

Transcript, Eight Annual GFR Lecture, 2006

Title: History of The Victorian Tapestry Workshop

Presented by Sue Walker

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Introduction by Marsha Bol

Good evening, welcome to the New Mexico Museum of Fine Arts, I'm Marsha Bol. I'm the director here at the museum and it is our honor to be a co-presenter of the Gloria Ross Annual Lecture. For those of you who are from away you are probably wondering about this space that you're in. This is a historic structure, a historic building. The New Mexico Museum of Fine Arts was built in 1917 and it was modeled on the Mission Pueblo Church at Acoma Pueblo which was built in 1692, so that is why it doesn't look 20th century. This space was modeled after the church, and we often have people ask us if it was a church. It never was but it looks very much, I had the pleasure actually of bringing an Acoma Pueblo potter in here this year and she said " Why, it looks like our church." Um, we've taken a bit of license with history. The murals were also done in 1917 and they are the life of St. Francis who is the patron Saint of Santa Fe. However, the muralist put St. Francis with the Mayans, and with Columbus so he took a little bit of license with the life of St. Francis. But I do hope you enjoy being here in Santa Fe and we welcome you. And now I would like to turn over to Ann Hedlund.

Ann Hedlund

Thanks you much – applauds.

I'm Ann Hedlund; I'm the director of the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies. It's a real pleasure for us to bring the annual lecture here and to collaborate with Marsha Bola and Martha Landry and the staff at the Museum of Fine Arts. About a month and a half ago I was here and there was a wonderful Lichtenstein tapestry in the galleries. Today we can't show you that piece because they're changing exhibitions but it was a pleasure to encounter a tapestry here. Um, we are going to see lots of tapestries on the screen tonight, which is going to be just wonderful. I want um to give, we I should say, while the Gloria F. Ross center is sponsoring it's lecture here we are also holding our annual board meetings here so we have six board members present. Um I'm hoping you will stand up for me. They are Lotus Stack, Susan McGreevy, Darienne Dennis, Alice Zrebiec, Margie Fox. Where am I seeing someone, where am I not seeing someone? Helena Hernmarck where are you. Here. Laughter. Tapestry weavers, scholars, business people, curators, it is a real pleasure to work with these individuals and have them support and help us in every way. Um, thank you very much to our board. Applauds.

A very special thanks to Jill Heppenheimer and Barbara Lanning who have been very special hosts here from the Santa Fe Weaving Gallery as we visited Santa Fe. It's great to brainstorm with you, to share notes, to have you here this evening and thank you many times over for your comradely. Applauds.

The Gloria F. Ross Center, GFR Center as we call ourselves, she called herself GFR, was, is a non-profit research institute. We're located at the University of Arizona in Tucson. We were founded in 1997 by Gloria Ross who was a New Yorker who traveled around the world producing tapestries by collaborating with artists and with weavers. The mission of the center now that Gloria is gone is to foster the creative practice of tapestry weaving and to also sponsor it's scholarly study and we look at tapestries at different times in our programs from around the world and from pre history all the way through to the present day as you will see this evening. You'll see a listing, I've provided a program for you, and you will see a listing of our past speakers, we offer an annual lecture somewhere in the country every year. And our lectures have, prior to this, which is our

eighth lecture, have addressed things like the earliest middle eastern origins of tapestry weaving in the Kilim carpet tradition. We've looked at contrast between medieval and renaissance tapestries in Europe. We've looked at historic American collections of tapestry. We've also looked at Twentieth century tapestry trends and we have invited Scotchman Archie Brennan to speak, Swedish American Helena Hernmarck has spoken for us, and Santa Fe's own Ramona Sakiestewa was a wonder speaker for us as well.

Tonight we have a real treat to hear about a major tapestry workshop in Australia. In 1988 Gloria Ross attended Australia's International Tapestry Symposium, which was organized by tonight's speaker, Sue Walker and her colleagues. It was held in Melbourne. Gloria arranged for the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, which you'll hear lots about tonight, to weave a very small tapestry designed by painter Paul Jenkins. And while I couldn't haul any other tapestries here we have one very beautiful 1988 tapestry by Paul Jenkins handwoven by Joy Smith at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop. And certainly at the reception I welcome you looking at this more closely. This was displayed during that 1988 exhibition. When Gloria spoke at the conference she drew commonalities between America and Australia. And she did it in sort of a negative way, which is interesting to start with. She said in Europe and Asia there is now, in the 1980's, a true renaissance of tapestry, whereas America and Australia have only a meager history of tapestry per se. Although we Americans and Australians are familiar with the term, and recognize tapestry when it hangs on the wall, the vast majority does not know what it is. This was a lifelong challenge to Gloria. It has been a career long challenge to Sue Walker as well. If there has been any rise in tapestry awareness in this country, between our two countries especially, during the decade of the ninety's and now into 21st Century it is due to individual tapestry workers all over this country and in Australia as well. But it is also due to Gloria's legacy in the United States and most certainly to Sue Walker's brilliant leadership of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in Australia.

Sue Walker was trained in Melbourne. She took on the directorship of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in 1974 and she has just recently stepped down to complete a major book, which we are very pleased to look forward to. As she will emphasize the workshop

focuses on weavers who are trained as artists in their own right. And that I know is a major part of the success of the tapestry workshop as you have organized and founded and run it.

In a 1988 press release, tonight's speaker was once described, and I think maybe this is by herself or a staff member but I don't know, as "Prone to optimistic enthusiasm for ambitious schemes." Laughter. Prone to optimistic enthusiasm for ambitious schemes, this is good. And indeed when I visited Sue Walker downunder two years ago I found her to have an irrepressible spirit, wonderful wit, intense dedication to her work and it's a real pleasure to invite her to the podium. We're going to have a reception afterwards and I hope we will have a little bit of time for questions and answers as well, but certainly we'll have refreshments out in the lobby and we hope you can join and talk with Sue and talk with all the other board members of the Gloria F. Ross Center. Thank you very much. Sue. Applauds.

