ATW: Tales from the Archive

By Dr Bree Di Mattina

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AUSTRALIAN TAPESTRY WORKSHOP

GORDON DARLING FOUNDATION

Global Perspectives

Patrick Heron

British painter Patrick Heron (1920-1999) collaborated on multiple occasions with the Australian Tapestry Workshop, having several of his colour-filled gouache pieces translated into tapestry.

Heron's bright, abstract works were heavily influenced by artists such as Henri Matisse and Georges Braque, and he drew significant inspiration from the natural world, including around his home in Cornwall. In addition to his painting career, Heron was also a well-respected art critic and writer, who passionately promoted the work of British painters. While painting was his chosen medium, Heron's interests and experience were broad. Heron's father owned a silk factory and in the 1940s and 1950s he designed patterns for textiles. During World War Two he also worked for renowned British studio potter Bernard Leach. Architecture was also a passion and in England, and during trips to the United States, Heron visited houses designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe and once met Le Corbusier in France. Heron's interest in the intersection of art and architecture led to his late 1950s commission to create monumental paintings for the Festival of Britain and a publishing house.

In 1989-90 Heron spent six months as artist in residence at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, painting a series of works inspired by Sydney, several specifically for translation by the ATW. The gestural, fluid quality of the works presented a challenge for the weavers, however Heron was effusive in his praise for their abilities and their interpretation of his works. In a letter to the ATW he stated: "I had never imagined you would be able to do something that was so subtle! It really is incredibly related to the gouache. In certain lights it is almost as if the water of the original was still moving across its surface!" One of the works created in Sydney, *Sydney: November 11 1989,* was translated into tapestry in 1993, and subsequently gifted to the V&A in London. The work is a vibrant, abstract view of Sydney Harbour, the colours and lines representing both the curvaceous coastline and the hustle and bustle of the area.

In 1999 Heron's works were once again commissioned for tapestry, the Gordon Darling Foundation selecting *22 July 1989*. This tapestry features large sections of bright orange, green, yellow and purple, with gestural flashes of navy and black, the colours and forms reminiscent of the flora around his home in Cornwall. The tapestry was completed shortly after Heron's death in 1999. The weavers again successfully interpreted Heron's work, weaving both large blocks of colour and smaller, delicate marks.

Although committed to his abstract, colourful style of painting, Heron was a passionate advocate for all forms of creativity, ignoring the perceived hierarchical divisions between art and craft. In addition to his work with Bernard Leach, his interest in architecture and his ongoing collaborative relationship with the ATW, Heron engaged in many cross-media collaborations. He designed a tapestry for the University of Galway, nine silk banners for the Tate Gallery bookshop and three for the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital in London. He also worked with hand painted needlework company Tapisserie in London to design kneelers to surround a Henry Moore designed altar at St Stephen Walbrook church in London.

Heron's ongoing collaboration with the ATW was part of his broader to commitment to both painting and the arts in general. His works rendered in tapestry by the ATW showcase his colourful gestural style, his ongoing interest in textiles and his collaborative spirit.

Key words: abstract, painting, colour, international, collaboration

Frank Stella

Frank Stella (1936-2024) was an American abstract painter who, in addition to his painting, collaborated extensively with master printmaker Ken Tyler. Pushing the boundaries of traditional printmaking, Stella and Tyler played with size and paper, custom making large and textured sheets of paper on which to print Stella's works. They also experimented with 3D printing, using moulds to shape paper.

Textiles were of interest to Stella and in the 1960s he amassed a collection of Navajo Diné woven blankets, valuing them for the labour, artistry and skill of the traditional weavers. Tapestry also played an important role in Stella's career and he collaborated with several internationally renowned tapestry workshops. In the 1960s and 1970s he had a series of circular works, the *Protractor* series, woven in Aubusson, France. In the 1980s he received a commission for the new Pepsi Co headquarters in New York, for which he had woven a series of eleven tapestries at the Dovecot Studios in Scotland. These tapestries were based on the Passover song *Had Gadya*, and featured Stella's constructivist, collage style works. The irregularly shaped works – consisting of layers of cut out shapes, images of columns and cones, torn paper and sketched sections – were enclosed within borders in their tapestry translations to give the finished pieces a regular shape.

In 1995 the Australian Tapestry Workshop and Ken Tyler were connected by the Lasalle- SIA College of the Arts (Singapore) then-director Alan Rubenstein. Tyler and Stella were proposing to have further tapestries made, and liked the history of collaboration between the ATW and Dovecot, and the experimental spirit of the ATW. Just as they had pushed the boundaries and experimented with size and shape in printmaking, the pair were eager to experiment further with tapestry, seeking to replicate Stella's shaped works into shaped tapestries. Tyler commissioned the ATW to make an approximately two metre in diameter, roughly-circular tapestry of a new Stella print, a copy of which was sent to the ATW to work from.

The commission was an exciting and prominent one for the ATW. Working with an artist with the renown of Stella and the influential printer Tyler. In a career spanning over 35 years, Tyler collaborated with over 70 internationally renowned artists. The National Gallery of Australia holds the Kenneth E. Tyler Collection, a complete archive of Tyler's printmaking practice and one of the world's most comprehensive collections of post-war American art outside the USA. In a letter to Tyler, the ATW's then-director Sue Walker aligned the collaborative relationship between Stella (and other artists) and Tyler, with the collaborative nature of weaving, both between the weavers themselves and with the artists.

In 1996 the ATW completed weaving on Frank Stella's *Untitled*, for the collection of Tyler Graphics Ltd. The irregular shape and complex, abstract, layered imagery provided both a weaving and logistical challenge for the ATW. Unlike the works previously woven by Dovecot, *Untitled* was not extended to include a border, instead the irregular rounded shape with protruding sections was woven just as depicted in the print. The image is composed of overlapping sections of different colours, shapes and patterns, much like a collage of pieces of paper torn from magazines. The dynamic mix of elements seem to radiate from the centre, swirling around the composition. The complex design mixing irregular shapes, patterns and sketchy elements required intense attention to detail from the weavers to ensure the unity of the

piece. Combining both weaving and surface embellishment, the work also required a fibreglass armature to support the flat hanging of the irregularly shaped work. Unlike other tapestries which could be rolled for shipping, the armature prevented rolling of the finished piece, requiring a specially designed and made crate to ship it to New York.

The long-standing relationship and collaborative, experimental process of Frank Stella and Ken Tyler extended to embracing other techniques such as tapestry. Their revolutionary approach to collaboration and material experimentation is echoed in the work of the ATW where innovation and flexibility have been a hallmark of the Workshop for 50 years.

