

**PRAIRIE INTERLACE: WEAVING, MODERNISMS,
AND THE EXPANDED FRAME, 1960-2000**

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Installation view of *Prairie Interlace: Weaving, Modernisms, and the Expanded Frame, 1960-2000*, Nickle Galleries, 2022.

Foreground: Carol Little, *Furrow*, 1976 (cat. 29)

Background: Pat Adams, *Prairie Sunset*, 1983 (cat. 1)

Weaving at the Horizon: Encounters with Fibre Art on the Canadian Prairie

by Mackenzie Kelly-Frère

... textiles are the receptacle for so many conflicting preconceptions, emotions, traditions and investments, people are often uncertain about what label to apply. Yet it seems that this very undefinableness is increasingly being claimed as a positive space between, around, and away from labels that normalize such hierarchies as high and low art.

ANN NEWDIGATE¹

For me, the Prairie shaped my weaving and I deliberately ignored any other influences.

PAT ADAMS²

I learned how to weave at the Alberta College of Art³ in 1994, a year before the final instalment of the Lausanne International Tapestry Biennial. At the time I was only vaguely aware of the influence of the Biennial on the fibre art movement and its role in the “transformation of classical tapestry to a new form of artistic expression.”⁴ My weaving teachers, Katharine Dickerson and Jane Kidd, introduced us to artists who exhibited at Lausanne, encouraging us to look beyond our local context. The work of Lenore Tawney, Sheila Hicks, and Magdalena Abakanowicz inspired us to experiment both on and off the loom, to investigate unusual materials, and to engage with weaving as a form of personal expression. We incorporated dye techniques and process-intensive approaches made popular by contemporary Japanese textile artists such as Hiroyuki Shindo, who visited the Alberta College of Art in the mid-1990s. As

an enthusiastic student of textiles, I began to understand that fibre art was international in its scope. At the same time, I also noticed that the network of artists working in fibre-based media was a small one. Claiming a space on the timeline of fibre art as a perennial student of weaving and a descendant of settlers on Treaty Seven Territory, I acknowledge the influence of my teachers and in turn the cumulative influences of their own mentors and teachers.

These artists and their weaving are the focus of *Prairie Interlace: Textiles, Modernisms, and the Expanded Frame*. With them I share a sense of place, here between the foothills of the Rocky Mountains and the east country of Alberta where I grew up. I experience a deep sense of recognition when looking at Pirkko Karvonen's *Rapeseed Fields* (cat. 25). Its hand-spun yarns are dyed in shades of gold and green, evoking the fragrant, cultivated fields experienced from an open car window driving from Trochu to Drumheller, Alberta. Like Pat Adams (cat. 1 & 2) of Saskatchewan or Elaine Rounds (cat. 46) of Manitoba, I understand that the vast flatness of this agrarian landscape invites textile abstraction, with a horizon line as flat as the *fell*⁵ of handwoven cloth as it accumulates on the loom. The horizon is also a destination to which one may never arrive—a kind of nonplace and an elusive site for becoming.⁶ As such it is a useful metaphor as we consider the interwoven legacies of weavers on the Canadian Prairie during a period of radical changes to weaving practice. Glenn Adamson argues that craft is a horizon that constitutes a “conceptual limit active throughout modern artistic practice.”⁷ The artists of *Prairie Interlace* have

interrogated this conceptual limit both on and off their looms, weaving at the horizon where textile traditions are challenged by artistic innovations of form, materiality, and context.

The work that resulted from this process offers a unique parallel record of the struggle for art world legitimacy undertaken by weavers and curators who instigated and sustained the fibre art movement in Europe and the United States. In her book *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art*, Elissa Auther contextualizes this struggle as it happened within “three spheres of practice . . . fiber art; process or postminimalist art; and feminist art.”⁸ Throughout her text, Auther complexifies the narrative of the fibre art movement by highlighting the overlapping subjectivities of its participants. In similar fashion, this essay will consider the work of several artists in *Prairie Interlace* and explore how contingent communities of weaving practice approached the notion of weaving as an art form. This text will also attempt to unpick overlapping contexts that informed the work, including early 20th-century efforts towards the revival of handweaving, the push for the professionalization of fine craft, and the Prairie landscape itself. While many of the artists in this exhibition have exhibited their work around the world, some of their weaving evokes a kind of made-on-the-Prairies sensibility in which landscape and the Prairie horizon are enmeshed with various subjectivities related to place and identity.

The transformation of weaving practice enacted between 1960 and 2000 is remarkable considering handweaving's pathway

to revitalization in North America with its focus on the preservation of weaving traditions. Commonly credited to Mary Atwater, the revival of American handweaving favoured colonial era weaving drafts⁹ and utilitarian textiles. These she featured in the *Shuttlecraft Guild Bulletin*, a self-published weaving periodical distributed widely across North America.¹⁰ Decades later these drafts were still in use at the Banff School of Fine Arts where Ethel Henderson of Winnipeg and Mary Sandin of Edmonton taught weaving from 1942 until the early 1960s.¹¹ While teaching in Banff, the two weavers also collaborated on a periodical of their own. *Loom Music* was published for more than twenty years and regularly featured what was taught in Banff in those early days. Anecdotes of summer activities in the mountains were also included with designs inspired by the colours of glacial lakes.¹² Advice and even drafts from Atwater's earlier publications were regularly included. *Loom Music's* editorial content was minimal, with most pages dedicated to educating the home weaver with clear and friendly instructions for useful domestic articles. When the authors of *Loom Music* encountered the weaving of Anni Albers in a 1952 travelling exhibition at the University of Alberta,¹³ they pointed to the modernity of the weaving as proof that handweaving holds an "important place in the textile world of today." At the same time, it is telling that these educators focused their report on technical aspects of Albers' upholstery and drapery materials, revealing a bias towards the traditional utility of cloth.¹⁴ Indeed, one must look very hard at the writing and teaching records of these weavers to discern the seeds for the experimental



