

The Fifth Annual Gloria F. Ross Lecture

“ART AND MAGNIFICENCE . . . BUT . . . : Reflections on the 2002 Exhibition of Renaissance Tapestries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.”*

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Introduction by Ann Lane Hedlund, Director, the GFR Center for Tapestry Studies.

(Applause)

(Brennan)

I really can't begin without just observing that in that world out there, there are some strange things happening, and some years ago I decided that the best all I can handle in life is to keep the edges straight and get the color as right as I could. Ah, I don't feel guilty about that and am happy to see that some of you people here feel the same.

There is another point I'd like to make. I started weaving when our studio workshop was one hundred percent male. I counted tonight. We're up to about 12% male in this group, which is very unusual. Ah, but it's changing. It's also good to see quite a lot of grey hair, like mine that used to be black when I first met many of you, but a lot of young faces too, and that's rather special. Okay.

Susan and I came over last night from New York City, and sometimes I find myself saying, “I've forgotten something. There's been something around that I should have brought here.” Sometimes in traveling it's, oh, a pair of shoes, a sweater, a boot, but I realize coming here what it was: I've spent *hundreds* of hours in the past eight months or so pouring over the catalogue of the tapestry exhibition that the Metropolitan Museum put on last March-April-May, and it's

* Catalogue: Thomas P. Campbell, 2002 *Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Yale University Press, New Haven, CT. Exhibition: “Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence,” held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, March 12-June 19, 2002.

one of the great books, as far as I'm concerned, in tapestry. I've collected with Susan most every publication in Spanish or German or French or English, and there are four or five that stand out. And this is one of them. One has to thank Tom Campbell for organizing that book, for the Metropolitan Museum doing the same, and for the astonishing exhibition that was there over that period. How many people actually saw the exhibition here? Oh, great! How many people have the catalogue? The hands that are not up have to get it – it's hard work but it's filled with wonderful stuff. And Tom Campbell, the curator, I've known for a few years, and first met him when he asked me to go along to the Metropolitan Museum and look at a particular tapestry. I'll talk about that work with slides shortly. But I realized then that I have a simple rule when I meet people involved in tapestry. Do they think that tapestry is more important than they are—and if they do, that's someone who I'll follow, who I'll listen to. And Tom's passion and involvement and caring in planning this *major* exhibition, I have enormous respect for. But, did you read the title of my talk? As a written word, right, tapestry in the Renaissance—art and magnificence, but. However, when you speak the word, there are different ways of saying it. I could say, art in Renaissance, or I could say Art in Renaissance, but it's up to you to decide which way I'm leaning at the end of this talk. Okay.

My claim to have some justification here is apart from my career (four days from now I'll have 55 years as a tapestry weaver, which is a birthday). But apart from my work as a weaver, Susan and I spent eleven days during that exhibition period, long days, focused days, delightful days, looking at the exhibition. We attended every lecture, too, by Tom Campbell at the very start, and all the papers right through, spent a lot of time with him and his enthusiasm. Tom is a Renaissance person. He *loves* Renaissance work, Renaissance tapestry. My heart lies before that—in medieval tapestry. I see everything having gone downhill since then, and he sees it going up. So the focus of what I'm going to be dealing with is essentially that. Of course, as usual, he's partly right and I'm partly wrong. But I'm mostly right (laughter). Okay.

Today, many people here are involved in making tapestry as artist weavers, which is, if one really thinks about it, the norm going back over history, over the centuries. The exception is that period somewhere between maybe 1,000 AD and up until a couple years back, a few years back. More people today work in their own work or in group projects. And there're a couple of characteristics that stand out—that we all work smaller for practical reasons. It's a smaller medium. And we all work, I hesitate to use this word, coarser, which means that the work threads are fewer and thicker. Certainly with me that's the case. In terms of numbers, we're talking from weaving that might have in one period as many as eighty warp threads to the inch, and today eight is the normal. But I think the reason for eight is really quite critical. It's nothing to do, in my case anyway, with speed. It's to do with bringing forward, out of the process, a language that is peculiar to the process. When you get really fine, it requires the viewer to go in and discover. I want the language to emerge and speak loudly and clearly. And

these are the people I associate with and am involved in with that kind of thinking.

I'd like to talk a little about the catalogue. I learned a new phrase when it came along, about a sort of "thud factor." Six-hundred pages. *Wonderful*, wonderful color reproductions—photographs by Bruce White, I think the photographer's name was. Intriguing writing.

