Color & Form

International Innovations in Textiles

April 3 – May 25, 1990

Gallery Entrance
Marriner S. Eccles
Federal Reserve Board Building
C Street between 20th and 21st Streets, N.W.
Washington D.C.

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Front Cover:
No. 15 Thoko Zile: *Untitled,* 1980

Back Cover:
No. 10 Nancy Hemenway: *Point of Peril*, 1986

Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System
in cooperation with the
Textile Arts Foundation

Its title should leave no doubt as to the meaning of this exhibition. Innovation in the use of materials and in design has radically altered the old expectation that textiles exist solely for functional purposes. Contemporary textile artists from around the world are pushing the limits of the fiber medium so as to embrace formal properties such as color and composition that are usually associated with painting.

Educating the public about textiles has been the mission of the Textile Arts Foundation since its inception in 1981. Its primary aim has been to elevate fiber arts from the realm of domesticity to that of the fine arts. The works exhibited here—of eight artists from six countries—are from the foundation's collection; they all demonstrate an understanding of the artistic possibilities of fiber. The Fine Arts Program of the Federal Reserve Board is delighted to join with the Textile Arts Foundation in encouraging and broadening an aesthetic appreciation of the medium by facilitating the exhibition of new and imaginative textiles of merit.

Mary Anne Goley, Director
Fine Arts Program

Introduction

Textiles are among the most enduring and universal forms of artistic expression. The fabrication of textiles began in the earliest days of mankind. In the Nile valley, one of the early centers of civilization, finely woven and dyed linen cloth has been produced since 1500 B.C. The Chinese, it is believed, began working in silk about the same time.

Tools, yarns, and remnants of cloth have been found in almost every locality where civilization has existed. Textiles printed in colorful designs have been unearthed in the tombs of the early pharaohs. Loomed wools and dyed embroidery were among the materials found in ancient Greek tombs.

Contemporary textiles offer a treasure trove of artistic examples. Laying aside all fabrics used for clothing, personal adornment, upholstery, and carpeting, the field offers, in tapestries alone, more variety than most other art forms. Essentially, tapestries are simply woven or knitted fabrics. Sometimes they are enhanced by embroidery or by the addition of appliqué, in materials such as linen, cotton, and silk, on various background cloths ***(Nos. 1* and *8).*** They can be of more exotic elements such as felt, bark, metallic threads, or synthetic plastics. Today, textiles may serve as canvas for the painter, but they may also exist in their own glory. In textile art, the humblest and the most sophisticated techniques and styles can be found.

This exhibit from the holdings of the Textile Arts Foundation explores the beauty and the variety of fabric art being created today in several areas of the world. Among the pieces displayed are an appliqué from Benin, loom paintings from Iceland, and wall sculptures from Maine. Some items are woven on looms or appliquéd, and others are free forms.

No two of the textile artists represented here fall exactly in the same category. Some use a loom as their canvas; others do not. Some work in a style that indicates a native influence, as in the examples from Benin and Swaziland, whereas others take their forms from nature. More generally, these artists, although using motifs or specific fibers from their own countries, work with a sense of universality and artistic freedom to express what they see and feel.

The textiles used in these works are diverse. They include lamb's wool, cotton, silk, mohair, alpaca, hemp, pony tail hair, horse hair, twine, and karakul (the tightly curled coat of a sheep native to Nambia, Africa). These natural fibers impart an enduring quality to the textiles. In some instances, the fibers have not been dyed, so they retain their natural colors. In some tapestries, an artist uses dyes made of bark, mushrooms, or other plants. In this collection, steam-pressured vat dyes predominate.

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become one. McFarlane takes full advantage of the properties of textiles — the variety in the surface, the hard and soft edge, and the depth provided to the artist. She crafts her work with the most acute understanding of the colors of the land and sky found in Scotland.

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Swaziland is often called the Switzerland of Africa because of its mountains, waterfalls, and pine forests. In this environment, Thoko Zile, a woman from a small village near the capital city of Mbabane, became part of an art cooperative. Under the guidance of Pauline Woodall, the cooperative's director and guiding light, who provided her with space and materials for working, Thoko braided by hand and embroidered strong original tapestries based on hair patterns worn by African women. Her piece in wool and cotton twine in the exhibition was handwoven flat on a table ***(No. 15)***.

