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Tapestries? Well, Not in the Classic Sense

Rita Reif

March 8, 1971

They conjure up images of unicorns, knights jousting, women playing lutes, lofty, stony Gothic castles. But they can also be elephant heads, transparent tubes, waterfalls, telephone switchboards, constructions that viewers can walk into and be enclosed.

Perhaps for want of a more suitable definition, a startling variety of flat and three-dimensional works in materials from silken threads to metal fibers are being called tapestry.

"Weaving is almost as obsolete a term as tapestry for what is happening today," says Jack Lenor Larsen, the designer and former weaver, whose textiles showroom is a showcase for the works of many of today's artisans. Mr. Larsen, who is co-authoring a book with Mildred Constantine of the Museum of Modern Art on the new hangings, prefers to call them "fiber forms" or "art fabrics" while he waits for someone to conjure a more apt word.

Actually, thread is the only element shared by the classic tapestry that warmed stony castle walls in the Middle Ages and the ultramodern creations of today. In fact, thread is the only bond the modern forms share with one another; and it is used in many divergent ways: woven, knotted, crocheted, embroidered, knitted, braided or sewn.

A Pre-Columbian Touch

The modern artisan finds inspiration in many places, too: in Eastern European peasant tapestries, in modern painting and sculpture, in the pre-Columbian weavings of Peru.

Magdalena Abakanowicz, a 41-year-old artist based in Warsaw, combines in her work both elements of modern forms and the printed loom weaving used in Eastern European peasant tapestries.

The works, sometimes as tall as 20 feet, and combining as many as 20 massive elements into environments, are usually without figural pattern. Some have sleeves to peer into or apertures, and some have projections that look like fingers, fins or elephant trunks.

Miss Abakanowicz is considered one of the leading tapestry designers in the Communist bloc, where weaving and tapestry are regarded as people's art and are Government-supported.

Because of this subsidization, many artists have ventured into avant-garde experiments. Jagoda Buic of Yugoslavia exemplified this with her sisal, jute, hemp and wool constructions that won acclaim at last year's Venice Biennale.

Her forms are in contrast to those of Miss Abakanowicz. They are a shade smaller, more controlled in shape and more decorative because of the geometric patterns she weaves or achieves with knotting.

The peasant weaving tradition is also evident in the naturalistic looking works of Ritzi and Peter Jaobi, a Rumanian couple now living in Frankfurt, West Germany. The difference is that the couple do flat-woven tapestries that are then shaped into three-dimensional forms and, have transparent tubes filled with rope sprouting from the front to make them resemble such things as a telephone switchboard.



Modern painting and sculpture have also influenced the work of European craftsmen, such as in the abstract style of Herbert Scholten, a Dutch weaver. His flat-woven, interlaced layers of fabric have ribbons of woven wool looped in and out of the top surface.

His most spectacular design is a tapestry where the ribbon running vertically through the tapestry is so long that it comes straight out of the base, travels down the wall and out across the floor.

Spider-Like Patterns

The ribbonesque weaving of both Scholten and Moik Schiele, a 32-year-old Swiss artisan, will be among those represented at the International Biennial of Tapestry at Lausanne, Switzerland, in June. Miss Schiele loops ribbons through long, narrow panels or she weaves spider-like patterns in long strips hung in clusters.

The impetus for the current boom in weaving comes from the Americas rather than Europe, according to Paul J. Smith, director of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts. Pre-Columbian (Peruvian) weaving, revived and developed further in the late nineteen-fifties by such pioneering craftsmen as Lenore Tawney has spurred the changes, he said.

The birth of this innovative art-craft form was proclaimed in the craft museum's 1963 show with further developments seen at the Museum of Modern Art five years later.

Since then artists have increasingly combined weaving with other nonwoven techniques or they have given up the loom entirely to concentrate on knotting, twisting, looping, braiding or needlework.

Sheila Hicks chooses to combine woven and nonwoven techniques in her reliefs that look like colorful, shimmering assemblages of tassels or pony's tails. The Nebraska-born Miss Hicks maintains a studio in Paris and is, at 37, one of the most disciplined weavers at work today.

Although she has done thread "sculptures," Miss Hicks keeps returning to reliefs and even to the flat weaves. An exhibition of her recent work opened in Rabat, Morocco, where she spent last year assisting native weavers to improve their designs and technology.