The first thing I have to question is the title. "Tapestry in the Renaissance." To me the exhibition had perhaps twenty-five or thirty percent of the work, in my view, Medieval. It wasn't Renaissance. Scholars, historians, academics tend to need to fit things formally into compartments. And I'm not speaking as a scholar; I'm speaking as a maker. And I know that the Italian Renaissance began somewhere in the early 1300s in Italy. The period of this exhibition's work was from about 1420 to 1560. But in my view—it always has been for many, many years and is equally strongly today—tapestry didn't really change until the emergence of Raphael as a Renaissance painter and his work being *reproduced* in tapestry. And that word is the word that I think is key.

I do not think of tapestry as a reproductive medium. It's not something where there is an artwork and we set out to reproduce that artwork in weaving. It's a creative medium. I don't see the setup where there is "the designer," "the weaver," the dyer," "the cartonier," as a series of compartments. I don't think the work happens that way at best. I think the richest way in workshop production is the *process*—the creative process from beginning to end. We don't have an artwork that is then "made and reproduced." That *is* the work. And I've been privileged to work with some artists who saw it that way as well.

I'll go on again with the catalog. I have some comments here. Okay. I'm not in a hurry, so don't feel embarrassed if I don't find the right place [right away]. Okay.

Quotes from the catalogue. Page 10, final paragraph:

"This book and the exhibition it accompanies have been conceived to bring the splendors of the Netherlandish, French, and Italian Renaissance tapestry production to the attention of a broader public" (Campbell 2002: 10).

As I said, on balance, the exhibition brought together examples of late Medieval—I like the word "Netherlandish", because it kind of generalized the production of tapestry in that period. Much of it settled around what is now Belgium, Brussels. But tapestry production then is not unlike baseball today, in that you might be a Chicago White Sox fan or New York Mets or the Baltimore Orioles, indeed. But the team changes all the time. The players in these teams, they move around, they go where the best opportunities are and I think looking closely at tapestry weaving, you can see the handwriting of various weavers who

worked in Brussels but moved around. And the need to pin down the workshop to me is quite irrelevant.

Second quote, right? Same page:

“William Morris . . . celebrated the greatest achievements of medieval tapestry design. . . . [William Morris is a name you all know, right?] Yet in doing so he was dismissive of the more pictorial style of design that had developed in the sixteenth century . . . (Campbell 2002:10).

And it goes on. As the content of this publication and exhibition that it accompanies demonstrates, the situation was much more complex and interesting than this simplistic [interpretation of] Morris’ viewpoint allows. That [statement] made my jaw drop. I know the quote. It’s from a speech Morris gave in Birmingham Art School in 1898 to a group of art students. It’s extracted from that. He obviously said it. But to me, to look at the work of Morris is not to do with simple quotes like that. His response to the change that he brought about in tapestry making by looking back at medieval works, the result of it is so clear in the Martinelli tapestry production workshops.

Sometimes the words are not what are needed. Sometimes looking is what’s needed. Long looking. And I found that characteristic of the symposium, particularly last year, there were a lot of words, but the people who were talking these words didn’t see the tapestries the way I saw them. I felt quite outside and foreign. I wasn’t interested in whether it was oh, Charles the first or Charles the fifth who did this and did that. Not the pedigree and the list of names. It was looking at the work that mattered to me. Okay.

Third quote:

“Likewise in need of vigorous correction is the misconception—propagated by William Morris in the late nineteenth century and developed by Jean Lurcat and other French weavers in the twentieth century—that the medieval weavers were designer-craftsmen” (Campbell 2002:38-39).

As I read that, I know Morris’ own weaving, right? He was no weaver, let me tell you. He was a wonderful person, he had an eye. He made tapestries happen. But I had the privilege, way back in the ‘60s, one of my then-students’ family owned Morris’ practice loom—a Victorian object filled with curlicue details, a warp that was very badly balanced with the weft, and some *terrible* weaving that was so distorted and so badly made. But my point here is that what he did was to examine the weaving and try to learn something about it by getting his hands into the work. I had the opportunity in the ‘60s to do the same with fine arts students who were interested in tapestry. They came one afternoon a week over a year in their studies, to do the same as Morris was doing. And I felt that that was something that made some contribution to the study of tapestry—by scholars, by historians—because there’s so much happening within the work that dictates the

actual work, not just the weaving, but handling of the weaving, the thinking about it.