Reproduction of the linen *Peyto Lake Towel* woven by Mackenzie Kelly-Frère based on draft and instructions in the November 1951 issue of *Loom Music*.

weaving which was to follow at Banff. In the decades following Henderson and Sandin's tenure, the weaving workshop at Banff was to become a generative site for fibre artist-in-residence programming under the leadership of Mariette Rousseau-Vermette, an artist from Québec who initiated the Fibre Interchange in 1979, attracting artists from around the world.¹⁵

The development of programs for weaving instruction on the Canadian Prairies occurred in the decades following the First World War. As early as the 1930s,



Calgary weaver F. Douglas Motter. Photo by Jack De Lorme and courtesy of Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary, 1954-02 (CU1140342).

the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art in Calgary (later the Alberta College of Art)¹⁶ offered weaving classes as part of their art program “provided there was sufficient demand.”¹⁷ The Banff School of Fine Arts weaving course was started in 1941 as part of the University of Alberta’s Department of Extension.¹⁸ Although initially there was no credential offered for the summer program, this was perhaps the first complete course for weaving available in Canada—and an influential one. Alice VanDelinder, a student of

the summer program at Banff, would go on to teach weaving at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art from 1948 until her retirement in 1962.¹⁹ F. Douglas Motter—one of the artists of *Prairie Interlace*—was hired to teach in the program at the newly named Alberta College of Art the next year.²⁰ Following the Second World War, weaving guilds, associations, and community-based workshops were initiated across the Prairie provinces.²¹ In 1947, the Guild of Canadian Weavers was founded by Mary Black, Ethel Henderson, and Mary Sandin with the express purpose of raising the standard for handweaving through the establishment of a new testing program by mail.²² All of this activity began as a project with shared goals—to elevate the technical standards of weaving along with its theory and critical reception. These initiatives were encouraged by a broader movement to professionalize the crafts across the country. In her book *Crafting Identity: The Development of Fine Craft in Canada*, Sandra Alföldy notes that “Canadians were highly influenced by the modernist perspectives put forward at the first World Conference of Craftsmen [in 1964] and taken up by the American Craft Council’s journal *Craft Horizons*.”²³ As some chose to align themselves with the art world, key values that had previously united weavers, such as function, finish, and fit for purpose, were directly challenged by new priorities like innovation with unusual materials, originality, and, above all, artistic self-expression. Alföldy notes that many were left out of this new future for craft. “Frequently, marginalized craftspeople reflected approaches to craft considered outdated, for example those who practiced and

preserved traditional skills, or those who avoided neat classification, like First Nations craftspeople.²⁴ The split between weavers with a more traditional focus and those eager to align themselves with fibre art eventually coalesced into two distinct yet contingent communities of practice—weavers in guilds and weavers in art schools. This is, of course, a broad generalization. Given the scale of the overall weaving community on the Prairies, overlap was inevitable. It is not surprising, given this smaller context, that many of the artists in *Prairie Interlace* either taught or were taught by other artists in the exhibition.²⁵ Beyond art schools, workshops were how most weavers learned to weave. Weavers also taught one another and traveled to conferences hosted by the Handweaver's Guild of America or the World Craft Council to take workshops from international weavers such as Lily Bohlin,²⁶ Jagoda Buić, or Ritzi Jacobi.²⁷

The typical narrative of this period given by curators and critics (notably not by weavers) is one of rupture where artists were liberated from the restrictions of weaving traditions and even their looms. In their text accompanying the 1969 exhibit *Wall Hangings* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, curators Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larsen heralded this new era in which weavers were able to experiment “free of the loom.”²⁸ The truth, however, was more complicated. In many cases weavers were looking to ancient weaving and traditional structures for inspiration. Writing recently about *Wall Hangings*, Glenn Adamson notes that weavers “adopted off-loom techniques such as knotting, wrapping, and plaiting, as well as ingenious ‘hacks’ of

the loom itself. Their motivation was to find new vocabularies for the discipline, which ironically led them to techniques that were deliberately anachronistic. They borrowed ideas, for example, from ancient Peruvian textiles: the shock of the old.”²⁹ Katharine Dickerson's 1972 work *West Coast Tree Stump* (cat. 11) demonstrates how weavers recontextualized traditional weaving structures while adopting the sculptural strategies of fibre art. Dickerson studied at the Art Institute of Chicago with Else Regensteiner, herself a student of Marli Ehrman and Anni Albers.³⁰ She counts artists like Magdalena Abakanowicz and Claire Zeisler as early influences on her practice and worked for a time as Zeisler's studio assistant.³¹ In the early 1970s Dickerson immigrated to Canada to pursue weaving in an entirely different context. Living on Vancouver Island, she met Salish weavers who taught her twining techniques.³² In *West Coast Tree Stump*, Dickerson used an adapted twining technique in concert with an overshot structure commonly used in loom-woven, settler-colonial coverlets. The twining comprises an integral part of the structure, holding the entire form together, while the overshot floats over the surface of the form, providing a textural effect of charred wood. The work was woven off loom from the top down using a custom-fabricated support. In this monumental piece Dickerson has instrumentalized the structural vocabulary of cloth, intentionally enmeshing the cultural referents of each. For the artist, *West Coast Tree Stump* was both an homage to the Salish people and a social commentary on the destruction of culture and nature by settler loggers.³³ A sculptor of textiles with