Key words: abstract, painting, colour, international, experimental, shape, innovation, collaboration

Gulammohammed Sheikh

Tapestry weaving is a culturally and linguistically diverse artform, with examples found all around the world. It is diverse also in the motifs depicted and that it is a practice engaged in by men, women and children. In 2004 the Australian Tapestry Workshop collaborated on a project with renowned Indian artist, curator and historian Gulammohammed Sheikh (1937-) producing a work which demonstrates the continuing power of, and encapsulates the diversity of, both historical and contemporary tapestry.

Mappamundi (2004) is one of a series of works created by Sheikh which utilise the ancient form of 'mappamundi', from the Latin for map of the world. Sheikh began using the form after seeing a postcard of the *Ebstorf Mappamundi* (c 1235), which was destroyed during World War Two. Like the Ebstorf original, Sheikh's *Mappamundi* feature a central circular form, following the conventions of T and O maps (dating back to at least the fifth century) which divide the world into three parts: Europe, Asia and Africa. These early cartographic representations of the world included not only geographic details but also mythical and spiritual stories. In his *Mappamundi*, Sheikh embraces both Eastern and Western imagery and iconography, layering and reimagining the maps in contemporary form.

Based on the artwork *Mappamundi: Marichika-3* (2003), the *Mappamundi* tapestry was woven by Cheryl Thornton, Caroline Tully, Rachel Hine and Amy Cornall. The tapestry has a central circular map filled with details, surrounded by borders containing further imagery to give the final square form. In the top lefthand corner Sheikh placed figures from the Indo-Persian tale of Manjun, driven to madness by his unfulfilled love for Layla, being led by an old woman. Sitting serenely in the top righthand corner is sixteenth century Indian poet Kabir, who's wide-ranging poetry continues to be sung today. A weaver by trade, Kabir is depicted at the loom, reinforcing the warp and weft of life. In the bottom righthand corner, a Jain dervish dances, and in the bottom left, Mary Magdanlene is sampled from a Giotto mural, reaching out to Christ as he emerges from his tomb. Across the central circle Sheikh also repeats Giotto's imagery of Mary Magdalene, and St Francis of Assisi feeding the birds, and samples a Pahari painting of Rama from the Indian epic poem Ramayana, hunting a demon which is disguised as a golden deer.

While Sheikh's *Mappamundi* series are a melange of different styles and influences, the physical making of the maps is also a process of combination. The works are comprised of painted scenes as well as sampled imagery from a variety of sources, including an Indian Pahari painting and a Giotto mural. Sheikh then combines the pieces into a digital collage which he prints and further works into with gouache. Sheikh's intense making, sampling and multilayering of imagery echoes the multiple cultural and spiritual viewpoints articulated in the work.

In translating the piece into tapestry, the ATW together with Sheikh brought a new aspect to the work. The weaving of *Mappamundi* became an extension of Sheikh's layered methodology and way of making. In a 2005 letter from Sheikh to Grazyna Bleja of the ATW, he wrote: "Looks the Mappamundi in its new avatar has acquired another physicality only the medium of tapestry can endow." In a happy coincidence, Sheikh also noted that the finished dimensions of the tapestry echoed the dimensions of the now lost *Ebstorpf Mappamundi*. He wrote: "In our joint venture of recreating a lost map – albeit a new one for our times – we seem to have managed to reclaim a lost legacy." The tapestry *Mappamundi* brought a new, textured iteration to Sheikh's

work, the layering of the labour of the weavers adding to both his layer and the layers of the artists he sampled, continuing the evolution of the form. The variety and complexity of the imagery also presented a challenge to the weavers, switching between the larger figures and the smaller, intricate details.

In addition to the making of the *Mappamundi,* the commission for the work also added another layer to the story. The piece was commissioned for the Yasuko Hiraoka Myer room in the Sidney Myer Asia Centre, Asialink at the University of Melbourne. Through its combination of inspiration and imagery, the work articulates the purpose of the Asialink centre which is to explore and study languages and societies from across the Asian continent. Japanese-born Yasuko and her husband Ken were noted philanthropists, keenly interested in cross cultural ties and exchange between Asia and Australia. The choice of tapestry was also significant for the location as Yasuko had trained as a weaver at the ATW under Cheryl Thornton.

Gulammohammed Sheikh's *Mappamundi* exemplifies both the historical and contemporary role of tapestry. Based on ancient maps, utilising and sampling imagery from both Asian and European culture, demonstrating a range of religions and belief systems, the *Mappamundi* is a global, contemporary work of art. The collaboration between Sheikh and the weavers of the ATW shows how the practice of making tapestries is not merely an act of translation, it is the creation a new, multifaceted work of art.

Key words: painting, colour, international, experimental, shape, appropriation, global, collaboration

Emerging and Mid-career Artists

NELL

The Australian Tapestry Workshop has collaborated with Australian artist Nell (1975-) on two occasions, for two very different commissions. In 2006 she was commissioned to create a work for the newly completed, architecturally significant Deutsche Bank building in Sydney. Four years later a second commission was forthcoming, for a private client who had seen the Deutsche Bank work and wanted something similar for their home. Both works are iconically Nell, featuring smiley faces and meditations on life, death and sex. While potentially unusual choices for a bank and a home, Nell's signature bold, graphical, quirky and fun images manage to communicate and ruminate in a no-nonsense way on life's biggest questions.

Making her contribution to the internationally significant Deutsche Bank collection, Nell created *Let me put my love into you* in 2006. Woven by Sue Batten and John Dicks, the work takes its title from an AC/DC song off the iconic Back In Black album. The dark back background of the tapestry provides a foil for the jewel tones of the snake and apple. Emerging from the smiling mouth of the apple, the snake winds around and back upon itself, its scales made from further tiny snakes and its body cavities filled with eggs. Approaching the top of the apple, from out of the snake's mouth emerges its tongue (also with a smiley face), stopping millimetres from the apple. Flashes of light on the side of the apple echo the shape of the tongue. The imagery is reminiscent of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden with the serpent and the apple, suggestive of temptation, fallibility and purity. The presence of the eggs within the snake, and the tongue which is also shaped like a sperm, further suggest fecundity and procreation. The cyclic formation of the snake, which emerges from and almost returns to the apple, also leans into Nell's recurring themes of birth, death, reproduction and transformation.

When she accepted this commission, Nell was in Europe and spent time studying medieval tapestries. Mythological and allegorical imagery were favourite themes of medieval tapestries, and the influence of this is evident in *Let me put my love into you.* In addition to the allusion to Adam and Eve, the work is also reminiscent of the ouroboros, an ancient symbol of a snake or dragon eating its own tail. The loop formed by the creature symbolising time, infinity, and the cycle of life (birth, death and rebirth). In 2006 Nell also began dating her now-wife, chef Kylie Kwong, and the symbolism within the work could signify this new, exciting beginning.

