

Know the Weaver # 12

May-June 2016



Mary Burns

Artist and TC2 owner

Based in the US, Mary Burns expresses her love of northern woodlands and waters in her weavings and writings. An award-winning weaver, she creates tapestries and felted work that reflect the hues and patterns of the natural world. She also weaves custom designed hand-woven rugs and wall pieces. Her jacquard looms, a TC-1 named Nora and a TC-2 named Bridget Mariah, allow her to craft her work in even greater detail, vibrancy, and character.

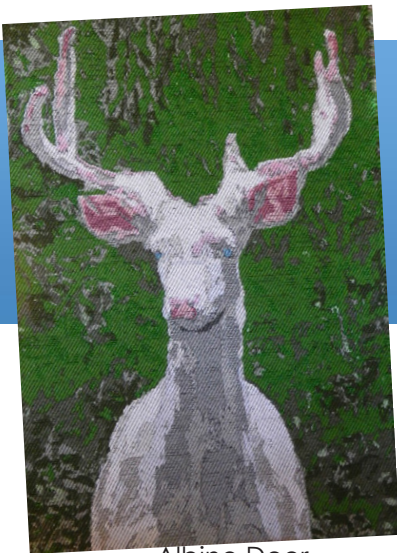
1. Tell us about Manitowish River Studio – when was it established and what are the kind of works that keep you engaged in there?

We started Manitowish River Studio in the mid-1980's, after we moved to a rural area in northern Wisconsin. It was a natural step in my weaving life. I had started weaving in a high school art class where we built our own frame looms and started creating basic tapestry style weavings. The textures, materials, colors, and the designing resonated with me. In college I focused on natural history, writing and fiber art. I learned to weave on a floor loom.

Then I bought an old handmade barn loom with 2 harnesses. I converted it to a 4-harness loom. It was a large, heavy wooden loom with a built in bench. I felt like I was crawling into another century when I worked on it. Eventually I sold that loom and bought a 60" Glimakra 4-harness loom. It was beautiful and new and everything worked! I wove yardage, wall pieces and eventually woolen rugs on it.

In 1984 when we moved to my grandparents' old home in northern Wisconsin (we are about 50 miles south of Lake Superior) I decided it would be a good time to pursue weaving full time.

WEBSITE:
www.manitowish.com



Albino Deer



Trail of Feathers 1



Hemlock Lake

I saw a niche for patterned wool and linen rugs and decided that would be my focus. I bought an 8' Cranbrook 4-harness rug loom and installed a shaft-switching platform. The shaft-switching platform gives me so much flexibility in design work. It is an amazing tool. Then I purchased a 10' AVL 12-harness Compu-Dobby loom and sold my Glimakra. These two looms have been the backbone for my rug business. I have created many pieces to exhibit and sell and have made many custom-designed rug and wall pieces for clients.

In the late-1990's I began reading about Vibeke Vestby creating a hand-jacquard loom and I found it fascinating! I took several jacquard weaving workshops and then was blessed to be able to purchase a TC-1. It's been an amazing journey.

2. You seem to have this power to soak in the elements of nature and recreate them in fabric – what brings about this closeness to nature? What is your spirit animal?

As a child I spent much of my time outdoors. We would visit my grandparents where we live now. Our home is in an area of lakes, rivers, forests and extensive wetlands. My husband, John, likes to say this our area: "For every three steps you take one will squish." John is a naturalist and writer. Together we take people out hiking, birding, paddling, snowshoeing—exploring nature slowly.

Our hope is to help people further understand and appreciate the world around them. We are out everyday. It is this connection to nature that grounds me and sustains me. This sense of place diffuses through me and into my work. Some of my favorite woven themes are connected to nature: forests, sunrises, northern lights, birds. In these weavings I hope to create a bridge and an insight into nature and encourage that bond to develop within people.

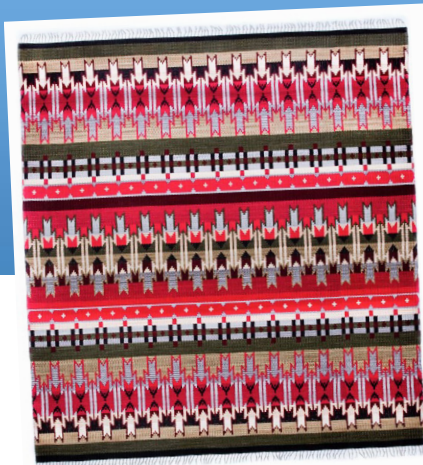
I'm not sure what my spirit animal is but I have a strong connection with birds. In the winter I am so appreciative of the black-capped chickadees and the winter finches that live here despite the cold and snow. In the spring I'm thrilled with the arrival of the warblers. But some birds are my favorites because of their beautiful songs – especially the songs of the winter wren and the hermit thrush.