Claire Zeisler does waterfalls of fiber twisted neatly into circles at the top and hanging loose to the floor. And Frangoise Grossen does macramé (knotted laces and fringes) worked into 10-foot-wide hangings or fashioned into 20-foot-high columns. Many weavers are devising cocoon-like forms as this field's answer to the art world's environments. Olga de Amaral, a Columbian-born weaver married to an American, weaves strips of gauze-like cloth that are then knotted loosely and hung from the ceiling. They looked soft and supple when shown at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts recently.

Not all of these cocoon-like hangings are self-supporting. Barbara Shawcroft, who used to do life-sized stuffed weavings of people, has one environment that keeps its shape with the aid of metal hoops used through the center of the construction and at the "front door." The rest of this environment, to be shown in the California Design show opening Sunday at the Pasadena Art Museum, is of soft netting.

The textured reliefs of Evelyn Anselevicius, a 48-year-old American now working in Mexico, are often woven of all wool—and just as often are constructed of beading, feathers and metal fibers. The effects she achieves in rendering huge faces look three-dimensional or, when in an open weave, can be viewed from two sides.

Mrs. Anselevicius's work is among the many designs by all the foregoing artisans except Miss Shawcroft, being shown at the Ruth Kaufmann Gallery, one of two new galleries opened here in the last year to show fiber forms. Mrs. Kaufmann



moved last week to new quarters at 1167 Second Avenue (61st Street) where the collection can be viewed by appointment.

At Arras, 979 Third Avenue (at 59th Street) Adele Siegel has gathered a broad selection of hangings costing from \$200 to \$20,000 that range from traditional flat woven reproductions of modern painters' works to three-dimensional designs. They include the double-layer constructions of Pierre Daquin, a 34-year-old Frenchman whose tapestries have slit-like openings in the top surface.

Peter Collingwood is also represented at Arras with transparent, two-dimensional hangings that borrow much from Lenore Tawny's early work. But his optical, geometric patterns are stronger than Miss Tawney's work and manage to convey a three-dimensional impression. The third artist of note here is Josep Grau-Gariga, a 42-year-old Spaniard, currently being feted with a oneman show at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. His weaving falls somewhere between the pictorial tapestries of Jean Lurcat and the reliefs of his contemporaries.

At Tapestry Associates, a third source that opened last fall in the apartment of Lee Neiman, 300 Central Park West, 10 artists' works can be seen by appointment. Their works range from \$28 to \$70 a square foot.

But whatever it is, the work of these artisans is changing the look of today's home, office, bank and museum.

"When industry realizes what these craftsmen are doing, machine-made hangings like these will be turned out even faster," Mr. Larsen said. "And then the craftsmen will be on to something else."



Evelyn Anselievich sits under her bead, feather and thread construction, which shows the face of Montezuma.

By RITA REIF
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"Weaving is almost as obsolete a term as tapestry for what is happening today," says Jack Lenz Larson, the designer and former weaver. "The tapestry showroom is a showcase for the works of many of today's artisans. Mr. Larson, who is co-authoring a book with Mildred Constantine of the Museum of Modern Art on the new hangings, prefers to call them "flat forms" or "art fabrics" but he waits for someone to conjure a more apt word.

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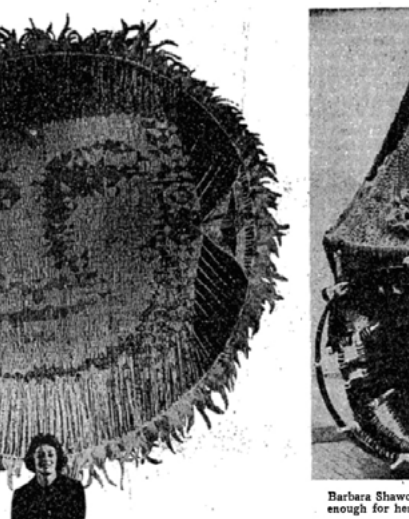
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Miss Abakanowicz is considered one of the leading tapestry designers in the Communist bloc, where weaving and tapestry are regarded as people's art and are Government-supported.

Because of this designation, many artists have ventured into avant-garde and tie in orange or yellow or dark green, to signify rank, are passed out. If they are able to attend meetings at all, the Scouts, wearing their treasured hats and ties, show up in wheelchairs or on stretchers with intravenous poles sticking above them.

A good many of these youngsters never get a chance to earn the sash with the nurse's head on it. There are seldom more than five at any one time. Actually, the 6-year-olds should not be accepted; all other Scouts the starting age is 7. Furthermore, three consecutive weekly meetings is the average attendance of any one girl.

