a day.

I've worked with two different weavers, one of whom has gone out on her own but we're still very good friends. She does beautiful work--Rebecca Bluestone. The other weaver who has been with me now 18 years--Candy Chipman.

This is the Balloon series, which I think people are pretty familiar with. One time I came into the studio and Candy was standing on the loom bench looking at this piece on the left. I said, "What's wrong?" and she said, "Oh, my gosh," she said, "I think this circle is like an egg." Well, we unbeamed the whole thing. It wasn't an egg, but as it beamed under, it stretched and it looked like an egg going under [the loom beam]. She was stricken and the blood kind of rushed out of her face. I said, "No problem! We will just re-do it." It's part of the luxury of weaving.

This, we did following an architectural rule just to see if we could do it. It was a triptych, also taken from that balloon series. And this is Wright's Usonian House interior--the house that traveled. You see the tapestry installed. The concept was that this was a house that a family of four could build on weekends. It has a lot of trailer like qualities to it. It has a long hallway. Long before there were big gourmet kitchens, it's got an almost boat-like kitchen. The bedrooms are off this back hall and they are very small cabin-like rooms. It's very cozy, but it's very elegant. It was a nice quality home. I don't know how many were sold or what the disposition of this project was, but Lee Cohen, who worked with the board of Taliesin worked very hard to get people to see what this Usonian home was like. It was literally deconstructed and moved from city to city over time. I saw it in Washington DC, where I got this photograph.

This is a series that was taken from that same project, but it was a series that came out of the Imperial Hotel in Japan, which was torn down because the real estate was so valuable. It didn't meet architectural earthquake code, but it was a kind of tufa, volcanic tufa, that was quarried from under the water and then as it dries it sets up and hardens, and then it was gilded. This is a fireplace that was in the lobby of the Imperial Hotel.

So, I took the two sections that you see on the right, using the Japanese gold again for these two smaller tapestries. I found these to be very satisfying. They turned out well, they were the right texture and had a kind of Oriental flavor that I thought they should have.

This is Japan. Every time I travel I usually turn out a tapestry series. As I mentioned, there are many colors of green in Japan. Green is not a color I resonate with. I'm only now doing my third green tapestry ever.

This was a beautiful Japanese garden. We had a friend who is a Buddhist monk. The place is called Tenryuji, outside of Kyoto. Its pond is in the shape of the character "heart" and was completely bombed to the ground, by us, the United States, and then rebuilt. It's remarkable, it's beautiful, it has these bamboo groves that the monks own and harvest. This is a group of gardeners who are clipping these bushes within an inch of their lives. I realized that I had always really admired bonsai, but after I had spent some time in Japan, I felt like it was passive-aggressive abuse to plants. I was so looking for the wild plant after awhile. But you could not help but be struck by how beautiful the landscapes. These are azalea bushes that had been in bloom in this kind of pink, had you been there a second earlier. They clipped all the blossoms off. So, this was a kind of tribute that I did,

these two green pieces, to that garden.

I am very intrigued by divination. I am very intrigued by the intersection of space and time. What happens? Why certain people meet certain other people at a given time. Why a collective body of people who went to school together then all became important in whatever their field of endeavor is. Is it chance, is it serendipity, is it some divine intervention that we or the Chinese believe we're fated to?

This is another series I did actually in silk. Raw tussah silk, which was about the sleeves of kabuki costumes. They have a tendency to wear those very long kimono that drape over their sleeve. In the process of seeing a kabuki play I noticed that there's a lot of crushing and pushing of these sleeves up and down. They fall down, they push them up their arm, they fall down, they push them up. There are postures where the sleeves are draping over their hands. So this was the idea--to make it feel like paper but to look like what I had seen.

Another series--this is about the Mediterranean and the sun, and the migration of sun. This is also done in silk. It's taken from an architectural idea of what colors and shapes look like in the Mediterranean.

Sometimes I just do a few of something and that's it. The idea was explored, or I go back to it over and over and over again. Or I am intrigued by something completely different.

These are other special commissions that we've done. The one on the left was meant to look like you had taken some really fantastic Hispanic textiles, cut them up and sewn them together. But it was done as one piece and it was done as a ceiling for a powder room in Phoenix. After it was done, the client said if he had known it was going to turn out that well he would have put something different on the ceiling.

All these textiles in their completeness exist at the Folk Art Museum in Santa Fe. The piece on the right comes from the collection in Arizona which is a textile which was a plain woven piece of fabric that was then dyed with what appears to be some sort of iron oxide in a very fine pattern. This is only a portion of that pattern.

I've also done a lot of floor rugs. Here is another tapestry that was done for a painter here in New York named Paul Brock. His gallery director wanted it in this color; he wanted it in brown. So we did the piece and then he was very upset that it wasn't brown. But it wasn't very good looking in brown, so it turned out to be a stunning tapestry piece.