3. What are the major influences that have defined your works over the years? Could you mention any of the work(s) that you consider the most significant?

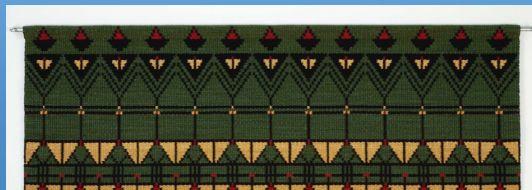
In my early work I was very influenced by the designs of Frank Lloyd Wright, Celtic patterns, pictographs, and always the natural world. I am still influenced by those things but I feel my spiritual connections, which have always been part of my work are even stronger now.



Trail of Feathers 2

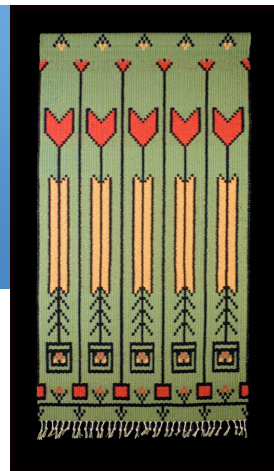


Southwest Rug*



Frank Lyoyd Wright Sampler*

* Rugs and wall hangings in wool and linen, woven on Mary's Cranbrook or AVL rug looms



Autumn in the Arts and Crafts Style*

Other weavers have provided great inspiration including Louise Lemieux Bérubé, Alice Schlein, Sheila O'Hara, and Bhakti Ziek. Tapestry weaving has helped shape my work, too. Painters who have influenced me include the Canadian Group of Seven and Tom Thompson.

4. Are there any memorable responses that you have had to your works? Could you share some experiences?

Over the years of weaving commissioned pieces I have had wonderful responses to my work but one particular weaving was special because it was based on the client's photograph of an unusual albino deer. It was a challenging commission. Here is a passage from her after the delivery of the jacquard weaving:

"We are so thrilled with the tapestry. You captured the essence of him and it is perfect. We'll enjoy this for years to come. Everyone who has seen it think it is absolutely spectacular." - Joan Giusto

While working on my Ancestral Women project I have had some very heartfelt responses to my work. I wove a portrait of Harriet LaSarge of the St. Croix Ojibwe. Here is her granddaughter Tracee Terry's reply:

"OMG that is beyond beautiful Mary!! How awesome!! Literally brought me to tears!! You most definitely did (represent her kindness). Mary, the portrait is just beautiful and signifies the kind of person she was."

This was the response from the St. Croix Tribal Historic Preservation Officer:

"Thank you so much. We are completely honored. I, for one, am very grateful to have one of our most cherished elders included in your work. Harriet had a special light that surrounded her and a sparkle in her eyes you couldn't miss. Her gentle way towards all of us and just people in general is something I always remember her by - such a soft spoken lady with her heart of gold is what I miss the most. She always made time for everyone in the community. Thank you again." – Wanda McFadden

"Holy Smokes, Mary! I just went to your website: www.ancestralwomen.com. The weavings are awesome!" - Patty Loew, author, professor, producer, tribal elder.

5. We browsed through the pictures of your latest works, Ancestral Women, and we loved what you have woven! Could you tell us more about the project? Also, what are your upcoming projects?

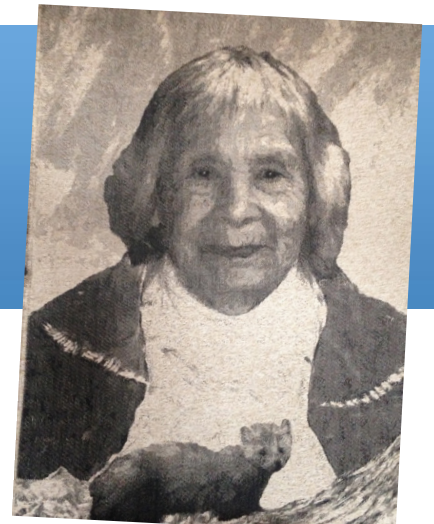
The Ancestral Women Exhibit is consuming most of my bandwidth at the moment! I am so excited about this project that I am dreaming about the women and the weavings. It began about a year and a half ago. I had designed a piece based on a historic photograph I had found while working with the Wisconsin Historical Society Collections. This was an image of a Native American Ho-Chunk woman, Emma Pettibone, from the early 1900's.



Bernice Davids, Stockbridge-Munsee



Emma Pettibone, Ho-Chunk



Harriet LaSarge, St. Croix Ojibwe

Above: Ancestral Women Exhibit
www.ancestralwomen.com

I had never done much work with portraiture and found the process very captivating. As I was weaving this piece, the idea for creating an exhibit that would honor women began to develop.