Special Permission
For Troop 3-352 at Memorial Hospital for Cancer and Allied Diseases and the girls are patients when they are invited. (The leader of the troop, Mrs. Edward Virgilio, got permission from national Girl Scout headquarters to take in cancer patients who had their hearts set on joining.)



Barbara Shawcroft weaves an environment of netting big enough for her to sit in. A metal hoop stiffens entry.

metric patterns she weaves or achieves with knotting.
The peasant weaving tradition is also evident in the naturalistic looking works of Rita and Peter Jacobi, a Rumanian couple now living in Frankfurt, West Germany. The difference is that the couple do flat-woven tapestries that are then shaped into three-dimensional forms and have transparent tubes filled with rope sprouting from the front to make them resemble such things as a telephone switchboard.

Modern painting and sculpture have also influenced the work of European craftsmen, such as in the abstract style of Herbert Scholten, a Dutch weaver. His flat-woven, intricately layered fabric has ribbons of woven wool loops in and out of the top surface.
His most spectacular design is a tapestry where the ribbon running vertically through the tapestry is so long that it comes straight out of the base, travels down the wall and out across the floor.

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The ribbons weaving of both Scholten and Molk Schiele, a 32-year-old Swiss artisan, will be among those represented at the International Biennial of Tapestry at Lausanne, Switzerland, in June. Miss Schiele loops ribbons through long, narrow panels or she weaves spider-like patterns in long string loop clusters.

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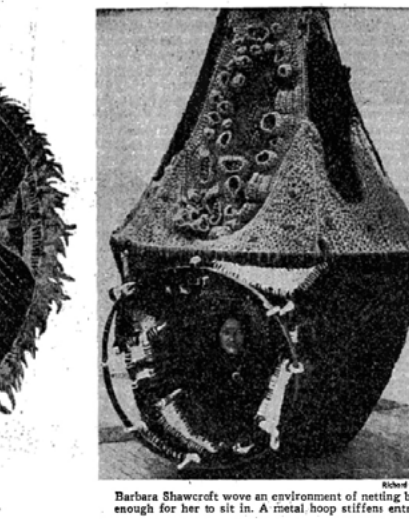
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Shelia Nicks chooses to combine woven and nonwoven techniques in her beliefs that look like colorful, shimmering, shimmering textures or she weaves spider-like patterns in long string loop clusters.

Peter Collingwood can be seen through his open-work tapestry of black thread and rods.

Parents Slip Away
On meeting nights — Wednesdays around 7 — the teens are usually easier to hold back.
Mrs. Virgilio shows slides of Scouts, and then all the children in the James Ewing pediatric pavilion (there are never more than 32) and parents are invited to come to the playground and watch. (Sometimes not a single parent is able to come.)
As the pictorial visit to a foreign land draws to a close, parents can slip out almost unnoticed because the nurses and Bluebellies (volunteers) are there to take an investigator also breaks the routine. Cookies and fruit



Olga de Amaral's weaving is soft, done in strips and hung from the ceiling in a cocoon shape that she walks through.

Although she has done thread "sculptures," Miss Nicks leans returning to reliefs and even to the flat weaves. An exhibition of her recent work opened in Rabat, Morocco, where she spent last year assisting native weavers to improve their designs and technology. Claire Zeiler does waterfalls of fiber twisted neatly into circles at the top and hanging loose to the floor. And Françoise Grosjean does intricate (knotted faces and fringes) worked into 10-foot-wide hangings or fashioned into 20-foot-high columns. Many weavers are devising cocoon-like forms at this time's answer to the art world's environments. Olga de Amaral, a Cuban-born weaver married to an American, weaves strips of gauze-like cloth that are then knitted loosely and hung from the ceiling. They looked soft and supple when shown at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts recently.

Not all of these cocoon-like hangings are self-supporting. Barbara Shawcroft, who used to do life-sized stuffed weavings, has one environment that keeps its shape with the aid of metal hoops, used through the center of the construction and at the "front door." The rest of this environment, to be shown in the California Design show opening Sunday at the Pasadena Art Museum, is of soft setting.
The texture selected Evelyn Anselievich, a 48-year-old American now working in Mexico, are often woven of all wool—and just as often are constructed of beading, feathers and metal beads. The effect is changing the look of today's home, office, bank and museum.

When industry realizes what these craftsmen are doing, machine-made hangings like these will be turned out even faster," Mr. Larson said. And then the craftsmen will be on to something else."

Molk Schiele stands with her white-on-white ribbons weaving that soars 10 feet high.