Pirkko Karvonen, *Rapeseed Fields*, 1974 (cat. 25)



Installation view of *Prairie Interlace: Weaving, Modernisms, and the Expanded Frame, 1960–2000*, Nickle Galleries, 2022.

Left to right: Eva Heller, *Heat*, 1983 (cat. 23), Katharine Dickerson, *West Coast Tree Stump*, 1972 (cat. 11), Ann Newdigate, *Then there was Mrs. Rorschach's dream/ You are what you see*, 1988 (cat. 39), Ilse Anysas-Šalkauskas, *Rising from the Ashes*, 1988 (cat. 3), Crafts Guild of Manitoba, *Prairie Barnacles*, 1979 (cat. 32)

Margreet van Walsem,
Inside Out, 1977 (cat. 57)





Jane Kidd, *Landslice #1*, 1988 (cat. 26)



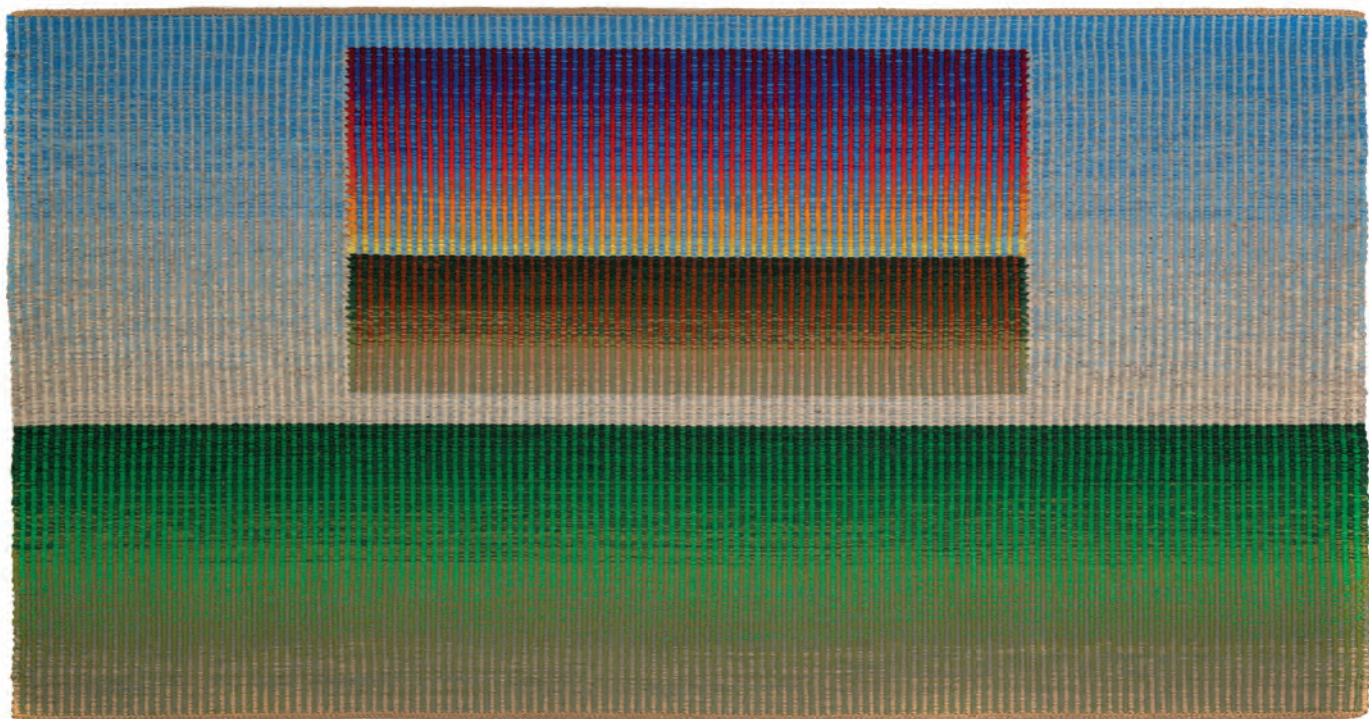
Jane Kidd, *Landslice #1* (detail), 1988
(cat. 26)



Ann Newdigate, *Collage Preparatory Sketch For Wee Mannie*,
1980 (cat. 37)



Ann Newdigate, *National Identity, Borders and the Time Factor, or, Wee Mannie*, 1982 (cat. 38)



Pat Adams, *Remember That Sunset We Saw from Here One Time?*,
1984 (cat. 2).