To realise her vision, Nell collaborated with Batten and Dicks, achieving the desired dark black background, jewel tones of the snake and the vibrant red of the apple, which was specially dyed by the ATW's in-house dyer. This specific tone of red was later incorporated into the second work Nell made with the ATW *Birds and leaves and we ourselves come forth in perfect harmony* in 2010.

This work was commissioned for a private home, after the owner had seen the Deutsche Bank work. Nell visited the client's home and together they decided on the specific space the tapestry would hang. Based on its location within the home, Nell then designed the work, with the birds appearing to fly off the tapestry and out the adjacent door. While *Let me put my love*

into you was named for Nell's love of rock music, *Birds and leaves and we ourselves come forth in perfect harmony* is from a Buddhist mantra and references Nell's practice of Zen Buddhism. The title, and the imagery of a large smiling leaf and an undulating line of birds in flight, tells of the interconnectedness and harmony between living things.

Once again, the dark black background provides a foil for the rich colours of the leaf. Embellished with shimmering threads, the leaf almost radiates off the work, the yellow and brown tones and the wrinkled surface hinting at autumn. Yet the leaf smiles, and from its mouth emerges a line of stylised birds in pinks and red, which take flight across the work in an undulating line. The detail in the leaf contrasts against the spare design of the birds and the rich black background. While not cyclical like the first work, this piece also speaks of life, death and rebirth. During this commission Nell again worked with the weavers, and the clients were also able to visit the ATW and watch the progression of the work.

The plain black backgrounds of *Let me put my love into you* and *Birds and leaves and we ourselves come forth in perfect harmony* belie the deep symbolism embedded in the imagery. Quintessentially Nell, the works feature in two very different locations, yet carry meaning resonant for each and demonstrate the malleability of tapestry.

Key words: symbolism, fun, commission, mid-career artist, female,

Hayley Millar Baker

Simple yet complex, this dichotomy is expressed throughout Hayley Millar Baker's *I screamed aloud (I Will Survive)* (2021). The work was produced as part of the Weaving Futures program which introduced contemporary artists from around Australia to the world of tapestry.

Spare in its content, the image is of a woman, arms outstretched, looking out across a gently rippling ocean. Her skirt, like the water, ripples in response to a gentle breeze, while in the sky above her head two crows fly. The woman and the crows form an inverted triangle, focussing the eyes of the viewer on the heart of the figure, where the lines of her arms and torso intersect. The figure and crows appear in deep black and crisp focus, in contrast to the softer focus of the sea and sky stretching before her. There is a quiet unease in the work. Is the figure caught mid-spin, happily frolicking by the sea, or are her arms open beseechingly, Christ-like, crying out in anguish? The image is cropped at the bottom, obscuring the figure's feet. Is she dancing, flying or falling? Above, the flying crows are reminiscent of death, yet their two distinct positions also suggest time passing. Gazing out toward the horizon, the woman could be contemplating an endless future, or is it the calm before the storm? The monochromatic palette adds to the ambiguity. Is the sky bright, hot and clear or grey, bleak and foreboding?

Millar Baker's photographic works explore how human memory is constructed and distorted over time. The *I Will Survive* series of photo collages explore haunting tales and memories of childhood, transported and transmuted into adulthood. Millar-Baker layers images and constructs ambiguity and unease. *I screamed aloud (I Will Survive)* encapsulates these concepts of ambiguity, unease and memory.

As part of the Weaving Futures project, artists and weavers worked closely together, experimenting and collaborating on small works to explore the potential of tapestry. For Millar Baker and weaver Amy Cornall, the apparent simplicity of Millar Baker's imagery brought about a raft of complex, technical decisions when translating into tapestry. While the source image, produced in monochrome, evokes simplicity, the manual depiction in tapestry of black and white and all the shades of grey in between becomes a complex task. The deep black of the figure and crows is lightened slightly to suggest the drape and movement of the wings and the skirt. The rippling water in the foreground gives way to eddies of current in the mid field and a blurred horizon line barely distinguishes between the distant ocean and the sky. Cornall had to vary her technique and stitch patterns to evoke the different focus points across the work. Small in scale, the tapestry allowed for a high number of stitches per square centimetre, the fine weave necessary to depict the intricate details in the work. The rippling foreground required higher contrast in colours and more precise placement of stitches to depict each distinct ripple. Whereas the softer focus of the middle ground allowed for more instinctive changes of colour.

Cornall's ability to capture tiny details through the employment of fine stitches was further enhanced through the use of threads in multitudes of different colour combinations. Weavers must not only possess the technical skills to translate images stitch by stitch, they also must be able to combine individual strands of yarn to create a variety of colours across different bobbins. Spinning together multiple strands of yarn of varying shades for each stitch, the weavers can create an almost infinite number of colours with which to weave.

In 2021, in a time of global uncertainty, the Australian Tapestry Workshop brought together artists and weavers to collaborate, experiment and most of all, hope for the future. Small in size, the works allowed for experimentation and play not possible on grand commissions. As part of their creative exchange, Millar Baker and Cornall both faced challenges in the process and expanded their repertoires. *I screamed aloud (I Will Survive)* demonstrates that often nothing is as complex as a simple, monochrome image. This elegantly simple yet deeply unsettling work showcases the benefits of creative exchange and collaboration and the agility of the weavers of the Australian Tapestry Workshop to respond to challenges, both technical and global.

Key words: emerging artist, mid-career artist, female, Australian, photography, monochrome, collaboration, experimentation

Atong Atem

Head turned to the side, the woman meets our gaze, her expression steady. The composition is familiar, yet the context is not. The origins are recognisably *Girl With a Pearl Earring* (c.1665) by Johannes Vermeer but this is Atong Atem's (1991-) interpretation, *Self Portrait in July (4)* (2021). Fabrics are resplendent in both works, Vermeer's girl is clothed in soft yellow with a blue and yellow swathe wrapped around her head, draped down her back in place of hair. Atem's work is more closely cropped, the dark background replaced by a riot of red and white gingham, a rich gold garment is offset by the paler head wrap. Yet Atem's gaze is more steadfast, and most unexpectedly, her face is bright blue. Pearls dot her brow and cheeks (as well as her ear) and uranium yellow shades her eyes and sweeps up towards the head wrap, emphasising the strong diagonal lines in the work.

Interpretation is a crucial concept underpinning tapestry. The separation of artist/designer from artist/weaver naturally imbues tapestry with a level of interpretation. The artist/designer composes the work in their chosen medium, such as painting, photography or collage, and then the artist/weaver brings their expertise to rendering the work in stitches of cotton and wool. The choice of yarn, density of stitch, type of stitch, combination and placement of colours are all manipulated to turn one work of art into another. Tapestry is more than just a medium of replication, the choices made by the weavers emphasise new aspects of the existing works, creating a new, collaborative work of art.