I've also been working for the last, now, going on year seven on the National Museum of the American Indian. This is in Washington, DC. The slide on the left is the summer solstice coming up through the trees. If you're standing on the site, that's what you'll see in 2004 at the entrance of the building looking toward the Capitol.

This is a model of the building. It has gone through several different transformations. It's a project that I've been involved in as a design consultant. I am not an interior designer,

although I've been able to enlist a lot of experiences, I should say, in my life and my personal aesthetics. Things you would not put on a resume, you are able to use on a project like this. It's like the world's largest conceptual design project. So I very often come up with concepts that I then present to the teams of architects and interior designers and clients and they are reworked so they become, or at some point will become, part of the architecture. I have had a chance to design pieces in metal and glass, and theater curtain.

This slide on the left shows you a kind of an open rotunda space that they're calling The Potomac. The sectioned wall where the figures are will actually be made out of copper metal. It will be a woven copper metal wall which if you had a gigantic basket that had been buried in the earth and then the rim of it began to emerge, this is what you would see. Sort of the top of this basket. It has some notion of antiquity in that it was here before the building was built.

We did a lot of charrettes and had to come up with color concepts for the building. I had to develop three vocabularies for the building, which the architects could use. One is based in astronomical configurations. One is based in traditional or tribal color and one is based in abstractions of nature. They are ideas and concepts that resonate with most indigenous people, because the collections span Central, South, and North America. It's not just one or two groups of Indians that will be represented by this building.

The first thing was to get people to commit to some kinds of color. When you say you see turquoise and pink, what does that mean? What do you see when you see texture? I put together a group of boards that would work in these charrettes that were from the collections. Some things aren't Native American and some things are. Just so people could begin to have something to react against. To say, "Well, I like this. I don't like that." I can see something that would look or it feels a certain way. When you go into a room and it should feel like this color or it should feel like something very vivid.

This was a series that I did that was fun. Based on artwork, based on nature to get people talking. These are feathers from the collection that are from the Amazon. What did Indian people on these different advisory groups see, what was their vision? I could do this all day long--this was the easy part--distilling the essences of other cultures, color, ideas.

Now, each space in the building is committed to some astronomical configuration, some plant, animal, insect from that region and some larger astronomical ideas. For example, the one on the right is the theater. You have the raven at the top, you have the moon, and you have a kind of icy coastline in the three little squares at the top. The raven is the bringer of the sun, the bringer of light in the Northwest culture. But he is also the trickster, the storyteller, the person that comes to a lot of tribal groups and is playful and is very similar to monkey in China. It's the same idea--of being both wise and yet still embodying youthful innocence that we hope we never lose. Most of these stories are told traditionally in winter. They are told in dark spaces. They are told in long houses, they are told around fires, they are told during the colder part of year when for most of us when evil and darkness is frozen in the ground. So, the theater has this iconography. The

wall sconce that you see in the middle is based on eight phases of the moon and will be cast in glass and then the bottom corner shows you a theater curtain that has four ravens and the moon. That will be in a theater curtain for the theater.

These are also colors from Inupiak culture, which are variations on gray, white, and a kind of rust and blue. It's very interesting. I thought, "Oh boy, this will be like the project from hell trying to come up with tribal colors." But I had two different people from Crow and I have these color aid strips, and I said, "Okay, you pick out what you think are tribal colors and you pick out what you think are tribal colors." The two women who were in completely different age groups, who grew up in different parts of the Crow reservation, picked out the same, within two colors the same, grouping of colors. I found that astounding. I thought, "My gosh, even now there's still some visual vocabulary in this culture." Everybody knows this color blue, this particular color kind of orange-red. There is really something to this. I got really intrigued with it. I also reviewed about sixty-five objects from the NMAI collection trying to develop a cultural color from the different areas of the Americas. Different objects and materials from different tribes and time periods.

The piece on the right--these are the boards that go out now for the architect, showing you the materials. You can see the copper woven wall in kind of a small sample. Hopefully, the whole museum will embody something of all of this. As you go through the museum it will certainly be added to, with the collection.

So, again the colors, you have the same vocabulary in each space all the way to the director's office. The basement commemorates the site itself which based on the swamp where Washington, DC was built and built out of.

It's been kind of a dream project. You don't get this kind of project often where you can utilize different ideas.

Kind of expanding on the idea of divination, I did a series based on just directional colors and these shards that I had found as a kid. I have collected baskets and baskets of them from long before--now you can't pick up any shard, anywhere. It's bad, bad, bad. But, when I was a little kid, we camped out everywhere and you just loaded your pockets and paper bags up. Wherever you were, even on people's ranches.

