

What follows is a pre-publication description of a book manuscript in progress, as of November 2008.

A CREATIVE CAREER: GLORIA F. ROSS & MODERN TAPESTRY

Ann Lane Hedlund

- View the splendor of modern handwoven tapestries designed by leading American and French artists
- Discover how and why one woman forged an intriguing career in the arts by orchestrating international tapestry projects
- Explore the ways that painters, sculptors, weavers, galleries, and Gloria Ross collaborated to create and promote several hundred exceptional tapestries

1. SUMMARY of SUBJECT

“I wanted to make tapestries . . .” - Gloria F. Ross

Gloria Frankenthaler Ross (1923-1998) combined traditional European weaving with modern American painting to orchestrate newly expressive tapestries. As an intermediary and catalyst-much like a musical conductor, a film producer, or a book editor-she forged her distinctive identity as a tapestry *éditeur*, producing tapestries by coordinating the efforts of traditional artisans and contemporary artists. During her career of thirty-four years based in New York, she engaged closely with several dozen weavers in France, Scotland, and the United States, including Native American weavers of the American Southwest. She also explored work with weavers in Portugal, China, Australia, and elsewhere. In the process, she enabled the translation of painted and collaged imagery by more than thirty well-known American and French painters, collagists, and sculptors into the textile medium. Among those artists were her sister Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Motherwell, Kenneth Noland, Louise Nevelson, Milton Avery, Stuart Davis, and Jean Dubuffet.

The book's title, *A Creative Career*, refers to the principle theme-how one woman forged her relatively unique career within the art world-establishing a visual language for contemporary tapestry; negotiating with weavers, artists, galleries, and collectors; and educating the public to her cause. The principle chapters are drawn from Ross's lively correspondence, weavers' notes and artists' sketches by cultural anthropologist Ann Hedlund. They explore the friendships and controversies, the wall hangings and exhibitions, the trends and twists of fate that grew from a simple desire to "make tapestries." To provide deeper context for what Ross produced, the book includes discussion of historic and worldwide tapestry weaving traditions.

Creativity comes in many forms. Artists draw inspiration from what they see and sense around them-absorbing, adopting, adapting and ultimately interpreting. Although

individual artistic genius is highly valued in modern society, many successful artworks result from creative collaborations. Recognizing this interpretive and shared nature of art expands our appreciation of what it means to be creative. Exploring Gloria F. Ross's world of modern tapestry, in particular, extends notions of how art is made within many social contexts. Along the way the book provides insights into the social nature of art-making and the varied roles that collaboration plays.

2. BOOK DESCRIPTION

This large format book illustrates bold abstract expressionist imagery as interpreted through the splendor of modern tapestry. It presents one hundred color images of tapestries, designed by some of America's best-known artists, woven from 1963 to 1997 by several dozen artisans on four continents. The central text by Hedlund traces the development of Gloria Ross's career, profiles the artists with whom she worked, and documents each tapestry series that she produced. Book sections are organized by the successive stages of Ross's work in the United States, Europe, and the Pacific. The tapestries, each illustrated with at least one color plate, are thematically grouped by Ross's professional chronology and the artists' stylistic approaches. A timeline, bibliography, list of tapestries and collections, and index are included.

3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD

This original book is based on the author's longitudinal ethnographic research that began in 1979 when she first met Gloria Ross. Source materials have included the extensive archives accumulated during Ross's career (and currently on loan from the Archives of American Art, Washington, DC); the author's personal knowledge and ethnographic fieldnotes made while traveling with Ross; interviews with Ross, artists, weavers, dealers and others; and numerous original and published sources.

The book makes original contributions to art history and the anthropology of art as it directly addresses the controversy between two critical stances: one that recognizes Gloria Ross's work as an innovative and contemporary extension of an age-old art form and another that slights the work as "slavishly making copies of paintings into tapestries." The author's role as a cultural anthropologist emerges importantly in providing contexts (cultural, temporal, technical) for addressing the intentions and accomplishments of Ross, the artists, and the weavers. Her exploration of their collaborative work and the contrary views that arose lead to insights about the social nature of some art-making and the varied roles that collaboration can play. Ultimately, fueled by the descriptions and stories provided, each reader may decide which works merit attention as lasting works of art.

4. AUDIENCE

For whom is the book written?

A general readership of non-specialists who are interested in one or more of the following topics: the twentieth century art world, especially modernism and abstract expressionism;

the textile arts, especially European and American tapestries; biographies of art personalities; professional careers in the arts; and modern American Indian art and culture. The subject holds special interest for weavers and other artists; architects and interior designers; curators, collectors and dealers of 20th century art; and members of the public who visit museums with modern art collections. To understand and enjoy the book, it is not necessary to have specialized knowledge concerning academic art historical or anthropological concepts or technical textile production. Combining strong visuals with biographic and ethnographic narratives, this is not an instructional how-to book. The book is not an exhibition catalogue, but might well serve as the basis for a later exhibition that could be developed.