Elaine Rounds, *Prairie Twill Seasons (Ode to Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter)*, 1985 (cat. 46)

an affinity for woven structures, Dickerson is deliberately anachronistic in her approach and utilizes these structures with startling fluency—the path of each yarn is a lexical gesture to be interpreted.

In 1977, Dickerson undertook her own handweaving revival project at the Alberta College of Art where she took over from F. Douglas Motter. At the time she was advised to rejuvenate the program, or it would be closed.³⁴ She would go on to teach weaving to many students in her thirty years at the institution, myself included. Throughout her career, Dickerson's research has focused on cloth structures and their relationship to making meaning in different cultures. A sabbatical in the mid-1990s found Dickerson on New Zealand's Te Ika-a-Māui / North Island, learning about *harakeke* (New Zealand flax) and Maori weft-twining techniques with weaver Eddie Maxwell.³⁵ More recently, Dickerson has investigated the particularities of the Flesberg weave structure,³⁶ a type of bound weave unique to her maternal ancestral homeland. Dickerson has shared her research broadly, publishing articles and monographs for the benefit of her students and colleagues.

Even in an art school setting like the Alberta College of Art, weaving curricula drew from technical source materials also referenced by weaving guilds or community workshops. Old-fashioned weaving drafts and loom set-ups circulated between students like recipe cards. *Craft Horizons*, with its focus on re-envisioning craft as art, was just as likely to be on a weaver's bookshelf as a copy of Mary Atwater's *Shuttlecraft Book of American Handweaving*.³⁷ What differed were the critical contexts in which

the weaving was conceived and shown. In addition, there was an implicit bias towards art making as opposed to practical weaving that persisted even in the mid-1990s. As a young weaver in my twenties, I made work for a gallery setting almost exclusively. The processes of weaving and its materiality were foregrounded as I aligned myself with post minimalism. Influenced by Jane Kidd, I also became deeply invested in textile history and the social history of weaving across different cultures. Considering myself an artist first, I confess that I did not weave a tea towel until I was forty-six years old but have always admired the weavers who did.

Immigrants to Canada brought with them textile traditions from Ukraine, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland and provided another key influence on weaving across the Prairies. In *Prairie Interlace*, artists like Eva Heller (cat. 23), Inese Birstins (cat. 6), and Pirkko Karvonen (cat. 25) share their unique perspectives in woven form. Their works exhibit the dual influence of textile traditions and the revolutionary fibre art movement celebrated at the Lausanne Biennials. Pirkko Karvonen learned how to weave in Finland as a teenager. In the early 1970s she would return to Finland for a summer course to learn how to weave "the right way."³⁸ This she did in preparation to teach a weaving course for the Edmonton Public School Board's Extension Services and later weaving workshops around the province for Alberta Culture. Karvonen travelled with other Albertans to several World Craft Council Conferences and counts F. Douglas Motter as a colleague who supported and influenced her weaving.³⁹ She was also a founding member of the Hand Weavers, Spinners

and Dyers of Alberta and a past president of the Guild of Canadian Weavers.⁴⁰ When I first met the artist in 2021, we discussed her association with weaving guilds. Karvonen explained that it was not always a perfect fit as she questioned the rules for appropriate materials and conventions for finishing and displaying textiles.⁴¹ At the same time it is very clear that she holds a profound respect for weavers of the past—especially weavers in her home country of Finland. Finnish textile artist Eva Anttila was a particular inspiration.⁴² As a result of her broad knowledge of textile structures, Karvonen was able to develop a weft inlay technique with linen to produce a series of tapestries that feature grain elevators. For Karvonen, grain elevators were like the “cathedrals of the Prairie” and a symbol for industry and the persistence of agricultural industry. At the time she wove this series, grain elevators across the Prairies were being replaced by centralized depots. In a sense Karvonen felt as if she were acting to preserve the elevators.⁴³ The sensitivity with which the artist renders late summer light on the sun-faded paint of the elevators is remarkable. Her self-developed method using variable weights of dyed linen threads (some dyed with plants) allowed her to blend colours impressionistically, stranding multiple colours to get the particular result. In conversation with Karvonen, one gets the sense of an artist who remains intensely curious about the world around her. She is currently working to complete a book on Finnish mats based on her interviews with Finnish weavers about their rag rugs.⁴⁴ Like her contemporaries in *Prairie Interlace*, Karvonen has travelled and taught throughout her life in such places as



Pirkko Karvonen, *Grain Elevators*, c. 1985, Linen, 142 x 175 cm. Collection of The Glencoe Club, Calgary, Alberta. Photo: Andy Nichols, LCR PhotoServices.

Sweden, Denmark, Australia, and the United States⁴⁵—metabolizing the influences of the fibre art she encountered along the way.