Thoko has had her work exhibited at the greatly esteemed Textile Biennial in Lausanne, an honor which few native African artists can claim. She is now retired, and other examples of her work are no longer available.

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Lissy Funk of Switzerland has combined painting and needlecraft in forming monumental yet exquisitely executed pieces ***(Nos. 6* and *7)***. After outlining her basic ideas in a small ink or watercolor sketch, she photographs her drawing and projects the image onto a large sheet of paper pinned to a wall. This magnification of the image becomes the actual size of the finished piece. Funk perforates paper according to the design and then with chalk traces the dots onto fabric to be embroidered. For one

No. 11 Kirsty McFarlane: *April, Deeside*, 1985

piece, she may use as many as four layers of fabric. These layers generally are of natural materials such as linen, cotton, wool, and silk.

Funk's finished tapestries are technically exacting and contain a strong sense of painterly understanding that is essential to any fine art. The intensity of her effort to create each tapestry while retaining the rhythm and strength of color and line sets her work apart.

In December 1988, a retrospective of Funk's work opened the newly refurbished textile galleries at the Art Institute of Chicago, after which the exhibition toured Europe. Funk has won the coveted Vevey Prize for tapestry and has participated numerous times in the Lausanne Biennial.

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Nancy Hemenway, from the United States, comes from a family of artists. Since her earliest childhood, she has drawn and painted. Working first in watercolors and oils, she turned to textiles when she and her husband moved to the high Andes in Bolivia. She has combined the fibers of that remote land, hand-loomed alpaca and lamb's wool, with other natural fibers from around the world to create her innovative "embroidered wall sculptures." Using a wood armature to support her fab-

No. 7 Lissy Funk: *La Mattinata (The Morning Song)*, 1975

For 200 years, Abomey, Benin, has been the home of tapestry-makers who have designed and constructed in appliqué the banners, wall hangings, umbrellas, and festive, decorated pieces for the Royal Court. Even though the court society disappeared early in this century, the Abomey artists continue their chosen work. Now, however, they work in extremely modest surroundings and primarily for the tourist trade. Cutting out bright cotton forms taken from nature, they continue to appliqué their art with the stylized figures of the peacock, the lion, and other jungle beasts and birds ***(No. 1* and *Fig. 1)***.

All the embroiderers are men, and they range from their late teens to middle age; apprentices are taught by the community elders. They sit cross-legged and intent under tin roofs in the dusty enclosure where the old palace now crumbles. They fashion their patterns from memories that no longer recall the association of those patterns with the ancient glory of the kingdom. Occasionally a new form surfaces, but generally that will soon be forgotten; and the traditional flora and fauna will reappear in the primitive and colorful shapes handed down for generations.

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Arising from a very different climate and society, the work of Asgerdur Buadottir of Reykjavík offers a distinct contrast with the work of the Benin artists. In Iceland, one cannot escape from the influence of nature. The terrain is rugged, volcanic, and fierce, except where covered deceptively with a blanket of snow. This moonscape calls for a starkness, well expressed in Buadottir's abstract textiles. Even the sheep are different; they produce an almost waterproof wool. Native wool and pony tail hair are for Buadottir the oils and brushes of the painter or the stone of the sculptor. Using these as her principal materials, she draws decisive verticals and horizontals accented with color, giving her textiles a third dimension that distills the extremes and the strength of Iceland ***(Nos. 2* and *3)***. Through her choice of colors and shapes in the two works displayed here, Buadoṭṭir expresses the gray earth, the naked hills, and the volcanic flames of Iceland. Through these tapestries, one can almost feel the ice and snow lying in apposition to the red lava of her northern home.

Figure 1 Fon People, Benin: *Appliqué*, 1980; photograph by Jeffrey Ploskonka

Buadottir studied drawing while attending the Icelandic College of Arts and Crafts. She left there for the Royal Academy of Art in Copenhagen, where she continued in the graphic arts. On her way home through France, she was impressed with some of the tapestries being created from the looms of Jean Lurcat (French, 1892–1966) and other contemporary artists.