Born in Ethiopia, raised in South Sudan and now residing in Melbourne, Atem's practice includes photography, film, portraiture, performance as well as elements of theatre, history and science fiction. Referencing her African heritage, Atem's works explore concepts of belonging, identity and connection. Her pieces draw on the work of mid-20th century African photographers who harnessed portraiture as a means of communicating with and for their community. They took control of their portrayal, rejecting colonial stereotypes and audiences, instead foregrounding self-determination, identity and resistance. Bright colours, clothing, elaborate hairstyles and proud poses became the hallmarks of these photographs, elements which Atem continues to include in her works. Interpreting the works of these photographers, Atem primarily uses herself in the staging, including bright clothing, layered colourful fabrics, and the surprising inclusion of sci-fi like makeup. Incorporating sci-fi elements into her works, Atem emphasises the 'staged' nature of portraiture, the capacity to communicate selected narratives through photography. The sci-fi references also speak to her own, contemporary interests. Yet, as seen in *Self Portrait in July (4),* Atem also references and interprets art historical sources.

Collaborating with weaver Pamela Joyce brought a new understanding for Atem of the weaving process and a new interpretation of her work. The woven form added new dimensions to the layering of textiles within the photographic work. The replication of the elements in cotton and wool brought a different, textural effect to the normally light-infused nature of photography. Joyce specifically blended wool and cotton to achieve the play of light across the work, with particular attention paid to the blue of the face makeup to give the matte effect, contrasting with the iridescent requirements of the pearls which dot Atem's face and ear. Where light (and shade) would normally play across the pale head wrap (as it also does in the Vermeer work), Joyce reinterpreted the light as colour, borrowing blue and green from the makeup to represent

the light hitting the head wrap. The subtle mixing of colours and placement of stitches gives the impression of light and shade, the use of blues and greens maintaining overall visual harmony.

Atong Atem's practice borrows, interprets and imagines elements from across art and history, creating a new, contemporary language. Interpretation is a fundamental aspect of tapestry weaving, the combination of the skills and vision of both artist/designer and artist/weaver. Atem's collaboration with Pamela Joyce and the Australian Tapestry Workshop brought a new textile aspect to her already densely layered pieces, interpreting the light of photography in woven form.

Key words: emerging artist, mid-career artist, female, Australian, photography, colour, collaboration, experimentation, interpretation, fabric.

First Nations Artists

Ginger Riley Munduwalawala

Ginger Riley Munduwalawala (circa 1936 - 2002) was a pioneering Indigenous artist who brought bright colours and narrative storytelling together in his unique compositions. Born around 1936 into the Mara people of his mother's country, southeast Arnhem Land near Limmen Bight, he travelled and worked across the Northern Territory. In the 1950s he met Albert Namatjira and was inspired by his use of colour in landscape painting and by his ability to support himself through his art. In the mid-1980s he learnt to print before focussing primarily on painting.

Wamungku – My Mother's Country was woven in 1996 by Merrill Dumbrell, Irja West, Mark Thrush, Amanda Markey, Claudia Lo Priore and Milen Paplinska. Based on the monumental (195 x 395cms) painting of the same name (now in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia) the mammoth tapestry is 400 x 800cms. The work was commissioned specifically to complement the architecture of the newly opened Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade building in Canberra. The large, primarily glass, circular atrium needed vibrant artworks which would work with the building's materials, enliven the space and showcase Australia's vibrant history and culture. *Wamungku – My Mother's Country* was commissioned and is displayed opposite John Olsen's *Rising Suns Over Australia Felix* of 1997. The circular atrium sits at the heart of the vast, rectangular building and is a focal point hosting events and displays. Since its inception, the Australian Tapestry Workshop has a long history of collaborating with architects and artists to make tapestries which complement and enliven architectural spaces. These collaborations on works of public art contributed significantly to the rising profile of textile art in Australia in the late twentieth century and continues today, providing the public with exceptional public artworks.

Throughout his career, Munduwalawala painted the stories of his mother's country. His works feature his totem, the sea eagle (Ngak Ngak), as well as snakes, Bandian the king brown snake, fire breathing dragons and the mountainous Four Arches of the Limmen Bight region. *Wamungku – My Mother's Country* is divided into two sections. In the top half of the composition there is a traditional landscape depiction. Two clouds heavy with rain hanging in the red evening sky. They pour their rain down upon the landscape and rivers of the region. The lower half of the composition features scenes from creation and historical stories, viewed from above, symbolising the Creators' view of the land. Each section of the composition is framed by triangular motifs, designs which were traditionally used by Munduwalawala in body painting. The Ngak Ngak is featured four times in the work, proudly watching over the artist's homeland.

Munduwalawala's use of vibrant colours in landscape painting was reminiscent of the work of Namatjira, yet his compositions and bold style set his work apart from other Indigenous artists. In 1997 the National Gallery of Victoria held a retrospective of Munduwalawala's works, the first time an Indigenous artist had held a retrospective at a major Australian gallery. *Wamungku – My Mother's Country* was shown as part of this exhibition, before being permanently installed in the DFAT building in Canberra. The presentation of this significant work, showing traditional

creation stories and guardianship, in the central space of the DFAT building symbolically signals the importance of Indigenous culture in contemporary Australia.

Keywords: Indigenous art, painting, colour, architecture, public art

Bentinck Island Artists (Rayarriwarrtharrbayingathi Mingungurra Amy Loogatha, Wirrngajingathi Bijarrb Kurdalalngk Dawn Naranatiil, Thunduyingathi Bijarrb May Moodoonuthi, Warthadangathi Bijarrba Ethel Thomas, Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori, Birmuyingathi Maali Netta Loogatha, Kuruwarriyingathi Bijarrb Paula Paul)

The importance of the painting *Dulka Warngiid (Land of All)* from 2007, and the subsequent tapestry of the same name from 2008, cannot be understated. The artists, Kaiadilt women from the remote Bentinck Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria, had no written language and no history of creating paintings. They were part of the handful of people remaining who spoke their language. Forced to move from Bentinck Island to Mornington Island due to rising tides and missionary intervention, the culture of the Island people was critically endangered. The story of Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori (1924-2015) starting her painting career at age 81at the Mornington Island arts and crafts centre is well known, but this act inspired others in her community to do the same, and a new form of Kaiadilt visual language was born. Each of the artists painted in their own way, working together to create vibrant, expressive works which documented their country. Their paintings became like an archive of their country, their traditions and their rapidly disappearing language.

