Wall hangings, by Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larsen

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Wall Hangings
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by Mildred Constantine
and Jack Lenor Larsen

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
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Works are lent by the artists, unless otherwise indicated. A partial listing is given for exhibitions and representation in public collections. Dimensions are in inches, height preceding width; depth is given when applicable. Exhibited at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, February 25 to May 4, 1969.

Cover: Sheila Hicks. Prayer Rug. 1965. Wool; hooked with electric pistol, with braided and wrapped pile, 12′ 0″ × 3′ 4″. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Dr. Mittelsten Scheid

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In the early phases of almost every culture, basketry, fish traps, and even shelters often shared a common technology with fabric. When true spinning and the loom were developed, weaving proved so efficient that it supplanted such other techniques as knotting, knitting, and plaiting. Weaving has dominated fabric production ever since, up to and including the industrial era.

Early in this century weaving was reassessed in terms of textures derived from its construction and the materials used. Weavers at the Austrian Wienerwerkstätte and particularly the German Bauhaus were fortunately not limited by traditional training. This freedom produced work full of individuality, novel in material and texture. The physical qualities of materials were consciously explored, and light-reflecting and sound-absorbing materials were developed in accordance with industrial needs. Improvisations led the way to more formal, pattern-making compositions, and to early wall hangings. Although conceived with the idea of machine esthetic, the works by Gunta Stölzl, designed in 1924, and Anni Albers, designed in 1927, numbers 1 and 33, reveal the inventiveness and discipline of these Bauhaus artists.

Until the 1950s, exploration and experimentation by handweavers kept pace with developments in architecture and furniture design. Custom work was then adapted to power weaving with such success that the role of the weaver changed. He could either continue as a designer for industry, or pursue the exploration of textiles for non-utilitarian purposes, notably hangings.

During the last ten years, developments in weaving have caused us to revise our concepts of this craft and to
view the work within the context of twentieth-century art. The weavers from eight countries represented in this catalogue are not part of the fabric industry, but of the world of art. They have extended the formal possibilities of fabric, frequently using complex and unusual techniques.

Only about one half of the works included have been based on conventional weaves, often with tapestry interlocking. These and other ancient techniques, more and more often free of the loom, have been reworked into modern idioms. Of particular interest to weavers have been the virtuoso techniques of pre-Columbian Peru, as can be seen in the shaped linen weaving *Little Egypt* by Lenore Tawney, number 30, the wrapped and braided pile in the *Prayer Rug* by Sheila Hicks, cover, and also in the plain weave *Detroit* by Ed Rossbach, number 22. This last work exploits synthetic materials through scale, and the four-sided selvage finish also used by the Peruvians.

*Celibacy*, the wool hanging by Walter G. Nottingham, and *Cocoons I* and *II*, in sisal and hemp, by Ewa Jaroszynska, illustrate complex uses of the simple technique of crochet. In employing this single-element technique, only one tool is utilized, thereby allowing the individual artist maximum freedom of expression. The techniques of crochet, knitting, and braiding, normally provide pliability; but the materials used here in the *Cocoons* are stiff rather than pliant. This reinforces the method of construction, defying gravity and providing body and substance to the design, numbers 15 and 16. Where pliable wool is used, as in the example by Nottingham, number 24, three elements interact to respond to gravity as an intrinsic part of the composition.

Thickness and depth of weave have been explored by two weavers: Wilhelmina Fruytier constructs cotton cord to create interest by massing, and Françoise Grossen controls a difficult material, sisal rope with macramé warp-wrapping technique, numbers 20 and 17. Material alone has been exploited by Susan Weitzman to make a poetic composition in which spun and unspun fleece creates form and tactile quality. She has exploited a principle of spinning which has lain dormant for thousands of years. Her two layers of fragile subtiley colored wool give luminous depth to an essentially simple composition, number 57. Variations of texture have been the interest of Zofia Butrymowicz in *Black Sun*, in which black wool, linen, and cotton threads are combined and relieved only by a sliver of white to produce a compelling image, number 52.

Sculptural effects are achieved in three-dimensional works of two kinds: those which lie flat against the wall and those which hang from the ceiling and are meant to be seen from all sides. In both categories, the work of Magdalena Abakanowicz is particularly impressive. In each of her two pieces form depends on the material used, *Abakan 27* and *Yellow Abakan* each having only one material, sisal. The articulation of forms, monumental scale, and the coarse materials all serve to produce works of commanding presence, numbers 11 and 12. By contrast, Kay Sekimachi’s free-hanging three-dimensional *Interlace*, made from multiple layers of a black monofila-
hyper-industrial material, is woven into a work at once complex and mysterious. Sekimachi is allowing her material to participate in determining the form, number 3. Transparency has been employed in other ways as well. The tapestry slits in Moki Schiele’s Rectangles, in which dull and shiny uneven white rectangular areas (cotton, wool, and nylon) are tenuously connected, aid in producing a kinetic effect, number 28. On the other hand, Ed Rossbach’s Constructed Color, braided filigree of synthetic raffia, number 21, and Thelma Becherer’s open composition in velon, number 4, reveal almost illusionistic qualities of depth, the latter being a poetic fusion of natural and synthetic materials. Those works which utilize transparency as a design element are almost always composed within a neutral color range—black, white, beige, or natural. Where color is used, as for example in Sherri Smith’s Volcano no. 10 the latent dimension of a simple waffle weave has been exploded in scale, released from necessity to “hold together” as a cloth. The gradation of color reinforces the three-dimensional effect, number 35.