Returning to Iceland in 1952, she took a short course in weaving and originated, through experimentation, new forms on the loom. Four years later, she sent a tapestry to the Eighth International Crafts Exhibition in Munich. Winning a gold medal gave her the confidence to plunge ahead with her work. Today she is considered Iceland's foremost textile artist and, by many, its foremost artist in any medium. She has exhibited in the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and Japan.

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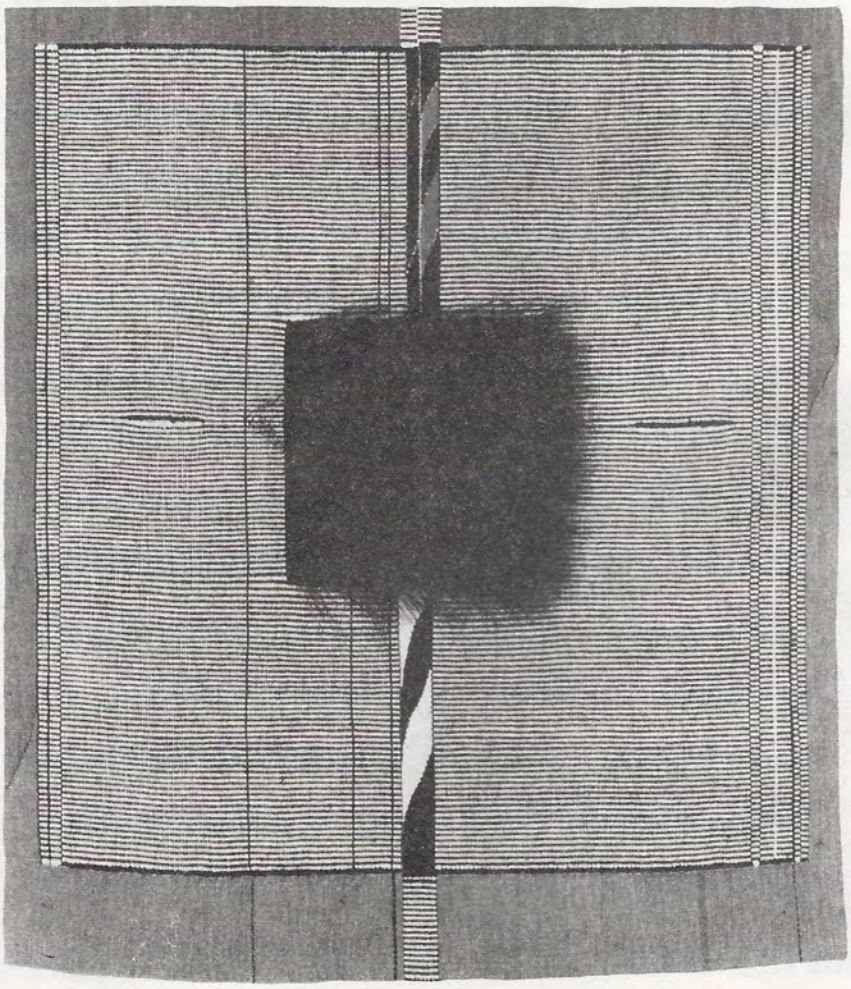
Kirsty McFarlane is one of Scotland's most distinguished artists. Her sensitive tapestries of the seasons in Scotland record with surety and strength the rapidly changing shadows and light of spring and autumn that play over the hills and fields of her homeland. Two pieces from a series of eight tapestries on the seasons appear in this exhibition: ***April, Deeside (No. 11)*** and ***October, Crossgate (No. 12)***. The titles represent the time of year and the locality that influenced each hanging.

In McFarlane's work, the loom shuttle and the embroidery needle



No. 3 Asgerdur Buadottir: *Orion*, 1981

rics, Hemenway has created a sculptural and bold art form, as demonstrated in two pieces from her series "New England Light." The folded and molded shapes of ***Chinese Puzzle (No. 9)*** and ***Point of Peril (No. 10),*** embroidered in vivid color, represent her most recent work in free form.

Aspen (No. 8), representing an earlier stage of Hemenway's art, is from a series called "Light Hangings." Using her knowledge of classical embroidery, Hemenway created on Swiss organdy the elusive and elegant atmosphere of the tree-covered hills of Colorado. The work is embroidered on both sides in wool, silk, and alpaca. It has no wrong side. The passing light and shade falling across the tapestry convey the depth and the quiet of the forest.

