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Tapestry Translations in the Twentieth Century: The Entwined Roles of Artists, Weavers, and *Editeurs*

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Historically, European tapestry making involved collaboration among artists, designers, draftsmen, cartoon makers, spinners, dyers, weavers, patrons, dealers, and other professionals. This specialized system of labor continued in modified form into the twentieth century in certain European and American weaving workshops. In contrast and with a small number of exceptions, American tapestry in the last half of the twentieth century has centered on weaver-artists working individually in their studios from their own designs.

This paper focuses, in a very preliminary way, on one exceptional example of continuity, or revival, of the European specialized labor system—the creation of a group of twentieth century tapestries orchestrated by *editeur* Gloria F. Ross in concert primarily with American painters, European weavers, and other specialists. From 1965 to 1996, Ross's work carried on the European tradition involving team effort to produce tapestries of significant pedigree and proportions. This incipient case study is based on the Gloria F. Ross Archive of unpublished correspondence, sketches, photographs, and other materials.

As background for understanding the Gloria F. Ross Tapestries (or GFR Tapestries as they are called), I propose to outline the range of tapestry making relationships in contemporary practice. I hope that presenting this spectrum of roles might assist in understanding the varied approaches that comprise tapestry making in the twentieth century and put GFR Tapestries into broader perspective. Very tentatively, I will outline eight sets of relationships between artists and weavers and among imagery, process and resulting handwoven artwork. The examples accompanying each set are intended merely as illustrations for discussion and are by no means meant to be comprehensive.

An examination of the roles of the artists, weavers, and others in tapestry making leads to a discussion of authorship, authority, and authenticity. Specific issues include the varied contexts in which designs are created and approved for the tapestry medium, how an *editeur* negotiates with artists and weavers and among artist's designs and woven products, the naming of works and acknowledgment of participants, gallery and museum representation of the work, and collectors' rationales for acquiring and displaying the work. In such discussion, the shifting relationships between collaboration and appropriation may be explored.

A Spectrum of Roles

Artist = weaver – These are artists who weave and weavers who create art without assistance from a designer. Shaw terms such individuals "the tapestry artist/weaver" (1989). They are "those who found in tapestry art the most appropriate way of expressing themselves" (Kontsek 2001:22) and are far too numerous to name here. Some individuals came to tapestry from painting and other media, discovering that textiles had a depth they did not experience in other materials; others came to tapestry from other fiber activities;

and some found tapestry first. Individual and group shows by artists/weavers attest to the liveliness and diversity of this category. Monographs and catalogues of the American Tapestry Alliance, ITNET, BC Stars, and other organizations document such weaver-artists and many other resources including websites and CDs exist to represent their work.

Artist & weaver team – Long-term teams of two people or those in which a designer works with a group of weavers on a consistent and intensive basis form exceptional collaborative units. For example, Jean Pierre Larochette and Yael Lurie are husband and wife who work as a weaver/artist team. Larochette, raised in Argentina by a weaving family originally from Aubusson, France, studied with Jean Lurçat in France. Yael is an Israeli painter, who designs tapestries. Lurie designs and Larochette weaves, but together the synergy is much greater than this simple description (cf. Clausen 1986:5-6).

Artist-weaver & apprentices or studio assistants– Some artist-weavers work with students, apprentices, studio assistants and other weavers to accomplish their projects. In 1982 Ruth Scheuer established her New York-based tapestry studio—the Scheuer Tapestry Studio, later called the Center for Tapestry Arts—with a carefully staged training-work program that "enable[d] a group of artists to create a collective body of work" (Scheuer 1985:33; cf. Scheuer 1983; Clausen 1986:11-12). Like other in-demand artists, Marcel Marois works closely with weaving assistants in his studio (Hedlund 2002; cf. Marois 1994; Clausen 1986:19-20).

Artist designs tapestry, finds weaver – In certain cases, an artist drives the collaboration. Jean Lurçat (1892-1966) championed specialized design specifically for tapestry, and "categorically rejected the use of paintings as designs" (Kontsek 2001:21) He worked in his inimitable style with French ateliers Tabard, Goubely, Picaud and others from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s (Damain and Moutard-Uldry 1958). In practice, Mark Adams has followed in these footsteps (Clausen 1986:3-4). In the 1970s Alexander Calder sought weavers in Mexico for his tapestry designs. Others artists with less knowledge about tapestry itself have certainly done the same.

