TECHNIQUES OF WOVEN TAPESTRY

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Filmed by Garry Benson
Dragon Design
South Australia
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INTRODUCTION

Woven Tapestry

Woven tapestry is about the imagery, the subject matter, the concept – all resulting from the process. It is not merely about demonstrating the techniques. Such techniques are simply the language, the medium, being used. But the reality is that the weaver, the maker, needs these skills to acquire image-making ability. In time they may become virtually second nature – even a subconscious act. But it is a slow and laborious learning process.

Traditionally, skills were acquired by sitting alongside an experienced tapestry weaver. In time the more formal apprenticeship system became the norm – and it was a long apprenticeship. However the popularity of the individual designer/weaver today makes this approach less available. There are some workshops that still make this possible, but not many. And there is a number of “how to” books, but I have found that they can confuse as much as clarify. Unless a long-term teaching establishment is available, it seems to us that visual and spoken explanations, as in film making, are the way to go.

We have produced some sixteen hours of tapestry weaving instruction on DVD, examining classical skills, with the possibility to select – replay again and again, freeze frame, slow or fast forward. This is not the whole tapestry story. It is important to consistently review and reconsider each step. This product is based on my training as an apprentice over seven years; of our teaching graduate courses and running shorter “workshops” with many students, all around the world, and above all with the experiences as practising tapestry makers that Susan Martin Maffei and I have garnered over a combined eighty five years in the medium.

These eight DVDs focus on the technical process of our approach. It is important to recognise that this is our chosen way – not the only way. It is, however a way that we have settled on with much thought. We have been very fortunate to have worked with Garry Benson as filmmaker and editor; a former student and a regular tapestry maker in his own right.

These DVD’s also show examples of our work from over the years, exploring and exploiting the tapestry weaving process.

Archie Brennan
March 2010
Woven Tapestry Techniques

Contents of Woven Tapestry Techniques
DVD package

DVD 1
❖ Copyright & opening titles
❖ Choosing the Right Loom
  Archie’s introduction to the series
  Types of Looms
❖ Warping
  Types of Warp
  Spacing the warp
  Types of Bobbins
❖ Basic Weaving
  Weft Selection
  Starting to Weave
  The ‘Stolen’ pass
  The ‘Half’ pass (more information on DVDs 7 & 8)
  Weaving two rectangles
❖ Setting Up Leashes

DVD 2
❖ Copyright & opening titles
❖ Weaving adjoining shapes
❖ Weaving higher Angles
❖ Weaving triangles
❖ Weaving smaller adjacent shapes

DVD 3
❖ Copyright & opening titles
❖ Weaving low angles
❖ Weaving Rectangles
❖ Warping up second sampler
❖ Completing possible steps to make a curve
❖ Inking on

DVD 4
❖ Copyright & opening titles
❖ Slide show 1
❖ Slide show 2
❖ Slide show 3
❖ Slide show 4 (see notes page 9)

DVD 5
❖ Copyright & opening titles
❖ Eccentric Weaving including test woven circle
❖ Inking on for a refined circle
❖ Pulling warp round & down
DVD 6
- Copyright & opening titles
- Joining slits, sewing & hatching
- Hatching 2
- Weaving summary (See diagrams on page 6 (using high & low steps))

DVD 7
- Copyright & opening titles
- Hatching & half passes continued
- Taking a Line for a Walk
- Weaver’s Mark

DVD 8
- Copyright & opening titles
- Four selvedge weaving
- Dersu Usala
- Susan on half-passes & hatching
- Half-passes & hatching continued
- Minimising steps by pulling demo
- Archie & Susan series farewell
Notes for using high & low steps in DVD 6

A -2 sequence where, by turning on the high (H) warp with the weft, the appearance of the step will be maximized.

A -2 sequence where, by turning on the low (L) warp with the weft, the appearance of the step will be minimized and will make a lower angle than a +1 sequence.

