

## Notes from Moon Rain Centre by Thoma Ewen

Hands during The Big Weave community tapestry project Photo ©Joanne de Nobriga

I'm sitting at Heathrow Airport waiting for my return flight to Ottawa, Canada. The Big Weave community tapestry project is launched. The pilot project, which Moon Rain Centre was invited to direct during the month of July 2009 is a huge success. The finished tapestry is about to have its first of several public exhibitions in England, accompanied by the photographs that document its process. Later, the tapestry will be permanently installed in Reading, where it began.

The Big Weave project was initiated by Moira Diane Wood, a professional flax spinner and weaver who draws personal inspiration from Japanese textiles. When Diane made the decision to fuse art, tapestry weaving and community, she contacted Moon Rain Centre and invited me to travel to Reading to direct the pilot project. That was 18 months ago. During the interim, Diane and I consulted by email on almost every aspect of the project. The Big Weave community tapestry project: Thoma and Diane work with young weavers at Henley Arts Festival, England Photo ©Joanne de Nobriga Diane developed the Big Weave in collaboration with Maiden Erlegh Community Arts School in Reading. Diane had previously organized a very successful series of outdoor community weaving workshops in neighbourhood parks in Reading. The School's dynamic community arts coordinator, Val Bowman, became interested in Diane's ideas and The Big Weave became a reality. Moon Rain Centre was invited to guide the project from beginning to end, and to enable Diane and the weavers of Maiden Erlegh School to continue to develop the community tapestry medium. What evolved during the month of July was a wonderful mixture of weaving and teaching that included the project's participation at arts festivals, schools and workshops. The Big Weave community tapestry is cut off the loom at Maiden Erlegh Community Arts School, Reading, England, Photo ©Joanne de Nobriga

Another aspect to the success of the project was the participation of Reading photographer, Joanne de Nobriga. Joanne specializes in photographing hands and has worked on projects all over the world. Her sensitive and telling photographs document the story of the complete community tapestry process from warping the loom to cutting the tapestry off and finishing the edges.

The unbridled enthusiasm for tapestry and community tapestry that was unleashed by The Big Weave was extraordinary and continues to amaze me. Everywhere the project went in Reading, Henley and Oxford generated overwhelming positive response and enthusiasm. Everyone who participated wanted more weaving, more tapestry weaving instruction, and access to yarns and to looms. Copies of Moon Rain Centre's recently published weaving manual, The Living Tapestry Workbook are in demand. The time is ripe for tapestry and for hands-on community tapestry weaving in England.

We never stopped. It was intense and challenging yet very rewarding work personally for everyone involved. One of the joys of community projects is that firm connections are made and trust is established. Early mornings involved travel, transporting and setting up the loom in a new location. The day proceeded with often more than one hundred community participants of all ages. The Big Weave project provided hands-on creative activity at the Henley Festival and at Art in Action near Oxford, one of the largest and best known arts festivals in England. Some members of the public stayed with the project and kept weaving for several hours, then returned another day to continue weaving, while others were happy to weave in a short length of weft. A number of young people were definitely "hooked" on tapestry. Earth Day 2009: Weave a Vision for the Earth at the Museum of Civilization, Ottawa, a community tapestry project, photo Francoise Chartrand

I feel that one of the most remarkable achievements of community tapestry projects is that they are creating a new generation of weavers. These projects are literally putting the word "weave" back into the vocabulary. This is essential, and is feeding the present day renaissance in textile arts that we are beginning to experience. To my immense delight and pleasure, the textile arts and tapestry are "in" in England.

A decade or so ago, announcements of textile department closures rang a death toll among practicing professional textile artists and students who wished to explore textile arts. Today a new era is unfolding and tapestry and textile arts are accepted as art. The work of pioneers like Judy Chicago have changed perceptions. It took a generation.

I'm on the plane and a wave of appreciation sweeps over me as I begin to assimilate what the Big Weave project accomplished in collaboration with participating communities. The plane begins to descend into Ottawa airport and the momentum of Moon Rain Centre's future projects fills my mind.

