

Conferences & Symposia "LOOKING AT TAPESTRIES: VIEWS BY WEAVERS & SCHOLARS"
Symposium Summary

Seventy weavers and scholars of tapestry gathered in Chicago on March 21-23, 2003, for the symposium, "Looking at Tapestries: Views by Weavers & Scholars." Inspired by the 2002 exhibition of Renaissance tapestries at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the symposium coincided with the Chicago showing of "American Tapestry Biennial IV," an international exhibit of recent tapestries.

The symposium featured a keynote lecture by Archie Brennan and slide-illustrated presentations by Candace Adelson, Tina Kane, Jane Kidd, Mary Lane, and Sharon Marcus. Subject matter ranged from ancient and historic traditions to contemporary artistic trends. Lotus Stack moderated a panel discussion and Ruth Manning coordinated a final open forum. Exhibition viewing, informal sessions, and mealtimes allowed for extended conversations.

Several topics recurred throughout the symposium. One of these concerned the weavers' participation in designing medieval and renaissance tapestries, and how their level of involvement has affected the perception of the works' artistic and weaverly qualities today. An intriguing technical consideration that was discussed concerned the distinction between images woven on their side and images woven "warp ways." The discussion centered on how the process and structural qualities of tapestry weaving can be emphasized, with comparisons made between precolumbian and medieval European weaving and contemporary artists. Finally, many participants expressed the need for attracting young people into tapestry weaving and regretted its scarcity in university art programs and its rarity in art galleries, museums, and publications. Many other topics interwove with these, making the entire symposium a rich and stimulating experience. (Thanks to participant Linda Rees for spotlighting these themes in her online review of the symposium and to Mary Lane for refining their expression).

The symposium was co-sponsored by the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies, a non-profit educational foundation that fosters the creative practice and cultural study of tapestry (www.tapestrycenter.org), and the American Tapestry Alliance, a non-profit membership organization that shares and preserves the knowledge and practice of tapestry art (www.americantapestryalliance.org). We look forward to future shared events!

--Ann Lane Hedlund