
Gloria F. Ross & Modern Tapestry is, without a doubt, a specialized title. That said, it is, at the same time, certainly one of the best researched titles on the topic of modern tapestry.

In the 1970s and 1980s, exhibition catalogs and gallery announcements began to present modern tapestries, wall hangings and carpet design in new ways, showing them as art rather than craft. These catalogs were often small and pamphlet like in appearance. The number of well-illustrated, let alone scholarly books published on this topic remains today limited (books by and about Sheila Hicks come to mind as exceptions). For this reason, as well as Hedlund’s thorough and engaging presentation of Ross’ work, Gloria F. Ross & Modern Tapestry is an important addition to any academic library with programs in design. Public libraries with strong art collections and collectors interested in learning more about modern tapestry will find this title solid and well worth the $65.00 price tag. The 378 page book illustrates each and every one of the artists’ tapestries in full color. The images are preceded by essays describing the artist’s work and their association with Gloria Ross.

Gloria Ross (1923-1998) was born Gloria Frankenthaler (Helen Frankenthaler was her sister). It was in the 1950s when Gloria became interested in handwork, creating needlepoint, crocheting and producing hand-hooked wall hangings. Following her 1950 divorce, Gloria sought an outlet in the arts. This “tapestry career”, as she called it, was made possible by her social and artistic connections as well as intense sense of purpose. She described her work as translating paint into wool and might best be called an editrice. She was an intermediary, selecting the artist, commissioning or negotiating the specific work, contacting the weaver or weaving company, overseeing the materials and quality of the production and finally financing the project.

From the 1970s until her death, Gloria Ross collaborated with twenty-eight different artists including Frankenthaler, Milton Avery, Romare Bearden, Jean Dubuffet, and Frank Stella. The sculptor Louise Nevelson designed nine tapestries specifically for GFR Tapestries. Ross had an especially fruitful relationship with Kenneth Noland, commissioning Navajo weavers to translate his paintings into tapestry.

The author, Ann Hedlund, is an anthropologist, and first began working with Ross during her travels to the Southwest. Thus, she has been able to bring her firsthand knowledge and access to archival material to this serious study of one women’s mission to “increase the scholarly understanding and public appreciation of tapestries”. It is fitting that Hedlund is the director of the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies at the University of Arizona at Tucson.

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