The modern weaver is unlike the modern tapestry designer who uses a painter’s palette of strong colors. The weaver generally uses single or muted colors; his interest lies in the potential of construction, for example see numbers 2, 25, and 37. Of particular interest is Sheila Hicks’s Evolving Tapestry comprising over three thousand similar elements, which she describes as “pony tails.” These modular units are made up of thread—a linear element—but rather than being intermeshed to produce a plane they are massed to create a volume, number 9.

The European work, having grown out of a virile folk art and tapestry tradition, tends to be weighty, finished, and permanent. Bas-relief, used to produce shadows, is a recent innovation. Much time is invested in each piece by craftsmen supported both by an established market and by government stipends. This official support is particularly strong in the East European countries where weaving is considered an art of the people, and has no complications inherent in its understanding or acceptance as does the work of the modern painter or sculptor. The American pieces are more exploratory, tending to be stated more as “sketches” and less often as monumental hangings. 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.

M. C. and J. L. L.
Gunta Stölzl (Sharon-Stolzl, Stadler-Stolzl), German, born 1897

1 Tapestry. 1924. Wool, silk, cotton, and metal thread, 71 x 44. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Phyllis B. Lambert Fund
Evelyn Anselevicius  American, born 1925
Studied at Black Mountain College, North Carolina;
Institute of Design, Chicago. Designer for Cohama Knoll,
1950s. Has worked in Mexico, India, Bolivia, 1960s.
Presently working in Mexico.

2 Third Eye. 1960. Linen and wool; reed weave with
knotted pile, 58 1/4 x 42. Lent by Mabel Curtis, St. Louis
Kay Sekimachi  American, born 1926
Studied at California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland; Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine.
Teaches at Adult Schools, Berkeley, San Francisco.

3 Interlace. August 1967. Nylon monofilament; quadruple and tubular weave, 6' 4"×1' 2½"×1' 1½"
Thelma Becherer  American, born 1916

4  Untitled. 1961. Velon, cattails, and seed pods; plain weave, 54½ × 51¾

4a  Detail of 4
Wojciech Sadley  Polish, born 1932

5  Sleepless Night. 1966. Wool and linen; tapestry with knotted pile, 9' 10½" × 6' 6½".

Mariette Rousseau-Vermette  Canadian, born 1926

6  Sparks of Glowing Embers (Éclats de Braise). 1966. Wool; tapestry, brushed after weaving, 9’ 4½” × 6’ 8½”.
Dolores Dembus Bittleman  American, born 1931
Studied at Columbia University, New York; University
of Calcutta; with Anni Albers. Fulbright grant for study
in Paris, 1953–54. Exhibited at Silvermine College of
Art, New Canaan, Conn., 1967; Schenectady Museum,
New York, 1967; Bennington College, 1968. Represented
in collection of Yale University School of Art and
Architecture, New Haven, Conn.

7  Entrance II. 1964. Wool; plain weave, 6’4” × 6’. The
Museum of Modern Art, New York, Philip Johnson Fund
Sheila Hicks  American, born 1934

8  White Letter. 1962. Wool; plain weave, four-side selvage finish, 58 x 47 1/2. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Knoll Associates
9  *The Evolving Tapestry*. 1968. Linen and silk; wrapped and stitched, two elements, left, *He*, 32 x 30 x 22; right, *She*, 34½ x 19½ x 14.
10 The Principal Wife. 1968. Linen, silk, wool, and synthetics; wrapped, spliced, and grafted, 10 elements, each 15' 9"
Magdalena Abakanowicz  Polish, born 1930

11 Abakan 27, 1967. Sisal; tapestry with supplementary techniques, 57½ x 71½ x 5½

12 Yellow Abakan. 1967–68. Sisal; tapestry, 10' 4" x 10' x 5'
Annemarie Klingler  Swiss, born 1919

13  Growing out of Black. 1967. Wool on cotton warp; slit tapestry, 32 x 32
Olga de Amaral Colombian, born 1932

Ewa Jaroszynska  Polish, born 1936
Studied at Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski (Catholic University, Lublin); Panstwowa Wyższa Szkoła Sztuk Plastycznych w Łodzi (Łódz School of Fine Arts).

