

Marilyn Rea-Menzies – Artist - Tapestry Weaver

Marilyn Rea-Menzies is a well known artist and contemporary tapestry weaver who has been painting and drawing since childhood. She taught herself to weave tapestries in 1980 and has since had wide experience in producing tapestries for exhibition, for private homes and also for public and corporate spaces. Recipient of a number of awards she has exhibited her work extensively throughout New Zealand and overseas. One of her tapestries was included in an exhibition **The 7th Triennale of Mini Textiles – ‘Order and Chaos – the Frontiers’** at the **Jean Lurcat Museum of Contemporary Tapestry, Angers, France**. This small work was purchased by the Museum for its collection of miniature textiles. Two of the collaborative tapestries ‘Raiment’ with Julia Morison and ‘Song’ with Don Driver were purchased in 2003 by the Christchurch Art Gallery, Te Puna O Waiwhetu. ‘Raiment’ is at present on show in the Contemporary Art Collection at the Gallery. She also has a work in the Waikato Art Museum.

For twelve years she worked from her studio in The Arts Centre of Christchurch, but lost that studio in the February 22nd earthquake in 2011. At this time, she was working on a tapestry screen for Government House in Wellington. This was commissioned by Lady Susan Satyanand as her gift to the House at the end of her husband’s tenure as Governor General. Work on the tapestries was suspended for about seven weeks because of the earthquake but it was able to be completed in time to be presented to Government House on the 17th August 2011.

Her paintings and digital work have also been exhibited widely and she has twice been a finalist in the Anthony Harper Awards at CoCA in Christchurch. She has a number of public art works around the country including the Millennium Tapestry in the Christchurch City Council, the Suffragette tapestry in the Marlborough District Council and the Baycourt tapestries in Tauranga.

In March 2013, Marilyn moved to Hamilton to live near her children, and set up her studio there until her last move to her hometown of Westport in June 2019. She is now currently living and working in the Marilyn Rea-Menzies Studio/Gallery at 241 Palmerston Street, Westport. Marilyn has started painting again over the last few years and has always kept up her drawing skills while continuing to weave tapestries. She is currently working on a series of tapestries, drawings and paintings featuring our endangered birds and has produced the exhibition **‘Extinction is Forever’** which was first shown at the Wallace Gallery, Morrinsville in October, 2018. This exhibition is touring next year to Arts in Oxford, Oxford, Canterbury in February/March and to the Toi Gallery, Pataka+Art Museum in Porirua in November. Marilyn has always had a love of birds, bush and all our native flora and fauna since childhood and feels very strongly that we should be doing much more to protect our natural environment.

Of her work Marilyn says –

I view myself as an artist who just happens to work in a medium – tapestry weaving – which can be termed a ‘slow art’ – almost an anachronism in today’s instant gratification world.

Tapestry is a very ancient art form. It has been around for thousands of years and has been practiced in most cultures on the planet. The process of weaving a tapestry is very meditative and while the techniques are very important and take a lot of time they are not fundamental as to how people view the final work. It should be the aim of a tapestry weaver to have the techniques become automatic while integral to the image or subject matter in the work. My

tapestries are often quite large, and the viewer has to stand back to see the image in its entirety. Close up it is a different thing altogether and becomes much more abstract. Colour blending in a tapestry is optical, where the eye actually blends the colours from a distance while close up every colour that has been woven into the image is visible.

“Many of my design concepts deal with the deconstruction and reconstruction of images in many different ways. I enjoy breaking up and distorting shapes and spaces to create new images from old. I also respond to the grid format and much of my contemporary work relates to this interest.

I also enjoy taking small things out of scale and enlarging them greatly. Many New Zealand native flowers particularly, are very small and insignificant, almost unnoticeable, but very, very beautiful close-up. I love to find beauty in the things that we normally walk over and do not see.