Sue Walker

Well thank you Ann, I'm not sure if I'm quite the person you described but anyway, (laughter) it was a nice introduction. And I would like to thank you Ann and the Trustees of the Tapestries Studies Center and also Marsha and the people here at the Museum of Fine Arts at Santa Fe for this opportunity tonight. The great thing for me is actually coming here. I never ever dreamt in my wildest dreams I'd get to such a wonderful place and having got here I'm just staggered at what a lovely city you've got and I can't wait to come back again. I'm so pleased that I came a few days early and I was able to walk around and see something of the city and really enjoy it and enjoy the great offerings that you have here. Anyway as Ann also said it is a great pleasure to be giving this lecture because I did know Gloria Ross, I knew, I met her first in 1980 and from that time I followed her work and admired her work and while we did only weave one tiny little tapestry I greatly valued her friendship and I think Ann has very aptly described the important influence that Gloria has had in so many ways.

Well, here we are tonight looking at artist's tapestries from Australia in the period 1976 to 2001. And this slide here - is there any way we can dim the lights? This slide is actually just taken from an exhibition that we had in 1988 when that international symposium was on. It's just a backdrop to start with.

Looking back 30 years it's almost impossible for me to imagine that tapestry was not always a vital part of Australia's cultural life. It's hard to remember a time when tapestries designed and woven by Australian artists were not an integral part of our daily lives, bringing color and warmth to public buildings in all parts of the country; to airports, hospitals, schools, courthouses, galleries, museums, hotels, universities and parliament houses. But this in fact is how it was and really Gloria is right, was right. Until recent times Australia had no history of tapestry production and was both geographically and culturally isolated from the tradition of European tapestry. When the Victorian Tapestry Workshop started operating in 1976 there were virtually no tapestries hanging anywhere on public view because except for a small number in galleries and this included two of Helena Hernmarck's which I just loved and I used to prowl around all the time having a look at them.

In fact it wasn't until just after the Second World War when exhibition of French tapestries toured the world that the imaginations of Australian artists and art loving audiences began to be captured by the richness and beauty of both historical and contemporary French tapestries. Some of our artists were so eager to see their work translated into tapestry that this led eventually to the establishment in 1976 of the state government funded Victorian Tapestry Workshop, and I should just clarify here that the state we live in is the state of Victoria and has nothing to do with the Victorian era except that it was called after Queen Victoria, this does cause a few problems.

In fact this is the critical point. Some of our artists were so eager to see their work translated into tapestry that this led to the establishment and this is really the critical point. It was the enthusiasm of artists that fired the concept from the start. I think that's the first really important point I want to make. Australian tapestry owes its existence to

artists. It didn't grow from a long-standing textile tradition as some studios have such as I think the Swedish workshop in Stockholm. But it grew from an excitement about tapestry as a magnificent and monumental medium for carrying the imagery and language of artists.

And this is really where my part in the story begins. I was married to a painter at the time and through him closely involved in the life and work of artists. And as a weaver and enthusiast about textiles I was also involved in the early days of the crafts movement. I became aware of moves to start a workshop, made some inquiries, and this resulted for me in a magical meeting with Archie Brennan the great Scottish tapestry weaver who was advising our government on the establishment of a workshop. Archie convinced me, through describing his own experiences at the Dovecot in Edinburgh, that tapestry could be an exciting and lively form of contemporary art. I could see that here in the art of tapestry was a medium that carried an ancient craft to a higher plane. It involved artists and art ideas. Its traditions were rich and glorious. And its production was team based and collaborative. I fell under the spell of Archie's ideas and was so greatly captured by the exciting possibilities for Australian artists that I eagerly set out to learn all that I could about the art of tapestry. Nevertheless it did seem to me a daunting task to think that a workshop could be set up in a country where there were no tapestries to study, except for Helena's, and no models to draw on. Archie argued however that in establishing a new workshop in Australia we had a wonderful chance to step away from the past. He encouraged us to see that our remoteness from Europe was in fact a huge bonus. He said it would give us the freedom to explore tapestry unfettered by its history. We would have a rich chance to make discoveries, to learn about tapestry with fresh eyes, and forge a truly Australian approach that reflected our way of life and the ideas and feelings of our artists.

He then persuaded me to apply for the position of director of the new workshop, which I did. And when I was actually appointed he remained as my great guide and mentor both in the early days and for many years afterwards.

Archie gave us a great deal of good advice. And here's my second critical point, I think most significant advice was that, as Ann has said, we should employ as weavers people who were actually themselves trained artists so that they could talk and collaborate with the artists whose work they were interrupting in an inventive and creative way rather than simply reproducing their ideas in tapestry. And this is what we did. We started with five weavers all of whom were trained in different areas of the arts. One was trained in sculpture, one was a painter, one was a print maker, one was actually a fashion designer and the other one was trained in graphic art. All of them were enthusiastic to find out all they could about tapestry.

Those early years were full of excitement and we learned a huge amount. Through collaborating with artists we made many discoveries about art and about tapestry. We discovered the richness and depth of woven color, the illusionary qualities of the sketchily woven image, the intriguing nature of the woven line, the exciting ambiguities achieved by editing detail, the narrative power of great mural art, the tactile beauty of the woven surface and so much more.

The first few years really laid the path for everything that followed over the next thirty years and set the stage for the development of the characteristics that are recognized today in our work. For this reason I'd like to start by showing in some detail our very earliest work. A bit of a blast from the past really. I'll then show some video footage, which will illustrate to you exactly how we worked with one particular artist on one project. Then I'll show you a few more slides. And finally another small video film about a particularly big tapestry that I think you will find interesting, then just a few little words to wrap up, so I hope you have your sleeping bags, it's quite a long haul. Anyway, here we go.