Studio or weaver seeks artist's designs – Workshops or weavers may also direct the collaborative effort. Three major American workshops operated from 1893 to 1993 (Zrebiec 1985, 1980) but few formal arrangements have followed in the United States (Scheuer 1985, Shaw 1989). In the United Kingdom, the West Dean Tapestry Studio grew out of a training center (Clausen 1986:43-44). In Australia, the Victorian Tapestry Workshop actively employs a stable of weavers, selects specific artists, and works with artists in residence (Newman 1983; Victorian Tapestry Workshop 1988). In Teotitlán del Valle, Oaxaca, and elsewhere in Mexico, weavers seek works by Miró, Picasso, Paul Klee and other modern painters to reproduce in tapestry (Stanton 1999:42). In France, le Mobilier National selects artists to create designs that are woven at the centuries-old workshops of Beauvais and Gobelins, and engages in active collaboration with some of the artists (Rex 1983; Hedlund fieldnotes, 2004). In Aubusson, a number of private ateliers have done the same for centuries (Fadat 1992). A more recent annual competition held in Aubusson seeks a single artist to design the town's annual tapestry (Hedlund fieldnotes, 2004).

***Editeur* seeks artist and weaver** – A knowledgeable individual who is neither designer nor weaver may put an artist and weaver together and serve as a go-between. In the film industry this role, both aesthetic and financial, might be equivalent to that of a movie producer. Other terms might include go-between, coordinator or project manager. Marie Cuttoli in the 1930s made her mark in this way, working with paintings first by Roualt, and then by Picasso, Dufy, Braque, Matisse, Leger, Miró, Marcusi, Derain and other artists of the French school. This, too, was Gloria F. Ross's self-selected role beginning in the 1960s. How many other individuals have served in this capacity?

Galleries commission work by artists and weavers – A gallery may take the lead in selecting the work of specific artists and contacting weavers. For instance, Gloria Ross worked with Pace Gallery in New York and certain joint ventures emerged. Only a few galleries such as Jane Kahan Gallery in New York focus on tapestry; fewer still have time to coordinate commissioned work. Does this practice continue today? Are there others out there?

Ephemeral ad hoc project-based enterprises – Some tapestry projects bring a group together and after the work's completion the team no longer continues. Such groups convene to weave in public spaces and gain community participation or to work intensively and accomplish large commissioned projects on a deadline. For example, weavers provided demonstrations that educated public visitors during the California exhibition of *Five Centuries of Tapestry* (Rowley 1983).[1]

Of course, such relations tend to evolve through time and there are likely many crossovers among these categories. One of the most notable examples is tapestry weaver and artist Archie Brennan who has worked in many of the capacities mentioned above, including significant collaborations with *editeur* Gloria F. Ross.

The Gloria F. Ross Tapestries

The late Gloria Frankenthaler Ross (1923-1998) worked with thirty American and European artists and orchestrated over one hundred tapestry designs from 1965 to 1996. Weavers in New York, the Navajo Nation, Scotland, France, and China, contributed to approximately 450 GFR Tapestries, woven as single panels or in editions of five to seven.

Ross asserted that the painted imagery was "translated" into the handwoven textile medium, not copied or reproduced. Further, as one writer describes Ross's approach: "The resultant tapestries cannot be called reproductions since they become new works in wool, notably different from the original. Yet it is the hallmark of Ross's work that her tapestries recreate the image and essence of the artist's statement. Her translation is not a literal one, but rather the broader interpretation which in the end allows for the truest adherence to the artist's intent. As Ross explained, she does not let her own personality intrude on her translations, but aims only to heighten the special character of the artist's original work" (Harris 1985:3).

Ross's tapestry making involved painters and other artists, weavers, dyers, other textile specialists, galleries and their clients, and her own role as an *editeur*. In this, she contrasted with the predominating modern-day approach of tapestry makers as

[1] These demonstrations forged the way for establishing the San Francisco Tapestry Workshop founded in 1977 by Jean Pierre Larochette and Yael Lurie and so developed into a longer-term endeavor.

independent studio artists and to the concept (however romanticized and skewed) of an artwork as a uniquely inspired and solo-driven creation.

