VANGUARD

Tapestry and the Australian Avant-Garde

Spanning the rupture between late Australian Modernism and Postmodernism from the 1960s to the 1980s, Mike Brown, Gareth Sansom, Lesley Dumbrell, Richard Larter, Irene Barberis, Jon Cattapan, and the artists of Roar Studios formed the vanguard of Australia's experimental painting scene. Anchored in Melbourne's independent galleries and art schools, they dismantled academic orthodoxy—bridging international abstraction with countercultural collage, anti-censorship satire, and raw neo-expressionism while pioneering new cooperative working methodologies, artist-run spaces, and collective studio models that subverted the myth of the solitary genius.

This collaborative ethos found its institutional counterpart at the Australian Tapestry Workshop (ATW) in South Melbourne. Established in 1976, the Workshop recast tapestry from decorative craft into a radical contemporary medium through an inherently dialogic studio practice, where artists and master weavers co-authored each work at the loom. Vanguard foregrounds this shared interpretive labour alongside the versatility and technical skill of ATW's weavers. Dumbrell's rhythmic abstractions, Larter, Brown, and Sansom's anarchic figuration, and the visceral expressionism of Cattapan, Barberis, and Larwill is all artfully rendered in tapestries that translate the urgency of contemporary painting into woven form.

The ATW extends this critical lineage by collaborating with contemporary artists reshaping Australian practice across cultural, ecological, and interdisciplinary terrain. Recent partnerships with Emily Ferretti, Yvette Coppersmith, Miranda Skoczek, Julian Martin, Naomi Hobson, Atong Atem, Maree Clarke, Troy Emery, Hayley Millar Baker, Janet Laurence, David Noonan, Brook Andrew, and Nusra Latif Quershi bring First Nations cultural resurgence, diasporic histories, environmental advocacy, queer politics, and neurodiverse perspectives directly into complex handwoven works that affirm the ATW as a vital site of artistic experimentation fifty years on.

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Jon Cattapan

Jon Cattapan's artistic practice explores the urban environment, investigating ideas of identity, place and the shifting nature of contemporary landscapes. Through his collaborations with the Australian Tapestry Workshop, Cattapan's layered, atmospheric imagery translates into tapestry, bringing together painterly expression and the visual language of digital technology, mapping and the city.



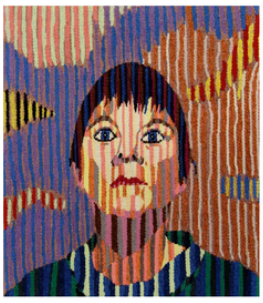
1| **Jon Cattapan**
Blue Figure with red outline, 2006
Woven by Peta Meredith
Wool and cotton (framed)
36 x 25 cm
$1,800



2| **Jon Cattapan**
Red figure on purple ground, 2006
Woven by John Dicks
Wool and cotton (framed)
36 x 25 cm
$1,800

Richard Larter

Richard Larter (1929-2014) was one of Australia's prominent Pop artists, celebrated for his vibrant colour, collage-based imagery and technical experimentation. His practice traversed abstraction and figuration, popular culture and fine art, often challenging convention through provocative and playful imagery. Larter was among the artists ATW collaborated with in its inaugural year in 1976. In 1982, four ATW weavers translated his 'Pretty As' into tapestry, commissioned by the National Gallery of Australia to mark the opening of its new building.



3| **Richard Larter**
Pat, 1979
Woven by Alan Holland
Wool and cotton
52.5 x 42.5 cm
$2,500



4| **Richard Larter**
Study - Try Tapes, 1976
Woven by ATW
Wool and cotton
55.5 x 36.5 cm
$1,600



5| **Richard Larter**
Study - Try Tapes, 1976
Woven by ATW
Wool and cotton
30 x 35.5 cm
$1,600



6| **Richard Larter**
Study - Try Tapes, 1976
Woven by ATW
Wool and cotton
11.5 x 22.5 cm
$600



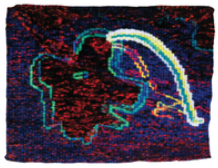
7| **Richard Larter**
Study - Try Tapes, 1976
Woven by ATW
Wool and cotton
13.5 x 17 cm
$400

Irene Barberis

Irene Barberis is an Australian artist whose practice spans painting, drawing, installation, new media and public art. Exhibiting internationally since 1980, her work explores intersections between art, space, ideas and technology. Barberis has undertaken significant artistic and collaborative projects across Australia, Europe, the UK and the United States, and her work is held in numerous public and private collections.



8| **Irene Barberis**
Explorative Study - Tapestry of Light, 2012
Woven by Emma Sulzer
Wool and cotton
32 x 30 cm
$550



9| **Irene Barberis**
Untitled, 2005
Woven by ATW
Wool and cotton
16.5 x 21.5
$450

David Slattery

David Slattery is an Australian contemporary painter, born in 1955, working across oils and acrylics. Around 1989, he maintained a studio at ROAR Studios in Fitzroy, an artist-run cooperative at the heart of Melbourne's independent and experimental art scene. ROAR fostered artistic exchange and challenged established conventions through alternative approaches to exhibiting and making art.



10| **David Slattery**
Untitled #1
Woven by ATW
Wool and cotton
29.5 x 29.5 cm
$1,200



11| **David Slattery**
Untitled #2
Woven by ATW
Wool and cotton
26 x 24.5 cm
$1,200

Lesley Dumbrell

Lesley Dumbrell is regarded as one of Australia's most respected artists in the field of geometric abstract painting. Her richly coloured and intensely lined paintings are essays in colour, geometry and optical perception. From 1979 to 1981 the Australian Tapestry Workshop commissioned a number of large adaptations of Dumbrell's work, including Snakes and Ladders for the National Australian Bank in 1979, and Grevillea, in 1981. Lesley was introduced to tapestry by her sister Merrill Dumbrell, a founding weaver at the ATW.



12| **Lesley Dumbrell**
Explorative Study - Fan Tan, 1989
Woven by Grazyna Bleja
Wool and cotton
37 x 30 cm
$1,100



13| **Lesley Dumbrell**
Explorative Study - Fan Tan, 1989
Woven by Barbara Mauro
Wool and cotton
27 x 30 cm
$900

Gareth Sansom

Victorian artist Gareth Sansom is one of Australia’s most highly regarded painters. A pre-eminent figure of the Australian avant-garde for over 50 years, he is renowned for merging pop cultural references with intuitive and gestural mark making. Family trust is an image brimming with contorted, spewing faces with disembodied eyes, all writhing in a patch worked pattern. The image is claustrophobic, packed with energy and agitated movement, and layered motifs jostling for attention.



14| **Gareth Sansom**
Family Trust, 1989
Woven by Andrea May, Peter Churcher, Hannah Rother, Jennifer Sharpe
Wool and cotton
275 x 366 cm
$300,000

Mike Brown

Mike Brown (1938-1997) was a prominent Australian avant-garde artist, Pop art pioneer and bohemian eccentric, known for his vibrant, irreverent imagery and unconventional approach to art. As the Australian Tapestry Workshop (ATW) was established in 1976, Brown was among the artists who collaborated with the Workshop in its early years, translating his distinctive graphic forms and bold use of colour into handwoven tapestry.



15| **Mike Brown**
Explorative Study
Woven by Sara Lindsay
Wool and cotton
29.5 x 29.5 cm
$1,100



16| **Mike Brown**
Explorative Study,
Woven by Irja West
Wool, cotton and lurex
43.5 x 19.5 cm
$1,200



17| **Mike Brown**
Untitled
Woven by ATW
Wool and cotton
56 x 63 cm
$2,800

Graham Fransella

Graham Fransella is an Australian abstract figurative painter and printmaker, born in England and based in Australia since 1975. His practice distils the human figure to its essentials, exploring gesture, movement and form through expressive lines and subtle variations.



18| **Graham Fransella**
Mirror, 2006
Woven by Milly Formby, Louise King, Emma Sulzer
Wool and cotton
1.14 x 1.40 m
$8,500

David Larwill

David Larwill (1956-2011) was a distinctive figure in Australian art and co-founder of ROAR Studios, one of Melbourne's earliest artist-run initiatives, established in Fitzroy in 1982. His expressive style combined bold colour, simplified, childlike forms and raw, spontaneous energy, often exploring both personal and broader social themes. His distinctive visual language was also translated into tapestry through his collaboration with the Australian Tapestry Workshop in notable tapestries such as 'The Talk' and 'Celebration' which was created for Singapore's new Performting Arts Centre in 2001.



19| **David Larwill**
the Talk, 2002
Woven by Milena PaplinskaIrja West
Wool and cotton
1.71 x 2.20 m
$22,000

Peter Ferguson

Peter Ferguson is an Australian painter and founding member of ROAR Studios, established in Fitzroy in 1982. His distinctive figurative style combines spontaneous drawing, childlike figures and lively depictions of birds, trees and buildings. Characterised by bold colour, dynamic shapes and densely layered compositions, his work captures a playful and energetic view of the world.



20| **Peter Ferguson**
Untitled #2, 1999
Woven by Peta Meredith
Wool and cotton (framed)
25 x 25 cm
$950