

Jack Lenor Larsen sought out contemporary textile artists to more deeply explore the connections between past objects and contemporary inspiration.

Jack Lenor Larsen is internationally known as a textile designer, author, and collector. He is respected as a leader in the field of textile arts, and as an advocate for traditional and contemporary crafts. He began designing textiles in the 1950's, and his innovations in color and texture have become exemplary of modernist design.

For "Sourcing the Museum," Larsen assembled artists who would approach the task with superior technical mastery and aesthetic abilities, including Olga de Amaral (Bogota, Colombia), James Bassler (Palm Springs, CA), Polly Barton (Santa Fe, NM), Archie Brennan (New Baltimore, NY), Lia Cook (Berkeley, CA), Helena Hernmarck (Ridgefield, CT), Ayako Nikamoto (Chigasaki, Japan), Jon Eric Riis (Atlanta, GA), Warren Seelig (Rockland, ME), Kay Sekimachi (Berkeley, CA), and Ethel Stein (Croton-on-Hudson, NY).

The 11 invited artists were asked to take a deeper look at pieces from The Textile Museum's collection of more than 19,000 historical textiles, including examples from East Asia, the Islamic world, Africa, Europe, and the Southern Hemisphere, and spanning over 5,000 years, dating from 3,000 B.C.E. to the present.

Each artist had their own method for selecting a piece from the collection for the project. Some confined themselves to a particular origin, or a specific technique. Jon Eric Riis remembered a work seen on display at the museum decades earlier. Archie Brennan decided to leave the choice to fate, picking his pieces by selecting at random three item numbers from the museum's database. Once the piece was selected, the artists returned to their studios and created new pieces in response to their chosen "muse."

On View

Each of the artists diverged from their museum "muse" to different degrees, and in several cases broke away from their usual methods of creation.

Polly Barton, a Santa-Fe-based weaver working primarily in silk, chose a dense, 15th-century Egyptian rug as her start. The result was three shimmering gossamer panels, reminiscent of the works of Helen Frankenthaler, for whom Barton was once a studio assistant. She keeps the richness of color and

lustrous shades of the original carpet but creates an air-and-light catching piece made of sheer and lustrous silk organzine (a material with which she had not previously worked), spanning over seven feet.



Robe, Central Asia, Uzbekistan, Bukhara, late 19th century. TM 2005.36.98. The Megalli Collection. Photo by Renée Comet. Ethel Stein, *Butah*, 2010. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Tom Grotta.

Ethel Stein, who will turn 95 this year, took on two different pieces as inspiration, both examples resist-dyed textiles. Her resulting Modernist hanging brings together a similar boldness of color and pattern, while also embracing a more abstract approach to shape.

Weaver Jim Bassler is perhaps the artist most familiar with the kind of challenge presented with “Sourcing the Museum”—he often uses ethnic textiles as a starting point for his work. In this case, a shirt from Myanmar inspired a piece called “My ‘Letterman’ Yantra,” referencing the talismanic inscriptions on the original shirt, meant to offer protection to the wearer. Bassler’s yantra is emblazoned with encouraging slogans “Go Man!”, “Run win!” and “Run won!” meant to push the weaver forward in athletic pursuit.

Lia Cook, whose recent tapestry work has focused on creating photo-realistic images, chose two small, fragmentary pieces from the 6th- 7th centuries. “I was fascinated that even though they were made centuries ago they could be very contemporary, with subtle nuances of recognizable human expressions,” she wrote. Her resulting tapestry

takes the figures onto a monumental scale, and incorporates her technique of keeping the structure of the weave visible, so that from a distance the image can read almost photographically, but upon closer inspection is made of many individual threads, like the strokes of an Impressionist painting.

Jon Eric Riis is an artist of great reputation, and was named a USA Fellow in 2011, a grant awarded to only 50 outstanding performing, visual, media, and literary artists. His “muse” was a textile he had seen in the museum in the 1970s – a richly embellished Chimu jacket. He took the decorative elements and turned it into something appropriate to the location of Washington DC in an election season—entitled “Congressional Straitjacket.” Riis’ artist statement best describes the piece, woven in meticulous detail: “This [is] a political statement dealing with two large figures, both bound by straitjackets, depicting a figure with an elephant face and the other with a donkey face...”

With a broad range of starting points, it is unsurprising that the results are equally varied: in size, in scope, in technique, and in viewpoint. But all are the finest examples of their craft, and a testament to both the vitality of contemporary textile art and the dynamic relationship between past and present.

About The Textile Museum

The Textile Museum expands public knowledge and appreciation—locally, nationally, and internationally—of the artistic merit and cultural importance of the world's textiles. Founded in 1925 by George Hewitt Myers, The Textile Museum is an international center for the exhibition, study, collection and preservation of the textile arts. The Textile Museum collection encompasses more than 19,000 objects that date from 3,000 BCE to the present, including some of the world's finest examples of rugs and textiles from the Near East, Central Asia, East and Southeast Asia, Africa, and the indigenous cultures of the Americas. The museum's 20,000 volume Arthur D. Jenkins Library of Textile Arts is among the world's foremost resources for the study of textiles. **Beginning in mid-2014, The Textile Museum will be a primary cornerstone for the forthcoming new museum on the campus of The George Washington University. For more information, visit www.gwu.edu/textilemuseum.**

The Textile Museum is located at 2320 'S' Street, NW in Washington, D.C. The museum is open Tuesday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. An \$8 suggested admission is requested of non-members.

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