In 2007 *Dulka Warngiid (Land of All),* documenting the different areas of Bentinck Island, was acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria. Soon after, the architects Ashton Raggatt McDougall were finalising the Melbourne Recital Centre (MRC) and commissioning artworks to complement the unique building. Tapestry was the agreed medium for the work be displayed outside the Elisabeth Murdoch Hall, reflecting Dame Elisabeth's sustained philanthropic efforts in both music and her role in the establishment and ongoing success of the Australian Tapestry Workshop. *Dulka Warngiid (Land of All)* was identified as visually and conceptually suiting placement in the MRC.

The work is a view of the land of the island from above. Each artist painted their special place on the island, the place they were born and have birthrights over, in their own signature way. While the work is varied, with seven different artists contributing their own parts, the vibrant colours and repeating rounded forms unite the work as a whole. Painting in their own styles, the artists demonstrate the complexity of their Island and their traditions. While the work maps the Island, each area is identified through different modes. Traditional body painting marks, landscape formations, sea formations, narratives, animals and rituals are all shown as representing particular areas. Each of these are significant to one of the artists and depicted in their signature style.

The collaborative spirit with which the artists created the work was then extended to the weavers of the ATW. Amy Cornall, Rebecca Moulton and Cheryl Thornton liaised extensively with the artists to ensure that each are of country, each form of mark making was accurately interpreted and represented. The varying styles employed by each artist meant that the weavers had to employ different techniques across the tapestry to depict the different painting techniques. The resulting work is full of action, the differently patterned areas leading the

viewers' eye on a journey across the Island. The density of pattern within the work is further enhanced by the texture inherent in tapestry.

The MRC is replete with natural patterns and textures. The walls and ceiling of the Elisabeth Murdoch Hall are composed of symmetrical, routed timber panels which act as both acoustic panels and continue the organic, natural decoration inherent in the building. The swirling patterns echo cloud or water formations. Outside the Hall, the walls feature patterned marble and the exterior shell of the building is made up of panes of quasi-hexagonal glass. Each element both inside and outside the building features some sort of pattern or texture, and this is reflected in the choice of tapestry for the artwork. The tapestry brings not only further texture to the space, but the riot of pattern and colour in the imagery add to the overall architectural effect.

Throughout history and across cultures tapestries have been a way of recording information as well as decorating spaces. *Dulka Warngiid (Land of All)* achieves both of these aims, the artists creating a new visual language with which to preserve their culture, replicated in tapestry, married with the architecture of a building which carries culture into the future.

Keywords: Indigenous art, painting, colour, architecture, public art

Brook Andrew

Catching Breath (2014) is a curious title for a portrait of a sturdy young man. To catch your breath or take a breather is to have a rest for a moment. One must consider why this athletic young man would need to catch his breath. He stands solid, statue-like, a muscular specimen. Yet it is his status as a specimen, an unnamed person, an object, which dictates his need to catch his breath, to have a break, to rest for a moment away from prying eyes. So Brook Andrew (1970-) gave him a veil, a separate piece of cloth with which to shield his face. Not only does it shield him from the gaze of the curious, but it allows him to see without being seen. The person being gazed at becomes the person doing the gazing. Andrew gave him back his power.

The archival photograph on which Andrew based *Catching Breath* is part of a collection of such photographs that he has collected as inspiration for his artworks. They were part of a tradition of photographing First Nations people, cataloguing their features, kept as souvenirs by curious people from far away places. They were regarded as objects to be categorised rather than people with their own stories. Andrew is interested in history, stories told and not told, the seen and the unseen. The subject of *Catching Breath* is not free, he has been captured for history in this photograph, his unnamed status ensuring his story is untold. To give him back some sort of agency, Andrew makes him unseen, he conceals his face from the viewer. However, he also further imbues him with agency, peep holes allow him to see out, giving him the power to enact the gaze. Art history is full of images and writing about the gaze. Those with power openly looking at those without power. If the subject should happen to return the gaze, it was considered scandalous. The importance of the eyes in *Catching Breath* was emphasised in 2019 when the Australian Tapestry Workshop wove a series of twelve small studies of those powerful eyes.

Concealment of the face is also associated with the spiritual, the cultural and sometimes with the nefarious. Veils are worn in spiritual and cultural contexts for modesty and protection. Wearing a mask to a carnival or a ball allows the wearer to adopt a new persona, and sometimes concealment of the face is associated with illegal deeds. Yet all these motivations have privacy at their core, privacy to grieve or worship, privacy to enact a fantasy, or privacy to commit a crime without detection. By offering this man a veil, Andrew offers him privacy.

The significance of the veil in the work is articulated in its construction. Woven as a separate piece in even weave technique (similar to cloth weaving) with specially dyed black warp and silver lurex threads, the resulting fabric is supple and shimmers in the light. Draped across his face, secured at the top of the tapestry, and fitted with peep holes, it gently obscures without constraining him. Equally important, the tapestry body was woven in half pass technique, a complex and time-consuming technique which requires the utmost skill and dedication from the weavers (Chris Cochius, Pamela Joyce and Milena Paplinska). The half pass technique gives a pixelated quality to the final tapestry, the depiction of light across his chest highlights the contours of his muscular physique. The time-consuming nature of tapestry further demonstrates respect for the unnamed subject, the attention to detail lavished upon him akin to a high-status portrait, rather than being ‘captured’ as a specimen in a photograph.

The presence of the veil also brings a conundrum to the work. Secured at the top, the veil hangs loosely across his face. Idiomatically ‘to lift the veil’ is to investigate or expose a truth that lies

underneath. Theoretically it can be lifted, his private moment broken by curious hands. Yet it is also a work of art, something viewers are generally encouraged not to touch. Lifting this veil though would only reiterate the misplaced curiosity which prompted the original image, it would only expose a version of the truth. A constructed image of a 19th century unnamed man. Not a man with a name, a home and a family, going about his daily life.

In *Catching Breath* Brook Andrew covers the subject to uncover a dehumanising practice. The work not only reclaims agency on behalf of the unnamed man, but it also articulates the complicated colonial history of Australia. *Catching Breath* is part of the Embassy Tapestry Collection, currently on display in the Australian High Commission in Singapore.

Keywords: Indigenous art, photography, portrait, gaze, colonial

Tapestry Unexpected

Ansett Airlines

The variety of places and spaces for which the Australian Tapestry workshop has made works is vast. From private homes to hospitals, performing arts venues, embassies, hotels and schools, the applications for tapestry as an artform are endless. One of the most unusual commissions to date was in 1980 for bespoke tapestry panels to be used in new Ansett long range Boeing 727-200 aircraft. The panels were to be made in pairs, displayed either side of the cabin, mounted on the dividers between sections. The brief was to create vibrant works which represented the spirit of Australia.

