



AMERICAN TAPESTRY BIENNIAL 10: The Humble Value of Concentration

BY REBECCA MEZOFF



"I weave because I want to tell you something. Working as an artist means a great deal of responsibility for me and ultimately being an artist is doing something good."

— Anna Olsson

TAPESTRY WEAVING, IN PRACTICE, STARTS AT THE BEGINNING and moves on until you reach the end. You can't go back and fix something you did at the beginning without unweaving. As such, tapestry creates an "unforgiving record of our inattention," says Dr. Jessica Hemmings, juror of *American Tapestry Biennial 10 (ATB10)* and head of the faculty of visual culture, National College of Art and Design, Dublin. It is "one of the qualities that sets tapestry weaving apart from the production of so much visual culture today." In her essay introducing the show, *The Humble Value of Concentration*, Hemmings talks about the world's hunger for concentration and the way that tapestry weaving trains that.

Luckily, as one of the co-chairs for *ATB10*, I had a front row seat. The photos of tapestries flooding my inbox last October was a month-long delivery of richness. Professor Hemmings had the inestimable task of weaving together selections from 230 submissions to create a comprehensive show. The resulting collective presentation of 37



TOP LEFT: Lialia Kuchma, *BluRose*; 2010; wool weft, cotton warp; tapestry; 64 x 71 in. BOTTOM LEFT: Christine Rivers, *North Coast Reflections*; 2013; wool and rayon weft, cotton warp; tapestry; 14 3/8 x 46 in. ABOVE TOP: Elke Otte Hulse, *Tempos Heterogeneos 2*; 2012; cotton, fabric strips, linen; 26 x 31 in. ABOVE & BACKGROUND: Anna Olsson, "Where have you been living since we last met? — Here and there"; 2012; linen; 31.5 x 39.4 in.

tapestries representing 10 countries challenges us to explore a variety of ideas from homelessness and vulnerability to nature and whimsy.

The Teitelbaum Awards are given for tapestries the juror feels display exceptional aesthetic and technical quality. This show's first place winner was Anna Olsson of Sweden for her work *Where have you been living since we last met? — Here and there*. Professor Hemmings expressed that both of the award winners' work was "pertinent to current debates about craft and society." Specifically she said about Olsson's work, "I found the sense of mystery in Anna Olsson's piece powerful—emptiness can be thought provoking. The space she presents us with and the narrative the title suggests are not comfortable, but why do we assume that the textile must depict easy content?" Olsson

explains that she has recently been working with themes of crisis and disaster. "I am strongly influenced by what is happening in my surroundings as well as in other countries. Through my pictures I want to express what I consider wrong. Many times I visualize my images after meeting people living in vulnerable situations."

The second place award went to Elke Otte Hulse of Brazil for *Tempos Heterogeneos 2*. Professor Hemmings says about this piece, "The skill evident in each face has an impressive accuracy, without aspiring to photographic perfection. But there is also the sense of the computer at work in the planning stages of this tapestry, cutting and pasting pieces of images together—the inevitable influence of technology on our daily lives." Hulse reiterates this herself when asked about

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ABOVE LEFT: Annelise Kofoed-Hansen, **The Flying Umiaq 2**; 2012; wool and flax; tapestry; 39.4 x 45.3 in. ABOVE RIGHT: Rebecca Mezoff, **Emergence VII**; 2013; hand-dyed wool weft, cotton warp; tapestry; 44 x 44 in.

the piece, "The tapestry brings together three images of the face of my son. They are fragments of my history. I started using faces as a learning exercise in tapestry and then I realized that people liked to be photographed with their cell phones. I began to use the computer to abstract forms, modify colors, but always kept the proportions the same."

When I took the co-chair position, I had no idea how many stories, like those above, I would hear, or the amount of work it takes to put on a show like this, nor did I anticipate the swings of emotion accompanying a wide variety of difficulties from computer issues to post delays. It has been a wild ride, but the show is hanging at the first venue and it is gorgeous.

Olsson and Hulse are but two of the artists contributing to the body of ideas presented in *ATB10*. The concentration, skill, and time needed to produce contemporary art tapestries is evident in the pieces displayed at Visions Art Museum in San Diego through July 20, 2014. The show will then move to Kent State University Museum in Kent, Ohio, and

end at Kaneko in Omaha, Nebraska in April of 2015. More information is available at www.americantapestryalliance.org.

Rebecca Mezoff grew up in the American Southwest. She weaves tapestries, teaches workshops and classes online, and continues to dump the sand out of her shoes at regular intervals. Follow her fiber adventures at www.rebeccamezoff.com.



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