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## **Textile Museum to Feature Contemporary Tapestry March 27 – September 5, 2004**

**February 27, 2004, Washington, DC** — By Hand in the Electronic Age: Contemporary Tapestry will be on view at The Textile Museum from March 27 to September 5, 2004. The exhibition includes the work of 14 contemporary artists that use tapestry technique, one of the oldest continuously used forms of textile art. Twelve of the artists represented are from Hungary, and two are from North America. The exhibition is curated by Rebecca A.T. Stevens, Consulting Curator, Contemporary Textiles.

### **The Exhibition**

By Hand in the Electronic Age is based on the ground-breaking exhibition Kárpit/Tapestry presented at the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest in 2001, and for which Ms. Stevens served as a juror. Stevens says, “For more than two millennia, across a wide variety of cultures, artists have produced textile objects of great aesthetic and artistic value in tapestry technique. Today, in our fast-paced world, artists are still engaged in this genre that, contrary to the ethos of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, compels them to work in a slow and deliberate manner. By Hand in the Electronic Age shows that this labor-intensive technique is not an abandoned anachronism, but continues to be a vibrant medium of artistic expression.”

By Hand in the Electronic Age is divided into two sections. The first features a single tapestry by each of 12 Hungarian artists: Ildikó Dobrányi, Gabriella Hajnal, Ibolya Hegyi, Krisztina Kóky, Anna Mária Kőszegi, Ida Lencsés, Eleonóra



Jon Eric Riis, “Masked Muses” (detail), 2000. Silk, metallic thread, cotton and freshwater pearls, 80" x 53".

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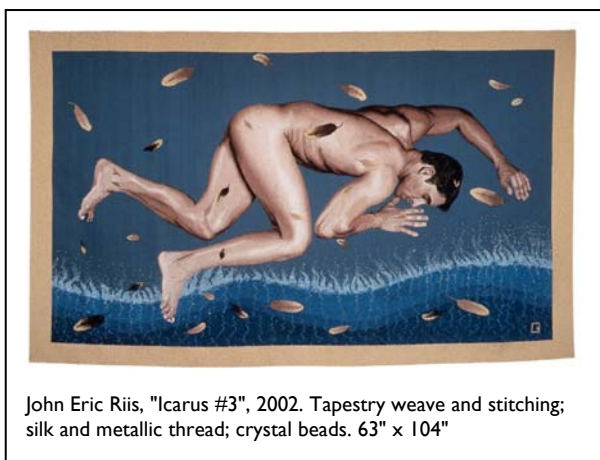
Pasqualetti, Livia Pápai, Éva Sipos, Gizella Solti, Verona Szabó, and Katalin Zelenák. Their works range from pictorial to abstract, each artist commenting and reacting to the changing artistic and political milieu in which they find themselves. For example Exodus by Gizella Solti combines images of war, peace, and redemption reflecting Hungary's tragic past and optimism for the future. Another work, the installation Cloister by Elenora Pasqualetti, features a series of five free-standing "faux-marble" columns executed in tapestry. This work simultaneously dispels the notion of tapestry as only a two-dimensional medium, while alluding to the historical roots of the genre.

The second section of By Hand in the Electronic Age is an in-depth exploration of the work of two North American artists – Marcel Marois and Jon Eric Riis – that shows how a tapestry artist, like a painter, develops his or her own style and themes. With several works by each artist, this section illustrates that tapestry technique does not dictate the imagery but serves as an expressive tool in the hands of creative people. Curator Rebecca A.T. Stevens says, "Tapestry gives the artist complete control of the process of creation from beginning to end, and offers unlimited design possibilities. Tapestry art can be flat and seamless, highly textured, or even three dimensional – it is like painting and sculpture combined."

### **In Depth: Marcel Marois & Jon Eric Riis**

Marcel Marois and Jon Eric Riis are two of the best-known artists working in tapestry technique today. Canadian artist Marcel Marois is a professor of art at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi and is the winner of numerous prizes including the Saidye Bronfman Award, one of

Canada's most prestigious art prizes. Credited with making tapestry relevant to our time, Marois explores 21<sup>st</sup>-century aesthetic ideas in his allegorical tableaux. Dissolving the boundaries between abstraction and figuration, his works are woven with consummate skill and sensitivity. Miroirs – Turbulences, for example, uses text and images to explore environmental issues. His subtle Rain series is an abstract study of the stages



John Eric Riis, "Icarus #3", 2002. Tapestry weave and stitching; silk and metallic thread; crystal beads. 63" x 104"

of life, destruction, and rebirth of a forest ravaged by wildfire.