Background

Born in 1923 in New York, Gloria F. Ross was the daughter of Alfred Frankenthaler, a justice in the New York State Supreme Court, and Martha Lowenstein Frankenthaler. She graduated from Mount Holyoke College in 1943. Marjorie Iseman, her elder sister, was an historian and writer. Helen Frankenthaler, the well-known artist, was her younger sister. In addition to raising three children and contributing to a variety of public service organizations and schools, Ross served on the Mount Holyoke College board of trustees from 1986 to 1991 and on the advisory board of the college's art museum from 1975 to 1998. From 1991 until her death, she was an active trustee of the Textile Museum. Her major passion, however, was the orchestration of tapestry making projects, working directly with designers, artists, weavers, galleries, clients and museums.

Finding the Way

Gloria Ross's first efforts to create artistic wall hangings began in a hooked rug technique with her own abstract compositions and those of her sister Helen Frankenthaler. Early works include a pair of large hangings designed by Frankenthaler and Robert Motherwell, which were hooked and finished for Ross by George Wells of Long Island, New York, and are now displayed in the Reading Terminal Head House of Philadelphia's convention center. After exploring work with several French tapestry ateliers and with individuals, in 1971 Ross closed her New York workshop to function exclusively as an *editeur*. She established a long-term relationship with the venerable French tapestry atelier of Pinton Frères, later Pinton Manufacture, in Felletin, just outside Aubusson. Ross collaborated productively with Archie Brennan at the Dovecot Studios of the Edinburgh Tapestry Company (cf. Scottish Arts Council 1980).

Establishing Relationships

Ross's relationships varied with each of the thirty artists and hundreds of artworks with which she engaged.[2] The artists are listed in Table 1; here I present just a few anecdotes (originally accompanied by color slides) drawn from the GFR Archives. Often visiting his studio, Ross worked directly with Kenneth Noland, who created many unique designs for her tapestries. She used an extant collage, *Reflection Pond,* by Harlem artist Romare Bearden (1911-1988), but then gave Bearden a title, *Mille Fleurs,* and asked for a design to follow.[3] The flowing acrylic paintings of Paul Jenkins showcased the consummate weaving technique in classic French tapestry. Ross worked with "Telephone," a Richard Lindner painting, for which a French "colorist" was sent from Paris to Hamburg, Germany, to view the original artwork and determine appropriate dye and yarn colors for a one-of-a-kind tapestry commission. Extant works of Conrad Marca-Relli (1913-2000) provided an opportunity to explore different fibers, including metallic gold-colored yarns. Likewise, the stylized figures of Ernest Trova in St. Louis opened Ross to using Mylar threads. Working through a gallery intermediary, Ross first inaugurated flat-woven

[2] These and other examples of creative collaboration will be amplified and illustrated in a forthcoming retrospective book on the GFR Tapestries.

[3] Both the original collage and one edition of the tapestry are now in the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

tapestries by French artist Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) and then, at the artist's prompting, created experiments in shaped pile weave. Dubuffet was the only French designer-artist with whom Ross worked as she focused principally on American painters. Ross met with Louise Nevelson (1899-1988) and worked through Pace Gallery to create a series of Nevelson "uniques," based on her collages and woven by Archie Brennan at Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh. Designs by Milton Avery (1983-1965) were translated into tapestry posthumously, as Ross worked with his widow Sally Avery. Likewise, three designs by Stuart Davis (1892-1964) were woven in collaboration with his son Earl Davis; these tapestries formed an exuberant backdrop for a jazz concert in celebration of Davis's centennial at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Jazz Foundation 1991).

The Navajo Noland Project

In 1979, Ross began working with Navajo weavers to create tapestries based principally on the chevron and target designs of painter Kenneth Noland. Noland had been one of the first artists outside of the family with whom Ross worked and he was also the last artist with whom she collaborated extensively. Ultimately, twenty-five unique tapestries were designed by Noland and woven by Native American weavers (Sikes 1985; Hedlund 1986; cf. Hedlund 1992:38-41; 1987:fig. 47).