Ann Newdigate immigrated to Saskatchewan from South Africa in 1966 and completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Saskatchewan in 1975. She credits Margreet van Walsem with introducing her to tapestry. Her fascination with Gobelin⁴⁶ tapestry persisted, and in 1981 she was granted funding by the Saskatchewan Arts Board (now SK Arts) to undertake a year-long course in tapestry at the Edinburgh College of Art, studying with Maureen Hodge and Fiona Mathison. It was here that she wove *National Identity, Borders and the time factor, or, Wee Mannie* (cat. 38). At this time the artist was engaged with interpreting the quick and free gestures of drawings with “the systematic quality of the tapestry process.”⁴⁷ The tapestry department at the Edinburgh College of Art was founded

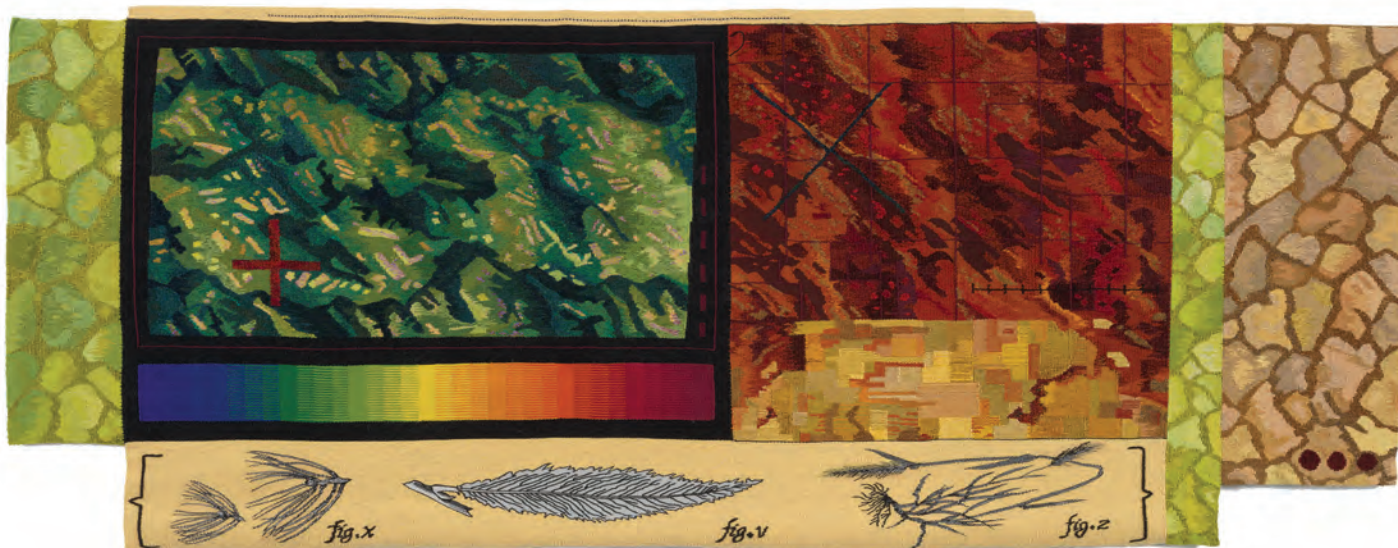


Margreet van Walsem carding wool at the Saskatchewan Summer School of the Arts, Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan, 1973. Photos courtesy of the Margreet van Walsem Estate.

by Archie Brennan, who was also the director of Dovecot, which produced tapestries in collaboration with artists like Louise Nevelson and David Hockney.⁴⁸ In this context, Newdigate became keenly aware of the interrelationship of craft, art, and the subordination of the tapestry artist—particularly women who work in tapestry—to those working in other media. In her 1986 MFA thesis “Love, Labour and Tapestry: Unravelling a Victorian Legacy,”⁴⁹ Newdigate examines the gendered boundaries of high and low art in the methodical manner one may imagine the artist weaves her tapestries. If we return to Glenn Adamson’s notion of craft as a conceptual limit,⁵⁰ we may conjecture that Newdigate’s work in tapestry traverses this boundary thread-by-thread as the artist continually redefines her position as a tapestry weaver in relation to dominant visual art forms. In *Then there was Mrs. Rorschach’s dream/ You are what you see* (cat. 39) the artist intentionally enacts a painterly approach to tapestry with masterful blending of colour throughout. The work’s title references Rorschach ink blots, wherein what one perceives reflects somehow on one’s state of mind. However, in this case it is with Mrs. Rorschach that Newdigate contends. In her text from the exhibition *Look At It This Way*, Lynne Bell notes Newdigate’s reference to Mrs. Rorschach and writes, “[w]ith the figure of Mrs. Rorschach, the artist points to the historian’s neglect of both women and tapestry.”⁵¹ In this tapestry that imitates the painting (p. 158) while also referring to psychoanalysis, Newdigate calls attention to the viewers’ own biases in relationship to what they perceive. Is it a painting or a tapestry? Of tapestry itself, Newdigate writes,

“The medium, belonging everywhere and nowhere, is everything and nothing. It is what you think, and it conjures what you don’t know and can’t remember—it has no certainty.”⁵² It would seem that for the artist tapestry is not only a *métier* but an unfixed form to which she may enmesh innumerable theoretical positions.