And the fact that the catalogue says that Jean Lurcat and other French weavers—Lurcat wasn't a weaver at all, he didn't weave. He was, in fact, quite the opposite. He was rigid in the sense, and I'm not disagreeing with him—I think he did a very important job in his time in the 40s—but he was a designer and a cartonnier. And the weavers in Aubusson and France were obliged very strictly to follow precisely what his full-size working drawings said. He wrote quite extensively of keeping the weavers away from being creative. So one has to raise that [issue] for sure.

The designers—another quote:

“The designers and cartoonists for the majority of documented extant medieval tapestries remain anonymous” (Campbell 2002:44).

Of course. Because that wasn't how the pieces were made. The need to label *the* designer then, *the* cartonnier then, *the* weavers—and the weavers who wove the heads, the hands, the plain borders, the gaps in between—it's not as rigid as that. Each tapestry—and I've had the fortune to work with seventy-six (I counted the other day) different tapestries by other artists, and no two were alike—we had to find the way to deal with it. Sometimes the way was quite firm – this is what I've done, I want you to reproduce it; other times it was an extremely creative evolving process. And that gave a very special result, I think. And I think at best, that's how medieval tapestries were made. So the fact that the designers and the weavers in the documentation were anonymous is *great*. Because they *were* anonymous. They were part of a great complex team; a changing and growing team that made the pieces grow on the loom.

Another final quote, I think second to last now:

“In addition, the vertical elements such as architectural features have frequently been extended and augmented.” (Campbell 2002).

This is certainly true. And I'm going to look specifically at that quite early on in the slides. But the reasons these vertical elements, I strongly believe, were emphasized, were not simply to do with the superficial fact—technical fact—that if you turn the tapestry on its side and weave these horizontally, it's a much stronger fabric. It has to do with a great sense that tapestry is a cloth, is a hanging, and if you start looking with that guidance, often not obvious but there, you'll see the point I'm further arguing with Tom.

Last one:

“. . . the designs for the *Lady and the Unicorn* and the *Hunt of the Unicorn* sets . . . , which for many years epitomized medieval tapestry design . . .” (Campbell 2002).

I struggle again with the presumption that there was a complete design and that tapestry was not a reproductive process, but to me—and this a plug for a personal bias and I’m not going to be ashamed of admitting it— when including the *Lady and the Unicorn* and the *Hunt of the Unicorn*, I would *have* to include a set of tapestries at the Cluny Museum in Paris, the story of St. Stephen, Saint ##, woven around 1500s, one of the great sequential linear narrative sets of tapestries of that or any era.* If you haven’t seen it, enjoy the *Lady and the Unicorn* when you’re there, but check out this wonderful, wonderful evolving glory in tapestry: one hundred fifty feet of it, six feet high.

Another quote here. I’m not always disagreeing. Tom, talking about medieval tapestry where you can’t really find the narrative—it’s a whole, a vast jigsaw of pattern (I’m not very good at that phrase) writes:

“. . . intentionally created an almost baffling surface in the beginning to discern the narrative only as we explore the lines and shape” (Campbell 2002).

That is a characteristic of, certainly, many of the great medieval tapestries—the need to find the story within it. But it’s not your McDonald’s sign on the highway or your television commercial that tries to tell you everything instantly. These tapestries required hours, days, weeks, and months of sitting before them. They won’t hit you between the eyes at once, they look quite boring and confusing. They require the effort and the time. And it’s something that seemed to belong to that time—where one didn’t need the story to unravel instantly but delighted to discover in all the *immense* details that go on, the intimacy of passages within it, that is so rewarding. [This] began to be lost in 1510 with the Raphael cartoons for the *Act of the Apostles*.

Could I have the lights on and we’ll look at some slides?

Can you see that slide all right? An interesting moment, this is a tapestry that Tom Campbell dragged me along to see the first time we met together at the Met, it’s the head of the innkeeper of *The Last Supper*, designed by one of the characters who, for me really, emerged at this exhibition. (Audience murmurs). Is that better? Tom Campbell dragged me to see this, this *wonderful*, wonderful head, he said, from a tapestry.