15  Cocoon I. 1967. Sisal and hemp; crochet, 27½ x 19¾ x 11½ irreg.
16  Cocoon II. 1967. Sisal and hemp; crochet, 29½ × 24½ × 4¾ irreg.
Françoise Grossen  Swiss, born 1943

17  Swan. 1967. Sisal rope, macramé knot, 6'10" x 5'10"

Jagoda Buic  Yugoslavian, born 1930

Barbara Falkowska  Polish, born 1931
Studied at Akademia Sztuk Pięknych (Fine Arts Academy), Warsaw. Exhibited in China, USA, Europe, including Biennale Internationale de la Tapisserie, Lausanne, 1965.

19  *Ammonites*. 1967. Wool and sisal; tapestry, 4' 2 1/4" x 8' 9 1/2"

19a  Detail of *Ammonites*
Wilhelmina Fruytier  Dutch, born 1915

20  Experience no. 9. September–October 1967. Cotton cord; tapestry with raised areas, 7' 10½" x 6' 8" x 10½"
Ed Rossbach  American, born 1914

22  *Detroit*. 1968. Polyethylene tubing, polyethylene twine, rayon, and cotton; interweaving, 8’4” × 7’8”

23  *Construction with Newspaper and Plastic*. 1968. Polyethylene film, polyethylene twine, and newsprint; interweaving, 50 × 40
Walter G. Nottingham  American, born 1930
Studied at St. Cloud State College, Minn.; Cranbrook
Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan; Haystack
School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine. Teaches at Wisconsin
State University, River Falls. Exhibited at Craftsmen
USA, Milwaukee, 1966. Awarded State of Wisconsin
Study Grant, 1965; Wisconsin Designer-Craftsmen
awards, 1965, 1967; Fall River National Award, Mass.,
1967.

24  *Celibacy*. 1966-67. Wool; crochet, $7\frac{3}{4}" \times 2' 10" \times
9\frac{3}{4}"

24a  Detail of *Celibacy*
Elsi Giauque  Swiss, born 1900

25  Move and Look. 1967. Wool and nylon; three layers of exposed warp with brocade liner; 7’ ¾” × 6’ 8” × 10½”
Mary Walker Phillips  
American, born 1923
Studied at Fresno State College; Mills College, Oakland; Rudolph Schaefer School of Design, San Francisco, Calif.; Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.
Taught at Fresno State College; Cranbrook Academy of Art; Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine; Penland School of Crafts, North Carolina.

Herman Scholten  Dutch, born 1932

27  The Mirror. 1966. Wool and hemp; tapestry, reconstructed after weaving, 7'5"x8'4¼". Lent by the Dutch State Collection, The Hague
Moik Schiele  Swiss, born 1958
Studied at Kunstgewerbeschule, Zurich, with Elsi Giauque. Exhibited at Kunstmuseum, St. Gallen, 1959;
Landesgewerbeamt Baden-Württemberg, Stuttgart, 1963;
Landesmuseum, Oldenburg, 1964. Represented in
collections of Landesmuseum, Oldenburg; Kunst-
gewerbemuseum, Zurich.

28  Rectangles. 1967. Cotton, wool, and nylon; slit
tapestry, 8' x 6' 6¾"
Lenore Tawney  American, born 1925
Studied at University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana;
Institute of Design, Chicago; with Marta Taipale, Finland. Exhibited at Kunstgewerbemuseum, Zurich, 1964.
Represented in collections of Kunstgewerbemuseum, Zurich; Museum of Contemporary Crafts, New York;
Cooper Union Museum, New York.

29  Little River. 1968. Linen; slit tapestry, 91¼ x 21.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

30  Little Egypt. 1965. Linen and pina; shaped weaving with knotted warp and fringe, 45¼ x 8¼. Lent by Mrs. Marian Willard Johnson, New York
Jolanta Owiędzka  Polish, born 1927

31  *Black and White*. 1965. Flax, wool, and cotton; tapestry, 7’10¼” x 7’10½”
Zofia Butrymowicz  Polish, born 1904

32  Black Sun. 1967. Wool, linen, and cotton; tapestry, 72¼ x 55¼
Anni Albers  Born Germany
Studied at Bauhaus in Weimar, later worked in Dessau.
Taught at Black Mountain College, North Carolina.
Lecturer and author of *Anni Albers: On Weaving.*


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nd units
Sherri Smith  American, born 1943  
Studied at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California;  
Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.  
At present a textile designer with Boris Kroll Fabrics,  
New York.

35  *Volcano no. 10.* 1967. Wool; dimensional weave,  
6' 6" x 3' 4\frac{3}{4}" x 4\frac{3}{4}"

35a  Detail of *Volcano no. 10*
Susan Weitzman  American, born 1933

36  *Tapestry for Frances Lynn*. 1967. Hand-spun wool; exposed warp with differential of twist, $32\frac{3}{4} \times 22\frac{3}{4}$. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

37  *Homage to Lenore Tawney*. 1968. Hand-spun wool; two layers of exposed warp with differential of twist, $7' \times 7'$.
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