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Mother, Novelist—and Once a Detective

By JOAN COOK
Mrs. Anthony Uhnak doesn't look like a former law enforcement officer. In 14 years she was on the Transit Authority's police force as its chief's assistant, she was.

And though she left the force in 1960, Mrs. Uhnak's work is among the many designs by all the foregoing artists. Miss Shawcroft, being shown at the Ruth Kaufmann Gallery,

and novelist still has very positive ideas about the police and a woman's role in law enforcement.

"Education combined with caring, really caring about people is the hope for the force," Mrs. Uhnak said recently in a commitment, it's a former career and discussed her present one as a successful author of detective novels.

During her years as a detective, Mrs. Uhnak captured and arrested an armed suspect for which she was awarded the department's highest commendation, the Outstanding Police Duty Medal. Encounters with perverts, purse snatchers and muggers, she said, were routine.

"I came away with more hardness than I would have wanted and more cynicism," Mrs. Uhnak acknowledged. "It's not the kind of job you'd say is a great one for a woman, but I had such great interest in police work and in people and wanted to make a commitment, it's a great way to serve."

Among the ways of combating public hostility toward the police, Mrs. Uhnak is highly in demand for her recent effort to recruit college graduates.

Personal Touch Counts
"We have to get away from stereotypes," she said. "Put a girl in uniform, and immediately he becomes a symbol of power and authority. A lot of men don't realize how effective they could be as a personal basis in reassuring people."

As a case in point, she went to walk a single block, she said. "He stops to chat with this one and then the next really cares that by one people. Everyone calls him by his first name and they know you break stereotypes down into people."

When a Girl Scout Pin Is Something Special

By VIRGINIA LEE WARREN
If you should happen to see a girl of 6 or 7, or anywhere up to 15 wearing a green round badge with a nurse's head on it you can be sure that the girl belongs to a most unusual Girl Scout troop.
The members, ranging from Brownies through Juniors and Cadettes, meet together, which is to say, at meetings at all the Scouts, wearing their treasured hats and ties, show up in wheelchairs or on stretchers with intravenous poles sticking above them.
A good many of these youngsters never get a chance to earn the sash with the nurse's head on it. There are seldom more than five at any one time. Actually, the 6-year-olds should not be accepted; all other Scouts the starting age is 7. Furthermore, three consecutive weekly meetings is the average attendance of any one girl.
Special Permission
For Troop 3-352 at Memorial Hospital for Cancer and Allied Diseases and the girls are patients when they are invited. (The leader of the troop, Mrs. Edward Virgilio, got permission from national Girl Scout headquarters to take in cancer patients who had their hearts set on joining.)

Uniforms do not figure in the inventory ceremony at Memorial. But the two official pins, one for the World Association of Girl Scouts and one for the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., are affixed to hospital gowns. And the regulation badge—a beaded for Brownies, green beret for Juniors and Cadettes—

and tie in orange or yellow or dark green, to signify rank, are passed out. If they are able to attend meetings at all, the Scouts, wearing their treasured hats and ties, show up in wheelchairs or on stretchers with intravenous poles sticking above them.
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juice are served after that ceremony.
Another activity of Troop 3-352 is cutting cartoons out of magazines and pasting them in 10-page booklets for patients in other parts of the hospital.
"Sometimes," Lucille Virgilio said, "it takes us a year to get a booklet finished."
For Scouts, there are a few days for a Scout to be here; three weeks is the average and four days when a girl is too sick to do anything.
While parents of members of other troops are expected to buy uniforms and meet other expenses, the parents of Scouts of Memorial need not pay for anything; all they are able to do is give permission for membership.
Berries, breads, ties and shoes are bought with money that comes to Mrs. Virgilio somehow.
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wig until her hair came back — and therefore she would need a bigger beret. She got one.
Mrs. Virgilio provides the slides for the traveleagues. She and her husband, an executive with Temperature Design Corporation, go to a different country in at least one a year to take the photographs. The photos are made in a film time animal for the younger patients.
"So," Mrs. Virgilio wouldn't be a Girl Scout troop at Memorial Hospital if it weren't for Mrs. Virgilio. Her second son, Fredric — she and Mr. Virgilio had four boys—died three years ago in Memorial of leukemia when he was 10 years old. After his death, Mrs. Virgilio asked to work at the hospital as a Bluebell, or volunteer, and noticed then that there was a Boy Scout troop.
"Something was in our family," she said. "I'd been a Scout leader for years and then, as our only daughter grew up, I went into wild Scout-like ravelling when she was a Brownie."

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Mrs. Dorothy Uhnak doesn't think her years as a detective were a handicap in her family life.