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## Fiber Art/Works of Art: Positioning and Perception in the Marketplace

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## **Fiber Art/Works of Art: Positioning and Perception in the Marketplace**

Alice Zrebiec

Contemporary works made of fiber or incorporating textile techniques frequently encounter an identity crisis. Craft? Fiber Art? Fine Art? How do these descriptions limit marketability and representation of the work, or, conversely, open up new horizons for talented artists? The owners of five galleries presented their viewpoints with specific reference to the focus of their galleries, the artists they represent, and the context in which they present textile-related works to the viewing public. They addressed the following issues: How did these galleries evolve their specific visions? Where is their emphasis: on materials and techniques, craftsmanship, or artistic content and expression? What criteria – aesthetic and economic - do they use to cultivate new artists for their galleries?

Rachel Brown, of Weaving Southwest in Taos, has presented and promoted the work of tapestry weavers living in New Mexico for many years. Although Bellas Artes in Santa Fe is often associated with contemporary fiber art, Charlotte and Bob Kornstein do not use medium as a determinate for the works they exhibit, objects that challenge the distinction between craft and art. Jill Heppenheimer explores the artistic endeavors of the Art-to-Wear movement at the Santa Fe Weaving Gallery. Terry McGrath Craig and Martha Hibberd showcase fiber artists, particularly but not exclusively those creating small-scale embroideries, at the Hibberd McGrath Gallery in Breckenridge, Colorado. Rob Coffland, co-owner of Tai Gallery/Textile Arts in Santa Fe, has brought the work of contemporary Japanese bamboo artists to the attention of American audiences. Each participant presented a slide-illustrated overview of their gallery and the work of the artists they represent, discussing how they, the owners, present these objects to the public. A panel discussion and questions from the audience followed the individual presentations. Alice Zrebiec served as moderator.

Rachel Brown, Weaving Southwest, Taos, NM

Rachel Brown received her BA from Radcliffe College and continued her art studies at the Art Students League and Cooper Union in New York. After moving to Taos in 1956 she delved into all types of southwestern weavings, particularly those inspired by Navajo and Rio Grande textiles. In the late sixties, she traveled to Mexico, Central and South America, immersing herself in technical studies, and upon her return wrote *The Weaving, Spinning, and Dyeing Book* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1978). During the 80's she helped found Tierra Wools – a worker-owned weaving business -- in Los Ojos, NM. She started Rio Grande Weavers Supply (1985) for the manufacture of looms and wheels and hand-dyed yarns, and in 1987 she opened an adjoining gallery, Weaving Southwest, to promote and exhibit the work of contemporary New Mexican tapestry weavers. The gallery currently shows the work of approximately twenty weavers. In 1993 Brown received a LifeTime Achievement award at the Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C.

Charlotte and Bob Kornstein, Bellas Artes, Santa Fe, NM

For nearly twenty years the focus of Bellas Artes has been the aesthetic viewpoint of its owners/directors rather than art from a particular time period, culture, or medium. Thus, there have been exhibitions of pre-Columbian, African, Japanese and Chinese art as well as one-person exhibitions for twentieth-century artists. These latter shows included the work of Antoni Tapies, Louise Nevelson, Judy Pfaff, Richard DeVore, and Ruth Duckworth, and that of Olga de Amaral, Shihoko Fukumoto and Norma Minkowitz, the three artists working in fiber who are represented by the gallery. The exhibitions for Lucas Samaras and Robert Kushner – artists who work in various media – included painting, sculpture, drawings and fiber.

Jill Heppenheimer, Co-Owner with Barbara Lanning, Santa Fe Weaving Gallery, Santa Fe, NM

The Santa Fe Weaving Gallery represents thirty of the most accomplished and creative textile designer-artists in America. Each of the Art-to-Wear artists has achieved national status for her/his technical mastery, innovative creative expression and integrity of design - from the creation of the fabric to the fashioning of the garment. Santa Fe Weaving Gallery pushes the boundaries of conventional clothing and style trends by showcasing artwork that blends the voice of the artist with the personal statement of the collector. A sampling of the artists represented includes Tim Harding, Ana Lisa Hedstrom, Jean Cacicedo, Susan Summa, Maude Andrade, Gina D'Ambrosio and Ina Kozel.

Terry McGrath Craig and Martha Hibberd, Hibberd McGrath Gallery, Breckenridge, CO

Martha grew up on the East Coast and migrated to Colorado after earning a ceramics degree at Alfred University. Terry grew up in the Midwest and Colorado, and after earning a Geography degree at the University of Missouri and studying weaving in Vermont, she settled back in Colorado. In 1982, after some independent wearable art shows, they started the Hibberd McGrath Gallery, where fiber-based artwork and textile influences have been a continuing theme. The Gallery - unusual for the mountain resort community of Breckenridge - has evolved over the years. The owners like to work with an artist as he/she evolves. The gallery has shown contemporary basketry and quilts, and the owners have an ongoing interest in the small-scale embroideries of Tom Lundberg, Missy Stevens, Beth Nobles and others.

Robert T. Coffland, Jr., Co-owner with Mary Hunt Kahlenberg of Tai Gallery/Textile Arts, Santa Fe, NM

Robert T. Coffland applies his extensive experience in communications, business management, product development and marketing within food industries to the art world. In 1982 he first visited Japan. Subsequently, he curated with his wife, Mary Hunt Kahlenberg, two exhibitions in Japan on American Indian art and African art: *Mother Earth Father Sky* and *Matisse's Secret: Kuba Textiles of Zaire*. Their Tai Gallery is involved in developing and curating public and private collections in the United States,

Europe and Asia. Coffland is a writer and researcher on Japanese bamboo arts, and in 2000 he published his first book on the subject, *Contemporary Japanese Bamboo Arts*. He currently serves as the chairman of the New Mexico Arts Commission.

Alice Zrebiec – Moderator, Santa Fe, NM

Alice Zrebiec received her PhD from the Institute of Fine Arts – New York University. Her dissertation, *American Tapestry Manufactures – 1893-1933*, examined the work of three prominent ateliers and the artistic and cultural milieu in which this work was produced. Formerly curator of textiles in the department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, she is currently a curatorial consultant based in Santa Fe and textile curator for the Denver Art Museum.