So I have boxes of shards. What I like about them is that in an instant you have again this serendipitous piece of ceramic that someone sat and made hundreds and sometimes thousands of years ago, probably in an evening, not ever expecting it would re-materialize, that it would re-evolve into its own story and its own life. What could they have been talking about as they're busily painting these bowls? And then to have it break in a way that has some integrity, that it caused me as a little kid to lean over, make the effort to pick it up, and say, wow, this is, like, amazing. Look at this. It's jagged, it's pointed. I could do that, or I couldn't do that. There is still some message from some event that took place many, many years ago.

This piece is about time and space and that's why these were originally done on silk. Printed on silk. Each one has a shard that travels from one to the next. There are four in the series.

I don't know if you are all familiar with the I Ching. It is believed that Confucius had a lot to do with it, and it's just about sixty-four possible combinations of change, because change is the constant in our lives.

These are about place. The one on the left is the story of the first Hopi bean dance, which is our spring New Year dance at Hopi, and what that looked like 2,500 years ago. You have the sky and what the stars looked like, because now we can program that back to 2,500 years ago on the computer and print it out. And then the bird that flew from the Third World to the Fourth World to say "Okay, it's all right, we can go to the next migration." Then you have the four colors of beans and beans sprouting, which are emblematic of the New Year for us.

On the right hand screen, this is paper that I made, printed, tore apart, and then sewed back together. I work with different printing studios and anytime there is sewing back together, they kind of loose patience, but I think it makes a nice piece.

Here's another one where it's like a deck of cards and if you reshuffle it, how does it turn out?

There is always something woven. If you look at the left one, there's a piece of woven mat from Mexico in it. This one has a piece of woven yucca fabric. There's two different pieces that I collected in Mexico and then had printed on it.

This is one of the earliest pieces of fabric that I know about in that it's just very simple, straightforward industrial cloth. A yellow fiber non-loom but woven paño, a washcloth size. Described by the Aztecs still woven in Mexico. You can now buy them for taking the sweat off of horses. Kind of a specialty item.

This is more tapestry work based on . . . I hope you can see the connection to Mexican color.

As you can see, some are successful and some are kind of "aaugh, okay." Wherever I go, I am always photographing and using the ideas.

This is a series about shrines. What makes a place a sacred place? Why do we as humans pick out certain places on the planet and say, "Okay, this is a sacred place, and we need to do something special to it." These are all wool for the most part.

So, these are just conversations, really, that I have with myself (laughing) over and over again.

This is a spotted corn series. Corn is very important to us.

This is the same bronze cauldron in the Forbidden City, but these were gilt and then, people of course, busily tried to scrape the gold off. I thought that makes such a nice--it looks so nice that it's been scraped. It has a similar feeling to the "hachures" [a shading technique] that you get in tapestry weaving.

And see, I might photograph this test pattern in China for future use. This is a brick wall, which I thought was really lovely. There's no mortar. They just stack up the bricks in China. [I like] the repetition of texture and color. This is basically what my work is about. Different mythologies of architecture, different shapes.

I am really interested in color. Color still intrigues me no end.

This piece on the left, you should know, is a kind of an interesting emblematic piece from Aztec culture in that it signifies the Popul Vuh, which is the creation story for Maya and Aztec culture. It's also the symbol for cotton.

And while we are terrified of bats in North American culture for the most part, China thinks of them as being very auspicious creatures.

I did a series based on Mound Builder culture, which is in this area and extended all the way down the Mississippi. It's very architectural in nature. I tried to put these different ideas together and see if they work. Sometimes we are more successful than others.

This is about migration, the migration of plants and animals, and ideas and people. This is a migration, a fish migration.

I've gotten into this sort of calligraphic idea, but it's not from Chinese calligraphy. It's just the idea of the migration of ideas. You know, knowing that people in Europe are migrating at a greater number than they have ever migrated. People from Mexico into the American Southwest are migrating at a huge rate. We migrate to a place and then we migrate back. What does that mean? There is kind of a cyclical flow that seems to be beyond our control.

These are poems in China that have kind of evolved. This is the piece, the piece used on the GFR Center announcement of this lecture.

There was a sign in a Tibetan temple, which has withstood all kinds of military action within the city of Beijing and I thought it was really emblematic of migrations. This whole idea that they've come from Tibet, they're in China, they have taken a stand in the Cultural Revolution and they are going to be there. Their people migrate back and forth from this temple back to Tibet itself. So very different looking but it's kind of the [embodying] of intellectual ideas in my work.

So that's it. If you have any questions, I'd love to hear from you.

Yes?

(Question: How large are your tapestries?)

Most of the early work was around 50 by 70. That was a lot of the work. Then there were special commissions and we had some that were 10 feet by 14 feet, so those were pieced together. Floor rugs were pieced together.

(Question: And your loom size?)

The biggest loom I have is 72 inches wide. But because of the inconvenience of covering it and sliding around on the bench, we can weave sections of pieces and then piece them together, which we've done often. About 14 feet is what we can conveniently beam on before we just can't get any more on.

