

The Museum of Modern Art

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The first major exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art devoted to the contemporary weaver whose work places him not in the fabric industry but in the world of art will be on view from February 25 through May 4, 1969. The experiments of the 28 men and women from eight countries represented in WALL HANGINGS have contributed to developments in weaving during the last ten years which "have caused us to revise our concepts of this craft and view the work within the context of twentieth-century art," according to the directors of the exhibition, Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larsen.

"The weavers whose work is being shown in this exhibition are in no way concerned with the pictorial aspects of weaving, but are involved with extending the formal possibilities of the craft. They frequently use conventional weaves, but more and more often they work free of the loom, in complex and unusual techniques. The methods of construction as well as the materials used derive from their primary concern to extend the aesthetic qualities inherent in texture."*

Created from wool, silk, hemp, sisal, linen, jute, cotton, metal, and thread, as well as velon, nylon, dacron, synthetic raffia, and even newsprint, and such incidentals as cattails and seedpods, the 39 pieces include two- and three-dimensional works, lying flat against the wall, hanging from the ceiling, and standing free of the wall.

Evolving Tapestry by Sheila Hicks, comprised of over three thousand modular units made up of thread (or "pony tails," as the artist calls them), is displayed on a revolving turntable visible from the sidewalk on 53rd Street. In this unusual construction, thread, a linear element, is not intermeshed to produce a plane, but rather massed to create a volume, a three-dimensional work to be seen from all sides.

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*WALL HANGINGS by Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larsen. 48 pages; 41 illustrations. Paperbound, \$1.95 (Members, \$1.46). Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Experimentation with construction and the physical qualities of the materials used in weaving can be traced back to the 1920s, particularly the German Bauhaus. The inventiveness and discipline of the Bauhaus artists are revealed in works by Gunta Stölzl, designed in 1924, and Anni Albers, designed in 1927.

The virtuoso techniques of Pre-Columbian Peru appear with a modern interpretation in the shaped linen weaving Little Egypt by Lenore Tawney, the wrapped and braided pile Prayer Rug hooked with an electric pistol by Sheila Hicks, and in the plain weave with four-sided selvage finish of polyethylene tubing, twine, rayon, and cotton by Ed Rossbach entitled Detroit.

Exploration of the thickness and depth of weave is illustrated by Wilhelmina Fruytier's massing of cotton cord in Experience No. 9; the sisal rope with macramé warp-wrapping in Françoise Grossen's Swan; the tactile and luminous quality of spun and unspun fleece in Homage to Lenore Tawney by Susan Weitzman, a young American weaver who studied to be a painter; and the variations in the textures of black wool, linen, and cotton threads relieved only by a sliver of white in Black Sun by Zofia Butrymowicz.

The weighty, permanent quality of pieces in coarse sisal by the Polish weaver Magdalena Abakanowicz is characteristic of European work, coming from a background of a virile folk-art and tapestry tradition. Craftsmen in Europe, and especially in Eastern Europe, are encouraged by an established market and government stipends to spend much time on each work. The American works tend to be more exploratory and less monumental, as illustrated by the "sketchy" and transparent quality of the free-hanging, gossamer piece of nylon monofilament by Kay Sekimachi.

Transparency as a design element is almost always achieved within a neutral color range -- black, white, beige, or neutral -- as seen in the wool and hemp tapestry The Mirror by the Dutch artist Herman Scholten and works by Ed Rossbach and Thelma Becherer. When color is used, as in Sherri Smith's Volcano No. 10, it is gradated to reinforce the three-dimensional effect, in this case a simple waffle weave exploded in scale.

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"The modern weaver is unlike the modern tapestry designer who uses a painter's palette of strong colors," Miss Constantine and Mr. Larsen observe. "The weaver generally uses single or muted colors; his interest lies in the potential of construction."

Artists represented, in addition to those mentioned, are: the Polish weavers Barbara Falkowska, Jolanta Owidzka, Wojciech Sadley; the Americans Evelyn Anselevicius, Dolores Dembus Bittleman, and Mary Walker Phillips; the Colombian Olga de Amaral; the Yugoslavian Jagoda Buic; the Swiss weavers Elsi Giauque, Annemarie Klingler, and Moik Schiele; and the Canadian Mariette Rousseau-Vermette.

WALL HANGINGS was directed by Mildred Constantine, Consultant to the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design and Special Assistant to the Director of the Museum, and the well-known weaver and designer Jack Lenor Larsen. The installation by Arthur Drexler, Director of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design, provides sharply contrasting color backgrounds to complement the individual wall hangings.

Miss Constantine and Mr. Larsen conclude:

Many of the wall hangings in this exhibition utilize new and relatively unexplored materials, but the modern weavers -- unlike the modern painters and sculptors -- shun technological involvement. They experiment with form, they respond to twentieth-century sculptural and graphic influences, but they are largely indifferent to certain recent developments which might supplement hand tools with machine techniques. This has not yet limited their inventiveness; indeed the works they offer here are products of surprising ingenuity. They reflect the new spirit of the weaver's art.

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Photographs and additional material available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Joan Wiggins, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. 245-3200.