I wondered how to accomplish this and realized the starting place for me needed to be honoring the Native American women in my region. There are 12 Native tribes in Wisconsin and I am weaving a portrait of an elder woman from each of the tribes. I am working with the tribes and they are suggesting the Elder to be included in the project. The framed pieces are each approximately 32" x 42". Along with the portraits I am weaving 6 clan symbols (the same size as the portraits): Eagle, Bear, Marten, Crane, Turtle, and Loon. Then there are 4 horizontal panels: Birch-bark Canoe Building, Wild Ricing, Maple Sugaring, and Spirit Rising. We are building a circular structure of cedar and canvas to display the portraits. The portraits will be hung on the interior of the structure so that viewers can enter this circular space and be surrounded by these women. The clan symbols will hang on the exterior framework and the landscape pieces will be displayed on the gallery walls.

The exhibit runs September 23, 2016 through November 12th at the Center For Visual Arts in Wausau, Wisconsin. After that we hope to have the exhibit travel to other venues. This project would not be possible without lots of help from my husband, family and friends. We are actually

starting a Kickstarter Campaign to help with the costs of framing and materials.

Future projects will include expanding the Ancestral Women project globally to feature women of many nationalities. There is also a "Women and Children" project that I have in mind. Then there are all of the natural history pieces, such as a new series based on Northern Lights. I might need to come to Norway and see the Aurora Borealis from a higher latitude!!

I have also participated in a number of science and art collaborations and am excited to continue to explore those themes. (Note: The "Trail of Feathers" weaving was part of an art and science collaboration called Paradise Lost: artists respond to Climate Change in the Northwoods.)

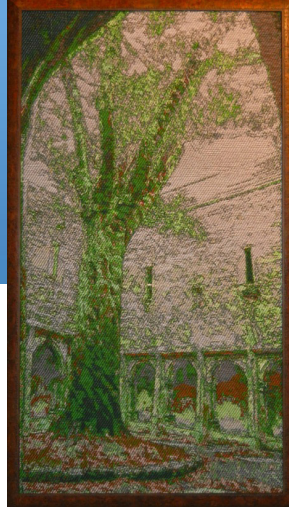
I'm excited to try working with more layers and colors on my new TC-2, including exploring brocade. I'd also like to bridge my love of weaving and felting by felting some of my woven jacquard pieces.

6. You've been weaving on the TC1 (called Nora) for years now and recently got yourself a TC2 – have you named her yet? Also, what keeps you hooked on to our looms?

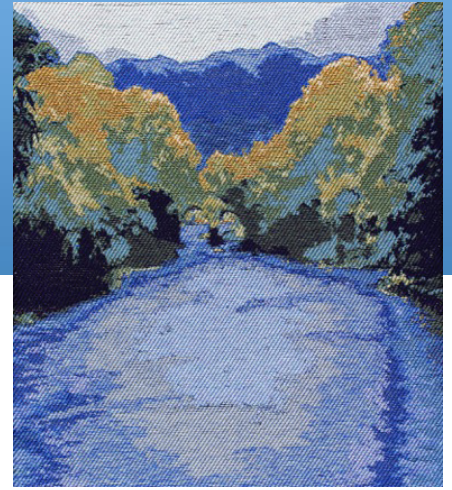
Nora was named after my grandma, Ann Nora, in whose home we now live in. The new TC-2 is named after my great-grandmother, Bridget Mariah Fitzgerald.



Crane Clan



Ancient Yew



Meeting of the Waters

I love all aspects of weaving, well, maybe not the warping of Nora and Bridget(!), but everything else. I love the inspiration that ignites an idea for a weaving, then the designing, refining, assigning of weave structures, the combining of colors, the feel of the yarn, weaving, and seeing the completed piece. It is so satisfying to start with a fully warped loom where the warp threads are waiting like a canvas for the first weft threads to be thrown and then at the end of the process you hold a new cloth created by your own hands and heart and can share that with other people.

Want to learn about Woven Jacquard Portraits?

Sign up for the seminar that Mary is teaching at Convergence 2016 in Milwaukee!!

**S-SA099 Woven Portraits: Weaving Wisconsin's Ancestral Women
Saturday, August 6th. 9:00-10:30**

Through woven Jacquard portraits, Mary Burns's project "Ancestral Women" honors individuals significant to each of Wisconsin's twelve native tribes.

This seminar will explore the design process and Jacquard weaving techniques used to bring these historical and contemporary portraits from photos to the loom. Mary will also discuss about conducting research and working with communities to choose those whom they wish to commemorate, as well as how to design, fund, and promote an exhibit of Jacquard weavings.

You can register by calling Handweaver's Guild of America (678)



Mary with her TC1 - Nora

Mary is selling all of the equipment in her rug weaving studio – looms, tools, yarns and designs - and in case any of you weavers are interested in buying, do contact her! And she may also consider parting with her TC1 (Nora). Write in to her for more details - manitowish@centurytel.net