Um, now on the wall you will see "Emerald Hue Yellow" which was woven in 1976 it measures about 8 feet by 7foot 6 and it was designed by artist Alan Leach Jones. It's our very first tapestry and it shown here hanging in our visitor's center many years later. Alan was a really good artist for us to start working with. We knew his work well, which

was important. He was a great believer in collaborative work. He was very excited about the idea of tapestry, but didn't have the sort of resources that could take him to Europe. And he was always urging us to explore aspects of his work in different ways and push new ideas. Here he is talking with one of the weavers. He also always said that working with the weavers helped him to develop his painting.

Now, how are your eyes, these two exploratory samples, which are the sort of things that are always woven before the tapestry starts, give you several insights into the sort of decisions that are made. You will be able to detect some differences I think between the earlier one on the left and the later one that was woven on the right. And what we learned from this very early set of samples, and I'm not sure you can exactly see it because there is something funny about the way the yellow comes through this projector, but the colors in the one on the right is much stronger and that's on a course warp setting. And we discovered that if you weave the course of the warp the more the bigger the weaving be the more coloration you get. And that was a terrific lesson because tapestry is about wonderful color. We also found, and you probably can't exactly see this, but by adding a more luminous thread like linen or mercerized cotton or even weaving with it, you will see that pile of blue on the right is actually solid linen I think. Um that you can get the luminosity that we all look for I think often in tapestry can be achieved in a range of different ways, and that's another way. And then Alan who was too frightened in his painting to put red against green you know that old adage, red against green never should be seen, or something. Um, we said why don't you try it, and we tried it and of course it made a much better tapestry. Um and so those are the sort of you know little discoveries we made in our very first tapestry. We also discovered that weavers are very influenced by the colors they are weaving. And they tend to sort of I think subconsciously drag things out of their wardrobe that are the right color. (Laughter)

Um then on the second tapestry with Alan, which was our first architectural commission, for this is a building where the architect was sympathetic, very sympathetic, very keen to work with us and he wanted a long narrow tapestry to go down an interior wall of the building. In fact it was so long, "Summer in the South" woven in 1978, thirty-six feet

long and three feet wide. Archie suggested using this rather crazy kind of box loom with a bit of a sort of like a ??? we thought, we discovered we would never do it again. Um that was the discovery there because it was terribly hard to keep the tension. Can you imagine having to keep putting new props in to sort of haul it up, but it was fun. Um anyway that the discoveries that we made through this project of course stood us in very good stead with vary many important architectural projects in the future and we were able to work out how to successfully work and collaborate and this is the part that I loved of course, collaborating with an artist and architect together.

Um Alan was always keen for us to push the color, push the color, push the color, and make it more intense, which we did and we tried to do. His design was a torn paper collage and you can see the torn paper edges. And finally, eventually, thank goodness, the box loom came to the end of its journey and the general manager of the ??? organization helped Sara, the weaver to cut it from the loom, a great sigh of relive there. And of course we didn't have a ceiling 36 feet high so we had to lay it on the floor to look at it and Um and here it is hanging in the building. It was very successful I think.

Um I we did many many tapestries with Alan, this um this one was given, which was exciting for us by our Prime Minister as a gift to the Performing Arts Center in Bombay. So Alan was you know really on his home turf, make it as vibrant as you can so and he also liked to think was adding new challenges for the weavers so he added this sort of pretend writing which was his initials and I can't ??? Um but through that and that was 1978 and many more tapestries with Alan followed and really the extreme came in in 1993 when Alan produced a line drawing and through challenge to one of weavers to um paint it so he and the weaver both painted versions of it and you see them there one above the other. I think you can imagine who probably won out in the end. I think was probably more Alan than the weaver, but I think it was a very interesting experience and you see the cartoon there on the wall and Claudia the weaver interestingly on a red warp is weaving a sample.

There's a lot of talking about it and other artists came in and took part of it. It was a very experimental project and interestingly it's still in the workshops' collection. It hasn't attracted anyone to buy it, but it's a pretty lively work; there it is finished, and here's the detail from it. You can see the sort of richness of it.

Now, I'm going to take you back to 1976 again, we've moved into the 90's. This artist, Richard Latter, was one who attracted me greatly because of his, the lovely way he used pattern and the very flattened pictorial nature of his work. This tapestry "Trytapes" which is an anagram type of tapestry, "Trytapes" measures 10 feet high and 5 feet wide and uh, you can probably see there why it attracted me. We borrowed paintings from Dick Latter, so that we could really explore his work in detail and a lot of his form was achieved with little dots and we have to try and work at how would we deal with these little dots, lots and lots of you know, pouty lips and glittery eyes and open mouths were woven in an attempt to work this out. The one on the top right, Sarah wove that, and we thought perhaps we were getting somewhere but you'll see there that the lines are achieved by working with the warp. So that the lines are actually going upward with the warp and we just felt that was a rather mechanical, it being a bit to rigid, not fixable enough so, Richard Latter was happy what we were doing with his work. But we decided then that we waded the tapestry on its side and I'm sure you can see how the lines are quite different there, much more lyrical. They don't sort of dominates the image in the same way that where those were rigid, grey ones did when they sort of moved up. Much more lyrical.

Richard Latter never actually came to the workshop, we had a wonderful collaboration with great big long letters, I went to meet him in Sydney but he wrote marvelous letters and was always very excited and felt delighted and thrilled about his tapestry to the extent that he wanted his painting burnt. Which was just such a terrible thing to do, you know I just really wanted to grab a corner of it and keep it, but there it is. Were out in the car park burning...