While not the largest works ever made by the ATW, measuring only 27 centimetres tall and 100 centimetres wide (shaped to fit the space), the works were significant for their unique position. The 727-200 aircraft featured navy and ivory soft furnishings, complementing the wardrobe of the flight attendants. The tapestries were to invoke the 'spirit of Australia', the subjects and bright colours adding a touch of luxury and enlivening the cabins. As a 'soft' and resilient art medium, tapestry was the ideal way to bring art into the skies, adding to the overall experience of flying.

Four artists were approached to provide designs for the brief, with three ultimately chosen. Patricia Moylan, Stephen Griffin and Michael Shannon each had multiple pairs of tapestries woven for the aircraft.

Patricia Moylan's imagery of vibrant Rainbow Lorikeets was taken from a previously made painting. Moylan worked with the weavers to create panels which showcased the vivid colours and swift movement associated with flocks of the Australian native bird.

Stephen Griffin's light infused works from the *Port Campbell* series show sun-drenched scenes from Australian summers. The imagery of beach and festival scenes are filled with bright colours, the people and objects rendered in small blocks of colour. Griffin worked with the weavers to flatten the imagery, rendering the scenes in almost abstract formation.

Michael Shannon's gestural bush landscapes of Brumby Creek in Tasmania were emotive and impressionistic. Swathes of blue and green were incised with marks of brown and grey, bringing interest and a hint of movement to an apparently still landscape. Though small in scale, the work showed the changeable nature of the Australian landscape, from blue skies and lush green grass to muddy flooded creeks and denuded trees.

The three chosen artists and their works provided a varied and colourful rendition of Australia. From the distinctive native wildlife to the beach and the bush, the works gave a glimpse of what those travelling on Ansett planes could expect to see across Australia. At the time when in-flight entertainment options on flights were limited, the resplendent imagery in the works provided a focal point for passengers, with enough action, colour and detail to keep them engaged for long periods of time. The texture of the woven surface would have provided extra detail and interest.

From a practical standpoint, tapestry provided a lightweight and colourful yet robust and easily maintained form of art for the aircraft. The works showcased the delights of not only Australia, but the skills of the artists and the ATW. They not only added to the experience of flying but also served to promote the destinations and sights of the nation. In the fifty-year history of the ATW, these works stand out as one of the most unusual commissions! Yet they exemplify the agile spirit of the workshop and the versatility of tapestry.

Keywords: innovation, tapestry in unusual places, art, painting, Australia

Reg Mombassa

The artist behind much of lifestyle brand Mambo's quirky imagery, and a member of band Mental as Anything, seems like an unexpected combination with tapestry. Yet on two occasions artist Reg Mombassa (1951-) (also known as Christopher O'Doherty) has collaborated with the Australian Tapestry Workshop, producing vibrant tapestries which are redolent with Australian imagery.

In 2001 Mombassa created the work *Alone in the Bush* as part of the colossal *Federation Tapestry* series, now displayed at the Victorian Museum. Mombassa's panel resembles a fancy plate, depicting the efforts and trials of colonial settlers attempting to marry their existing lifestyles to the unforgiving climactic and physical conditions of Australia.

Following the positive experience he had working with the weavers of the ATW, Mombassa collaborated on a second work in 2002, entitled *Bush Suburbs*. In his signature graphic style, Mombassa depicts a 'typical' post-war Sydney suburb. Modest, detached houses are depicted amongst tidily trimmed eucalypts and bushes. Clouds hang in the warm sky, the sun baking the houses beneath. A row of power poles and telephone lines bisect the image, their forms echoing those of the eucalypts. On the street in front of the houses sits a row of quintessentially Aussie cars. The only movement which interrupts the sun-baked stillness is from a couple of dogs who chase a bird down the road.

The stark, graphic style of the imagery gives the work a surreal feeling. Like the juxtaposition depicted in *Alone in the Bush*, in this piece Mombassa articulates the dichotomies of post-war urban sprawl in Sydney, and other cities, in Australia. Suburbs rapidly expanded, trees trimmed and nature curbed, to make way for speedily erected housing and infrastructure. The suburbs located, in what was formerly bush, trimmed and manicured for habitation by Australia's expanding population. Swathes of power poles stand alongside heavily pruned trees, their towering forms offering no respite from the sun beating down. The houses and the cars suggest the presence of people, yet the only living things depicted are the trees and the three animals. There is a sense of unease, the viewer observes the seemingly quiet scene, unable to tell how many faces gaze back, hidden behind the windows of the homes.

Mombassa's works offered the weavers of the ATW a different type of challenge to other woven works. While abstract and gestural pieces require a similar weaving style, the straight lines and stripped back nature of Mombassa's imagery require intense precision. Despite the cartoon-like depiction of the scene suggesting simplicity, the hard edges, repeating shapes and orderly, detailed arrangement of imagery make the weaving an exacting process. The precise translation of Mombassa's signature style into tapestry demonstrates the skill of the ATW weavers.

While Mombassa's signature graphic style appears to show a jolly depiction of Australian suburban life, *Bush Suburbs* reflects his deeper engagement with the history of art. The stylised forms are reminiscent of Japanese Ukiyo-e wood block prints, artworks which depicted subjects of pleasure, leisure and the transience of life. These prints were also favoured by the Impressionists, who also depicted scenes of leisure and from everyday life.

Depiction of the ordinary and the quiet is also seen in the mural works of British artist Sir Stanley Spencer (1891 – 1959), who drew inspiration from medieval tapestries, and from whom

Mombassa also drew inspiration. One of Spencer's best-known painted murals is in the Sandham Memorial Chapel, where he depicted the lesser-known aspects of war, based on his experience as a medic. Spencer's use of scale and flat picture plane, as well as the depictions of ordinary subjects, can be seen reflected in Mombassa's design for *Bush Suburbs*.

While best known in Australia for his eccentric, expressive and graphical artworks of the Mambo label, Reg Mombassa's works, including his designs for *Alone in the Bush* and *Bush Suburbs*, demonstrate a sustained and deliberate engagement with art and Australian history. Through their stripped back imagery, both tapestries show the dichotomy of initial colonisation and post-war expansion in Australia. While his funky, cartoon-like style and ordinary subject matter seem an unusual choice for a medium long associated with luxury, this pairing demonstrates the artistic flexibility and experimental nature which has become a hallmark of the ATW.

Keywords: Australian, art, experimentation, painting, unusual pairings,

Melbourne Cricket Club Tapestry

Tapestry and sport are two hobbies which would not ordinarily be associated; however the Melbourne Cricket Club chose to mark the 150th anniversary of the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) by commissioning the 2-metre tall by 7-metre long *Melbourne Cricket Club Tapestry* (2002).