As in Scotland and France, Ross derived much joy from working directly with the weavers in their own environment. On her travels to the Navajo Nation each summer, she encountered weavers who were accustomed to incorporating outside imagery into their work while remaining true to their traditional techniques and processes. In addition to Navajo weavers, Ross worked with Hopi artist Ramona Sakiestewa, who employed floor looms rather than native upright looms in her Santa Fe studio.

Models for the Noland-designed tapestries ranged from formal paintings to colored pencil sketches on graph paper. For certain designs, in addition to drawing on his well-known repertoire of geometric forms, Noland also explored classic Navajo motifs and layouts, including the bold chief-style blankets (cf. Hedlund 1992:29). For one series, he designed target patterns on shaped canvases, because he learned through Ross and a visit to the Navajo Nation that Navajo weaver Rose Owens made circular rugs within a metal frame on her Navajo loom (cf. Sikes 1985).

The Navajo weavers employed standard native looms with a vertical frame and basic handtools. They used tapestry weave, a weft-faced plain weave with discontinuous weft patterning, and employed traditional twined selvages on all four edges of each fabric. Some used the natural sheep colors of the Two Grey Hills community style; others the vegetal dyed colors of Crystal and Wide Ruins regional styles or the deep aniline-dyed reds of the Ganado area.[4]

[4] Three Noland-Navajo tapestries and accompanying documentation were featured in an exhibition , *Kenneth Noland: The Navajo Tapestries*, curated by Darden Bradshaw and Ann Lane Hedlund at the University of Arizona Art Museum, Tucson, January 14 – February 25, 2001.

Galleries and Museums

GFR Tapestries were featured in the 1965 Museum of Modern Art exhibition, *Tapestries and Rugs by Contemporary Painters and Sculptors.* Ross's first "solo" show was held in 1968 at Feigen Gallery in Chicago. Maintaining a strong working relation with Richard Solomon's Manhattan gallery, Pace Editions, GFR Tapestries were shown actively through the 1970s and '80s in New York and elsewhere. A GFR Tapestry designed by Richard Anuszkiewisz was selected for the *8th International Tapestry Biennial* in Lausanne, Switzerland and Lisbon, Portugal (Centre International 1977).

GFR Tapestries have been collected by individuals, corporations and museums including those listed in Table 3. Ross was especially proud of a tapestry-woven ark curtain designed by New York illustrator Mark Podwol and produced in France for Temple Emanu-El in Manhattan.

Gloria Ross died in 1998, having ceased her tapestry production the year before. The non-profit GFR Center for Tapestry Studies in Tucson currently pursues research and public programs in her name, but does not collect nor curate her tapestries. The challenge now is to trace and document the many GFR Tapestries in both public and private collections and to explore the varied negotiations held and results achieved in the design, creation, and marketing of these tapestries.

Authorship, Authority, and Authenticity

Beyond the weaver-as-artist, each one of the dynamic relationships outlined above has implications for authorship, authority, and authenticity. **Authorship**—who is to be named the originator? In what order are names mentioned? How is credit given to each party with what titles? What voice is speaking? **Authority**—who gets to decide whether a color is correct, whether a different texture should be achieved, how big the tapestry should be? **Authenticity**—If a Picasso design is woven by a weaver in Mexico, can the tapestry be called "a Picasso"? By whom and in what contexts can it be so-called? If the artist modified the design, is it an verifiable work by him or her? What if the editeur made a change? How about if the weaver did? Each of the relationships I outlined faces these challenges, and more.

What I have discovered, thus far, in researching Gloria Ross's tapestry making is that just within a single editeur's *oeuvre*, each tapestry project addresses a unique set of relationships, a distinct decision-making process, and a special working-out of relatively unique properties. As each collaboration has resulted in artwork that makes its way into public collections and museums, these relations need to be documented and interpreted.

How do we examine these shifting relationships? The answer, I believe, lies in an ethnographic and archival approach—listening to all available parties, interviewing artists, weavers and go-betweens, studying written records, and consulting with galleries, clients, collectors and a host of others. I am just beginning to undertake such research concerning the GFR Tapestries and, thus, this represents a very preliminary report that can only raise questions and open discussion.