In a +1H / +2L sequence, the steps will be the same height- more so than a simple +1 sequence, but will make a steeper angle. That a +1H looks similar in height to a +2L can be exploited in many ways to refine shape making.
Tapestry Terms

Warp
The underlying vertical strings to be completely covered by the weaving. They can be of linen, wool or cotton, cotton being preferred.

Warp Set
The selected number of warps per inch/centimetre (e.p.i./e.p.c.)

Warp Spinning
The preferred warp is a 3-ply strand, counter spun in an s twist then z twist to build in a degree of elasticity.

Warp Weight
International suppliers offer different counts for different thicknesses, i.e. 12/12 – 12/18 etc. that confuses. Each warp count offered needs to be tested for the chosen warp set.

Warp Spacing
The space between each warp is critical. Ideally this space should be fractionally wider than the warp width when under tension.

Weft
The actual weaving material, which covers the warp. (Pre spun or plied for suitable strength and flexibility: wool, linen, silk, cotton etc.)

Full Pass
Weaving across the warp then back, in order to cover all the warps.

Half Pass (or shed)
Weaving in one direction, thus covering every second warp.

Dividing Rod (or shed stick)
Usually a wooden dowel, approx. ½” diameter set between every second warp across the warp to set a fixed open shed.

Open Shed
When the weft is passed through the fixed open shed.

Closed Shed
When the weft is passed through by picking up the back (closed) warps in order to cover the warps not covered by the open shed.

Leashes
An optional set of hanging loops (made of the same warp material) around each back, or closed, warp – to speed up weaving.

Highs
Where every 2nd warp is covered, as a result of either shed.

Lows
Where every 2nd warp is uncovered as a result of either shed.

Ribbing
Where the woven surface is distorted as a result of uneven weft tension. (Usually the open shed is too tight).

Twacking
Checking the quality of the woven cloth by the fingers. -An old Scottish word that is a natural but dangerous habit (felting).

Slits
Because tapestry weaving has the option to weave each shape independently, two rectangles ad joining, for example, will result in the weaving of a vertical slit.

The Bead
The small shape covering each warp. This can be quite circular or elliptical, depending on the weft thickness, flexibility & density.

Weft Tension
The most difficult skill to acquire because shape making and surface control requires frequent weft tension adjustment, dependent on the shape, size and location.
Woven Tapestry Techniques

Sewing Slits
This is a specific sewing technique where slits are independently joined during the shape making process.

Interlocking
An alternative to sewing slits that makes a good join but has the disadvantage of rejecting tapestry’s ability to focus on one shape at a time. (Try weaving twenty squares in line by interlocking the vertical edges).

Double Weft Interlocking
A more sophisticated but more complex technique for joining slits. (Normally woven from the back)

Warp Drifting
Warp wandering off the vertical as a result of poor weft tension control and uneven weft beating down, particularly at the edge of shapes and the tapestry’s edge.

Pulling
Again the result of a too tight weft tension.

Buckling
When the tapestry cloth surface deforms like wet paper by a weft tension that is too loose, usually when making small shapes.

Half Hitch
The basic tapestry knot used with many variations throughout the process.

Double Half Hitch
This makes a locked knot, used right across the warp at the tapestry’s start and finish to lock unravelling wefts and to permit a simple clean edge, then sewing back each warp ends to finish off.

Tying Down (tying off)
Using a half hitch to secure the start and finish of each woven shape.

Looping
Carrying the weft across the back of the tapestry from a completed shape to begin a new shape of the same colour, with not cut end at the back of the tapestry.

Steps
The sequence of weft turns to make a non-vertical, non-horizontal shape.

Angles
Weaving a straight line at varying angles by repeating the same step sequence of the same height.

Curves
Using a sequence of changing step heights progressively increasing or decreasing the step height to make a curve- or a circle.

Hatching
A complex traditional technique of stepped, flat, wedge shapes to create 3 or more weft shades.