Like Ann Newdigate, Jane Kidd’s trajectory as an artist parallels the shifts and changes in fibre art along with the rise of theories of craft and the handmade. In her own writing Kidd has articulated her commitment to tapestry and her belief in its potential as a contemporary form. She writes, “I have come to value the handmade as a human-centered activity and site for tacit knowledge, process as a means to reconnect skillful making with skillful thinking, time investment as a reflection of generosity and willingness to take care and pay attention.”⁵³ Jane Kidd taught at the Alberta College of Art from 1980 until 2011. Taking care and paying attention are hallmarks of Kidd’s approach to her work in tapestry and as an educator. As a tapestry weaver, Kidd has always been attuned to an international context. She describes her *Landslice* series from the late 1980s as transitional work in which she attempted to create woven work like Peter and Ritzi Jacobi or Sheila Hicks whom she admired.⁵⁴ *Landslice I* and *III* (cat. 26 & 27) in *Prairie Interlace* are artifacts from a series of experiments enacted on the tapestry form. Using a pulled-warp technique, Kidd added tension to what was initially woven as a flat piece. Strips woven with discontinuous weft are separated in places by slits in the web. By slowly and deliberately pulling and securing different warp threads,



Jane Kidd, *Land Sentence: Arbour*, 2009, woven tapestry: wool, cotton, rayon and silk, 81 x 203 cm. Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, 2009.057.001. Photo by John Dean and courtesy of Jane Kidd.

the artist created ridges and texture across the surface. By the intentional manipulation of warp threads, the transformed textile looks much like a landscape with furrows of scraped or plowed earth forced into sharp relief. In a medium intrinsically intertwined with historicism and allegory, Kidd evokes geologic time and the shifting of tectonic plates, all at a very small scale. These works reference earth and landscape without quite representing it.⁵⁵ In her long career following these experimental pieces, Kidd has produced entire bodies of work that ponder what it is to collect, to make things by hand—in essence, to be human. With her *Land Sentence* series begun in 2009, Kidd’s focus turned to the impact humans make on the land itself. Referencing aerial and satellite photographs of ecological devastation, Kidd meticulously weaves patterns of drought and

deforestation at once beautiful and terrible. In her own words, Kidd uses “the slow and intimate process and flawed language of tapestry weaving . . . to refocus on our complicity in the sentencing of the world we live in.” With *Inheritance*, a new series of sculptural tapestries woven between 2020 and 2022, Kidd continues her focus on our impact on the natural. Referencing the body with garment-shaped forms at the scale of children’s clothing, Kidd personalizes the plight of the land, rendering its devastation intimate as we negotiate with ecological destruction on the horizon.

In Pat Adams’ work, the horizon line is a literal focus for his woven abstractions of the Saskatchewan landscape. Pat Adams first encountered weaving in Halifax, taking extension courses at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in 1974. At the time Adams

was a professional working in community development. He was drawn to weaving as he felt it might give him a sense of finishing something in a more tangible way than he had experienced in his professional life.⁵⁶ He began weaving rugs in a set dimension, working out his designs in bands of natural, undyed grey wools. Interestingly, Adams deployed a strategy for composition in these pieces in which each grey shade was to be used once before repeating. He would write out a sequence in advance and then weave it. Using an algorithmic approach to composition, Adams was able to “take his perception out of it.”⁵⁷ Although Adams claims to have ignored the art world intentionally,⁵⁸ it is compelling to consider how weaving lends itself easily to systems for composition used by contemporary artists. Adams’ approach was not unlike those enacted by artist Sol LeWitt, whose “structures, based on squares and cubes, fabricated using industrial materials and processes, eliminated the hand of the artist through a rule- and system-based conceptual approach.”⁵⁹ In his own community, Adams was an advocate for the crafts working for the Saskatchewan Craft Council and various other organizations including the Saskatoon Weavers and Spinners Guild. Commenting on the reception of his work Adams noted that the people who collected it were most often other craftspeople showing at the same craft shows who would buy the rugs using the money they had made at the shows.⁶⁰

His weavings in *Prairie Interlace* are from a series of rug format pieces that capture a sense of shifting light on the horizon (cat. 1 & 2). Utilizing a pick-on-pick technique in which alternating wool yarns of

different shades are passed across the warp, producing vertical bands of changing colour. Not unlike furrows of a cultivated field, the stripes in this work shift and change depending on the viewing angle. Devoid of figuration or landmarks, Adams’ weaving is as much about light at a particular moment of time as it is about the land. There is something of the sublime here as one encounters the ephemeral, transitory nature of existence when faced with the vast Prairie landscape. It is a theme shared by weaver Elaine Rounds whose multi-panel work *Prairie Twill Seasons (Ode to Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter)*, (cat. 46) also takes advantage of the flatness of the weft line to enact a mimetic textile response to land and sky. In Adams’ later work, a connection to the land would continue as he shifted to a weaving practice that connected him to his Métis culture. He learned to finger weave in the 1990s and later discovered that he could reproduce a Métis sash on the loom.⁶¹ The Métis sash evolved from the traditional sashes of French Canadian and Indigenous hunters and trappers. Three metres in length, the sash had many practical purposes. “It was tied around the waist of the *capote*⁶² for warmth and could also be used as a tumpline for carrying packs or as rope to haul canoes during a long and difficult portage. The sash also served as an emergency bridle when the Métis were out on the hunt.”⁶³ Today, the sash has become a symbol for Métis identity, culture, and connection to the land. A specially commissioned Métis sash woven by Adams now sits alongside the official regalia of the Saskatchewan Legislature in Regina.⁶⁴ In both his weavings of the Prairie horizon and Métis sashes Adams says he is working



Pat Adams in his studio. Photo courtesy of Sask Valley News.

with identity.⁶⁵ To the weaver both applications of his weaving in art and for cultural regalia enmesh traditions with concept and personal expression.