What was more interesting to me was that when you saw the exhibition, as you entered, he had arranged to have this particular head enlarged to a given size, in

* Musée National du Moyen Age (Cluny), Paris. See Campbell 2002: figure 35.

black and white. Can you recall that when you saw the exhibition? Susan and I checked it out, this reproduction. Tom had it enlarged to eight warps to the inch! (Laughter in audience). It seemed to me to have some significance in the display.* I can't see if the focus is good, so yell out if it's a bit...no...okay. It's one of the *Hunt of the Unicorn* series, and (murmur)... I can't hear, sorry. It is not in focus to me... Okay. Thank you. I love to be driven!

It's in the *Hunt of the Unicorn* and obviously a medieval tapestry, but it's a fascinating exercise if you take that and lay a piece of tracing paper over it and pull out the verticals. If you do that with tapestries—many of the great tapestries of that period—you'll find the undercurrent of vertical movements, which as I said are not to do necessarily with strengthening the fabric, but to do with making the cloth hang. And I think any mural-sized tapestry, at best, recognizes that it is a cloth—it's not a taut canvas or a wall where every mark, every image, every part relates to the four furled edges. But intuitively one feels the hanging quality of the mural-sized tapestry. And in fact, as time went on, you'll see this characteristic recurring and used—theatre curtains are a great example, but drapes and curtains do the same thing. It's worth doing to see and to realize how much it was part of making tapestry in that time.

The slides were very difficult for me to make. I made them from books and catalogs. I think that's probably the best we can get. This is a Franciscan tree of around the same period, a little later. And again, you can see the verticality very powerfully present in that—this pendant quality. I can't help but observe here, too, that I think it's Pope Sextus who commissioned this to honor Saint Francis, but it's intriguing to see that the Papal group at the [inaudible] are much grander, much more decorated than Saint Francis at the [inaudible]. And I think a lot of tapestry was made by people to honor themselves as much as to honor anything—coats of arms and the like.

More verticality. I'm going to run through a few slides of that period where this vertical underlying movement is so present. Obviously, there in the background, they're all medieval. You can see here where the architecture was used to emphasize that. Okay.

This [*The Trojan Wars*] is the jigsaw, this is the jumble, the complex confusion of detail. I have to depend on you, Lotus Stack if this is not [inaudible]. Okay. But you can see, indeed, the situation where it's hard to discern, to sort out, what's going on. And then you start seeing *every* detail has been worked to a high intensity. It's not organizing the main characters, and playing the interval passages down. The complexity and the detail presented here is characteristic of so much of the work at that time.

* Archie Brennan, Susan Martin Maffei, and their students generally weave at 8 warps per inch.

Same series. *The Trojan Wars*. You can see how you really need time. There's no way on a mediocre slide in a room like this that you're going to be able to grasp what this is about, and how, in real life even, you can instantly resolve it. There's a change here where the skill of weaving (this is a little later, it's actually one of a series of details of *Julius Caesar*), how the skill of the weaving became, the draftsmanship, if you like, was more skillful. For me, there's a change, the virtuosity of the weaving became a goal and I think tapestry lost something when it sought to make, to be a wonderful draftsman. There's rawness about earlier work that enchants me.

Handsome. The other aspect of that period, which is clear here—the distortion of perspective, the layering of people, almost as if from a higher viewpoint, looking down. We tend to see it as distortion, but that's because when the Renaissance came along we began to understand about perspective in far greater detail, and the thinking wasn't about working that way. It was about organizing information in a particular way. (Murmur from audience). Okay.

What I would love to do is to switch off this electronic stuff and just talk to you. Is that better? Will the tape recorder still work? I see Rebecca [Stevens] sitting there and I remember at the Renwick Gallery talk. Exactly the same problem.

Wonderful detail again. There's passages in the details, see, there's a great issue of the restriction of the weaver for working details, and the importance of the cartonnier as a separate person. If that cartonnier was a weaver, it might have worked. If the weaver was a draftsman, it might have worked. And I think that's really what happened in the best of tapestries. These interchanging of roles, we'll come to some that really show that. These wonderful passages. I've made up a collection in the last few years of gussets in medieval tapestries. Over the whole piece, over this complicated—confused, if you like—narrative, there are all these wonderful, critical conversations going on.

These are all from the *Hunt of the Unicorn*. They abound in many other parts. Narrative—the use of manuscripts in early tapestries, early manuscripts that were adopted in that period—was obviously widespread. This may or may not have become a tapestry, but it was the kind of stuff that abounded and was used—abounded in a sense, not with these publications of course, but where the stuff that was around. And this linear story, reading through one frame to the next, says something about the making of tapestry in any scale that seems to me simple, characteristic, so important.

Adam and Eve, another illustrated bible, but the same thing, you read it left to right, in this case from top to bottom. That linear narrative is, I think, so powerful. The process of weaving one bit at a time, weaving on it, needn't be as formalized as this, but it's a long way from sorting out a piece of work and imitating it. You can see how . . . Plus this is the *Apocalypse*, some *huge* and eighteen feet high and about seven miles long—I think I don't know (laughter)!

But you move along it. And the way the weaving—the handling of the passages—evolved, you can see the tapestry was not completely designed, worked out before they started weaving. You can see thoughts that are rows but some people, a group getting together and developing subsequent frames, if you like, as the tapestry evolved.

Very poor slide, but it's a start of something. This is my current favorite tapestry, it's the story of Saint Stephen, 150 feet long, five and half feet high at the Cluny, and you read this like a book. There are a couple of very nice publications on this tapestry as well, with very good reproductions.

A change in the situation. This is 1500, as far as they know, when it was woven, they have no idea who wove it, and they don't know who the designer was. If such there was in any case. But because it's only five-six, five-seven, over the whole length, and the figures that are within that, the warp set is relatively coarse, there are many, many fewer warps [on which] to weave passages. And to me, that has a great benefit to the resulting warp.

Just in passing on this, the line [slit] under the lady's eye, her right eye—when one raves about the skills of weavers of that period where they deliberately wove it that way so that the line appeared, to me that's nonsense. It was very, very rarely used. All these lines happened with age. The slits weren't well joined and the way it's started, it's very often intrusive, they're not helpful at all. But it's a nice thing to say, I guess.

Here's a wonderful character. It's the same characters that appear along with Saint Stephen. It's the body of Saint Stephen that's traveling through a journey. And the various bishops and various characters recur along the story line as you move through the tapestry. The rhythms, the march, the confusion, the sorting out, just makes my heart sing when I see it. I wish I could work like that.

That's that lady again, the bishop from one frame to the next, one panel to the next. There are some twenty-three frames, if you like, twelve separate tapestries of varying lengths, all about the same size.

I can't resist this slide. I spoke about manuscripts where sequential frames were given/ The modern comic papers today are a direct product of that way of working, and the way we instantly read left to right, we Westerners. I don't know how Asians will deal with that in looking at comic strips from the West, or indeed tapestries for that manner, in the sense that they won't intuitively read from left to right. But this is [inaudible, perhaps Andy Capp?], who died just a few years ago, and was a designer. You're led along here with a rhythm from left to right and on. It's much longer than that. I admired him a great deal as a draftsman and I do look at comic papers, not to read the narrative but just to see the way that the best of them handle this linear narrative. That's one of the details and I couldn't stop

[from weaving it myself] (laughter). I had to weave one of the classics (laughter). I won't say any more about this particular piece. It's about that size.

Okay. This the tapestry from the honored series by woven in the workshop of Bernaert van Orley. And these were the two characters that emerged for me. I knew the work, had seen it before, but I'd never realized how significant [inaudible] were around the late 1400s and to the 1500s—how they were part of this period of change. How van Orley himself, he started as a workshop weaver, had his own workshop producing tapestry, and then he became a designer. It's not something one hears about very much, but I think it happens with many people. It has happened in history with many people.

Here's a fine example of this. So this is this giant piece, I couldn't get a whole slide of it from the catalog, it's a double page spread, it's 16-1/2 feet high by 28-1/2 feet wide and this is just half of it.* To me it was the sophisticated peak of medieval times. Filled with detail, complex, having to dance all over to read it, wonderful skills. Another detail again. You can't draw that up if you don't know how to read. In speaking about the cartoon, the fragments of the designs, and so on that are around on some occasions—there's something missing, because I know from long experience in my own work and workshops and working with weavers, there's another factor creeps in. There is the original design. There is the development of the design. There is the cartoon of production. Often a full page of cartoon. Then there is the linear drawing from the cartoon. But, *then*, there is the weaver's work in drawing. And that isn't available, isn't around. I know in my time, in workshops, the working drawing is something we use that gets messed up; it was tracing paper; it was dumped. I don't know what they used then. And the evidence in the weaving, you can see that there was a skillful draftsman or a skillful weaver who was a draftsman, who had worked to organize the scale, the mark making, the using of warp, and to use it to the best advantage, given the limitations. I've known cartoniers in France, very important valuable people in France, and they missed out on this. [Scholars] needed to [visit weaving studios], the weavers, and [get] input working with them, if they didn't weave themselves.

That's the other half of it. A little character down there in the center. There he is there. And you can't, this is a piece of weaving, it's woven by a weaver, resolved by a weaver who may well have been a very skilled draftsman, or the draftsman may very well have been a good weaver. But this part of the team, in making a working drawing to deal with this head, it is essential. It wouldn't happen this way without that.

A curious set of figures in the catalogue too, saying that this head, which is roughly a square foot in total area, that a weaver could weave that in a week.

* Possibly referring to van Orley's "Invasion of the French Camp and the Flight of the Woman and Civilians," plate 36 in Campbell (2002)?

Around 20 warps to the inch. The figures are somewhat confused. I don't know where that information is coming from. But a really skilled practicing weaver would require, oh, two, three weeks of hard weaving, having prepared his working drawings. I say that very advisedly these days—his and her working drawings. [This gender shift]—it's amazing and a nice change in tapestry making again.

Okay. The change. Raphael was invited by the then-pope to produce a series of tapestries, designs for tapestries, *The Acts of the Apostles*. I was brought up, particularly at the Victoria and Albert Museum, to praise these tapestries, to look at the works. And I can't help but look at the tapestry and back to the painting. There are a number of changes. (It's a bit unfair to use that other example there, out of focus as it is). I'll reverse the slide here, that's part of the problem, but I'm wanting to present the same orientation because often work at that time was woven from the back and needed to be reversed. But does anyone feel that there is not a *huge* loss in the transition between this painting and the tapestry?

And there is another change, of course, that is very marked in Renaissance work. And it is wonderful in Renaissance painting, where knowledge has changed as we came on illustration. It's almost like a very sophisticated organized compositional snapshot of an event within the piece, right? And that [inaudible] same thing that had changed from the painting to the tapestry. But the same workshop, the same weaver, the same designer, Claes von der Elst. This really epitomized the best of skilled weaving of that period, not the earlier Renaissance. These wonderful, alive, action figures, indeed. The snapshot thing again—a frozen moment in [inaudible] and that really came towards the end of Renaissance work.

Strange things happened at this period. We've all seen tapestries like this. This is, in fact, seventeenth century—a detail where the surface is all dimpled and lumpy and mumpy. We decided that [if] we had to weave in very more refined detail, [then] we would have more warps to the centimeter. But they used the same warp [count]. And the minute they couldn't get the detail in, they forced it in—a woolen warp, a woolen weft and this is what you get. I have to say in the exhibition there were a couple of Italian pieces that were of this quality, but were beautifully lit, directly, [so] that cancelled out the lumps and bumps for sure. You can see here with Von Orley and these two figures that I mentioned really emerged at the exhibition for me. To the degree that going elsewhere for a tapestry history and seeing work by them, these were *huge*, important characters that the Metropolitan Museum brought forward to us.

Another of these virtuoso pieces. Someone today was talking about this amazing bit of weaving. Not just the drapery, handled by means of complex pattern, but so that you can see light and shade. The very quality of the cloth is there, you know, you can sense it's not a woolen skirt, it's more than likely silk, and it handles like silk, it moves like silk. This amazingly rich pattern. And, but (laughter), another of the same. But in neither case did either of these pieces [get] woven without a

weaver's working drawing to get there. The detailed pattern on this ? and is something. And here. That's the same, this is from [inaudible]. And I think this is the height of the Renaissance. But for me, it's the start of the journey downhill. Von Orley again, from the *Hunts of Maximilian*, actually. This is a detail of the dragon attacking the . . ., I forget the detail. But again, working drawings would be used here. Admiration at a very high level for the skill that drawing, the form, the structure, the skull, the flesh, the muscles, the back of this dog, this hand, are amazingly woven. Up to now, in the twenty warps per inch [range]. And, I would have to weave that (laughter). I love to draw; I draw as much as I weave. But the fact is I draw adequately well because I've been drawing all my life, but I wouldn't enjoy weaving it. I feel there is something—a wasted effort, an avenue that needs to be explored.

Here's a group of hens running right through, one after the other, running from 1500 through to 1560, and interesting to see the change. This is from Saint Steven, and you can see these open slits—time has opened as much as anything else. Seeing these again, it's interesting, because—I'm not suggesting you do it now—it's interesting to count the warps they've used to describe this hedge and this hand. I like the first one, I admire the second one, but I like the first one. Wonderfully tender piece of drawing, lamentation detail, very fine work, lots and lots of warps. Faded probably quite a bit, too.

And on to the eighteenth century, where you can hardly even tell it's woven, you know.

Okay, the change. For me the exhibition had a highlight. This is a piece of mine, 1974 which Ann nicely mentioned. My interest in tapestry making is not what I know will work, it's what I don't know it will work, or not. It's the venture into the unknown. And around this time, I'd been taught that tapestry was essentially two-dimensional and to avoid any real perspective and to work flat. So this was a flat tapestry and obviously optically very illusionary [in] three dimensions. It's set at the Georgian fireplace. The tapestry part is a bit [inaudible], which is flat, and at the same time the same kind of thing going on, about six feet high. And then, last year at the opening of the Metropolitan's exhibition, we came across this 1560 [tapestry—somebody else was breaking the rules then. And I felt, well, I was only, what was that, four hundred years late! (laughter). And, understood, that was healthy. But this is amazing, it's a [inaudible], which is a canopy around the throne, that the weaving of the figures, [inaudible], maybe it was woven by a different person than the man in the [inaudible]. In the reproduction in the catalogue, you can see it well. But with the illusion of perspective and this ridiculously wonderful, lavish, extravagant indulgent object.

I think that's the last slide, but there is one comment I want to make. In the presentation of the papers at the [Met's] symposium, [inaudible], Associate Professor of Art History, of all the speakers there, presented a paper about . . . the title was that the Pope didn't sleep here. His presentation was so amazingly

technical, so skillful, and he was one of a whole group of people who really looked at the tapestries in the way that I would look at them. So there you have it, right?

You either disagree with me or not. I hope Tom Campbell gets a copy of this (laughter). It would only be fair, right? I'm talking behind his back. But then he's talking behind my back. So thank you very much for listening anyway. (Applause).

I'm sorry about the slides. They were very difficult, [but] the catalogue is wonderful. I've done a lot of slides from the catalogues, but this particular paper had such a high gloss it was difficult to focus and to photograph. If there are any questions or any—I'd love for somebody to disagree, provided they give their name first. (laughter).

(Question too difficult to hear).

Yes, it depends on what you mean by the word aesthetic. To me the aesthetic is as much to do with the language of the process being used, to make observation and comment, to say something that painting can't say. Tapestry today is a minor art. It has its own language, and rather than comments and I feel that up to late medieval tapestry had understood and used this language, and we've slowly lost an understanding of this right through then.

(Question).

Yeah, so the question arises, why bother to weave it? It was wonderful in the painting. You know, (audience comment), or that the painting was relatively useless to be woven in tapestry. You know, you could come from either side. Raphael is . . . Renaissance painters, working with the medium that they used is wonderful, but there is often the presumption that, oh great, let's make a tapestry of it, became the same thing. And that thinking is with us today. I've struggled with painterly painters who I'm required by the director of the paint, to make precise replica imitation of David Hockney, who I admire as an artist wonderfully, but not as a weaver, a designer of tapestry. That's just a name; I could give you twenty names where the same thing happens. You know some artists whose work today happily has the potential of being transposed into tapestry weaving. But the thinking that took place in 1515-1520 right through was the start of dropping off of a language, and a spoken language. To me, French is a wonderful language for certain things, right? German works otherwise, for other things. Latin is fine. But language—I once gave a lecture that tapestry is another way of saying dog. Right? Because in Iceland, in Reykjavik, in 1968 or something, we banned dogs, and I tried to think of how you would tell a child what a dog is. And I was handling this film on the language of textiles and I might use sculpture [as analogy?]. Each one of these might offer a comment about this dog. And we've closed up a whole language by that change. I'm glad somebody disagrees, or seems to disagree.

(Question from audience).

Is this a piece at the Metropolitan Museum you're talking about? There's one of Napoleon at that same period in the Metropolitan Museum. With Jean Pierre [L:arochette], Susan and I were walking around and we went up to look at this painting, and we were five feet away before we realized it was a tapestry.

(Audience comment). Yeah, I couldn't agree more, but I'm saying we're losing touch, we're not, not we, the makers. So we're fumbling to seek a language in today's idiom. (Audience comment) As I said at the beginning, it's the questions we don't know that excite us, right? But it's very difficult to learn this language because we've been pushed away from it, when I say we, I mean people in general. Art historians. (Audience comment). The van Orley, the Maximilian. They're not early in van Orley, they're 1530s, I think, after that. (Audience comment). And so that, the dog, right? The hound, yes, you find it really appeals to you that you have to. (audience) (laughter) I'm sorry? You might not want to? Which tapestry? No, of course, I absolutely agree. It would be a great mistake to weave these tapestries, because each one of us is seeking a form, a language that might help to push things forward and re-explore, and re-explore. (audience). Not on it's own, but the sum total of all the examining that's going on by the two hundred individuals in North America and a few hundred more around the world. They are seeking . . . we're not wishing to emulate the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth centuries in tapestry. (audience). Uh, yeah, you and Tom can stay that way (laughter). But you're wrong! (laughter). I think it was over to the picture. I think there were odd things about the whole thing, about even the valuing of the gold, splitting up the cost of the weaving, the real cost of the weaving was labor [and] was far, far greater than it was in making the weaving in the [inaudible]. (Audience comment). Magnificent for sure, yes.

And maybe that would be, too. (audience) That really depends on what the labor was valued at, of course (audience) Sure. (Audience comment). I could tell you tapestries that I could sell for being very well, but I don't like my truck breaking down last week in the middle of nowhere because the ones I want to make, I can't afford a better truck, but that's all right, that's my choice. (Audience comment). (laughter) Yes. Yes. (Audience comment). I'd love to see it in a limited space. Where you're so right by the tapestry you can't get further back than say twenty feet or the building would collapse, as opposed to the fifty/sixty feet at the Met. And it's in this—how things change and how we look in our time as opposed to how we looked—I think the candlelight thing is equally the case in giving the weaver's life span, maybe something in the mid-forties, maybe starting as a six, seven, eight-year old. Given the flat and, for instance, everyone allowed by law to weave before the morning church bells, and weren't allowed to weave in artificial light—that huge restriction to deal with has to be amazing [as an influence].

Yes. (question) What about the last 30% of the exhibition? (comment) Yes, the ? (audience). How do you respond to ? (laughter). Yes, yes. And you like that?

(audience). (laughter) But would you describe the Exhibition as being Renaissance?

(audience). Well, did anyone else find . . . to me, the peak of the exhibition, a couple of peaks: One was certainly in the [inaudible] tapestry on [inaudible]. Some of the passages later than Renaissance—1640s and so on. When Italian [inaudible] got together. But to me, the peak of the exhibition built up to the tapestry. A large one that I'm still [inaudible]. And everything [inaudible] and then at the end, we tried a number of times going to the exhibition the other way around. Starting at the back to see if we were missing out on some of the pieces, and I couldn't find any pleasure, satisfaction. (Audience comment). So the commissioner had a big role to play in these decisions then. I once worked on a Calder tapestry, and I think it was about two square meters plain and simple. What a tapestry! (laughter). What you're saying is the people want it, but this weaver didn't want it, and he was being [inaudible] into this position in many situations, because that was the established criteria. And judgment of what was worthwhile was in contradiction to me—weaving is more [than] paint. [inaudible] (Audience comment). Yes, but I think in terms of tapestry [inaudible]. But equally, it's [that] weaving tries to do something with paint, and that's in both directions, and I think, to me they're just languages, that's all. Languages we choose to use. Along with the language of architectural drawing, because it's evolved in order to make buildings grow. I'm curious about the language of electrical components in your computer. And these are just two fairly banal examples of an enormous variety of languages that are out [there]. And in this field of tapestry, there's a language to me that's being drawn, and I wanted to say [inaudible]. I think I couldn't agree, I think the exciting thing about how it was rebuilt [inaudible]. And we're asking questions, and many of us are asking very different questions. And all of us are partly right and partly wrong. To me this is a rush [inaudible] time, but it's a most exciting time for tapestry and that's happening. (Audience comment). I think it's a basic language. That's all it is, it's a basic language. (Audience comment). That's all it is, it's a basic language. Many people have lost that. We've got to use it. (Audience comment). It may be that they developed and changed. But we've got to build them.

Ann: Thank you Archie!

Applause.

Archie: Good, that was interesting.