Bar hatching
A vertical, light to dark transition by using two colours with graded pass thickness on the vertical.

Blends
Using a variety of thin contrasting coloured strands to make up a broken mixture, thus making up an appropriate weft thickness.

Stealing
The process of adjusting woven levels or step heights for subtle shape making.

Selvedge
The woven tapestry edge where the weft returns, uncut.

Four Selvedge
Making a complete tapestry cloth by using a complex three part warping technique that will produce a four selvedge finish with not cut warp ends.

Cartoon
A full size working line drawing or full coloured painting of the planned design, to hang behind the warp.

Inking On
The process of marking on the warp an inked line as a guide for the weaving to follow.

Inking Round
The process of marking round each dot or line on the warps (the warps gently rotate and lose the inked on dot as weaving progresses)
Archie Brennan has been a practicing tapestry maker since 1948, first as an apprentice, then as director, Dovecot studio, Edinburgh; as an arts graduate and teacher, lecturer and tapestry maker world wide.

Susan Martin Maffei began her training in tapestry in 1984 with Mary Lane at Parsons University. In 1985 she studied with Jean Pierre Larchette and Yael Lurie in Berkeley California and Michele Mesnaje in the south of France. In 1986 she apprenticed at Scheuer Tapestry Studio in NYC and in 1987 and 1988 was a foreign student at the Gobelins in Paris. Since 1988 she has practiced as an independent tapestry maker, collaborated with Archie Brennan in teaching workshops, exhibited and lectured worldwide.

They are recipients of many awards of distinction as practising artists.

Garry Benson is an artist, a cinematographer & filmmaker of international experience, an educator and a tapestry maker since 1976. He directed and produced this DVD series.
Woven Tapestry Techniques

Using the DVDs

Introduction

This series is recorded on DVD-R computer disks. It should play without problems on most modern computers and fairly recent DVD recorders (2000 on) that are listed to play DVD-R disks.

At the start of each DVD there is a Copyright Warning. Please don’t copy the DVDs for friends or family. Apart from the legal aspects we have tried to create a package that is value for money - the contents of the series make up the equivalent of a hands-on six week course. We are a small independent group of artists who are trying to bring you a unique and lasting record of the design & weaving of tapestries.

Handy Hints

On the computer you can use the on-screen control (example below) or the navigation arrows:

On a DVD player the remote has similar features. Once the DVD starts you can select the segment you want by using the mouse or navigation arrows on the computer or the remote. The ‘live’ segment has a yellow dot next to it:

You then usually have two choices. You can Play the Movie or if the segment has short-cuts embedded, you can select Scene Selection:
You then usually have two choices. You can *Play the Movie* or if the segment has short-cuts embedded, you can select *Scene Selection*:

Even if you *Play the Movie* you still can use the navigation arrows to jump to the next section. However, if this is the first time you are using the DVD play it right through. Of course you can Pause or Rewind if you want to double check details.

The *Scene Selection* button takes you to a new window. Below is a visual of the frame that you can jump to:

Notice that selected scene has a yellow border - this indicates that if you click on it or press *Play* it will jump to that segment.
If you wish to return to the previous screen?

Use the navigation arrows or mouse to select the triangle at the bottom right of the page - when it is yellow (see above) click and it will return you to the previous screen. Or select Menu on your control.

Some movies don’t have shortcuts. When you select this type of movie (for example Slide Show 4 on DVD 4) it will go straight to the movie:

Final words? Enjoy, explore & become enriched by this unique Woven Tapestry Techniques series.
Quick Reference Guide for Care & Handling DVDs

A client contacted me and said their DVD didn’t work. I replaced it at no cost, and asked for the old DVD back. A simple check revealed the problem was a number of fingerprints, dirt and scratches on the playing (silver) surface (below):

Please try not to touch the playing surface of the disk or bend the disk. After every use store it back in its cover. Handle disks by the outer edge or the centre hole (below).