Now his 2nd tapestry was much smaller. This is “Startarp” again an anagram of tapestry. It measures 3 feet high and 7 feet wide and it was commissioned for the library college. And this, and here you’ll see Sarah and Alan inking on the warp and this time he prepared it with the lines actually all ready for weaving, that he prepared them in horizontal lines. So that it was a more straightforward business cause we could see what we were doing as we went. Here it is finished on the loom, and there it is in the library and the college was very excited and very delighted with it and we were too. But we did feel we made another discovery, we felt that we actually because it had been woven so fine, we’d actually made it rather too beautiful. The decorative nature of finally woven tapestry really had sort of taken away the kind of rawness and brashness that he saw himself as a provocative artist and I think we’ve taken the edge off that provocation and we did quite a lot of talking about this, talked about this with him; and he agreed to paint with a broader line, something that would make it more robust. This is his wife, Pat; who figures that was her, that naked one of her with the suspenders that I showed you earlier. And he painted this you know, very broad linear image of Pat, which was woven and we just felt it was much stronger and grabbed you much more. And in fact, this stood us in very good stead for the next commission the came along, for the National Gallery of Australia in Cambria. And again, an anagram on tapestry, “Pretty As”. This one measured 9 feet by 15 feet and was really a spectacular work. What you see on the wall is, is Richard Latter’s painting and um, this work which as I said was so large really foreshadowed a decade of truly monumental projects that dominated the 80’s. But again here, we just wanted to make sure this sort of detail that was needed to carry off the images could be achieved on the broad warp setting. And Sarah did this one first; she never completed it because it was perfectly easy to see already that that was achievable. And as you can see once it got going on the loom it was very striking, I’ve always loved this tapestry.

And this particular image is one of my special favorites, Pat Latter with her mouth open. I think it was interesting that Sarah decided to keep that painting a bit of a distance from the loom, so there was no temptation from the weavers to you know to be captivated by every tiny mark, but to try really read it from the distance and weave it on a broad scale. Here she is cutting a lot of ends on the back there because of so many changes of bobbin.

It's a bit washed out I'm afraid that slide, but it does show the work finished. And here again is a not terribly good slide but it shows you in the children's theatre where it was to hang.

Now again, this is going back to 1977 and it's the only picture that I have of this, and we received it from the Saskatchewan Center for the Arts in Regina because this was an incredible commission that we got for 4 tapestries. In fact the first inquire kind before we even started to employ weavers. And Allen Weinstein was a Canadian artist who'd won a competition for a suite of tapestries to hang in the Saskatchewan Center for the Arts in Regina. And he was searching the world for a studio capable of undertaking such a commission. And although we had very limited experience, we threw our hat in the ring and we actually did then when we had weavers employed, send in a couple of samples and he was captivated, he said he really liked the interpretation and it was just the sort of thing he was looking for. And we actually got the commission, which was fairly mind boggling looking back on it. You know, we never even done anything like this before never even costed a tapestry but we had to quickly employ and train a few new weavers and learn how to manage such a huge project. Fortunately, Allen Weinstein was, he was able to come out and he will spend some time with us and came to give a lot of freedom to the weavers. You'll see here, he's painting on the right and the um...the way it was, that that piece is actually 16 feet long. We didn't weave it on a box loom having had that lesson already, thank goodness. At 4 foot 6 wide, and the biggest piece in this series was 10 feet by 14 feet. But all, what we learned from this, apart from how to deal with a big project and a suite of tapestries, was a mixing of quite diverse color on the bobbins as you see there, with something that large scale tapestries could respond to well and absorb. And we also learned about the, yeah, this is, I love this one, we learned about the sort of animated line and the energy of vertically woven line as it jumps up across the warps. And that stood us in good stead for the future. Anyway we managed to finish the 4 tapestries on time, in fact, before time and within budget. And the only mistake I made was in calculating the amount of lemon colored wool that was needed for the borders instead of adding up, I multiplied and we had shelves and shelves of lemon wool for

years and years sitting there waiting for more lemon colored tapestries. I think in the end we sort of died it black.

Anyway the Weinstein commission was very important for us in set us on the path of working with international artists, which we did a lot of in later years to working on suites of tapestries and to working on monumental architectural projects. And it brought us to your attention, our Federal government which led to many important outcomes in the future.

After working with Weinstein, we were much more prepared in 1978 for our 1st monumental project, "The Sun Tapestry." It measured 30 feet long 12 feet high tapestry designed by John Cobin, a very experienced tapestry designer who'd been one of the first Australian artists who'd become keen about tapestry. And he had worked extensively with the French workshops. And I think out of his output of over 100 tapestries, the 1st 80 he did with the French workshops and after that he started working with us because he really liked the collaborative relationship with our weavers, and he felt his own work benefited from that. This was a monumental tapestry that was required rich color and there was a lot of working out of color. And it was to hang in the dining room of the Queensland Parliament and that's the sunshine state in Australia, that's one of the states at the top where it's really hot and people go there for the sunshine. And you'll see he did a sort of small coat of arms in the corner. A lot of color mixing we started to learn about that there and we had a great cutting off ceremony with politicians from Queensland and politicians from our state. Everything was set up; you know it was really big we possibly even managed to have the press there. Everybody, all the weavers were standing around ready to pull the tapestry off the bottom roller and it didn't unroll, it was terrible! (Laughter) And we had to run around and get a wrench and eventually discovered that the bolt at the bottom needed unscrewing or something. And eventually we got it on the floor, and then it was taken to Queensland to put on the wall and I think it's been a very successful tapestry. We have done many tapestries, probably 20 or more with John Cobin, this is in a telecommunications building it's woven in 1997, 5 foot 6 by 14 feet. Oh, this is one I like. This is in a bank this is St. George Tapestry 1998. 20 feet high 8 feet wide.

This one, this is you know a big medical center, a big hospital the ??? Medical center. And I always think it has something very special and lively in the ??? Medical center, it's called the "The Sun is the Source of Life", ??? And "The Tree of Life" this is in your very wonderful private home in Western Australia on the banks of the Swan River of 1996, 8 feet by 10 feet.