Hemenway's work has been exhibited in one-person exhibitions in more than twenty museums from every continent, from the Art Institute of Chicago and the Seattle Art Museum to the Museum of Fine Arts in Botswana.

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British by birth, Jacqueline Field now lives in the United States. She graduated from Edinburgh College of Art and Moray House College, Scotland. In her career as artist and teacher, she has worked with textiles and design. Her interest is in large-scale tapestry weaving as well as in miniatures. Her early pieces were six feet or larger, with pyramidal and diagonal grids; the more recent pieces are smaller and more complex.

Network (No. 4) and ***Space Net One (No. 5)*** fall between those early and late works. The last of a series woven over six years and finished in 1985, they are medium in size. In these tapestries, Field, using a limited range of colors, has explored the effects of transparency. The size and the form of the grids are more varied than in the earlier works and are juxtapositioned with planes, enriching the illusion of layers of nets. Because her designs include so many verticals, Field has employed a double weft interlock technique to maintain a strong fabric and an unbroken surface. She has also incorporated yarns with different degrees of luster and shine, including synthetic fibers as seen in ***Network.***

Field's loom tapestries suggest the range of her ideas in both color and design. They are abstract designs in the contemporary mode, and they display the same freedom that the painter's brush can depict. Field follows no particular stylistic school; her method is her own and expresses artistically what is of primary importance to her. At present, she is exploring new imagery using a computer as a sketching tool.

Since coming to the United States, Field has taught at the University of Southern Maine, Westbrook College, and Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, all in Maine. She is represented in public and private collections, and her work has been shown extensively in New England.

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In ***Emergent Figure II*** and ***V (Nos. 13* and *14),*** Winn Smith has taken a mundane material—unbleached muslin—and has made an original statement with it. By subtly padding the undersurface, she has created strong and poignant *bas reliefs*. Because of her training as an artist, particularly in drawing, she has brought an acute and delicate skill to her repoussé tapestries. Just by accentuating a hand or a knee and by using her minimalist sensitivity she obtains a powerful result.

Both of these pieces derive from the artist's earlist drawings. She says of her work, "The single line is the mark of those of us who are haunted by space and the sense of essential shape that exists therein."

Smith was a student at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in the early 1930s, where she focused on the French modernists.

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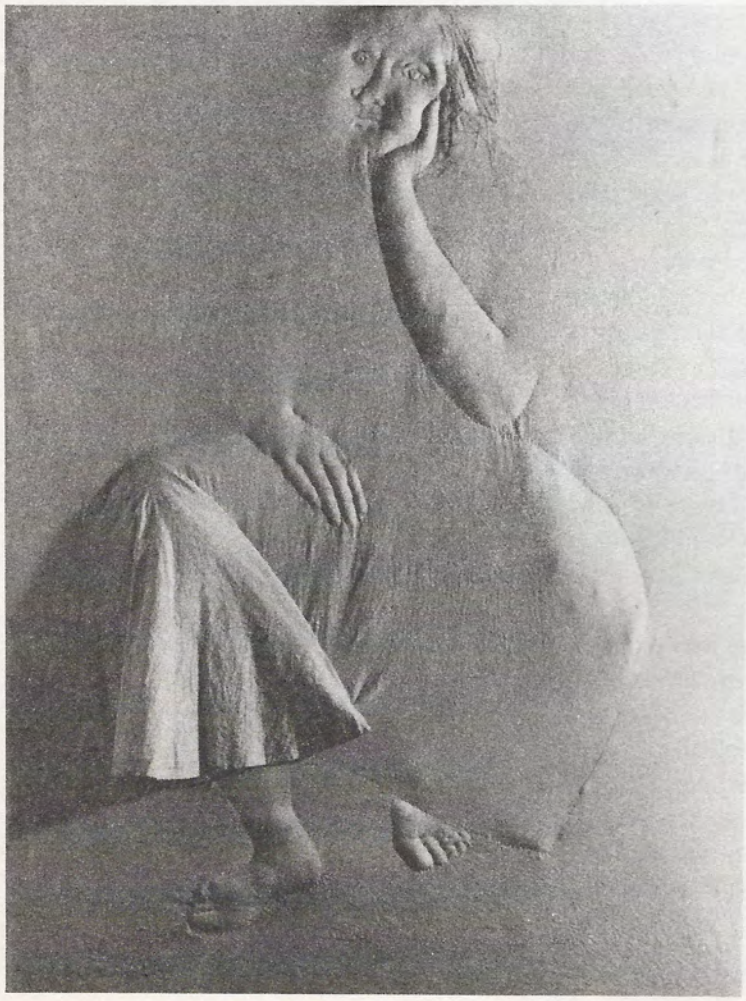
This exhibit aspires not only to show textiles as innovative fine art but to encourage the viewer in appreciating textiles as an art unto itself. Textiles are the oldest and most durable of all art forms except possibly sculpture, and they deserve a more significant place in the annals of world art and a wider understanding and appreciation on the part of connoisseurs.