I began this writing with the horizon as a metaphor for the perpetual negotiation between tradition and innovation undertaken by the artists of *Prairie Interlace*. The weavings of Pat Adams and Pirkko Karvonen are deeply rooted in the landscapes that inspired them and are nourished by textile traditions. Katharine Dickerson employs a complex lexicon of textile structure and pattern to speak to her personal lived experience. Tapestry artists Jane Kidd and Ann Newdigate have worked with a view towards the broader art world and their place in it, tackling complex ideas with discipline and intellectual rigour. Like the meandering threads in a handwoven tapestry each artist has taken their own path and committed to a *métier* uniquely suited to explore narrative, embody care for the world, and convey tacit, inherited knowledge. Whether the horizon is reached or not, it remains important. For, as Glenn Adamson writes, a horizon “is nonetheless intrinsic to any sense of position.”⁶⁶ Or as my father, a man born and raised on the Prairie, has reminded me on more than one occasion, “If you go that way, you’ll be over there.”⁶⁷



NOTES

- 1 Ann Newdigate, "An Essay," in *Annabel Taylor: New Works in Fibre*, exhibition brochure (Prince Albert, SK: Little Gallery, 1993).
- 2 Pat Adams, interview with Timothy Long, June 25–26, 2020.
- 3 In 1995 the institution was renamed the Alberta College of Art & Design and again in 2019 as the Alberta University of the Arts. <https://www.auarts.ca/why-auarts/history-and-mission>, accessed March 17, 2022.
- 4 Giselle Eberhard Cotton and Magali Junet, *From Tapestry to Fiber Art: The Lausanne Biennials 1962–1995* (Milan: Skira/Fondation Toms Pauli, 2017), 133.
- 5 The *fell* is the leading edge of handwoven cloth as it is woven on the loom.
- 6 Here I acknowledge the influence of queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz's conceptualization of queerness as an unreachable horizon in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 2.
- 7 Here Glenn Adamson builds on Johanna Drucker's argument that Modern art is "an infinitely varied field defined by a series of contingent horizons." *Thinking Through Craft* (London: Berg/Victoria & Albert Museums, 2007), 2.
- 8 Elissa Auther, *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xxi.
- 9 A weaving draft is a kind of preparatory notation used in planning a piece of weaving. Atwater and other weaving educators popularized these drafts by reproducing them and sharing them with students.

Traditional weaving drafts continue to be revived in different ways in contemporary periodicals and guild newsletters. As such these relics of a colonial past persist in contemporary weaving practice.
- 10 The *Shuttlecraft Guild Bulletin* was initiated in 1924 and was published until the early 1950s. Atwater retired in 1947 but continued to contribute articles to the publication. <http://www.mmawg.org/Bulletin.htm>, accessed March 18, 2022.
- 11 David and Peggy Leighton, *Artists, Builders and Dreamers: 50 Years at the Banff School* (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1983), 93.
- 12 A regular "Banff Report" was typically included in September issues of *Loom Music*. A design for "Peyto Lake" towels using the "M's and O's" structure featured pattern bands in turquoise, red, green, and grey in the November 1951 issue of *Loom Music*. Ethel Henderson and Mary Sandin, *Loom Music* (November 1951): 68–70.
- 13 *Anni Albers: Textiles* was first exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1949 and travelled to twenty-six museums in the United States and Canada. <https://www.albersfoundation.org/alberses/chronology>, accessed September 18, 2023.
- 14 Henderson and Sandin, *Loom Music* (April 1952): 24–28.
- 15 In her introduction to *From Tapestry to Fiber Art*, Janis Jefferies writes about Ruth Scheuing's observations regarding the Fibre Interchange at Banff and its impact on fibre art in Canada and internationally. Janis Jefferies, "Introduction," in *From Tapestry to Fiber Art*, 11.
- 16 Now the Alberta University of the Arts.
- 17 Jewellery, pottery, wood carving, and weaving are listed under "Craft Work (Special)" as topics for which a course may be requested in the 1932–33 Annual Announcement, for the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art in Calgary. It is also noted that "Students will be given every encouragement, and where possible a market will be found for their production," 61.
- 18 Mary Atwater was hired to establish the weaving program at the Banff School of Fine Arts in 1941 and taught with Ethel Henderson as her assistant. The following year Atwater decided not to return. By her account this was due to Canadian government's wartime rationing of gasoline and the fact that alternative travel was "uncomfortable and crowded." *Shuttlecraft Guild Bulletin* (July 1942), <http://www.mmawg.org/Bulletin.htm>. Another account of Atwater's reason for resigning is given in *Artists, Builders and Dreamers: 50 Years at the Banff School*. David and Peggy Leighton note that Atwater was "very concerned about her personal security, and it was rumored that she carried a revolver wherever she went." This was reported to have caused trouble at the border when Atwater crossed from her home state of Montana. "Faced with having to give up the gun or her teaching job at Banff, she chose to give up the latter," 93, 95.
- 19 *Calgary Herald*, "Weaving Instructor Retires," May 16, 1962, 43.
- 20 Motter also taught at the Banff School of Fine Arts in the 1970s. Brian Brennan, "Weaver's Life was a Rich Tapestry of Experience," *Calgary Herald*, December 9, 1993, B2.
- 21 Two of the earliest weaving guilds on the Prairies were founded by Ethel Henderson, who founded the Manitoba Branch of the Guild of Canadian Weavers in 1947, and Mary Sandin who formed the Edmonton Weaver's Guild in 1953. Joanne Tabachek, 1997, <http://>