CDs and DVDs are not ‘bomb-proof’ — they need reasonable care. You can remove dirt, foreign material, fingerprints, smudges and liquids by wiping with a clean soft cotton fabric in a straight line from the centre of the disk towards the outer edge. The best policy is NOT to touch the playing (silver) side at all. If your new disk doesn’t play because of compatibility problems or damage when you receive it, please email dvds@brennan-maffei.com and instructions will be sent on how to return for a replacement copy.

But please be careful — don’t expect a new disk or refund if the disk is badly handled or after some months’ use.

Extra educational information is available on Archie & Susan’s website - www.brennanmaffi.com
Tapestry Studies – Archie Brennan (see Slide Show 4, DVD 4)

After the second biennale in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1967, I have, with few exceptions, restricted my tapestry making to smaller studies. Working within the framework of the traditional process, I have sought to extend the language of this graphic pictorial medium. I tend to work in series and the following notes describe some examples from recent years.

1. The Reconstruction Series
   *The Lymerer*, based on a figure from the Hunt of the Unicorn set, in New York’s Metropolitan Museum offers as to how I might explore this approach.

   *Gypsy Woman* is simply a test weave for a larger work based on two separate figures from the Devonshire Hunting set in London’s Victoria and Albert Museum. The larger tapestry is now underway. This series is now extended to studies based on well-known works by painters and sculptors.

2. The Drawing Series
   I have maintained a weekly practice of drawing from the human figure, since 1947. Although such drawings are made completely independently of any tapestry considerations, for over a decade now, and from the many hundreds of accumulated drawings, I have currently reconstructed some 75 of them. I seek to extend them from paper and charcoal towards a woven version that does not imitate but re-orchestrates the original handling. This is not unlike a piece of piano music that might be scored for other musical instruments.

   I explore the nature of tapestry cloth by interplaying surface changes, the woven line and employ a rather neutral colour range. Simply put, I am exploiting this alternate medium, this other language. *First Meeting*, for example, grew out of an experiment of drawing, with my inefficient left hand, two separate individuals who appeared on television. I was curious of how my left hand drawing would open my approach to bringing them together in a small tapestry.

3. The Postcard Series
   In contrast to tapestry’s historical, majestic magnificence, I enjoy the woven postcard as a humble everyday object and a vehicle worthy of consideration.

   *The World Map* 72 tapestry postcards that offer an alternative view of our world, was woven as postcards then assembled with the North Pole at the centre. The cards were completed then sent out to 72 colleagues world wide, who stamped, addressed then mailed them to me uncovered – from the Arctic Circle, Uzbekistan, Australia, UK, Japan, etc. Since 1974, not a single one of more than 100 such cards and woven packages have failed to be delivered.

4. A Sonnet Without Words opens a new direction for me. Susan Martin Maffei’s tapestries are woven without pre-planning – no design - and I have been curious to weave a tapestry that would essentially design itself. So I drew on the warps a series of horizontal lines – the diagram of a sonnet; a line for a title, six lines then eight lines. I then prepared two packs of playing cards.
Pack A had 26 cards with each card representing a letter of the alphabet by 26 basic geometric shapes. Pack B had 12 cards, ten of which represented one of twelve pre-chosen colours. The two remaining cards were for the background colour and when ‘chosen’ would define the space between words.

Simply by ‘cutting’ each pack, the chance result informed me of the shape, colour, or word length, so I wove it – a tapestry of pure chance in the form of a sonnet. Not by coincidence, the Sonnet layout matches the layout of a classic tapestry hanging.

5. **A Secret Language** was provoked by a tapestry of a letter in Pitman’s short hand by Canadian artist Anne Newdigate. It suggested to me a now secret language only known to former female shorthand typists. When translated this small tapestry reads, “If you can read this you are too old”. Maybe it should have been just a car bumper sticker…

*The Lymerer*