Now in 1988, 78, 1978 again right back to the beginning, we began a wonderful journey with our indigenous artists who are such masters of pattern and color. The architect at our new performing arts center in Melbourne, had discovered the work of these artists and was keen to include a group tapestries based on their work in his new center. And here, we see the "Wind Parker Serpents" were ?? with the artist ??entire sentence unclear??. This tapestry measured 8 feet by 12 feet. Known as the art of western desert, this work can only very recently been transferred, transposed from the traditional sandpaintings on the canvas. It was all very new and an exciting time to be working with these artists. Because it was also new actually we did a lot of looking at their work before we started and was hard to find but occasionally there would be expeditions. I even went up to central Australia and met with their art advisors and met with some of the artists because we thought it was very important to get a good insight of them, into these artists and into their way of life. Naturally, we couldn't quite collaborate with them the same way because I lived at a great distance and communication with them is a bit different. But um, Carper did come to the workshop, and with his son, Harrison, and they sang their stories to us, which was really wonderful way to connect with them and their way of life. And here you see the very beginning of the tapestry on the loom, and the sample line there because it was a huge challenge, we didn't, we weren't even sure how we'd manage to weave all those dots and those lines. Because it was still very earlier days, as I mentioned, but we managed and we grew some. I think a terrific tapestry, we learned alot from it. Again those wonderful woven lines and the way the quality of the line changes according to the angle it takes across the warp threads. Terribly exciting stuff I think. I thought it was really important since this was to be a group of these tapestries to take the first one up to the desert and show them.

And here we see the west desert in central Australia. We took the tapestry rolled up on top of a car, drive at along the rough roads, and here we laid it on the ground for all the artists to look at and on the left is “Yellow-Yellow Gibbs,” Carper’s in the middle, and Charlie ??? is on the right. And they sat and looked and talked and thought about it for quite a long time. And they decided it was all okay, it was actually needing business and it would be something that all their families could come to Melbourne and have a look at and feel proud about so I feel greatly relieved after that because really were telling mens’ stories and we were women who were weaving them. In those days, that was a more quite sensitive area, since then, things have changed a lot. But here you see it hanging in the foyer of the playhouse in the Victorian Arts Center. As aboriginal art became better known and much more accepted as an exciting and vital part of Australia’s contemporary art scene we found ourselves working on a number of ambitious projects with different indigenous artists and you’ll see something of this later on.

This is “Yellow-Yellow Gibbs,” one of the other ones that we worked with and this had a million dots, or 3 million dots, or 10 million dots when it was finished we were greatly relieved but you’ll see a lot of fluff had gathered with all those dots being woven. Here it is in the workshop and by the length of his hair you can see it was the 70’s. Charlie ??? was the 3rd one. And this was woven with a bit more freedom, you’ll see here in this sort of mixed bobbins in the background it was done with greater sort of more random um, adoption.

This is from a different part of Australia, completely this is from the islands north of Darwin, and its based on a very fragile ?? painting by Dick Lan???. And the ?? painting was falling to bits so I thought it was a really wonderful thing that we could translate it into a much more long lasting form. And this was bought by Phillip Morris for their offices in Madison Avenue, quite a long time ago 1982, um after the wives of the executives saw it on the loom. Again that lovely jumping across the warps and mixing and lots of things I think which are wonderful about tapestry, there’s just a sample.

Now you've probably all seen this on the invitation, I thought I should include it. This is Daisy Andrew's "Lumpu Lumpu Country" 2004, about 7 ft. by 8 ft. And definitely comes from a different part of the country and often the women, no this is a generalization, but a lot of the women's art has more brighter color; although, that's a detail.

Ginger Riley used wonderful color and you'll see more of Ginger later. This is a tiny tapestry, just 4 ft. by 5 ft. The 1st one we did with Ginger, he lives in ???, near Darwin. And this was sold to a private collector from the US, who saw it during visit to Melbourne.

And finally, I come to a very different strand of our work, finally for this part of the lecture, the documentary or story telling commissions. I. M. Pea the New York architects where, had designed and was being built, an impressive new uh, what would you call it? Complex, court Collins Place which would have amongst other things a hotel and the world head quarters at the ??? bank. Robert Lima, who the architecting responsible for the interiors, was looking for a massive work of art 42 ft long. And funny enough, he didn't find one in any artists' studios, because not too many artists have 42 foot long work of arts in the studios. So we had already done 2 tapestries with him for a hotel and he'd been quite impressed. So he discussed with the banks, the idea of a very long tapestry to go in this wonderful dining room. He didn't it want it to overpower the dining room, of course the interior space and all that, but he wanted it to sit well on the wall and tell a story. And that was the genesis of the "Charter Room Tapestry" which is 7 ft. 6 high. It's in 5 panels and as of fitted measures 42 feet. And in those days, it was very hard to find artist for such a commission, that sort of historical material was not of great interest to artists, I'm not sure that is particularly today, but it was certainly difficult then.

However, we were lucky that Maury Walker was an artist with a great interest in Australian history and a lot of under great knowledge of early imagery. He worked very closely with weaver, Mary Cook, and they together they selected images that were both suitable for tapestry and appropriate for the brief. The actual design goes there along the top of the board and you'll see that it's really a sort of collage. But Walker was inspired

by belief that historic image reproduced by artists of their earlier time conveyed a powerful directness that would be lost in the reinterpretation of events by artists of the later time. If somebody tried to illustrate the events, he didn't think it would have such power. These types of tapestries were woven on different looms of course, in 5 pieces. And we learned a huge amount from these.

This is based on a tiny postcard, this is called "Christmas in the Colonies" and as you can see it is only about 4 or 5 feet wide. But I think one of the big messages of this one was that the economy of means can be very powerful, look at those faces. I mean there's hardly anything there but our eyes tell us, don't they, our eyes put it all in that wonderful dog, I love the dog. You don't have to fill in all the detail; you don't have to do like they did in the renaissance, and just get every single thing. We learnt that architectural forms work well on the grid of tapestry. This is the data, from the one called, "The Eastern Market" again, great economy of means. You know, everything isn't defined but we know its there. I love this. This one was the story of the 1st bank in Melbourne, and John Bapmin is a key figure in this establishment of the city of Melbourne, and that was his name from the top of his bank ledger thing.