- www.mbweavers.ca/about-us/our-history/ accessed March 15, 2022; <https://albertaonrecord.ca/edmonton-weavers-guild-fonds>, accessed March 15, 2022.
- 22 <https://www.thegcw.ca/about>, accessed March 15, 2022.
- 23 Sandra Alfody, *Crafting Identity: The Development of Fine Craft in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 6.
- 24 Alfody, *Crafting Identity*, 7.
- 25 F. Douglas Motter and Margreet van Walsem have several students represented in *Prairie Interlace*.
- 26 Jane Kidd, interview with the author, March 1, 2022.
- 27 Margreet van Walsem took workshops with Jagoda Buic and Ritzi Jacobi in 1974, possibly at the World Congress of Craftsmen in Toronto.
- 28 Constantine and Larsen, *Wall Hangings*, 2.
- 29 Adamson, "Experiencing The Shock of the Old, Fiber Artists Rediscover Shows Like MoMA's Pivotal 1969 'Wall Hangings,'" *Art in America*, June 23, 2020, <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/wall-hangings-moma-rediscovered-fiber-art-1202692079/>.
- 30 Christa C. Mayer Thurman, "Else Regensteiner and Julia McVicker," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 23, no. 1 (1997): 18–95, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4104389>.
- 31 Katharine Dickerson, interview with the author, March 11, 2022.
- 32 Dickerson, interview.
- 33 Katharine Dickerson, email to the author, March 16, 2022.
- 34 Dickerson, interview.
- 35 Katharine Dickerson, "Aho Tapu: The Sacred Weft," in *Craft Perception and Practice: A Canadian Discourse*, ed. Paula Gustafson, vol. 1 (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2001), 162.
- 36 Katharine Dickerson, "Flesberg Bound Weave System," *Norwegian Textile Letter* 12, no. 2 (February 2006): 1–8, <https://norwegiantextileletter.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/ntl12-2-1.pdf>.
- 37 Originally published in 1928, the book was reprinted several times and re-issued as recently as 2008 with a special biography of its author included. Another of Atwater's influential publications was "Byways in Handweaving," which has taught many artists Central and South American techniques for band weaving. Drafts reproduced from this book appeared in photocopied handouts in Katharine Dickerson's 1994 weaving class in which the author learned to weave.
- 38 Pirkko Karvonen, interview with Julia Krueger, September 7, 2021.
- 39 Karvonen, interview.
- 40 Pirkko Karvonen, email to the author, March 3, 2022.
- 41 Pirkko Karvonen, interview with the author, December 4, 2021.
- 42 Karvonen, interview.
- 43 Pirkko Karvonen, interview with the author, March 15, 2022.
- 44 Karvonen, email.
- 45 Karvonen, email.
- 46 Gobelin tapestry refers to a style of tapestry woven in Gobelin, France, popularized by such artists as Archie Brennan. Often referred to as upright or "high warp" tapestry.
- 47 Ann Newdigate, "Tapestry, Drawing and a Sense of Place," in *Ann Newdigate: Tapestry, Drawing and a Sense of Place*, exhibition catalogue (Regina: Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, 1982), 5.
- 48 Newdigate, "Tapestry, Drawing and a Sense of Place," 5
- 49 Ann Newdigate, "Love, Labour and Tapestry: Unravelling a Victorian Legacy" (master's thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1986).
- 50 Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 2.
- 51 Lynne Bell, "Look At It This Way," in *Ann Newdigate Mills: Look At It This Way*, exhibition catalogue (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1988), 4.
- 52 Ann Newdigate, "Kinda art, sorta tapestry: tapestry as shorthand access to the definitions, languages, institutions, attitudes, hierarchies, ideologies, constructions, classifications, histories, prejudices and other bad habits of the West," in *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 174
- 53 Jane Kidd, "To Practice in the Middle," 2008, <http://www.janekidd.net/?pageid=07> accessed March 18, 2022.
- 54 Jane Kidd, interview with the author, March 1, 2022.
- 55 A parallel may be found in the work of Eva Hesse whose sort of abstraction Elissa Auther characterizes as "highly allusive without being symbolic." Auther, *String, Felt, Thread*, 73.
- 56 Adams, interview.
- 57 Adams, interview.
- 58 Adams, interview.
- 59 Kirsten Swenson, *Irrational Judgments: Eva Hesse, Sol LeWitt, and 1960s* (New York and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 4.
- 60 Adams, interview.
- 61 Adams, interview.

- 62 A *capote* is a thigh-length winter coat worn by Métis men.
- 63 Louise Vien and Lawrence Barkwell, “History of the Metis Sash,” 2012, 6, <https://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/14789.History%20of%20the%20Metis%20Sash.pdf>, accessed July 31, 2022.
- 64 John Lagimodiere, “Metis Sash at Home in the House,” *Eagle Feather News*, December 2010, 1.
- 65 Adams, interview.
- 66 Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 2.
- 67 Ed Frère.