

Artist's Statement

My Unweaving® fiber art pieces convey spiritual narratives through form, color, texture, and calligraphy. My work alludes to the oldest traditions of narrative textiles, but in a completely contemporary idiom.

The words within each piece and the unwoven form that suggests these words serve as visual interpretations of various Biblical texts. The unwoven spaces form symbolic shapes—wings, ladders, prayer shawls, veils, trees, falling waters, and the sacred architecture of windows, domes, and gates. The narrative is enhanced by my own distinctive iconography, indicating guardians, messengers, journeying and praying figures, processional figures, and more. By unweaving the fabric I make manifest what is hidden within the material—liberating the threads to create shape, then “reweaving” through color, texture, and text. The narrative emerges from the juxtaposition of images within the surface, from the texts I choose, and from the combination of color, texture, and pattern which convey a sense of time and place. And the pieces become carriers of my individual and our collective memories through the spiritual narratives they transmit.

Method of Working

The textile used is a heavy cotton canvas. I first release either the warp or weft threads to create the desired shape. Various textures are collaged onto the surface, such as fibrous papers, sand, and pumice. My images and calligraphy are applied with modeling paste. I then apply acrylic paints to the surface, and a final thin layer of gold wash. In the last part of the process, beads—prayers and marking points—are affixed with acrylic gel.



Renew Our Days



There is a River

Brief Biography

Laurie Wohl is an internationally known fiber artist. Her Unweavings® fiber art are held in the collections of the Museum of Arts and Design (NYC), the American Bible Society (NYC), the Constitutional Court of South Africa, and Catholic Theological Union (Chicago), among others. Her works have also been on long-term loan to the United States Embassies in Beirut, Vienna, Tunis, Cape Town, and Pretoria.

She has accomplished a number of liturgical projects. Fourth Presbyterian Church (Chicago) commissioned The Psalms Project—12 major works for its sanctuary—which was completed in 2008. Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church (NYC) commissioned the Talbot Bible Stoles project—four works for its sanctuary, which were completed and installed in 2005. Monmouth Reform Temple (NJ) commissioned a piece for the entrance to its sanctuary, which was installed in 2006. In 2003, Ms. Wohl received an Honor Design Award for The Psalms Project, from the Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art, and Architecture (AIA).

Wohl's work has been featured in numerous solo exhibitions, including the Philadelphia Museum of Jewish Art, Hebrew Union College, and Atelier International (NYC), and Catholic Theological Union (Chicago). Ms. Wohl has curated a number of interfaith and multi-cultural exhibitions, including *With Many Voices* (Fourth Presbyterian Church) and *Art from Soweto* (ARC Gallery and Catholic Theological Union). Sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, she has given a series of lectures and workshops in Soweto, Johannesburg, and Pretoria, South Africa. She has also given numerous lectures and workshops in the United States on issues of art and faith, art and resistance to apartheid, and textile as narrative/ritual. Among her special projects has been an interactive set design for a full-length dance piece, "Unweavings," for Jan Erkert & Dancers. Ms. Wohl lives and works in New York City.

Laurie Wohl—Threads of Spirituality

Laurie Wohl is a renowned fiber artist who evolved a professional technique called “unweaving.” Weaving is one of the earliest acts of intellectual creativity and takes many forms, shapes, and materials. Wohl’s trademark technique “liberates” various threads and strands of fiber from a previously woven cloth, leaving them still attached, so they become loose filaments but still part of the whole. Text is an intrinsic part of her work, and she uses it in the form of delicately painted calligraphy superimposed on the canvas.

Her approach to creating an artwork is parallel to that of a painter. Wohl starts with cotton artist canvas; paints and dyes the surface; teases out the warp threads running lengthwise, or the weft (woof) threads, which are horizontal, based on the design of the piece; and over paints glyphs and phrases to reinforce the content and narrative. Each of her pieces is dimensional and scaled for a particular setting. Wohl is particularly known for pieces destined for religious sanctuaries, a visual focus in word, texture, and image evoking prayer and spirituality.

Laura Kruger
Curator of the Hebrew Union College
Jewish Institute of Religion Museum

Laurie Wohl’s *Unweavings*® convey a deep sense of spirituality. Wohl selects passages from the Bible and Hebrew prayers for her inspiration. Her work is rich in color, lush in feeling and floats on the walls communicating an otherworldly effect. As we look at Wohl’s *Unweavings*®, we are reminded of Medieval and Baroque tapestries. These tapestries warmed the walls of churches and castles just as her magical wall hangings enrich the walls in her church and synagogue commissions. Wohl’s unique *Unweavings*® alter the process of tapestry-making. Tapestry makers paint the cartoons and then weave; Wohl unweaves and then paints and embellishes the canvas. Her *Unweavings*® exist between the realms of craft and fine art, continuing the oldest traditions of narrative textiles.

Wohl’s calligraphy is created by a complex process and appears etched in the fabric much as the calligraphy in illuminated Hebrew manuscripts appears etched on the pages of vellum. Laurie Wohl’s *Unweavings*® carry ancient traditions into the contemporary world of wall hangings.

Wohl has a profound knowledge of both Jewish and Christian traditions. She carefully chooses passages from the texts to inspire religious feeling.

Joan C. Sall
Director Emeritus
Philadelphia Museum of Jewish Art

What others have said...

Laurie Wohl’s *Unweavings*® are a unique blend of painting and fiber art. [They] embody a serene, joyous spirituality... Lushly colored and covered with a personal vocabulary of pictographic signs, Wohl’s work celebrates the sacredness of human life as expressed in common passages, rituals, and dramas. The cascades of unraveled thread she released from the cloth frequently take resonant symbolic form... domes... ladders, trees, and wings... Others use simple swathes of trailing thread to suggest numinous curtains and veils.”

Surface Design Journal, Fall 1996

Wohl’s *Unweavings*® “mesh her own spiritual musings with a sophisticated cultural awareness, revitalizing the venerable traditions of ceremonial textiles in the process.”

Janice Paine, *Fiberarts*, Sept./Oct. 1996

Wohl’s personal iconography of pictographic signs is complemented by Hebrew calligraphy using biblical and mystical texts. The resulting combination of word, symbol, and unwoven image in her work “conveys a heightened consciousness of the role of the verbal and visual elements in [our] perception of the Divine.”

Christianity and the Arts, Winter 1999

“The use of forms that recall prayer shawls are important and integral to her art because these serve as visual parallels to ‘mystical texts [that] refer to God spreading a garment of light and peace over the world.’”

Matthew Baigell, *Jewish Art in America*

First Presbyterian Church presents “On Wings of Prayer” *Unweavings*® by Laurie Wohl April 15—May 31, 2012



Lecture and Reception
Sunday, April 15, 5:00 p.m.

Public Viewings
Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays
2:00 p.m.—4:00 p.m.

Third Friday Art Walks
April 20 and May 18
6:00 p.m.—8:00 p.m.

Groups may schedule viewing by appointment.

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