Concluding Remarks

Rebecca Stevens has commented, "The history of tapestry has been marked by cycles of change and revival revolving around two basic concepts: tapestry as craftsmanship and tapestry as fine art" (2001:34). For instance, one may see in medieval times a weaverliness—an honoring of the craft in which designers and weavers were closely connected or one and the same—as seen in the famous fifteenth century *Hunting of the Unicorn* tapestries and the Swiss *Wild Man* tapestries. We then witness a shift to Renaissance painterliness such as in Raphael's *Act of the Apostles* series, in which a singular artist was responsible for the designs executed by other artisans. Through the centuries significant changes in process and styles occurred as labor specialization and production hierarchies shifted and as aesthetic preferences changed.

American tapestry in the twentieth century, too, has cycled through various phases. In 1983 *FiberArts* focused on major tapestry *ateliers* in Australia, France, Scotland, Sweden and the United States, noting that tapestry "is cresting—painters, sculptors, printmakers, and architects have design tapestries and weavers in great numbers are pursuing the design and execution of works for individual and corporate clients" [and government entities] (FiberArts 1983:36). Of the selected studios, the privately operated American establishments of Ruth Scheuer and the San Francisco Tapestry Workshop are no longer active. Dozens of private ateliers in Aubusson have also closed during the past several decades. Significantly the surviving workshops all have government subsidies in addition to other funding sources. Are we perhaps seeing yet another phase of Stevens' "cycles of change and revival" in the tapestry world?

As a cultural anthropologist, I am fascinated with the roles, labor specialization, and implications as artists and others collaborate on creative artistic endeavors.[5] Inherent in the study of these is an acknowledgment that process is not just about techniques and tools, but it is also critically about relationships among people. The varied relationships in tapestry making that are briefly outlined here are worthy of further exploration. There is no time like the present for carefully documenting specific case histories of individual tapestry weavers and studios and exploring their complex and evolving relationships with designers, *editeurs*, galleries and other collaborators.

[5] For contemporary weaving, what are the implications when a tapestry is created by a weaver working alone or with a team of collaborators? Christine Laffer recently suggested that, for instance, scale is affected—big tapestries are usually the products of workshop settings, smaller works come more often from solo artists (personal communication, 2004). What other features are affected as well?

Table 1. Artists with Work Represented in GFR Tapestries

Richard Anuszkiewicz	Al Held	Larry Poons
Milton Avery	Hans Hoffman	Clifford Ross
Romare Bearden	Paul Jenkins	Lucas Samaras
Gene Davis	Alexander Liberman	Richard Smith
Stuart Davis	Richard Lindner	Frank Stella
Jean Dubuffet	Morris Louis	Ernest Trova
Paul Feeley	Conrad Marca-Relli	George Wells
Helen Frankenthaler	Robert Motherwell	Jack Youngerman
Robert Goodnough	Louise Nevelson	
Adolph Gottlieb	Kenneth Noland	

Table 2. Weavers of GFR Tapestries

Archie Brennan, Edinburgh, Scotland	Edward Fields, Inc., New York, NY	Manufactura de Tapecarias de Portalegre Ltda., Lisbon, Portugal
Mary Lee Begay, Ganado, AZ	Micheline Henri, France	Ramona Sakiestewa Handwoven Textiles, Santa Fe, NM
Irene Clark, Crystal, NM	Kunstadt-Kennedy Workshop, NY	Shanghai Carpet Factory, China
Sadie Curtis, Ganado, AZ	Rose Owens, Kinlichee, AZ	Martha Terry, Wide Ruins, AZ
Anna Di Giovanni, Glen Cove, L.I., NY.	Raymond Picaud, Aubusson, France	
Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh, Scotland	Pinton Manufacture, Felletin, France	

Table 3. Museum Collections with GFR Tapestries

The Art Institute of Chicago, IL	Mt. Holyoke Museum, South Hadley, MA
Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY	The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA
Cleveland Museum of Art, OH	Neuberger Museum of Art, NY
Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO	Racine Art Museum, WI
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY	The Textile Museum, Washington, DC
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