These are 45 by 45 intentionally, and then there is 40 by 65. I find that I have kind of a standard range that I have started to work in. 65 by 90 is another one. So it just depends. How many of you are weavers out there? Aaah, lots of weavers.

Yes?

(Could you talk more about your use of color?)

It goes in cycles. I realized that when I was in the first grade I only had like the six or eight colors in a box when I showed up for school and everybody had 48. And then, I had 48 for a while, I got up to 48, I went to junior high school and everybody had 64. And I was really afraid of color when I was little, so I would just kind of draw in these one or two colors. Then as I got into junior high school, everything had to be pastels, so the 64 box became very attractive to me. I had to have those pastel peachy tones. And, now as I get older, I'm finding that I just want really intense drop-dead color. I also love playing with these relationships. I think there's like no bad color, just bad relationships in color. You can keep moving it around and trying. So very often, I do things where I have ends of color and I purposefully just pick a group and try and make it work, and see what comes of it. Over time, I think my color sense will just get more and more intense.

Yes?

(Question? How did you get started and why did you choose tapestry?)

Well, I had an art teacher in high school--he was a ceramics teacher and he taught me something I thought was really valuable. He said, "You kind of know from the first moment you put the pencil to the paper that it is going in a good direction, or when you start a piece of clay you know if it's going to turn out because there is a feeling about it." I feel like weaving, more than anything, has a process, almost a meditative process. A lot of people don't like setting up the loom. I find it very cathartic. It's like you're making the preparation, it's like a ceremony. You're preparing to do this piece and if you do it carefully and you do it well enough, then, in theory, the ceremony will turn out well.

What you think you want or the idea you think you have conceived of and that you want to work through will come to fruition. It's really important for me to finish the piece.

It doesn't matter but somewhere into the process I might go, "Naaugh, this is not working, this is not the color that I wanted, it's not the texture I wanted, it's not the layering of color or it's not something that I wanted." But I finish it because sometimes you can really learn from the mistakes and the ugly and the awful stuff that you've done. Same in print-making except there is more instant gratification, because you can just get out another piece of paper and stick it right there and try something else. With weaving, you really make a commitment and then work through it. In the process I have seen lots and lots of bad work.

I saw the Matisse show here, I don't know if many of you saw it here in New York. They did it chronologically, which was very revealing, because it starts out and, frankly, he's not a very good drawer, a great painter, but he can't really draw. Then you get to the Odalisque series at the end of his life and there is fantastic drawing. You think, okay, this guy has worked through this and did probably just as many bad paintings somewhere. Everything you do is not great. It is just that you have a bigger commitment in a piece of tapestry. You can't, like, break it and throw away. It's a commitment.

Yes?

(Question: Where have you traveled to and how has that influenced you?).

I have traveled a lot. I love to travel. I love to see how other people live their lives. I went to Peru to, in theory, to help Peruvian weavers set up some kind of co-op and work through that. I discovered that my sphere of influence was like on the top of a pin head, because they have so many social and political problems that you just can't overcome. But it was really inspiring to see the quality and level of weaving these people were committed to. I learned so much from them.

I do travel and teach. I don't teach very much. I find it exhausting and I really admire people who can teach, because I am just like a racehorse. I'm out of the gate and I don't know how to sustain my energy. I get, like, wiped out. I know people who teach all the time. You learn so much from your students. I wish I could do a better job of it, travel and teaching.

I like to travel. My husband and I next are going to Italy just to soak it in. You always learn something about people and it takes you out of your own little cul-de-sac of knowledge at home and puts you out there. I do notice that when I go some place and I like it, I enjoy it and I've learned something and I feel a particular way about something, I very often come home and have to do a couple of tapestries. So, does that answer your question?

Yes?

(Question: Can we talk about how long it takes you to weave a commission?).

We can. It doesn't take as long as you think. I mean, these don't take as long as you think at all. The Frank Lloyd Wright pieces were really the hardest, and also, Gloria Ross's commissions, because they were very big. Also, they were somebody else's works and we were obsessed about precision. You have to give over the fact that it's not really your work. You want it to be even better than your own work. Literally there were some days when we were into it--it seems like a very far place to go--but still probably not more than six weeks.

(Question: Where is the tapestry that was supposed to go on the ceiling?)

Where? It lives in Phoenix, in the bathroom. If you went into the bathroom, you could see it. (laughter) What the owner really regretted was that he hadn't put it in the bigger bathroom where he could lay in the tub and see it! Well, it is an extraordinary powder room, because, for instance, the towel racks are all hand forged towel racks. I mean, everything in this place is exquisite. So, then you look up, sitting there. Oh, it's pretty amazing. It's wonderful that there are clients like that.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you. Thank you. (Applause).