Designed by Robert Ingpen (1936-) and woven in wool and cotton by Chris Cochius, Hilary Green, Pamela Joyce, Sue Batten, Irja West, Laura Mar, Merrill Dumbrell, Caroline Tully, Grazyna Bleja and Louise King of the Australian Tapestry Workshop, the work was an intricate undertaking. Ingpen painted each of the 200 figures, bringing life and movement to the work by perfectly capturing their distinctive actions. The weavers then positioned each of the figures (or groups) across the golden hues of the background, the swirling mass of people appearing as if mid-game. This challenging weave, demonstrated by the number of weavers required, was an exercise in precision for the weavers tasked with replicating not only Ingpen's masterful watercolour portraits, but accurately representing many of Australia's most beloved sporting heroes. The finely woven stitches required to achieve the level of detail also gave the surface of the work a subtle texture, further enhancing the movement within the composition.

While giving the initial appearance of a chaotic mix, the structure of the image is both orderly and symbolic, while also maintaining the feeling of watching a sporting match in motion. The tapestry marks the 150-years of the MCG through fifteen subtle bands running vertically through the background, each representing a decade. Each figure was then placed in their approximate location in time, creating a timeline across the work. While the initial bands are narrow and include fewer people and events, as time passes the bands become wider and the concentration of figures denser. Yet the dynamic arrangement of figures and the inclusion of pockets of empty space prevents the composition from becoming crowded and maintains the feeling of movement. The action within the work is also enhanced by the tiny shadows which fall under each person.

Underneath the swirling mass of figures, two lines cut across the work, their curves loosely marking the oval shape of the ground. These lines add depth to the otherwise flat work. Entering from the left and exiting to the right, the lines also symbolise the beginning and continuing life of the ground. The open-ended oval and the placement of the figures also represents the continuing seasonal cycle of sporting events at the MCG. The elongated oval, spread across seven metres, also gives the viewer the impression of sitting in the stands of the MCG watching a game unfold.

While the design shows the cricketing origins of the ground, the two distinct halves of the sporting year for which the ground is now used, are also demonstrated. The traditionally winter sports of AFL and (later) football and rugby feature in the lower half of the composition with the summer of cricket in the top half of the work. The two halves are also delineated by colour, with the winter sports playing across a deep golden background and the summer sport on a sunny yellow ground. Other significant events, such as the Billy Graham Crusade, the Three Tenors performance and the Melbourne Olympics sit on the central line, between the two sports which dominate the MCG's time. A Royal visit, a Papal visit and war time military use are all included through crests and flags. Technological innovations also feature, with the introduction of lights

and day/night cricket as well as drop in pitches, which the MCG pioneered to better preserve the turf surface for the whole sporting year.

The *Melbourne Cricket Club Tapestry* is a fun yet deeply symbolic work which tells the evolving and continuing story of the MCG. The delicate translation of Ingpen's watercolour portraits is a testament to the fine skills of the weavers.

Keywords: Australian, art, experimentation, illustration, unusual pairings, realism, sport.

Female Artists

Lesley Dumbrell

Lesley Dumbrell (1941-) was the first female artist to establish an ongoing relationship with the Australian Tapestry Workshop. Her style of abstract painting was perfect for translation into tapestry, and coincidently, her sister Merrill Dumbrell was also one of the foundation weavers of the ATW. A driving force in the 1970s Australian feminist movement, Dumbrell was a founding member of the Women's Art Register and Melbourne-based LIP Collective. Her abstract compositions shied away from overtly feminist themes or circular and central core motifs, instead exploring the nature of painting, line and shape. Her works show the ability of line and pattern to generate movement and represent natural conditions in seemingly unnatural ways.

Dumbrell's abstract works, often compared to those of British artist Bridget Riley, seem to hum and vibrate, embedded with both visual and aural qualities. Her angular forms lend themselves extremely well to tapestry, a medium built on the grid. Like the symbiotic relationship of American artists Leonore Tawney (weaver) and Agnes Martin (painter), who worked closely together exploring the grid through their varied media, Dumbrell's tapestry works combine her abstract painting forms with woven textiles. Additionally, tapestry's textured nature also accentuated the inherent movement in Dumbrell's works, the stitches rippling across the surface adding to the vibrations within.

Dumbrell's first work translated by the ATW, *Snakes and Ladders* (1979), provided the weavers with a playground of intersecting lines and triangular forms. The subtle colour changes across the background of the work allowed the weavers to demonstrate their precise colour blending and changing abilities, while the bright, straight lines which criss-cross the surface imbued the work with action. The linear precision of Dumbrell's work demanded equal precision from the weavers, resulting in a technically brilliant tapestry.

In the two works from the early 1980s however, Dumbrell challenged the weavers, trusting them to translate more fluid forms. *Grevillia* (1981) and *Rosella* (1982) are based on pastel sketches of Australian native flora. The more gestural marks and zig zags echo the forms of the flowers, bobbing around on the breeze. In these two works the colours and sketched lines are packed more densely into the composition, the straight lines and hard angles of the earlier work give way to feathery, fan-like marks. Dumbrell replaced the hard edges of *Snakes and Ladders* with scribbles and scratches in bolder colours. The vibrant colours of the yarns perfectly capture the essence of the pastels from the preliminary sketches. Leaving the work in the hands of the weavers, Dumbrell trusted them to translate the looser more gestural mark making.

The two resulting tapestries (now in the collections of the ATW and the National Gallery of Australia) exemplify the skill of the weavers. Each feathery line is composed of multiple shades, expertly positioned to emulate Dumbrell's sketchy marks through both shape and shade. Viewed from afar the works closely resemble the inspiration imagery, however when viewed up close, the expertise of the weavers becomes evident, showcasing the myriads of decisions which underpin the placement of every woven stitch.

In the late 1980s Dumbrell was commissioned for another tapestry through connections made at the ATW. *Fan Tan* (1989) was a vibrant bed of reds and oranges, overlaid with Dumbrell's signature lines and patterns. The ATW developed a connection with influential Australian-English designer Jon Bannenberg, who designed interiors for luxury yachts. Bannenberg worked in conjunction with Perth based yacht building company Oceanfast, installing ATW tapestries on several vessels. In 1991 another commission followed for Dumbrell, this time closer to home, a work custom designed for the Hamilton Art Gallery in Victoria.

The ongoing relationship between Lesley Dumbrell and the ATW goes beyond the associations between female artists and textiles. Dumbrell's staunch feminist sensibility and abstract painting techniques would seemingly put her at odds with textile expressions, yet she valued and trusted the skills of the ATW weavers to not only replicate but also enhance her works when translating them into tapestry. The vibrations and movement implied in Dumbrell's works through pattern and line are enhanced and accentuated by the skilful colour blending and precision of the weavers of the ATW. The subtle movement inherent in all textile works due to incremental stitches further accentuates the movement embedded in Dumbrell's paintings.