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Jon Eric Riis began weaving tapestry as an undergraduate at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago after seeing pre-Columbian Peruvian tapestries in the museum's collection. He immediately saw the hands-on technique of weaving as a link between the past, present and future of humankind. Today he is an expert on historic textiles as well as an artist. Riis pushes the tapestry genre far beyond the woven reproduction of two-dimensional graphic images. His precise and stylish tapestries are made from silk and metallic thread, and many are further embellished with beads and crystals. Drawing inspiration from sources as diverse as Greek mythology and current events, Riis masterfully juxtaposes materials and imagery to investigate issues of identity and contemporary notions of beauty. His Icarus series, perhaps inspired by the rise and fall of technology titans at the center of the dot.com boom, places this ancient myth in a contemporary context. Heart of Gold Female #1 and Heart of Gold Male #2 are metallic gold coat forms that open to reveal a medical illustrator's depiction of internal organs executed in tapestry weave. These pieces force us to ask fundamental questions about who we are – what is seen on the outside and what lurks inside of each of us. The overall effect is at once luxurious, sensual and mysterious.

### **Tapestry Technique**

Tapestry weave is one of the oldest, most versatile textile techniques used to produce designs and pictures in cloth. Two characteristics distinguish tapestry weave from other woven structures: the weft yarns completely cover the warp in the finished textile, and the weft yarns (called discontinuous wefts) do not extend across the complete width of the cloth. Instead, the weft yarns turn back at the edges of each individual color area to form the desired design or pictorial image.

While the origins of tapestry technique cannot be documented with certainty, it has been used in cultures throughout the world for centuries. Greek and Roman literature is replete with references to tapestry weaving, and extant examples of 4<sup>th</sup>-century Egyptian Coptic and pre-Columbian Peruvian tapestries can be found in The Textile Museum's collections. The genre flourished in France and the Netherlands from the 13<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> century. During that time tapestries were created in manufactory-type workshops that employed artists, cartoon drawers, and weavers. Tapestry designs were based on sketches made by artists, enlargements were made by cartoon drawers, and finally weavers began work based on the cartoons.

In the Renaissance the concept of tapestry began to change. A hierarchy of the arts was articulated during this period and painting took preeminence over the art of tapestry. Tapestry focused on the reproduction of paintings and became marginalized as a vehicle for expressing new art ideas. In the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, English Arts and Crafts movement founder William Morris championed a revival of the tapestry genre. Later the German Bauhaus movement served as another catalyst for renewed interest in tapestry technique. In both instances, instead of a separation between design and the ultimate creation of a tapestry, the emphasis was placed on a personal relationship with materials and technique, and unifying the concepts of handcraft and art. Contemporary tapestry artists continue to embrace this attitude toward the art form today.

### **Catalogue & Support**

By Hand in the Electronic Age is accompanied by a full-color catalogue with essays by exhibition curator Rebecca A. T. Stevens and Hungarian art historian Edit András. The catalogue can be purchased through The Textile Museum Shop at [www.textilemuseumshop.org](http://www.textilemuseumshop.org) or by calling (202) 667-0441, ext. 29.

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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 Museum explores the role that textiles play in the daily and ceremonial life of individuals the world over. Special attention is given to textiles of the Near East, Asia, Africa and the indigenous cultures of the Americas. The Museum also presents exhibitions of historical and contemporary quilts, and fiber art. With a collection of more than 17,000 textiles and rugs and an unparalleled library, The Textile Museum is a unique and valuable resource for people locally, nationally and internationally.

The Textile Museum is located at 2320 'S' Street, NW in Washington, DC. The Museum is open Monday - Saturday 10 am to 5:00 pm and Sunday 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Admission is free; suggested donation is \$5.00. For further information, call 202-667-0441.

**For more information or images**, please contact Rachel Bucci at 202-667-0441, ext. 42, or by email at [rbucci@textilemuseum.org](mailto:rbucci@textilemuseum.org) or visit [www.textilemuseum.org/about/pressroom.htm](http://www.textilemuseum.org/about/pressroom.htm).