This was all the stuff arriving in early. One of the early settlers was good at watercolors, and he did a series of wonderful watercolors. Leonardo, was his name, he actually ran a pub. This is based on one of his little paintings. Um, oh this terrible sort of image of a poor woman being taken into the Outback, you know where there was nothing on a cart, and having to sort of set up home?, but what we sort of learned from this, of course is that woodcuts, woodcuts, wonderful, wonderful in tapestry, well I think they are. I think the weaver's found that first one a great trial but learned over the years how to handle it a bit better, but look at her poor little face.

And then this one is really the "Last Frontier" and the fascinating thing we found with this was, of course, the photography is fantastic for tapestry. And it already it's flattened, it's got a 2 dimensional pictorial plane. Much details being illuminated and I just love this

camel and the guys there waiting to ride the camel out into the desert. Anyway we worked on many other tapestries with Murray over the years.

And the final one your going to see today in the video is the great Federation Tapestry that he coordinated and partially designed. This is a favorite one and I don't really know whether it comes across willing slides um, but it was woven for school chapel, the Ivanhope Chapel. And we had this incredible brief that covered everything, every single thing that took place in the school all the Christian values, everything you could possibly want, and the surroundings of the school in a rather beautiful location. And Murray together with another weaver, made the suggestion that growing up in a helicopter and taking the aerial view with all the little boys out playing on the field, playing all the different sporting things and when the bell rang, you know and taking a photograph in autumn when the leaves were beautiful, would be a good basis for it. And um, that's in fact what they did. And those little jellybeans you see there, they're actually the cars at the local railway station, which the head master of the school said it was an important place cause that's where the boys from his school met the girls from the girls school, and he thought that was important. But interestingly, what I think we learned from that is that such a work can be very realistic from a distance and then almost like an abstract pattern up close, as you'll see here.

And finally, in terms of Murray's work, this is really one of my favorites. A tapestry called, "Disaster at Sea" woven in 1989. And as you can see again, based on the woodcut, and this is a woodcut depicting the sinking of the British Admiral, which founded, which was the ship that founded on its maiden voyage to Australia and many lives were lost. But how poignant it is and it doesn't spell it out in great detail, but I think we can see again the power of the woodcut is very successful in tapestry. That's the completed work; it was commissioned by the architect of the National Maritime Museum in Sydney, who wanted a tapestry to that would sort of set the mood as you entered the Maritime Museum. (laughter) I'm not sure there's, there's quite a right mood to be set. Anyway, that concludes the first bit.

What I'm now going to show you, because I'd like you to now get some insight and do the collaboration that takes place between artists and weavers is one particular project, a tapestry that we were commissioned to weave by our government as a gift to Singapore's new performing arts center, the Esplanade and I have to let Ann do the magic thing to get the video working. (pause). We need to know what slide this is, I don't, we'll figure that out later.

(Side B)

First Video

(Applauds)

Later (laughter)

Ah, the wonders of technology. Were going very quickly now going to just go through 10 projects with 10 different artists just to show you. I showed you through earlier years, now I'm just going to sort of zip through the last 20 years, just like that. Just to give you a little bit of a glimpse of some different projects, some monumental ones, some based on quite miniature designs, but all of them as you will see drawing on the knowledge that we gained in those early years those early sort of formative years of the late 70's and early 80's. Over the years, we made several tapestries for the luxury yachts. But these works were actually from an airline. I thought it was a fantastic project.

And you'll see that in fact this artist, Steven Griffin, his work was based on photographic imagery, and I just thought I had to show you these. They are about a yard long and he was working on them in the workshop there because we had to sort of, we got the material from the airline that showed the shape of these works and he came in and wove and worked on them in the workshop. While they do show something about the Australian way of life that beach life that's so famous, were so famous for. But it also does show that we have learned and we decided to work with this artist because of that

elimination of detail, the fact that our eyes were just feeling what isn't there. The illusionary quality that I think is so fantastic in tapestry and you see this in many medieval tapestries like the different ??? tapestries in the Victorian Albert Museum.

Again here, actually quite abstract, close up, now there were three sets of these, what were actually class divide is in between business and economy. Three different artists did four panels each and when the airline collapsed they disappeared and we don't know where they are. Very sad because they are lovely, lovely works.

We so much enjoyed working with Steven Griffin that we actually commissioned him to do a design for us which was and purchased by Outbank bank, which is our national body that rents out works of art, and this is the sun, this is called "Sun" woven in 1982 and it's 8 ft. wide and 4ft. 6in. high. Again you'll see that sort of reduction of detail the sort of elimination.

Now I come to a young artist called Jeff Ricardo, a young artist that we approached. We recommended him to the festival of Perth, who are looking for an artist to design a tapestry that would become the poster for the festival of Perth and eventually this image, "Guest Bags," was chosen and here it is, it was actually woven on it's side, but the slides been turned so you can see it. A lovely tapestry, 6 feet high 4 foot 6 wide, very popular and it looked fantastic during the festival of Perth, very decorative, really celebrated all those qualities of decoration that is so wonderful in tapestry, there it is hanging actually at an exhibition that we had in Perth.

Jeff is a print maker, quite a young artist as I've already said. Great to work with, a very interactive, live near by where his studio is near by came here a lot and he really enjoyed the possibilities of the development of the image as it was growing on the loom. This is his second tapestry, "Elephant Gingham", people almost trampling each other to death to buy and its' been bought by a private collector, who I don't know if he even got it hanging on his wall; but it's a fantastic tapestry. We did a lot of experimental work, working at how to weave that checkered, blanket thing, you know it was enormously

challenging so it didn't look too rigid; it had that sort of fluidity that a blanket would have if it was hanging over an elephant or over two men that were pretending to be an elephant, should I say.