Exhibition: Tapestries from Moon Rain Centre, Lyon, France (woven works by Thoma Ewen) photo Denise Coker

Summer tapestry workshops will begin in several weeks when students arrive and studio residencies begin. Moon Rain has become an active tapestry and textile arts workshop centre and a place for quiet creative retreat and renewal. People come to Moon Rain to explore and expand their own creativity, while surrounded, protected and inspired by the natural beauty of the Gatineau Hills in West Quebec. early morning view from behind the studio, photo Ken Ewen

In September 2009 Moon Rain Centre is presenting Fibres Boreales / Northern Fibres a group exhibition of members' works at the Centre d'Action Culturel in St. Andre Avelin, Quebec. The group has grown out of a very interesting three year professional development programme, designed to encourage professional practice in textile arts, that I taught at Moon Rain Centre between 2005 and 2008.

Moon Rain Centre is in the process of co-ordinating a very exciting textile arts event for summer/fall 2010 called When The Thirteen Moons Are Woven Together/ Quand les treize lunes s'entrelacent. This festive event will include outdoor textile art installations, workshops in a variety of textile techniques and exhibitions. The feature exhibition will be the 9th International Triennale of Mini-Textiles, on tour from Angers, France's Musee de la Tapisserie Contemporaine, which will be presented in Galerie Montcalm in Gatineau from August 26th to October 10th. 2010 PR image for Northern Fibres Exhibition

Moon Rain Centre's project co-ordinator and emerging young textile artist, Gabriel Ewen Phillips, developed the concept for this textile festival in order to promote and encourage textile arts in the region and beyond. Gabby based it on the thirteen moons of the indigenous lunar calendar, to reflect and affirm Moon Rain's connection to nature, the environment and the Earth. Selecting work for the group exhibition, Fibres Boreales / Northern Fibres in the studio at Moon Rain Centre; Photo Ken Ewen

Weaving is linked to the mystic. It is the creative first principle in legends and myths from around the world telling how the earth was created. Since its mythic beginnings, weaving has provided a threaded text, a crafted record of the clothing of human cultures around the world, throughout human time.

Weaving has a symbolic new role to play in contemporary society. Joining together is the infrastructure of collaboration, it is the configuration of community. This is an image that is so easy to understand, and so fitting, and so necessary for the future.

The very essence of the structure of weaving — of interconnections - is a new contemporary metaphor for the inter-relationship of all living systems in the biosphere.

Weaving provides us with a symbol for the future.

Moon Rain Centre's vision is to share the beauty and mystery of weave. Through its exhibitions, workshops, community tapestry projects and artists-in-the-schools projects, Moon Rain makes tapestry weaving accessible, contemporary and alive.

Tapestry weaving has been my personal creative vehicle for 35 years, and the longer I weave, the more profoundly interesting weaving becomes. This is the sacred work and the biggest gift of craft — it leads, it reveals and it always teaches. Thoma Ewen at her loom in Moon Rain Centre studio, photo Jamie Cruickshank

Moon Rain Centre is a non-profit cultural organization dedicated to integrating creativity and harmony in the community through the creation, exhibition and teaching of tapestry weaving and textiles arts. The name Moon Rain refers to mystic connections in indigenous cultures between the moon, weaving and the cosmos. The vision of Moon Rain Centre is to share the beauty and mystery of WEAVE. Located in the Gatineau Hills north of Ottawa/Gatineau, in the Outaouais region of Quebec, Canada, Moon Rain Centre is known for its unique approach to inter-weaving art and community.

Canadian tapestry artist Thoma Ewen is artistic director of Moon Rain Centre. She has exhibited her visually radiant tapestries nationally and internationally for more than 35 years, and her works appear in corporate, private and public collections. Inspired by the natural environment of the Gatineau Hills that surround the Centre, and by ancient indigenous weaving wisdom that recognizes weaving to be a sacred path, Thoma's workshops teach how weaving transmits the energy of Peace. Thoma was recently awarded Le Grand Prix d'Excellence IVem Jeux de la Francophonie for her contributions to the cultural community.

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the Living Tapestry Work Book is available through Moon Rain Centre check out website for more information: