

FIBERARTS

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FOCUS ON TAPESTRY



Ruth Ginsberg-Place • Ellie Fidler • Vera Wainar
Kopecek • Trends in Fiber Art • Madge Huntington •
Working at Home • Plus Pleasures and Etceteras



ORCHID,
tapestry, 28 by 36
inches.



DYING
CYCLAMEN,
tapestry, 28 by 36
inches.



BIRD OF
PARADISE
tapestry, 24 by 36
inches.

A Cycle of Growth.

An Outpouring of Color and Energy Distinguishes
the Flower-inspired Tapestries of
Ruth Ginsberg-Place



FLOWER FREIZE #1
CANNAS, tapestry, 12 by
45 inches.

BY JOANNE MATTERA

Every other week I ask myself: Why am I weaving instead of painting?" Ruth Ginsberg-Place pauses and then begins to answer her own question. "There's something exciting about the architectural process of weaving. You're building an image . . . building a form. You're choosing yarns appropriate to the structure. And there's something fantastic about the kind of light refraction and color quality you get from yarn."

For Ruth Ginsberg-Place, who began her artistic career as a painter, there was no one circumstance that led to weaving but she recalls some of the sparks that ignited her interest. "I remember going to a show in New York City years ago—it must have been the Contemporary Crafts Museum—and seeing an abstract landscape done in pile and flat weave. I had never seen weaving before and found it tremendously exciting."

Positive inspiration was followed by negative experience. Ginsberg-Place took a weaving class and "hated it." The inspiration remained, however, for halfway through graduate school (Syracuse University, where she received an M.F.A. in 1966) Ginsberg-Place again found her attention turning to fiber. "The weaving instructor was absolutely uninspiring but for some reason I found myself wanting to weave anyway." She cites fellow student Janet Rausch Taylor as a lone positive influence there: "I wouldn't say that I learned anything from her except that I learned *everything*, which was: you can do expressive things in weaving."

Like the paintings before them, Ruth's early weavings were landscape-influenced but abstract. Incorporating techniques such as leno and floating warp, she utilized the loom in the manner of Anni Albers, whose work she admires.



Photo: POPPIES #2 (inset) and detail (background), tapestry, 25 by 31 inches. All photos, Ken Clark.

"Then there was an interval where I did stylized figures. It was a period I went into and finished and that was that," she says without elaboration.

Of her more recent work Ruth says, "I am trying to balance what is right for weaving with my current interest in imagery." Still nature-inspired, the artist has turned to flowers. "The flowers started accidentally. Someone wanted me to do a commission of the Boston Common and State House. I wanted the commission without having to do all the cliché stuff, so I thought I might get around it by doing a worm's eye view of the Common through flowers."

Among the many flowers transplanted to the well-prepared beds each spring are "the most fantastic cannas." Ruth photographed and drew them as she thought about the commission. "Fortunately it fell through," she says, "but I remained enamored of flower forms."

The first translation of these images to the warp was in the form of a frieze which allowed the artist to explore one flower after another. Three finished pieces resulted, each characterized by a cool background that enlivened and intensified the woven forms.

"Flowers are a traditional subject in art, as are the nude and the still life," says Ruth, mentioning Monet and O'Keefe in the same breath. Like them, she is attempting to use common flowers in an uncommon way. "I guess what I like about the recent work I've done is that everything is moving on the surface."

There is a sparkling quality to the work and a liveliness created by the use of complementary colors and the juxtaposition of intense and muted areas. The yarn textures enhance the images—rya and tapestry wools worked with traces of mohairs and silks. A pleasant surprise comes with the discovery of cloth strips worked into the weft. Ruth uses the strips to modulate an otherwise homogeneous element. She says: "The yarn I use is the same color, shape, and size the entire length of itself. Patterned cloth changes either randomly or as I manipulate it, adding another richness, another variable in the vocabulary of making images in fiber."

Upon closer inspection one realizes that the warp itself (a rayon/linen blend) adds to the vitality of the surface. Here the warp is red, farther up it is neutral. Over to the left it is green, or blue, or purple. Using textile paints, india inks, and acrylics, Ruth paints the warp according to the design of her cartoon to obtain a dark/light or bright/dull pattern that works both within itself and with the image subsequently woven into it. Occasionally she uses a striped warp. In both instances she controls through beating the amount of color allowed to "bleed" through. This method of working distances her style of tapestry from that which she intensely dislikes (flat, uninterrupted color which she says resembles "cut paper work"). "Besides," she says, "it brings more joy and fun to the process of weaving."

Depending on the piece she will create, Ginsberg-Place may ply the image horizontally across the warp or weave it warpwise. Her sole technique is slit tapestry. She works from a line cartoon, the design well-confirmed before she begins. Her approach to color is looser—"a generalized feeling that I ad lib," she says of it.



Ruth Ginsberg-Place.

The friezes were followed by three bolder works: the hot BIRD OF PARADISE, whose orange petals unfold against a red/red-violet ground, and the more subtly modeled ORCHID and DYING CYCLAMEN. Each is a masterpiece of color and technical control where the intensely colored background acts as a foil for the image.

"Color is my strength, my most expressive vehicle," admits Ginsberg-Place. "Other things I am trying to work out, like beautiful forms, spatial distance, value."

In her newest series, POPPIES, executed in the 28 by 36 inch format over which the artist is in full control ("I don't care how big people's sofas are, I am going to stick with this kind of size."), one can see the results of her efforts. Something different is happening. The fluid orange forms convey the paradoxical qualities of floating and rootedness. The intense, anonymous background of the previous series has been succeeded by a suggestion of environment that recalls her earlier landscape images. Like the flowers which inspire her, it appears that Ruth Ginsberg-Place, in her recent work, has completed a cycle of growth. •

Contributing editor Joanne Mattera is an artist, teacher, and writer. She lives in Beverly, Massachusetts.

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Tapestry design by Ruth Ginsberg-Place used as logo for her business cards.