And then we did another tapestry; you might have seen this in the background and here's Jeff talking about his tapestry. This one's called, "Emblem" and very Australian image but with a bit of a creepy kind of feel to it; I think which is characteristic of Jeff's work, 6 foot 6 high, 4 foot 6 wide.

And now we come to another artist, Christopher Payette, an artist with a great joy in color; a great knowledge of color theory, which is very rare today and the ability to use it exquisitely and a great love of tapestry. And for a few years, he was actually deputy director of the workshop, but I think his greatest contribution has been in the knowledge of color that he's brought to the workshop. Now he was chosen to design a tapestry that was based on a series of works that he did every morning at 6 o'clock. He painted the sky, and you'll see there, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10...10 little paintings of the sky that were brought together as one complete work. Here it was a challenging, interestingly to make sure that the sort of frames between each of these works was not too rigid. I'm not sure whether you'll be able to see how they manage this. But his use of color and the lovely patterns of his work are really a joy to weave. I don't think, this is blown up too big I think really to get the delicacy of it but with Chris really he lifted our use of color to a new level of luminosity and beauty, I think.

Here it is, finished on the loom and here again a bit sort of washed out looking from where I am is in the family room, it was commissioned by a family, a legal family. I don't know why I'm exactly saying it but the children had very been involved in the whole process as well, which I think was very nice.

Subsequently to that, a Christmas commission to design a tapestry for a small community of Anglican Sisters, who as you can say it's a nice old building and they had a lovely chapel. They wanted something to go behind the alter because they didn't have a stained-

glass window; they wanted something with a lot of luminosity. It was a terrific project because it was a small community, I think only about 10 sisters and of course they all had to agree about the design, can you imagine? I'd take my hat off to Sister Velma, who was the superior or whatever the word is, in charge of the order because in the end she did get them all to agree. Now she was recorded in an earlier video, there's the detail from it, its saying and now we all love it. I thought that was so touching there was no disagreement. I think they treasure it and they are very proud of it. We've done many more tapestries with Chris Payette and they are always very popular because of his use of color but I'm not showing you anymore because now I come to the great high point of the 1980's, in fact the great high point, almost of my time at the workshop.

This is the building of our new parliament house which took place through the 80's, designed by the New York architect from ??? and his team, his office carved into the top of a hill in Cambria. A remarkable building and I have to tell you a totally remarkable experience for all of us that were involved in this project. Our part of it took 5 years, it started with earlier discussions in 1983 and by 1988, and we had completed a tapestry that measured, 66 feet across and 20 feet high. It was designed by a very important Australian artist, Arthur Boyd, who actually was living in London so I had wondered how we'd collaborate with him but he came out to Australia and he painted 3 designs out in the bush. He's known for his landscape painting and this was what ??? wanted. It was to have the doorway through the middle of it that's why you see that white section there. And here's Arthur in the grounds of his studio. Here you'll see the design; I think it was 19 feet wide in the workshop, truly wonderful to live in the presence of such a great of art for 5 years, just fantastic.

Drawing the cartoon, you can imagine was no main feat and it took LeAnn and Ian, I think 10 days to really work across the prospects from there and identify the shapes they felt they needed. And the cartoon itself was monstrous, we had to hire a theatrical studio, and when I thought honestly, my heart went into my mouth; it looked like something we had horses to be galloping around it. It was so big, it was like a great field anyway we squared it up and put it together and then we separated it into four sections because there

was no way we could have a loom that was 66 feet wide and even 20 feet wide was pushing it a bit and would take a long time to do. So we actually wove it in four sections and because what you saw of the painting you'll realize the divisions could easily be hidden amongst those trees. It was ideal; we were terribly lucky for that reason.

An enormous amount of this experimental work went on because this project was very much in the public eye and it was going to cost a fortune if you can imagine. There were a lot of questions why those chairs in the new parliament house are costing so much, if they were questioning chairs, what were they going to say about a tapestry? Letters to the paper, you know we had to be sure that we really costed it well and costed it responsibly, not that we didn't always do that but we were going to be in the lime rights, so we really needed to do a lot of the experimental work. In that sense, but also to honor the great artist with whom we were working and to make sure we were going to give credit to what his intentions were and that it would be strong enough to carry in that great space cause it was a vast reception hall, the central meeting space for the whole of the parliament, you'll see that in a minute. So we did a great deal of sample weaving, much, much more than that. We even did 2 samples and joined them with industrial Velcro so that we could demonstrate to the people we were dealing with at the parliament house, that it would look all right. Then we took samples up to the site, which we commonly did, and met up there with Arthur and the architects. We found that the blue we used for the sky was feeble. You know, we had to bump everything up ??? lift the color, lift the color but anyway Arthur of course agreed with it and wanted us to lift the color too, which we did. And then of course, we had to set up the whole workshop, we had to take on extra space through all the products cause we had a massive amount of work at that time. We set up two looms side by side, put a whole, the whole pallet was on the tables. This was the pallet that is being used in that particular project and what you can't see on the far right is that the painting was there behind the weavers and they used to look at it through opera glasses back to front, you know to try to get the senses scale, I'm sure you are all familiar with that sort of project way of working. We just did passage by passage and just kept on working until the four of them were complete. Here you see, we see on the left, is the painting. On the floor is one panel up hanging off the mezzanine of the end floor is

another panel. On the loom on the right is the 3rd panel so we must have been getting pretty close to the end at that point. It was a huge challenge, you know, to make sure that the trees would stand out from the patterning from the background, a lot of the emphasis went on that, that the colors adjacent to the joins were, you know, mix that you wouldn't find some terrible thing. There was one curving tree; again my heart was in my mouth until those 2 pieces met that was the only sort of critical piece. Then they were put into crates taken to the site and then there was union dispute and the weavers and the tapestry weren't allowed on the site so they had to sit there for a couple of days until that was all sorted out. The politics of it, all if you can imagine. Eventually they got in, scaffolding was erected. Here again, probably not a terribly good picture, but you'll see this may have been the opening by the Queen in 1998 or similar important ceremonial occasion. You see that curving tree, going around the corner of the door; Arthur had especially designed it with that in mind. That was just a huge and wonderful experience and I think changed all our lives, those of us that were involved in it. Here's the Silver Crested Cockatoo flying through that beautiful azure blue sky.