Key words: feminist, abstract, tapestry in unusual places, female.

Janet Laurence

Janet Laurence's (1947-) art practice dwells at the intersection of art, nature and science, explored through media including painting, photography and installation. Working with the Australian Tapestry Workshop on two occasions, Laurence's works presented unique challenges for the weavers. For two private collection commissions Laurence created new photomontage works: *Listen to the Sound of Plants* (2017) and *Hear the Plant Song* (2020). Incorporating her signature glass and spherical forms as well as painted and photographed natural elements, the photomontages present complex layers of imagery. Composed predominantly in bountiful of shades of green, in both works Laurence invites the viewer into an undefined, damp, subtropical realm. The dappled light suffuses the works with softness, occasional brighter shafts bringing sections into focus. Spheres hover, reflecting the green around them, suspended in space and time like raindrops halted mid-fall.

The predominant impression of the works is a bath of shades of green, closer inspection reveals the true skill of the weavers and dyer. Each stitch is composed of multiple strands of yarn, twisted together to give the desired tonal variation. Flecks of yellow and hints of mauve combine with the custom dyed shades of green to bring Laurence's vision to life. Brown, umber and blue create areas of light and shade. Commissioned for private homes, the works are ideal for sustained examination and contemplation.

While restful there is also a liveliness in the works brought about by the weavers' attention to the tiniest of details. The careful blending of colours brings well-orchestrated harmony across the surface, only punctured by the handstitched tendrils of foliage which emerge and creep across the work. These stitches, added by hand after the tapestry was completed, ensure that even the smallest details in Laurence's composition were not lost in translation.

Spheres of glass, and other glass objects such as beakers and cloches, are often seen in Laurence's installations. Their presence in these compositions encapsulates her practice, bringing it into the tapestries, adding to the overall dynamism of the works. The spheres, carefully outlined in darker tones, also bring an otherworldly quality to the work. Are they raindrops caught mid-descent, bubbles floating or even tiny protozoan beings drifting through the atmosphere? Their presence adds to the ambiguity of the pieces, the shape enhancing the overall impression of fecundity.

The transformation of Laurence's photomontage presented a unique challenge for the weavers. Areas of crisply focussed foliage are layered with shafts of light, soft focussed indeterminant swathes of green and gestural painted marks. Imagery and focal points advance and recede. Translation of this style of work into tapestry demonstrates the artistry and skill each weaver of the ATW possesses. Rather than creating copies of the original pieces, the weavers' process involves thousands of small decisions, from choosing and blending colours on the bobbins, to selection of yarns and density of stitches. Precision placement of stitches and changes of colour are required to depict and delineate the sharp, photographic elements from the soft-focussed swathes of colour. The resulting works encapsulate the feelings inherent in Laurence's photomontages, and in her practice more broadly.

The collaboration between the ATW and Janet Laurence to weave *Listen to the Sound of Plants* and *Hear the Plant Song* demonstrates the unity which must occur between weavers and artist to create great tapestry works. The weavers successfully translated the complex imagery provided by Laurence, imagery which summarises the concepts and media in her practice. The resulting works are tapestries which are faithful to the original designs yet still showcase the incredible artistic skill of the weavers of the ATW.

Key words: female, feminist, nature, science, art

Sangeeta Sandrasegar

The continuing and evolving nature of tapestry in contemporary art is no better exemplified than in *Everything has two witnesses, one on earth and one in the sky* (2014), the work Sangeeta Sandrasegar (1977-) made responding to a commission for *Current Exchanges* in 2014. The commission was part of the Commonwealth Games celebrations in Edinburgh, Scotland, a joint project between the Dovecot Tapestry Studio and the Australian Tapestry Workshop. Artists were asked to create a work which responded to what a future Commonwealth might hold for multiple identities emerging from a complicated colonial past.

Sandrasegar's original artwork was created in watercolour, featuring her signature paper cutout technique. The background is a swirling, inky black which oozes down the page. Scattered across the middle of the blackness is an array of brightly coloured dots and shapes. At the bottom an expanse of white provides the background to a magnificent portrait of a sea worm, its complex array of tentacles and fine features cut out and mounted in front of the background, casting gentle shadows onto the white.

This work, packed with fine details, would prove pleasantly challenging for weaver Sue Batten. Working one on one with Sandrasegar, Batten was able to let the weave conceptually unfold as the work progressed. While not the focal point of the work, the inky black wash required particular attention to recreate the colour variation and swirling patterns of the original watercolour. Batten opted to employ the soumak wave, bringing a complex texture to the woven surface, emulating the swirling nature of the painted original. Another area of complexity arising from the original work was the representation of the shadows created by the worm. Originally created in Sandrasegar's signature paper cut out technique, with the worm mounted in front created natural shadows, Batten chose to include the shadow in the weave, adding to the delicacy of the strange creature and giving the work a three-dimensional effect.

While Sandrasegar's artwork challenged the weaver to experiment and push the boundaries of tapestry, it also expressed global concerns. The ocean, the medium which facilitated colonisation and still today connects the Commonwealth, is the conduit Sandrasegar used to link all the concepts within the work. The inky black background represents the water, slick with oil from pollution. The smattering of bright shapes across the middle ground of the work represent the micro plastics which are increasingly causing environmental harm. The shapes are also a map of the nations colonised by the United Kingdom. The hero of the work, the magnificent sea worm, is a beacon of hope for the future. Found in oceans all around the world, in all depths, the sea worm performs a similar role to that of its terrestrial cousin, cleaning the water and even helping to mitigate oil spills. While the celebration of the sea worm offers hope for the future, the title of the work, borrowed from Indigenous philosophy, reminds us that we are all connected and all responsible.

The apparent simplicity and abstract imagery in *Everything has two witnesses, one on earth and one in the sky* carries layered and complex narratives. When Dovecot Studios assisted with the establishment of the Australian Tapestry Workshop, their ethos was to push the boundaries of tapestry, to propel the ancient medium forward on both material and conceptual levels. The commission for *Current Exchange*, while linked to colonialism and the Commonwealth,

demonstrates the shared concerns facing all nations around the world and the need for cooperation and collaboration.

Conceptually and materially Sandrasegar's piece *Everything has two witnesses, one on earth and one in the sky* is complex, it pushes the boundaries of tapestry, it foregrounds collaboration between the artist/designer and the artist/weaver. Additionally, it represents contemporary environmental, national and cultural concerns, reflecting the history of not only the ATW and Dovecot, but also colonial history and First Nations perspectives.

Key words: female, feminist, nature, science, art, environmental