Robert D. Barton, President
Textile Arts Foundation
West Southport, Maine



No. 13 Winn Smith: *Emergent Figure II*, 1986

1. Fon People
Abomey, BENIN
Royal Pheasants, 1980
Cotton appliqué, 42½ x 54 in.
Textile Arts Foundation

2. Asgerdur Buadottir
Reykjavík, ICELAND
Icebound, 1989
Handwoven wool and horsehair, 40½ x 35 in.
Textile Arts Foundation

3. Asgerdur Buadottir
Reykjavík, ICELAND
Orion, 1981
Handwoven wool and horsehair, 54 x 46 in.
Textile Arts Foundation

4. Jacqueline Field
Portland, Maine, U.S.A.
Network, 1989
Woven wool, nylon, rayon, linen, cotton, 40 x 40 in.
Textile Arts Foundation

5. Jacqueline Field
Portland, Maine, U.S.A.
Space Net One, 1987
Woven wool, nylon, rayon, linen, 28 x 38½ in.
Textile Arts Foundation

6. Lissy Funk
Zurich, SWITZERLAND
Composition IV, 1977
Embroidered linen, cotton, wool, silk, 36 x 72 in.
Textile Arts Foundation

7. Lissy Funk
Zurich, SWITZERLAND
La Mattinata (The Morning Song), 1975
Embroidered linen, cotton, wool, silk, 71 x 60 in.
Textile Arts Foundation

8. Nancy Hemenway
Southport, Maine, U.S.A.
Aspen, 1983
Embroidered cotton, organdy, alpaca, mohair, wool, 138 x 71 in.
Lent by the artist

9. Nancy Hemenway
Southport, Maine, U.S.A.
Chinese Puzzle, 1986
Embroidered handwoven alpaca, lambswool, wool, 132 x 78 in.
Textile Arts Foundation

10. Nancy Hemenway
Southport, Maine, U.S.A.
Point of Peril, 1986
Embroidered handwoven lambswool, wool, 96 x 86 in.
Textile Arts Foundation

11. Kirsty McFarlane
Lanarkshire, SCOTLAND
April, Deeside, 1985
Woven and handwoven Scottish wool, 56 x 29 in.
Textile Arts Foundation

12. Kirsty McFarlane
Lanarkshire, SCOTLAND
October, Crossgate, 1982
Woven and handwoven Scottish wool, 56 x 29 in.
Textile Arts Foundation

13. Winn Smith
Cross River, N.Y., U.S.A.
Emergent Figure II, 1986
Quilted cotton muslin and batting, 51½ x 38 in.
Textile Arts Foundation

14. Winn Smith
Cross River, N.Y., U.S.A.
Emergent Figure V, 1987
Quilted cotton muslin and batting, 51½ x 38 in.
Textile Arts Foundation

15. Thoko Zile
Mbabane, SWAZILAND
Untitled, 1980
Woven, plaited handwoven African wool, cotton, twine, 44 x 73 in.
Textile Arts Foundation

Figure 1
Fon People
Abomey, BENIN
Appliqué, 1980
Cotton appliqué, 54 x 79 in.
National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert D. Barton, 80–34–1

Contents of the Exhibition

Designer: Helen M. Gebhardt

Editor: S. Ellen Dykes

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