Now you did see Ginger Riley in that video. I just quickly wanted to show you, this is the weavers just took samples to Cambria or and incidentally they'd already been to Cambria to see the parliament house tapestry before or would see the parliament house before they worked on their tapestry. But here they went up because this was a bigger and important space and they needed to see how it would look. Here is Ginger himself, wonderful man, very happy and he put his hand on his heart and he said, "the colors of my heart you've got it" you know. So I thought those were lovely pictures and I wanted to show you. That tapestry is 25 feet wide 12 feet high. Now this is one of my special favorites, it hangs in Sydney in a very prominent location in the foyer of the state library of New South Wales.

Martin Sharp is a fun artist. He always gave us sort of really scruffy little bits of designs, so you'll see there on the pin border sort of bits of paper stuck together and half peeling off but it was really sort of poster design but a great feeling for what he was doing. He designed this tapestry which he called, "Oz Question Mark." A team of quite young weavers got going on it and did a lovely job and I think his flat pictorial imagery is ideal

for tapestry and lots of fun and he had poetry written about around the borders, which of course acknowledges the traditions of tapestry, an intelligent and thinking artist. And one where, double and single warp was used because they didn't need a fine warp in the central part of the tapestry that they did for that writing. Finding a practicing of the writing. I just thought that was a nice picture and here it is on the loom and you can see that's just the detail from it.

Now, I'll take you to Melbourne airport. Those of you who've been there may have seen these, this suite of six tapestries that enliven the arrivals hall. But when you get off the plane you really too zonked after 15 hours to look at them. But these six tapestries were designed by Leoni Bissent, who is the weaver actually in charge of the Arthur Boyd projects had been, subsequently went to Royal College of Art in London, did her MA and came back and continued with her own painting as well as weaving. She had a lifetime of painting the different regions of Victoria, which is what this commission called for. A good sense of style and color as we knew from the Arthur Boyd tapestry and she'd handle this commission very well; 72 feet in total, 6 tapestries, each measuring 6 feet by 12 feet. A lot of sky begins mixing color in a strong sort of authority I think in these works.

But now, talking of scale, this is the largest single piece of tapestry waiting for woven. Its 36 feet high and 20 feet wide and with this work which is called the, "???" tapestry and designed by Robert Ellis from New Zealand, where stepping into the international arena. Again, but on a vast scale, woven in 1989, this work was commissioned for the of ??? performing arts center in Auckland, New Zealand. It was a huge challenged because this was such a strong and dramatic work and it was a very interactive one. Fortunately, there was enough money for Robert Ellis to come frequently over to talk with us. You see this sort of scale of the imagery on the loom on the right. We borrowed paintings from him so we could get a sense of his handwriting. He came and gave slide talks, and he was with us a lot but we just needed that closeness to his sort of imagery. His own design was only 20 inches high so it was a huge change of scale, this work. The weavers, in fact, flew to New Zealand to see the site before the project and then we all flew over to the unveiling of it. Here's the tail of the fish.

But look, I just want to go back a couple, look I just want to point out that this project really required us to get a new loom because the old scaffolding ones, which Archie Brennan had design were really sort of collapsing after the parliament house project. We searched the world looking for somebody capable of making a really you know terrific new loom, one with at least start with it was going to be wide enough, this one needed to be not 26 but about 30 feet wide. And what should we do that find John Senickia in Washington State in America. And we now have a studio full of the most fantastic looms. This was the first one and since that time all the old scaffolding looms had been thrown away and they've been replaced by John's absolutely wonderful..um..wonderfully engineered and beautifully made looms. You'll see here the sort of handing all of what we learned in the early days, the mixing of color and everything, and why I've put this on again, is if you look very closely at the bottom, you'll see the artist sitting there on the left and two of the weavers on the right so that truly gives you a sense of this sort of scale. It was quite an amazing project.

Okay, this is my 2nd last artist, this is Ken Dunn, a Sydney painter and I'm just finishing up with 24 views of the greatest Australian icon the Sydney Opera House. This is a tapestry that's 12 feet wide and 9 feet high, quite vibrant you'd have to say.

And last, oh not quite a last, one more, last but not least, a tribute to an American artist, Frank Stella, who we worked with in 1996, based on a shaped and three dimensional tapestry, this was a tour de force, commissioned by Ken Tyler, the master printer from New York. This was an amazing project for us and I've really put it in to kind of as a representation of the many international artists we've worked with. An extraordinary, challenging project because of the embellishment that was needed. Hannah and Joy were the main artists, main weavers. You'll see the sort of detail, and then other bits were woven and attached on. Because it was shaped we had to weave all this white underneath it, which then it got pulled out because the tapestry had to be mounted on an, on an amateur. Ken Tyler wanted a photograph of everybody who'd been involved so its' got all the different weavers that wove different bits of it, it's got Reg the dyer around the right,

its' got me looking rather weird on the left and our conservator looking even weirder. Then to the bottom left, she was responsible for mounting it on a metal amateur, so there we are.

Now, we just, if your still awake, we're just going to see one other short video film covering the "Great Federation" tapestry suite that was woven in 2001, to celebrate 100 years since the federation of the state and territories of Australia. I think you'll see in this video that this project draws together so much of the experiences of the years preceding it and makes the grand finale to the presentation tonight. I really think I should make this my final statement, and just say to you that it's been a fantastic thing to be invited here tonight. I hope you'll enjoy the final video and thank you very much for the opportunity to be here. (applause)

Second Video

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